

PRECARIOUS PROFESSIONALS

Gender, Identities and Social Change in
Modern Britain

EDITED BY HEIDI EGGINTON
& ZOË THOMAS



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Precarious Professionals



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This edited collection took shape during several tumultuous years in British politics and rounds of university strikes, and was completed in the early stages of a global pandemic in 2020, by which time the nature and experience of precarity had taken on meanings we could never have foreseen. It would clearly be absurd to compare the precarity of the professionals who feature in these pages to that experienced by today's 'precariat', particularly those in the Global South, who face casualization, exploitation and the continuing disruption of political, social, economic, environmental and public health crises on an unprecedented scale. One of the main subjects of this book has been precisely the wide range of forms which precarity has taken in different historical contexts in modern Britain, and the often insidious ways insecurity has interacted with forms of privilege to reproduce inequality over time. If professionals tended to enjoy the comfort of family support and other financial resources, a high level of mobility, and relative job security in comparison with the contingent workforces of the early twenty-first century, they faced the impact of marginality in other ways, whether on account of their gender, race, age or sexuality. Their experiences, moreover, highlight how precariousness has been a feature of the so-called professional society from its conception. Nevertheless, it could provide a platform for social change, as our contributors have shown, and the quietly radical progress that women, ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ professionals made against the odds has inspired us throughout the process

Acknowledgements

of drawing together this collection. We hope, therefore, that our book acts as a provocation and a timely reminder, as professions and institutions in Britain come under ever greater scrutiny for who they include and exclude, of how work can be reimagined in precarious times.

Heidi Egginton and Zoë Thomas

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Introduction

Heidi Egginton and Zoë Thomas

Even when the path is nominally open – when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant – there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way. To discuss and define them is I think of great value and importance; for thus only can the labour be shared, the difficulties be solved.¹

At 8 pm on Wednesday 21 January 1931, around 200 young professionals crowded into a hall on Marsham Street, Westminster, to hear Virginia Woolf speak. The meeting was hosted by the London and National Society for Women's Service, a suffrage organization which had dedicated itself to promoting women's employment and equal economic opportunities following the granting of the vote to some women in 1918. Woolf's talk, later published as 'Professions for women', was addressed to those who had perhaps already won the rewards she had famously argued were key to a woman's independence – a room of one's own and a steady income. This 'freedom', she declared, 'is only a beginning – the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared.'² In an earlier draft of her speech, Woolf had considered the manifold professional careers in which she expected the women of her audience had already begun this task:

meteorologists, dental surgeons, librarians, solicitors' clerks, agricultural workers, analytical chemists, investigators of industrial psychology, barristers at law, makers of scientific models, accountants, hospital dieticians, political organisers, store keepers, artists, horticultural instructors, publicity managers, architects, insurance representatives, dealers in antiques, bankers, actuaries, managers of house property, court dress makers, aero engineers, history instructors, company directors, organisers of peace crusades, newspaper representatives, technical officers in the royal airships works – and so on.³

¹ V. Woolf, 'Professions for women', in *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, ed. M. Barrett (London, 1980), p. 62.

² Woolf, 'Professions for women', p. 63.

³ H. Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London, 1997), p. 600.

Woolf, the self-described ‘daughter of an educated man’, had a complex relationship with professional work in her own life as a writer and publisher.⁴ The themes of her speech would reverberate in her fiction and non-fiction over the next seven years, culminating in *Three Guineas* (1938), in which she considered how women might use their new economic and social privileges to help prevent war. Throughout this period she asked working women not only to ‘perpetually question and examine’ their emerging status as professionals, but also to remember and to make creative use of their precarious position as outsiders in patriarchal professions. This position was part of the indelible inheritance they had received from their mothers and grandmothers.⁵ Many ‘phantoms and obstacles’ would continue to haunt the aspiring woman professional, Woolf believed, but the most pressing and urgent task ahead of those who heard her speak in 1931 was the fight to remake the professional society in their own image.

This edited collection takes Woolf’s assertion of the potential of professional women as its starting point. The range of examples she offered will perhaps surprise readers of this book, as many of them do not fit within traditional narratives of ‘the professions’. As editors, we embarked upon this project with the intention of exploring how professional selfhood was defined and experienced by a wider range of those who entered the workforce. Our own research into women in creative fields had uncovered countless examples of individuals carrying out professional work beyond the boundaries of prevailing masculinist rules and assumptions. We wanted to know if these creative women were anomalies, or if historians of professional identity had overlooked something fundamental about the way professions operated: that the routes to acquiring professional expertise could be more fluid than the focus on the model of a handful of established careers, such as medicine and law, had ever supposed. Perhaps what was so distinctive about the history of professional identity was not the fact that professions only occasionally admitted outsiders into their ranks, but rather that they depended on the undervalued contributions of women and some men who only ever established a tenuous foothold within them, and that many individuals flourished as part of professional work cultures outside the confines of the professions’ elitist structures. Perhaps these gendered histories of success, but also of insecurity, were woven into the very fabric of what had come to be known as ‘professional society’.

Precarious Professionals therefore brings together studies of women and men who worked on the margins of their fields in art and science, high

⁴ V. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London, 1938).

⁵ Woolf, ‘Professions for women’, p. 63.

culture and popular journalism, private enterprise and public service, in both their local and international contexts. The contributors to this book foreground questions about the relationship between gender and forms of precarity in the past to illuminate how professional recognition could be claimed, adapted and denied by historical subjects at different moments. We ask: what imprint did experiences of working precariously on the margins of a profession leave on an individual, and what was the role of gender in determining how their expertise would be valued? How did subjective understandings of professional status and selfhood relate to formal categories and patriarchal processes of professionalization? Did precarious professionals manage to forge their own distinctive ideals, networks and practices, despite the contingent and unstable nature of their working lives, and did gender help or hinder their attempts to do so? Did the gendered experience of precariousness ever provide a foundation for practical innovations, political action or forms of cultural authority which may have been sidelined in later histories?

In using gender and marginality as analytical tools to investigate the politics of professionalism, the following chapters reshape understanding of power and expertise in public life before the late twentieth century. We have deliberately included essays by scholars working on the lives of more established professionals, alongside more overtly 'precarious' roles, in order to provoke reflection on the different ways that insecurity could lie at the heart of what it meant to become a professional woman or man during this period. The contributors to this volume have focused on the 1840s to the 1960s, the period which saw the rise of a society driven by competition to enter increasingly specialized career hierarchies, governed by the ideals and expert opinions of a handful of select professions. This supposedly linear process of professional 'progress' underpinned many of the master narratives in modern British history. Professionals – from traditional Victorian men of science and members of the 'intellectual aristocracy' to social science experts and planners – have often played a central role in observing, narrating and directing historical change. The peculiar dynamics of professionalization loom large in historians' explanations for trends in the evolution of modern British capitalism; state formation and the shaping of social and public policy; family life and parent-child relations; the development and impact of education; patterns in intellectual and cultural production; as well as the nature and meaning of modernity and individualism.

Women were allocated a minimal supporting part in classic surveys of this period, such as social historian Harold Perkin's *The Rise of Professional*

Society (1989).⁶ Since the 1970s, however, some historians, economists and sociologists have been refocusing attention on the gendered nature and experience of work and with it women's place in a wide range of different professions. Following recent explorations of the relationship between middle-class femininity and professional identities in a variety of different fields, there is now an emerging recognition of the urgent need to interrogate conventional categories in the history of professional and white-collar employment through the lens of gender and its intersections with other identity markers such as class, race and ethnicity, religious belief, sexuality, disability, generation and geographic location.⁷ Making space for biographies of pioneering individual women professionals within institutions and within the historical record more broadly has been given renewed impetus by the centenaries of the legislation granting some women the right to vote and to enter Parliament and the higher professions.⁸ When the working lives of precarious professionals are placed in dialogue with master narratives in the history of the professions, it becomes obvious that the landscape of 'professional society' has changed irrevocably since the terrain was mapped out prior to the rise of women's and gender history.

The literature on professional identity is now vast and varied, so it is instructive to revisit some of its major landmarks and underlying assumptions. This introduction firstly interrogates and refines classic chronologies of the rise of professional society and approaches to defining professional work in Britain. It then considers the development of women's history as a field, the emergence of gender as a category of analysis, and trends in the recent scholarship on women in different professions, including in an international context. It shows how bringing these strands of historiography together advances the study of gender and professional identity. Finally, it explores how the contributors to this volume redefine our conceptions of professional cultures and expertise. At a moment when changes in the labour market mean that the contemporary experience of precarity and the position of marginalized groups in the professions in Britain is under intense scrutiny – and when the professions continue to be riven with gendered, racialized and classed hierarchies – it has never

⁶ H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780–1880* (London, 1969), and *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989).

⁷ K. Cowman and L. A. Jackson, 'Middle-class women and professional identity', *Women's History Review*, xiv (2005), 165–80.

⁸ This commemorative work has included major conferences and portrait exhibitions inserting women into the heart of public space at the Palace of Westminster and the Institute of Historical Research, and the 'First 100 Years/Next 100 Years' project charting the history of women in the British legal profession.

been more important to critically re-examine professional society from a historical perspective and to reflect upon the gendered politics of the production of history itself.

Defining the modern British professional

After the eighteenth century, ‘profession’ was transformed from a general term used to describe a source of employment to a word denoting a category of occupations guarding access to a body of expert knowledge and demanding specialist training and authentication.⁹ Traditionally, the archetypal professions have been those connected with the triumvirate of law, the clergy and medicine, and these fields continue to play a starring role in histories of the making of professional society. Yet over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the professions gradually began to encompass occupational roles, along with ancillary and supporting staff posts, in the military, science, engineering, architecture, banking, education, creative and cultural industries, management and planning, and posts in local and central government. These elite ‘white-collar’ and ‘white-blouse’ jobs, in contrast to skilled or manual labour, have typically been understood to have depended on intellectual rather than physical exertion and, at the higher grades, gave individuals a greater degree of independence and autonomy in the workplace. Beyond this, however, overarching definitions of ‘professionalism’ or ‘professionalization’ tend to tell us as much about the professional positions of their authors and the status of particular fields as they do about common threads linking work in the professional society as a whole. When we examine the existing definitions more closely alongside a wider array of contemporary voices such as Woolf’s, what we find is that the boundaries to the professional society were more porous and contested than has previously been acknowledged.

Professionals now make up just over a fifth of the UK workforce and account for over a third of all trade union members. The rise of new forms of precarity in the rest of the labour market means that they are still seen to be among the most secure, well-paid and influential workers in British society.¹⁰ Twenty-first-century notions of a professional ‘career’

⁹ ‘profession, n.’. (*OED Online*) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/152052>> [accessed 10 Apr. 2017]. See also the useful *longue durée* definitions provided in D. Crook, ‘Some historical perspectives on professionalism’, in *Exploring Professionalism*, ed. B. Cunningham (London, 2008), pp. 10–27, at p. 11.

¹⁰ According to a 2014 study of trade union members by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, quoted in S. O. Rose and S. Brady, ‘Rethinking gender and labour history’, in *History after Hobsbawm: Writing the Past for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. J. Arnold, M. Hilton and J. Rüger (Oxford, 2017), p. 245.

– defined by elements such as the expectation of progressive promotion and incremental rewards, an income awarded on a sliding scale, holiday entitlements, sickness pay and an occupational pension, as opposed to the structural insecurities of traditional working-class employment – have their origins in the mid nineteenth century.¹¹ In Perkin's account, the increasingly complex and interdependent fabric of English social structure came, by the late nineteenth century, to consist of a warp of vertical hierarchies based on professional careers, which overlaid and interacted in various ways with the weft of older, horizontal hierarchies based on class and status.¹² Recognized processes of professionalization which constructed these vertical hierarchies within different occupations include the establishment of formal systems of instruction and qualification derived from theoretical or practical expertise; the development of official codes of practice; and the formation of exclusive professional networks and associations, including specialist unions – all of which enable professions to construct their own forms of regulation and governance.

If a key characteristic of the modern profession or professional body can be said to be its self-governing exclusivity, then another distinctive quality of professional life in Britain is the lack of uniformity as to what constitutes a 'professional' across different fields. Attributes that characterize professionalism and professional ethics in one occupation are often absent in another. Consequently, the fluid nature of the group of occupations considered under the umbrella category of 'the professions' has been an important feature of social descriptions and economic measurements since they became an object of formal sociological enquiry in the 1930s. Early sociologists emphasized the importance of a small number of occupations which had attained professional status through what Max Weber termed 'social closure'.¹³ One of the first comprehensive academic studies of the professions in Britain added so-called 'semi-professions', 'would-be professions' and 'marginal professions' such as social work, librarianship and complementary therapies to the 'old-established professions' like medicine and law and 'new professions' such as science.¹⁴ The hierarchy

¹¹ S. Szreter, 'The official representation of social classes in Britain, the United States, and France: the professional model', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxxv (1993), 285–317; A. Miles and M. Savage, 'Constructing the modern career, 1840–1940', in *Origins of the Modern Career*, ed. J. Brown, D. Mitch and M. van Leeuwen (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 79–100.

¹² Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 2–9, 116–70, 455–71.

¹³ M. Weber, *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley, Calif., 1978), pp. 342–3.

¹⁴ A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, *The Professions* (Oxford, 1933).

of these classifications solidified during the subsequent few decades, in the context of the expansion and growing importance of the welfare and warfare states. Conventional wisdom tended to suggest that the emergence of the modern career in the mid nineteenth century, followed by the 'exclusion of the unqualified' from the old, established and new professions, resulted in women's withdrawal from the formal labour market, at least until the late twentieth century.¹⁵ Marginal professions are often assumed to have tried to follow the same processes of professionalization and social closure as the elite professions, despite the huge variety in different fields of work and expertise.

When we step back from academic sociological texts and consider popular career guides and handbooks for aspiring professionals, however, the picture begins to look very different. In 1895, for example, the Cambridge journalist Margaret Bateson published *Professional Women upon Their Professions* in an attempt 'to show by the evidence of trusty witnesses what possibilities for happy labour women may expect to find in certain of the professions and avocations that are now open to them'. It was not until 1919 that the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act formally enabled women to enter public life and become magistrates, solicitors, barristers, accountants or veterinary surgeons and to enter the civil service. In an era in which the expression 'woman professional' still registered as a contradiction in terms, Bateson's collection of interviews reveals that women who did not have access to formal training, accreditation or institutional affiliation were nevertheless capably assuming the identity of a 'professional' across fields as diverse as dentistry, illustration, vestry work, ballet dancing, indexing and stockbroking.¹⁶ From Bateson's perspective, like Woolf's some years later, these women had all become fully fledged members of professional society. Though the optimism of advice writers should by no means be taken for granted, their keen eye for practical solutions hints at a growing culture of women's industry and professionalism. Alongside women who had attained 'acknowledged professional distinction' in their fields by the early 1890s, Bateson included conversations with 'young, or at least youthful-minded' members of each field in her guide for aspiring professionals, aiming to remedy her readers' assumption that 'the choice for a young woman of

¹⁵ Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, p. 2.

¹⁶ M. Bateson, *Professional Women upon Their Professions: Conversations Recorded by Margaret Bateson* (London, 1895), pp. iii–v. Drawing on her reputation for interviewing pioneering working 'ladies' for the well-to-do women's periodical *Queen*, Bateson gave readers a series of 'snapshots' taking the form of 'half an hour's talk with an experienced woman'. See also Mrs Margaret Heitland, née Bateson, in *The Women's Suffrage Movement: a Reference Guide 1866–1928*, ed. E. Crawford (London, 1999), p. 282.

good education and belongings lies between complete domestic obscurity on the one hand and the very highest distinctions that art or letters can offer on the other'.¹⁷ A range of similar advice guides for aspiring 'professional' women was published throughout the period covered in this volume. A number were compiled by dedicated organizations like the London and National Society for Women's Service, which disseminated information on job openings for women and helped them to navigate gendered labour markets and career hierarchies.¹⁸ It is not a coincidence that early-twentieth-century academic sociologists' so-called would-be professions were those in which women had made the deepest inroads by the 1930s. Conventional accounts often continue to see professionalization through the lens of the archetypal, male-dominated ring of 'closed' professions and the modern civil service, yet as the chapters in this volume will show, there are diverse models of professionalism which need to be historicized and accounted for.

Professional citizenship and the 'professional mystique'

Another component of the traditional history of the professional society was a distinctive philosophy of professional citizenship, which has been portrayed as maintaining its cultural purchase in British public life until at least the 1960s. This was rooted in a belief in liberal pluralism and the ethics of service, and driven by the moral concern to use professional expertise impartially and for the common good.¹⁹ In Harold Perkin's survey,

¹⁷ Bateson, *Professional Women upon Their Professions*, pp. v–vi. Bateson noted wryly: 'A man, it is understood, may be very middling indeed, and no remarks made; but not a woman.'

¹⁸ See, e.g., J. Mercier, *Work, and How to Do It: a Practical Guide to Girls in the Choice of Employment* (London, 1891); M. Mostyn Bird, *Woman at Work: a Study of the Different Ways of Earning a Living Open to Women* (London, 1911); *Trades for London Girls and How to Enter Them: a Companion Book to Trades for London Boys* (London, 1914); *New Careers for Women: the Best Positions, and How to Obtain Them* (London, 1917); L. Eyles, *Careers for Women* (London, 1930); *The Road to Success: Twenty Essays on the Choice of a Career for Women*, ed. M. I. Cole (London, 1936); R. Strachey, *Careers and Openings for Women: a Survey of Women's Employment and a Guide for those Seeking Work* (London, 1937).

¹⁹ Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society*, pp. 319–26. On liberal professional ideals and public duty during this period see S. Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991); J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain, 1870–1914* (London, 1994); *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, ed. S. Pedersen and P. Mandler (London, 1994); A. Woollacott, 'From moral to professional authority: secularism, social work, and middle-class women's self-construction in World War I Britain', *Journal of Women's History*, x (1998), 85–111; J. S. Pedersen, 'Victorian liberal feminism and the "idea" of work', in *Women and Work Culture: Britain c.1850–c.1950*, ed. K. Cowman and L. A. Jackson (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 27–47; E. Ross, 'St. Francis in Soho: Emmeline Pethick, Mary Neal, the West London Wesleyan

the conflict between a professional ‘ideal’ (always, in his account, singular and, we can assume, masculine) and entrepreneurial free market ideals was one of the main forces shaping English culture during the long twentieth century.²⁰ After the 1960s, he went on to argue in a comparative study, England’s professionals became absorbed into ‘global professional society’.²¹ The post-war era saw the gradual disintegration of the social democratic model of professional citizenship and its displacement under a rapacious, unregulated form of Anglo-American capitalism Perkin termed ‘corporate neo-feudalism’. This he ascribed to the growth of a new form of global elite professional expertise lacking in professional ethics.²² Feminist scholarship has explored the dissolution of the post-war settlement and its impact on women’s professional lives in Britain from different angles. Recently, Eve Worth has argued that feminized roles in public-sector employment underwent a process of ‘de-professionalization’ after the late 1980s, a process that is as important as deindustrialization in terms of understanding the history of work in Britain.²³ This edited collection has taken as its end point the 1960s, by which time many of the processes we now recognize as key to professionalization had been firmly established but the economic and cultural value of most women’s work had yet to be fully accepted in law or the wider society. The effects of the unravelling of professional structures and ideals of citizenship in different fields and institutions during the last third of the twentieth century deserves further investigation.²⁴ As the final

Mission, and the allure of “simple living” in the 1890s’, *Church History*, lxxxiii (2014), 843–83.

²⁰ Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 352–60. These comments were later extended in a new preface to the 2002 edition.

²¹ For Perkin’s application of the concept of English professional society to Britain, France, the United States, Japan, West and East Germany and the Soviet Union since 1945 see H. Perkin, *The Third Revolution: Professional Elites in the Modern World* (London, 1996).

²² For Perkin’s critique of Anglo-American capitalism and its relationship to British economic and social decline see Perkin, *Third Revolution*, pp. 58–76, 187–96; and Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880*, 2nd edn (London, 2002), pp. xi–xx. All subsequent citations are taken from the second edition. See also S. Halford and M. Savage, ‘The bureaucratic career: demise or adaptation?’, in *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, ed. T. Butler and M. Savage (London, 2003), pp. 117–32; *The End of the Professions? The Restructuring of Professional Work*, ed. J. Broadbent, M. Dietrich and J. Roberts (London, 2005).

²³ E. Worth, ‘A tale of female liberation? The long shadow of de-professionalization on the lives of post-war women’, *Revue française de civilisation britannique*, xxiii (2018) <<http://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/1778>> [accessed 27 Jan. 2019].

²⁴ On popular and political understandings of the ‘decline of deference’ see F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968–2000* (Oxford, 2018).

chapter in this volume, by James Southern, indicates, changing definitions of sexuality also began to place a new strain on establishment codes of professional conduct after the late 1960s.

Professional citizenship interacted in different ways with competing forms of public authority throughout the period covered in this book. While intellectuals and scientific experts may have set themselves at a critical distance from the managerial and commercial classes, they actively cultivated professional hierarchies, institutions and customs in order to maintain their place in British public life.²⁵ Penelope Corfield pointedly incorporated in her study of power and the professions in Britain before the rise of the modern ‘career’ unsalaried and unqualified groups which depended upon patronage and consequently toiled ‘on the fringes of professional status’, such as actors, artists, musicians and writers. As she notes, they not only evidently shared a ‘precarious’ level of income, but also similar ethics of professional service with those in the conventional professions.²⁶ On this basis we, too, argue that creative work must be included in enquiries into professional society. Service often brought with it the need to communicate with wider publics, and several of the chapters in this volume look at their subjects’ ambivalent relationships to the popular literary market for professional expertise or advice. Ideals of professionalism are still highly influential in popular culture today: professionals are over-represented in the recent popular publishing trend for life-writing, their memoirs regularly becoming bestsellers.²⁷

In looking more closely at the relationship between identity formation and structural processes of professionalization in a wide range of professions, it becomes clear that membership of a professional society itself was often connected to what we have termed the ‘professional mystique’. The acquisition of the specialist expertise that might enable one to move across and up traditional hierarchies based on class and property ownership was never simply connected to official, disinterested forms of accreditation and public

²⁵ *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory*, ed. T. L. Haskell (Bloomington, Ind., 1984); J. Stapleton, ‘Political thought, elites, and the state in modern Britain’, *Historical Journal*, xlii (1999), 251–68; M. Fourcade, *Economists and Societies: Discipline and Profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890s to 1990s* (Princeton, NJ, 2010).

²⁶ P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700–1850* (London, 1995), pp. 24–5, 28. Perkin also included in his analysis ‘unqualified professions like the Civil Service, journalism, and the theatre’, who ‘try to make early entry and practical experience stand in for qualification’. Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, p. 378.

²⁷ R. Walker, ‘Doctor, teacher, bestseller’, *Observer*, 4 May 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/04/real-life-memoirs-are-a-hit-with-readers>> [accessed 27 May 2020].

service. Rather, the internal cogs in the machine of professional society were greased by symbolic forms of trust and affirmation, as well as association with like-minded individuals within specially designated professional networks and spaces. Even Perkin's salaried male professionals, enjoying all the 'psychic rewards' of stable employment, lived by 'persuasion and propaganda, by claiming that their particular service [was] indispensable to the client or employer and to society and the state'.²⁸ 'Looking and acting the part', Corfield mused, could be crucial to the formation of professionalism.²⁹ Beth Jenkins's recent work on early-twentieth-century women's occupational cultures has shown that 'physicality, height, voice, accent, clothing, and deportment' were 'intimately connected' to the shaping of professional authority in modern British working lives.³⁰ Several of the chapters in this volume put these embodied elements of style in professionalism, and the impact of homosocial professional spaces, under greater scrutiny.

The symbolic and psychological aspects of professional identity, then, were important aspects of professionals' assimilation into modern British public life. After all, even when we use conventional definitions that focus on the regulation of admission into the professions, the transformation of a working life into a professional career depended upon the careful preservation of state support, public recognition or consumer confidence, not to mention stable family or kinship networks and domestic and working conditions conducive to long periods spent in the process of training and qualification. These are not issues which can easily be separated from the intimate histories of private lives. Indeed, the increasing sophistication of bureaucratic and administrative systems and the spread of new professions based on increasingly complex and esoteric forms of expertise proved to be fruitful subjects for modernist writers, who identified paranoia and self-doubt as one of the chief side-effects of the experience of meritocratic society in the early twentieth century.³¹ Living up to professional ideals

²⁸ On the 'psychic rewards' of professional status, including confidence and self-respect, see Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 6, 371, 439; on 'persuasion and propaganda' see pp. 3, 6, 16. Perkin argues that, as '[professional men] existed to provide services which were esoteric, evanescent, and fiduciary – beyond the knowledge of the laity, not (with some partial exceptions like architects and civil engineers) productive of concrete objects', their professional identity therefore had 'to be taken on trust'.

²⁹ Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, pp. 20–21.

³⁰ B. Jenkins, 'Gender, embodiment and professional identity in Britain, c.1890–1930', *Cultural and Social History*, xvii (2020), 499–514.

³¹ D. Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 82–5. 'You did not have to be a doctor or a lawyer or a clergyman to suffer from paranoid delusion', Trotter argues, 'but it certainly helped.'

always required the emotional work of managing one's feelings and anxiety in response to the demands of employers and the public.³² Historians have tended to assume these burdens increased at the lower ends of professional hierarchies, but several of the essays in this volume highlight the importance of attending to gendered forms of insecurity in the affective lives of those at the top of their fields. It is striking that so many of the bestselling memoirs of early-twenty-first-century celebrity professionals are written in confessional mode, drawing their apparent authenticity from their elucidation of the 'secrets' of their intensely demanding and highly skilled jobs.³³

Becoming a member of 'professional society'

Never simply closed circles of insiders, modern British professional cultures can best be characterized by their dynamic mechanisms for both inclusion and exclusion, the emphasis of which changed over time and across different settings. Historians and social scientists now agree that, in order to meet the standards of professional citizenship, many different occupations saw processes of professionalization involving social closure, which resulted in increasing specialization, the restriction of access to accredited training and the intricate implementation of regulatory standards. While these changes all effectively worked to downgrade the achievements and contributions of non-elite individuals, often with deleterious effects for the success of certain fields, it is important to remember that they were occurring at different rates and moments. Nor were marginalized individuals necessarily unaffected by developments within professions from which they had theoretically been excluded. In Perkin's now-classic view, no social group remained untouched by the rise of professional society and its ideals: the value of professionalism and the professional service ethic 'permeate[d] society from top to bottom' before the last third of the twentieth century.³⁴ While Perkin's materialist conception of a single, monolithic 'professional society' may now seem outdated, his formulation still has a number of important implications for locating definitions of professional identity arising from specialist studies into particular fields within unequal social systems. Insofar as professional ideals, ethics and authority emanating from the core of the traditional,

³² A. R. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, Calif., 1983); C. Langhamer, 'Feelings, women and work in the long 1950s', *Women's History Review*, xxvi (2017), 77–92.

³³ See, e.g., A. Kay, *This is Going to Hurt: Secret Diaries of a Junior Doctor* (London, 2017); S. Bythell, *The Diary of a Bookseller* (London, 2017) and *Confessions of a Bookseller* (London, 2019); The Secret Barrister, *Stories of the Law and How It's Broken* (London, 2018).

³⁴ Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, p. 3.

patriarchal professions became structuring threads within Britain's social hierarchies and entangled within everyday life, so too did forms of 'would-be' professionalism on the periphery of the established professions. As the chapters in this volume have found, it was the labour of precarious individuals that often made conventional professional working life possible.

Moreover, the selvedge to this social fabric was undeniably becoming more complex during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise of new administrative, technical and commercial professions went hand in hand with political reform, the proliferation of self-help and mutual improvement societies, the growth of trade unionism, the increasing access to public libraries and museums, the creation and formalization of new academic disciplines, and the expansion of secondary and higher education.³⁵ Consequently, there were increasing opportunities for a larger proportion of the population to acquire a professional education and qualifications than ever before, meaning that professional cultures could start to define themselves against, and thrive outside, patriarchal structures.³⁶ These social changes made the cultural and social boundaries of the professions particularly fragile during the period discussed in this book. Neither the state nor the market ever had a monopoly on professional expertise in Britain and processes of professionalization can be found in commerce, trade and private industry.³⁷ Recent research into the spatial practices and material culture of professionalism has also demonstrated that modern professional identities were by no means always forged outside the home.³⁸ The chapters in this volume confirm that professionalism could

³⁵ J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 2001); M. Daunton, *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2005).

³⁶ *Women, Education and the Professions*, ed. P. Summerfield, History of Education Society Occasional Publications, viii (Leicester, 1987).

³⁷ In contrast, perhaps, to the rise of professional society during the same period in comparable economies such as Germany, which was more closely tied to state formation and the nationalization of society and culture. On professionalization in Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries see K. H. Jarausch, *The Unfree Professions: German Lawyers, Teachers, and Engineers, 1900–1950* (Oxford, 1990); C. E. McClelland, *The German Experience of Professionalization: Modern Learned Professions and Their Organizations from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Hitler Era* (Cambridge, 1991); M. Malatesta, *Professional Men, Professional Women: the European Professions from the Nineteenth Century until Today*, trans. A. Belton (London, 2010); J. Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life: Society, Politics, and Culture in England, France, and Germany since 1750* (Cambridge, 2012).

³⁸ Z. Thomas, 'At home with the Women's Guild of Arts: gender and professional identity in London studios, c.1880–1925', *Women's History Review*, xxiv (2015), 938–64, and *Women Art Workers and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Manchester, 2020). See also Jane Hamlett and

be inherent in, and expressed through, self-employment, entrepreneurship and voluntary forms of work. In theory, these developments were meant to establish new forms of ‘professional capital’, along with systems of selection based on competitive merit as opposed to inherited wealth.³⁹ Yet social status and connections, as Perkin pointed out at the end of the 1980s, continued to remain a priceless (if not uncontentious) commodity.⁴⁰ While his model professional was a ‘self-made man [*sic*]’, he argued, revealingly, that controlling access to professional prestige and rewards was most vital in fields ‘whose subject matter is most accessible to the laity’.⁴¹ Defensiveness was, in some ways, central to modern professional lives and status.

The boundaries and hierarchies of professional society, therefore, were by their very nature *permeable*: the degree to which professions were open or closed became politicized at different moments. This was precisely because professionalism demanded ethical engagement with wider society but was also key to a form of social status that needed to be carefully policed and defended from outsiders. To avoid tautological definitions it is always necessary to scrutinize rhetorical and sociological conceptions of professional identity and their particular histories in more depth.⁴² This book asks what happens when we look beyond traditional measurements and meanings of professional life and, following writers like Margaret Bateson or Virginia Woolf, instead investigate the everyday labour of maintaining a professional identity on the margins of the professions. By listening more closely to the terms in which professionals described their own work, it becomes possible to interrogate the masculinist assumptions found in classic surveys and to

Lesley Hoskins, ‘Introduction: home and work’, *Home Cultures*, viii (2011), 109–17.

³⁹ Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 380–89.

⁴⁰ Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, p. 360. Perkin noted that ‘there are still career hierarchies in which wealth and connections are decided advantages’, specifically finance and management.

⁴¹ Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, p. 395. The example given by Perkin, from close to home, is the academic field of ‘humanities and social studies’. The ‘modern university’, in his view, had the archetypal ‘paradoxical role’ in professional society: ‘at once the gatekeeper to the career hierarchies of modern professional society and the hermetically sealed preserve of the professional specialist’. Academia evidently played a foundational part in Perkin’s formulation of professional society; interestingly, in an earlier work, higher-education professionals were deemed ‘key professionals’; see H. Perkin, *Key Profession: the History of the Association of University Teachers* (London, 1969).

⁴² Anne Logan helpfully summarizes this danger: ‘Definitions of “professional” are more often implicit than explicit and are frequently arrived at tautologically by examining the characteristics of activities assumed by the author to be “professional”’. A. Logan, ‘Professionalism and the impact of England’s first women justices, 1920–1950’, *Historical Journal*, xlix (2006), 833–50, at p. 837.

better understand the unequal processes which made 'professional society' in modern Britain.

Women's history and the politics of professional identity

The uneven development of professionalization in the academy during the twentieth century is intimately connected to the early development of academic women's history.⁴³ It shaped both the evolution of professionalization as the subject of various fields of historical enquiry and the contemporary experience of early women's historians who were themselves initially writing from the margins of their professions, with impacts for the lives of women and minorities that reverberate to this day.⁴⁴ The findings of early historians of women's work in Britain confirmed that more egalitarian and democratic professional aspirations were held in constant tension with forces of reaction and tradition. Not only was much professional work off limits to women, these scholars argued, but male-dominated professions actively exploited women's labour in order to more effectively exclude them. This section looks more closely at key turning points in the histories of women's engagements with 'professional society', situating them in the context of the patterns of inclusion and exclusion which characterized women's working lives in and outside the academy during the twentieth century. It shows how engaging with precarious professionals can advance our understanding of the history of women's work.

Ivy Pinchbeck and Alice Clark, two early female practitioners in the

⁴³ On the 'radical but also marginalized' outlook fostered by exclusion from the academic mainstream in the history of women's history after the 1970s see J. Rendall, 'Uneven developments: women's history, feminist history and gender history in Great Britain', in *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, ed. K. Offen, J. Rendall and R. Pierson (Basingstoke, 1991), pp. 45–57.

⁴⁴ In 2018, the Royal Historical Society's *Second Gender Equality Report* noted that only 26.2% of history professors in the UK were women. This 'leaky pipeline' effect was attributed to a wide range of issues including institutions failing to offer appropriate support and promotional opportunities after women had taken maternity leave; 47.8% of respondents reported that their general working lives had been affected by discrimination, with widespread issues of bullying, intimidation and sexual harassment. In the same year, one third of black and minority ethnic respondents to the Royal Historical Society's *Race, Ethnicity and Equality Report* wrote that they had witnessed 'discrimination or abuse of colleagues and/or students based on race or ethnicity during their academic employment'. This report also highlighted the fact that black historians made up less than 1% of UK university-based history staff. *Second Gender Equality Report* <<https://royalhistsoc.org/genderreport2018/>>; *Race, Ethnicity and Equality Report* <<https://royalhistsoc.org/racereport/>> [both accessed 21 July 2020].

academic historical discipline in Britain in the early twentieth century, produced detailed histories of women's work during industrialization. They showed that professional organizations had deliberately poached domestic skills, including teaching and healing, to meet the needs of an expanding commercial economy at the same time as erecting barriers that restricted women's access to formal scientific or technical training.⁴⁵ Shaped by the context in which they themselves were living and working, Clark was as much concerned with social policy reforms and women's suffrage as social history, while Pinchbeck was among a number of early women economic historians at the London School of Economics whose research arose out of a deep commitment to women's issues.⁴⁶ For many women throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries professional ambitions offered a tangible way to directly challenge the social and political inequalities facing women, although that is not to say that professional aspirations and 'feminism', or the ideals of the women's movement more generally, were always in harmony.⁴⁷ Revisiting their historical analyses can prove instructive in plotting the trajectories of women's participation in public life. While effectively excluded from climbing and controlling professional hierarchies, Clark argued, women nonetheless continued to perform a useful, if unacknowledged, service to them. It would be an error, she cautioned, to imagine that even the highest professions could function 'independent' of women's informal contributions.⁴⁸ Across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, indeed, legions of professional men relied upon the secretarial assistance and intellectual sustenance provided by their female employees, 'incorporated wives' and domestic servants (routinely female), often at the expense of these women's own careers and aspirations.⁴⁹ Though

⁴⁵ A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1919); I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1930).

⁴⁶ M. Berg, 'The first women economic historians', *Economic History Review*, xlv (1992), 308–29. On the admiration of Clark and her contemporaries for pre-capitalist systems of work see A. L. Erickson, 'Introduction', in A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, new edn (London, 1992), p. xiii.

⁴⁷ For more on this see K. Gleadle and Z. Thomas, 'Global feminisms, c.1870–1930: vocabularies and concepts – a comparative approach', *Women's History Review*, xxvii (2018), 1209–24; Z. Thomas, *Women Art Workers*, introduction and conclusion. See also M. Witwit, 'An evaluation of anti-feminist attitudes in selected professional Victorian women' (unpublished University of Bedfordshire PhD thesis, 2012).

⁴⁸ Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 236–89, at p. 241.

⁴⁹ *The Incorporated Wife*, ed. H. Callan and S. Ardener (London, 1984); R. Crompton, 'Women and the service class', in *Gender and Stratification*, ed. R. Crompton and M. Mann (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), pp. 119–36; H. McCarthy, 'Women, marriage and work in the British diplomatic service', *Women's History Review*, xxiii (2014), 853–73.

they were never a topic of discussion in Perkin's surveys, one imagines these notions would not have been completely foreign to him. In 1989 *The Rise of Professional Society* was dedicated to his wife – and fellow social historian – Joan Perkin, his 'helpmate for over fifty years', who published her first academic monograph, a feminist history of nineteenth-century married women, the same year.⁵⁰

Across the mid twentieth century, individuals such as the sociologist Olive Banks continued to grapple with questions relating to women, work and precarity in historical and contemporary contexts. Although Banks felt she could not fully focus on such topics until she left the academic profession aged fifty-nine in 1982, her experiences as a working-class student and of what she later called 'the prejudice against women in employment' as an early career scholar in a sociology department in the 1940s and 1950s shaped her thinking on the gendering of the labour market before this phenomenon entered mainstream academic research.⁵¹ Furthermore, recent histories of women sociologists have shown how their enquiries into women and issues surrounding employment shaped public conceptions of women's role and status before the 1960s, and how attitudes towards women workers in Britain became a source of tension as more women entered public life before, during and after the Second World War.⁵² From the 1960s and 1970s onwards a new generation of women's historians in adult and higher education became increasingly focused on rescuing the labour of women which had been hidden from history by the 'enormous condescension of posterity'.⁵³ Influenced by Marxism, the Women's Liberation Movement and the development of new forms of social history and cultural studies, these provocative studies highlighted female oppression and empowerment in the workplace and challenged conventional forms of historical periodization

⁵⁰ J. Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1989). Perkin dedicated her book to 'Harold, my husband, partner and private tutor in social history, without whose guidance, confidence and support this book would never have been written'. Their daughter, Deborah, commented in Joan Perkin's obituary that 'Harold never changed a nappy, but he didn't doubt women's intellectual abilities.' <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/22/joan-perkin-obituary>> [accessed 27 May 2020].

⁵¹ O. Banks, 'Some reflections on gender, sociology, and women's history', *Women's History Review*, viii (1999), 401–10, at pp. 404–5. We are grateful to Peter Mandler for bringing Banks's work on these questions to our attention.

⁵² H. McCarthy, 'Social science and married women's employment in post-war Britain', *Past & Present*, ccxxxiii (2016), 269–305.

⁵³ C. Hall, 'The tale of Samuel and Jemima: gender and working-class culture in nineteenth-century England', in *E. P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives*, ed. H. J. Kaye and K. McClelland (London, 1990), pp. 78–102.

and canonization.⁵⁴ Some tended to offer a rather essentialized account of women's oppression under patriarchal capitalism, viewing working- and lower-middle-class women's labour histories as representative of women's working lives more generally.⁵⁵

Ever present in discussions about women's professional identity, both in and outside the academy, has been the debate around the ideological legacy of the doctrine of 'separate spheres' and its impact in terms of the sexual division of labour, both in and outside the home. One of the most important early investigations into the intersection between gender relations and middle-class society, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes* (1987), brought to light a whole host of archival evidence from Birmingham and Suffolk families confirming that women had played a significant role in capitalist enterprises during the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet Davidoff and Hall concluded that women had at best been silent partners – 'hidden investments' – in professional and commercial concerns, especially at the higher end of the social spectrum, where there appeared to be a 'deeper commitment' to patriarchal domestic ideologies.⁵⁶ *Family Fortunes* left its mark on a generation of scholars: the assumption that structural processes of professionalization diminished most women's workforce participation took root, even as the very concept of separate spheres attracted criticism from different quarters.⁵⁷

The work of Martha Vicinus provides a useful example of the shift in emphasis as women's history developed; it increasingly sought to account

⁵⁴ Key early works in this literature include L. Nochlin, 'Why have there been no great women artists?', *Art News*, lxi (1971), 22–39; S. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against It* (London, 1973); J. Kelly, 'Did women have a Renaissance?', in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz (Boston, Mass., 1977), pp. 137–64; E. Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (London, 1977).

⁵⁵ For lower-middle-class women's work in Britain by a member of this cohort of feminist historians see, e.g., S. Alexander, 'Women's work in nineteenth-century London: a study of the years 1820–1850', in *Rights and Wrongs of Women*, ed. J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (London, 1976), pp. 59–111.

⁵⁶ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, 1987), 279, 287, 307.

⁵⁷ A. Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *Historical Journal*, xxxvi (1993), 383–414. For two more recent assessments see K. Gleadle, 'Revisiting *Family Fortunes*: reflections on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of L. Davidoff and C. Hall (1987)', *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*, *Women's History Review*, xvi (2007), 773–82; and S. Steinbach, 'Can we still use "separate spheres"? British history twenty-five years after *Family Fortunes*', *History Compass*, x (2012), 826–37.

for the wider range of ways women worked within and beyond restrictive social systems and cultural codes. In contrast to her more pessimistic views, expressed in the aptly named collection *Suffer and be Still* in 1972, her later work more sensitively examined the experiences of middle-class women who consciously strove to live outside the confines of Victorian cultural mores.⁵⁸ Exploring love, sexualities, life and work in single-sex residential institutions, including boarding schools, convents, hospitals and women's university colleges, her 1985 monograph, *Independent Women*, investigated the strategies by which, during the nineteenth century, two significant generations of single women in Britain began to demand lives defined by meaningful work as a 'revolt against redundancy'. Paid employment outside the home afforded women both private dignity and a public platform to question their place in society: '[i]t was the means out of the garden, out of idleness, out of ignorance, and into wisdom, service, and adventure'.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Vicinus alerted scholars to the pervasive impact of professional aspirations on late-nineteenth-century women's decisions as to whether to marry or remain single, alongside the rich emotional and sexual lives of women who lived with female partners.⁶⁰ The dawn of the twentieth century was identified as the moment at which 'the idea that girls ought to have an occupation of their own' became more accepted: from then on women who entered the workforce became a common site of myriad concerns about industrial modernity.⁶¹

As the value and status of a wider range of women's professional work became even more culturally acceptable in British society towards the end of the twentieth century, feminist historians began to uncover a much wider range of working women's experiences in the past. By the late 1980s and 1990s, women's historians had begun to investigate in greater depth the working lives of married women, mothers and widows as well as 'spinsters', revealing an array of women's professional contributions and complicating their relationship to family, home and class after the mid nineteenth century.

⁵⁸ M. Vicinus, *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington, Ind., 1972); cf. *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. M. Vicinus (Bloomington, Ind., 1977).

⁵⁹ M. Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 1–6.

⁶⁰ For the history of single women and men in the twentieth century see Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914–60* (Manchester, 2007).

⁶¹ E. Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1999), p. 91. See also B. Melman, 'Gender, history and memory: the invention of women's past in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', *History and Memory*, v (1993), 5–41.

This scholarship provided a wealth of convincing evidence that many different women used professional work and related practices, such as investing and managing property, as a means of gaining financial independence, cultivating spaces for feminist political activism and acquiring cultural capital.⁶² Moreover, it suggested that their professionalism *as women* could, at times, be made compatible with mainstream and conservative bourgeois social codes. More recent work has brought into focus the importance of the interplay between women of different classes and their cultural practices, and the importance of accounting for the movement of women within and between classes during the course of their lives, in understanding processes of professionalization. Research by Laura Schwartz, for example, has uncovered the drive to professionalize domestic service during the period under consideration in this volume.⁶³ In a pair of edited collections, Krista Cowman and Louise Jackson have argued that, for the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ‘middle-class’ woman, ‘the professional’ should be seen as a multi-faceted identity incorporating a kaleidoscopic combination of sliding categories, including ‘the vocational, the intellectual, the amateur ... the entrepreneurial, and (even) the proletarian’.⁶⁴

It cannot be denied that the development of opportunities for some professional women over this period played a role in reinforcing social inequalities. In practice, possibilities for women to use their foothold in professional society to bring about meaningful change were unequally distributed. Even among the most privileged, securing a degree of independence as a professional woman could also mean making profound material and emotional sacrifices. Gill Sutherland has emphasized the

⁶² Important book-length studies and edited collections including work on women in the professions in Britain include *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800–1918*, ed. A. V. John (Oxford, 1986); P. M. Glazer and M. Slater, *Unequal Colleagues: the Entrance of Women into the Professions, 1890–1940* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987); E. Roberts, *Women's Work, 1840–1940* (Cambridge, 1988); J. Perkin, *Women and Marriage*; M. J. Peterson, *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989); J. Rendall, *Women in an Industrializing Society: England, 1750–1880* (Oxford, 1991); *This Working-Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain, 1914–1945*, ed. S. Oldfield (London, 1994); A. Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom: Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life* (Cambridge, 1997); E. Gordon and G. Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family, and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 2003); G. Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (London, 2005).

⁶³ A comparison was often made with nursing, ‘a once-despised sphere of female labour that had been elevated by establishing training schools and professional qualifications’. L. Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 137.

⁶⁴ Cowman and Jackson, ‘Middle-class women and professional identity’, p. 166; see also *Women and Work Culture*, ed. Cowman and Jackson.

continuing significance of ‘respectability’ to a generation of conservative women university graduates during the heyday of the ‘New Woman’ around the turn of the twentieth century: as a consequence, when these women entered professional work they ‘had some enhanced scope for action but always with boundaries and limitations; no choices were without costs’.⁶⁵ Penelope Corfield and others have noted that in theory ‘there is no reason to suggest that women were or are harmed by the professional virtues of service, commitment, expertise and vocational dedication’, suggesting that it might be possible to excavate a parallel tradition of feminized professional citizenship alongside that of established male professionalism.⁶⁶ In practice, service was a double-edged sword for women. It could and did provide an entry point into public life before women were formally admitted into the professions, and through that gained the possibility of obtaining education and training as well as of participating in local and national politics, though Sutherland has pointed out ‘how powerful and durable assumptions about social class remained, how seductive and enduring the image of the Lady Bountiful proved’ for women entering medicine and social work during the late nineteenth century.⁶⁷ Historians of twentieth-century Britain have traced the echoes of these ‘Victorian values’ into the 1950s and 1960s, suggesting that inherited ideas of feminine moral authority could be a particularly useful resource for married, uneducated or older women who felt left behind by new technocratic professions.⁶⁸ Vestiges of these attitudes and ideas about women’s and men’s supposedly innate and oppositional traits continue to shape the structure of many professional fields today.

One of the most significant developments of the last three decades has been the multitude of discrete studies looking at women’s activities in a wide variety of professional settings. Moving away from a focus on women’s conventional roles in health care or social work, feminist scholars and women historians have invested their energies in productively mapping out histories of women’s professional activities in a range of disparate fields.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ G. Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 2015).

⁶⁶ Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, p. 188.

⁶⁷ Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, pp. 11–12.

⁶⁸ J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War: Continuities of Class* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 198, 234; see also F. Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 2010). Sutherland goes further, finding these ‘atavistic’ conceptions at work in David Cameron’s vision of the ‘Big Society’. Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ On women in medicine see C. Blake, *The Charge of the Parasols: Women’s Entry to the Medical Profession* (London, 1990); C. Dyhouse, ‘Women students and the London medical

They include the feminist activist strategies of teachers;⁷⁰ the pen names and publications of women authors, art historians, historians and journalists;⁷¹ the global careers of the earliest women diplomats and League of Nations Commissioners;⁷² the struggles of women lawyers, politicians, scientists, entrepreneurs and musicians to gain recognition or specialist training on the same footing as their male counterparts;⁷³ the demands placed upon women clerical workers, factory inspectors and social workers;⁷⁴ the salaries

schools, 1914–1939: the anatomy of a masculine culture’, *Gender & History*, x (1998), 110–32; G. Gosling, ‘Gender, money and professional identity: medical social work and the coming of the British National Health Service’, *Women’s History Review*, xxvii (2018), 310–28.

⁷⁰ D. Copelman, *London’s Women Teachers: Gender, Class, and Feminism, 1870–1930* (London, 1996); A. Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900–29* (Manchester, 1996); C. de Bellaigue, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800–1867* (Oxford, 2007).

⁷¹ C. Clay, *British Women Writers, 1914–1945: Professional Work and Friendship* (Aldershot, 2006); L. H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton, NJ, 2009); H. Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking like a Woman* (Cambridge, 2014); R. Mitchell, “‘The busy daughters of Clío’: women writers of history from 1820 to 1880”, *Women’s History Review*, vii (1998), 7–34; B. G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); M. Tusan, *Women Making News: Gender and Journalism in Modern Britain* (Urbana, Ill., 2005).

⁷² H. McCarthy, *Women of the World: The Rise of the Female Diplomat* (London, 2014); S. Pedersen, ‘Metaphors of the schoolroom: women working the Mandates System of the League of Nations’, *History Workshop Journal*, lxvi (2008), 188–207.

⁷³ R. Pepitone, ‘Gender, space and ritual: women barristers, the Inns of Court, and the interwar press’, *Journal of Women’s History*, xxviii (2016), 60–83; H. Kay and R. Pipes, ‘Chrystal Macmillan, Scottish campaigner for women’s equality through law reform’, *Women’s History Review*, xxix (2020), 716–36; H. Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914–1950* (London, 2000); K. Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815–1867* (Oxford, 2009); *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, ed. J. V. Gottlieb and R. Toye (Basingstoke, 2013); C. G. Jones, *Femininity, Mathematics and Science, 1880–1914* (Basingstoke, 2009); P. Fara, *A Lab of One’s Own: Science and Suffrage in the First World War* (Oxford, 2018); A. P. Kay, *The Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship: Enterprise, Home and Household in London, c.1800–1870* (London, 2009); J. P. Clark, *The Business of Beauty: Gender and the Body in Modern London* (London, 2020); J. Aston, *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy* (Basingstoke, 2016); D. Kennerley, ‘Debating female musical professionalism and artistry in the British press, c.1820–1850’, *Historical Journal*, lviii (2015), 987–1008.

⁷⁴ *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers since 1870*, ed. G. Anderson (Manchester, 1988); M. Savage, ‘Trade unionism, sex segregation, and the state: women’s employment in “new industries” in inter-war Britain’, *Social History*, xiii (1988), 209–30; R. Livesey, ‘The politics of work: feminism, professionalisation, and women inspectors of factories and workshops’, *Women’s History Review*, xiii (2004), 233–62; S. Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Nineteenth-Century London* (Princeton, NJ, 2004) and *The*

and private lives of early women broadcasters and producers;⁷⁵ the working hours of women museum curators, archivists and undercover detectives;⁷⁶ the studio spaces and living arrangements of women artists, architects and designers;⁷⁷ and the impact of motherhood on professional aspirations,⁷⁸ among other subjects in different regional and national contexts.⁷⁹ This innovative work has employed a range of historical approaches and methodologies in order not only to explore a wider variety of professional experiences, but also to alter the way we conceptualize the development of professional identity within different fields – for women and men alike.⁸⁰

Match Girl and the Heiress (Princeton, NJ, 2015); E. Ross, *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, Calif., 2007); E. Colpus, *Female Philanthropy in the Interwar World: Between Self and Other* (London, 2018).

⁷⁵ M. Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London, 2012); K. Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: a History of Early Women at the BBC* (Basingstoke, 2016).

⁷⁶ K. Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester, 2016); C. L. Kreuger, ‘Why she lived at the PRO: Mary Everett Green and the profession of history’, *Journal of British Studies*, xlii (2003), 65–90; L. A. Jackson, ‘The unusual case of “Mrs. Sherlock”: memoir, identity, and the “real” woman private detective in twentieth-century Britain’, *Gender & History*, xv (2003), 108–34.

⁷⁷ D. Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London, 1993); *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. C. Campbell Orr (Manchester, 1995); J. Helland, *Professional Women Painters in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commitment, Friendship, Pleasure* (Farnham, 2000); *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. K. Hadjiafxendi and P. Zakreski (Farnham, 2013); *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870–1950*, ed. E. Darling and L. Whitworth (Aldershot, 2007); *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, ed. J. Attfield and P. Kirkham (London, 1989); J. Seddon and S. Worden, ‘Women designers in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s: defining the professional and redefining design’, *Journal of Design History*, viii (1995), 177–93; J. Seddon, ‘Mentioned, but denied significance: women designers and the “professionalisation” of design in Britain c.1920–1951’, *Gender & History*, xii (2000), 426–47; *Fashioning Professionals: Identity and Representation at Work in the Creative Industries*, ed. L. Armstrong and F. McDowell (London, 2018).

⁷⁸ H. McCarthy, *Double Lives: a History of Working Motherhood* (London, 2020).

⁷⁹ For instance, Beth Jenkins’s research has emphasized that economic conditions in Wales between 1880 and 1939 restricted Welsh women’s professional opportunities to a smaller range of occupations than those available to women in England, a contrast that was especially marked by the outbreak of the Second World War. B. Jenkins, ‘Women’s professional employment in Wales, 1880–1939’ (unpublished University of Cardiff PhD thesis, 2016).

⁸⁰ C. de Bellaigue has convincingly argued that female headmistresses were not only ‘deeply implicated in the development of teaching as a career for women’ but also ‘helped shape the way it evolved as an occupation for men’. De Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, pp. 101–2.

Gender and processes of professionalization

Histories of women's work have been further shaped by critical theoretical approaches to gender history in Anglo-American academia in the late twentieth century. This development had important implications for the study of power relations and the professions, including subjecting the history of masculinities to greater scrutiny. Re-evaluating her own scholarly training in the history of labour relations in industrial France, Joan Scott argued in a path-breaking 1983 article that feminine and masculine roles and relationships should be analysed in relation to 'gender', a term more commonly applied to language.⁸¹ Identity, from this perspective, which conceptualized power in Foucauldian terms as 'dispersed constellations of unequal relationships', was 'contested terrain'.⁸² This intellectual turn went on to open up a variety of original avenues of enquiry. Of particular relevance was the shift away from a focus on women's oppression under patriarchal capitalism towards analyses of gendered practices and strategies of negotiation.⁸³ It is interesting to note, as Susan Pedersen has pointed out, that as women's history and gender history entered the mainstream, historians working on gender and power have increasingly tended to position past hierarchies and boundaries as blurred and negotiable, perhaps shaped in their conceptions of past power dynamics by their own opportunities in the present.⁸⁴

Paying close attention to power relations in specific historical contexts nevertheless still has important implications for understanding and confronting gender stereotypes with long histories, such as the pigeonholing of women into 'caring' roles or the portrayal of women who performed commanding and authoritative professional work as 'unsexed' or 'unfeminine'. Furthermore, since the rise of gender history, researchers have become increasingly invested in exploring the intricacies of lived practices, which rarely mapped neatly on to prescribed norms. There has been increasing attention to the gendered politics of qualitative sources such

⁸¹ J. Scott, 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', *American Historical Review*, xci (1985), 1053–75.

⁸² J. Scott, 'The evidence of experience', *Critical Inquiry*, xvii (199), 773–97, at p. 787.

⁸³ In the 1990s feminist scholars increasingly turned to directly assess how different historic professions had constructed gendered barriers, refusing women entry to specific fields so as to claim authority and expertise. Most notably, see B. G. Smith, *The Gender of History*. For the later context see *Gender and Change: Agency, Chronology and Periodisation*, ed. A. Shepard and G. Walker (Oxford, 2009), p. 4.

⁸⁴ S. Pedersen, 'The future of feminist history', *Perspectives on History*, xxxviii (2000) <<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2000/the-future-of-feminist-history>> [accessed 21 Aug. 2020].

as autobiographies, novels and advice literature, which tend to elucidate prescriptive theories of how idealized women *should* behave but can nevertheless be read against the grain to help explore the intricacies of how individuals lived and worked in practice. Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills have convincingly argued that it makes little sense to set up ‘separate spheres’ as ‘a theory whose only utility lies in the insights we can develop by disproving it’. They instead encourage assessment of how ‘the rhetoric of domesticity operated and was made meaningful in particular contexts, how contemporaries used it to make sense of their experiences, how it shaped the actions of particular individuals or groups, and how it changed over time’.⁸⁵

Gender analysis can also help us to unpick how the record-keeping produced by the rise of professional society itself was distinguished by its ‘careless disregard of women’s contributions’ to economic activity. ‘Politicians, public administrators, civil servants and statisticians, lawyers and even private businessmen ignored working women, overlooked their activities, and attributed their production to the nearest male’, financial historians have reminded us.⁸⁶ Barbara Caine has drawn attention to the gendered assumptions within the very ‘model of biography’, especially that focused on so-called ‘pioneers’ within professions, suggesting it can have the paradoxical effect of both ‘mak[ing] women marginal’ and reinforcing the notion that only public recognition was significant.⁸⁷ The most recent studies of professional women in particular fields across this period have consciously drawn upon an accumulation of many different types of source materials in order to capture the fragmentary archival traces left by individuals and to more fully contextualize cultural ideals alongside everyday practices, an approach taken by the contributors to this volume.

Gender analysis also reframed contemporary sociological studies of professionalization, which had tended to focus on the legal, political or cultural mechanisms used to dissuade, and formally bar, women and minorities from entering a limited range of male-dominated professions and industries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁸⁸ Blanket

⁸⁵ L. Delap, B. Griffin and A. Wills, ‘Introduction’, in *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 1–24, at pp. 11–12.

⁸⁶ R. Beachy, B. Craig and A. Owens, ‘Introduction’, in *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 2006), p. 8. See also M. Walsh, ‘Gendered endeavours: women and the reshaping of business culture’, *Women’s History Review*, xiv (2005), 181–202.

⁸⁷ B. Caine, ‘Feminist biography and feminist history’, *Women’s History Review*, iii (1994), 247–61, at p. 250. See also P. Hicks, ‘Women worthies and feminist argument in eighteenth-century Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, xxiv (2015), 174–90.

⁸⁸ Valuable sociological studies include S. Walby, *Patriarchy at Work: Patriarchal and Capitalist Relations in Employment* (Cambridge, 1986); A. Witz, *Professions and Patriarchy*

categories such as 'pseudo-professional', 'semi-professional' or 'para-professional' are still commonly used to describe any group deemed by their contemporary investigator to have fallen victim to 'strategies of closure' and to thus have been trapped either outside professional cultures or in purely supportive roles.⁸⁹ From the 1990s, feminist sociologists applying gender theory to studies of contemporary professional identities sought to replace Weberian paradigms of professionalization, which were effectively defined by the careers of successful white, male academic sociologists in their own image, with more nuanced models of women's agency. Most notably, Anne Witz's work showed how female professionals working in health care in Britain during the 1980s constructed 'professional projects' to actively resist patriarchal management structures by enacting their own strategies of 'occupational closure'.⁹⁰

Gendered strategies of negotiation within the workplace were particularly important during the period covered in this book, when many occupations were becoming professions for the first time and new fields of work were opening up without the burden of long-established hierarchies. Feminist and women's historians have long been attentive to the ways in which men tend to dominate managerial posts in feminized professions, and how, more generally, greater equality is often followed by renewed obstacles to women's progress. The passing of the legislation that widened employment opportunities for women in 1919 was quickly and effectively curtailed for some professionals in practice over the next two decades through measures such as the marriage bar, for instance. Recent studies of working married women and mothers have added nuance to this picture, highlighting the range of occupations into which professional women's labour could be

(London, 1992); *Gender and Bureaucracy*, ed. A. Witz and M. Savage (Oxford, 1992); C. Davies, *Gender and the Professional Predicament in Nursing* (Buckingham, 1995); R. Crompton, *Women and Work in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1997).

⁸⁹ The classic sociological study is A. Etzioni, *The Semi-Professions and Their Organization* (New York, 1969). Sociologist Jeff Hearn has argued that the semi-professions should be recognized as having a greater impact upon the 'maintenance and development of the patriarchy'; J. Hearn, 'Notes on patriarchy, professionalization, and the semi-professions', *Sociology*, xvi (1982), 184–202, at p. 197. For a rare example of a social historian dealing specifically with precarious practitioners in health, welfare and education see C. Nottingham, 'The rise of the insecure professionals', *International Review of Social History*, lii (2007), 445–75.

⁹⁰ A. Witz, *Professions and Patriarchy* (London, 1992). See also A. Witz, 'Patriarchy and professions: the gendered politics of occupational closure', *Sociology*, xxiv (1990), 675–90; M. Savage, 'Women's expertise, men's authority: gendered organisations and the contemporary middle classes', *Sociological Review*, xxxix (1991), 124–51; A. Witz and M. Savage, 'The gender of organizations', *Sociological Review*, xxxix (1991), 3–62.

diverted.⁹¹ Thirsk's Law, conceived by the economic and social historian Joan Thirsk at the end of the 1980s, is a useful tool for understanding how these processes occurred within particular fields and the implications for how we think about women's professional capabilities and expertise. Thirsk posited that in any new occupation the establishment of professional enterprises and associations proceeded on a basis of equality until 'the venture has been satisfactorily and firmly established, when it has been institutionalised, formalised, and organised. Then, when the formal structure hardens, the direction, and the style as well, always fall under the control of men.'⁹² Recent research into the history of gender-segregated labour markets has revealed – contrary to older assumptions about the primacy of efficiency in employers' decision-making – that a complex mixture of cultural, political and economic factors determined how and when women's skilled work was downgraded in value and status in relation to that of their male colleagues. In a powerful example of Thirsk's Law in action, Mar Hicks's recent study of the changing place of women in the post-war British computing industry demonstrated that, despite the range of women's technical competencies and experiences, 'biases that had nothing to do with the bottom line shaped managerial conduct' and increasingly led to the underutilization of their skills as the century progressed.⁹³

Since the 1990s, scholars have become increasingly invested in challenging notions of masculinity as historically static and ahistorical. Patriarchy is now understood as a work in progress and historians have identified unstable, vulnerable and contested as well as confident and performative masculinities.⁹⁴ Scholars such as Mrinalini Sinha have emphasized the

⁹¹ M. Takayanagi, 'Sacred year or broken reed? The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919', *Women's History Review*, xxix (2020), 563–82. On the marriage bar see H. Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation: Women's Work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900–55* (Manchester, 2016), pp. 178–208; H. McCarthy, *Double Lives: a History of Working Motherhood* (London, 2020), pp. 82–7, 95–6, 142–4, 150–53.

⁹² J. Thirsk, 'The history women', in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, ed. S. Wichert and M. O'Dowd (Belfast, 1995), pp. 1–11, at pp. 1–2.

⁹³ M. Hicks, *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017), p. 10.

⁹⁴ M. Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man since 1945* (Oxford, 1994); J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1999); B. Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge, 2012); A. Miles and M. Savage, 'The strange survival story of the English gentleman', *Cultural and Social History*, ix (2012), 595–612. For a useful overview of the field see K. Harvey and A. Shepard, 'What have historians done with masculinity? Reflections on five centuries of British history, circa 1500–1950', *Journal of British Studies*, xlv (2005), 274–80.

intersections between masculinity, class and racialized hierarchies that continued to structure British society; for instance, problematic stereotypes of the ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ persistently served to legitimate colonial rule in late-nineteenth-century India.⁹⁵ Yet despite the wealth of scholarship on historical masculinities, there has been little *direct* interrogation of how men sought to construct professional roles, how dominant masculine norms and expectations shaped these activities, and how this varied between different professional fields and occupational cultures.⁹⁶ This is surprising, as the concept of work and debates about ‘manly labour’ have received notable interest, albeit focused on the working and lower middle classes.⁹⁷ This relative silence on the question of masculinity and the construction of professional status has led to a tendency to position ‘the project of professionalization’ as ‘a simple route to the acquisition of status for men’, a notion this edited collection seeks emphatically to problematize.⁹⁸

Gender is thus a potent tool enabling scholars to interrogate the ways in which changes in masculine and feminine occupational identities are ‘complementary and interdependent’, resulting in new insights into the processes by which certain types of employment were transformed from ‘men’s work’ to ‘women’s work’ and vice versa.⁹⁹ The influence professionals wielded in society and culture throughout the period under discussion in this book means that ignoring the rich, messy, complex realities of gender relations in and on the margins of the professions has grave consequences for the interpretation of modern British history as a whole. As David Edgerton points out in his 2018 history of the British nation state, ‘histories reflect visibility in the public sphere’. But it is surely naive to declare of the historiography in the same breath that ‘[m]any men operated in the public

⁹⁵ M. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali* (Manchester, 1995).

⁹⁶ A notable exception is Heather Ellis’s work on the masculine self-fashioning of scientific practitioners in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain. H. Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain, 1831–1918* (London, 2017).

⁹⁷ A. James Hammerton, ‘Pooterism or partnership? Marriage and masculine identity in the lower middle class, 1870–1920’, *Journal of British Studies*, ccciii (1999), 291–321; A. Baron, ‘Masculinity, the embodied male worker, and the historian’s gaze’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, lxi (2006), 143–60.

⁹⁸ K. Cowman and L. A. Jackson, ‘Introduction: middle-class women and professional identity’, *Women’s History Review*, xiv (2005), 165–80, at p. 165.

⁹⁹ M. Zimbeck, ‘Jobs for the girls: the expansion of clerical work for women, 1850–1914’, in *Unequal Opportunities*, ed. A. V. John, pp. 152–77, at p. 152.

sphere while most women were confined to a separate private world'.¹⁰⁰ Such an example is a sobering reminder that there is still an urgent need to repeatedly evidence and assert women's historic – and contemporary – professional contributions to society in the face of scholarship which continues to efface them. Throughout the period under discussion in this volume, most women may have been denied the opportunity of securing a stable professional career, according to conventional estimations, but the vast body of research into women's history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries over the past fifty years confirms that many women led remarkable professional lives and even more conducted professional work without full recognition or remuneration. Far from being neatly confined to a 'separate private world', moreover, women's labour (in all its guises) underpinned many men's operations and achievements as professionals, as the earliest feminist historians of work in Britain understood.¹⁰¹ Attending to gender and its intersections with other social categories in the study of power and expertise therefore provides a much richer means of exploring British public life in this period.

Gender, race and professional identity in a national and an international context

A particularly productive area of scholarship over the last twenty years has focused on the impact that international mobility had in enabling certain British citizens to assert their professional statuses, although there is far more work to be done. Many men, such as those in military and colonial administration, were required to travel and live overseas to build their professional reputations.¹⁰² By leaving Britain and strategically travelling to areas which had less restrictive professional practices, some women claimed new opportunities to make a name for themselves. Nineteenth-century British women artists seeking professional status sought to gain new experiences in European cities such as Paris and Rome. While they segregated students by sex, private art schools in Paris, for instance, allowed women to participate in the same topics of study as men and to paint nude

¹⁰⁰ D. Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: a Twentieth-Century History* (London, 2018), p. xxxvii.

¹⁰¹ Emily Callaci notes that this effacement of domestic labour in the lives of both male and female professionals is built into the very format of academic monographs. E. Callaci, 'On Acknowledgements', *American Historical Review*, cxxv (2020), 126–31.

¹⁰² E. Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004); B. Caine, *From Bombay to Bloomsbury: a Biography of the Strachey Family* (Oxford, 2005).

models.¹⁰³ Nursing, education and missionary work, furthermore, offered white middle-class women an opportunity to be valorized as agents of feminine ‘civilization’ in the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁰⁴

Mobility could therefore function as a crucial underpinning of the crafting of professional identities, but the circumstances of such mobility and its effects varied along fault lines shaped by hierarchies of gender, class, race and British imperial strategies. Antoinette Burton has offered revealing glimpses of Cornelia Sorabji’s experiences of colonial power as a Parsi from a middle-class Christian family in the Bombay Presidency who travelled to England to study at the University of Oxford, becoming the first woman to study law there.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, certain groups were often barred – formally and informally – from gaining access to international ‘professional society’. This was particularly the case for women deemed lower-middle or working class, or ethnically or racially ‘inferior’, or whose identities cut across these categories, whether they were seeking to emigrate to Britain for work, to leave or to move between different global geographies. Many were encouraged into a tightly circumscribed range of roles as domestic servants and ‘lady’s helps’ for white middle-class women, although, as Olivia Robinson has argued in her recent work tracing the global networks of travelling ayahs, such individuals could still transform ‘spaces designed to contain ... into spaces of gain’.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, scholars are increasingly emphasizing the necessity of accounting for and contextualizing the breadth of experiences different men and women of colour faced at work or while training in modern Britain.¹⁰⁷ In recent years there have been a number of insightful pieces, in

¹⁰³ L. Madeline et al., *Women Artists in Paris, 1850–1900* (New Haven, Conn., 2017).

¹⁰⁴ J. Howell, ‘Nursing empire: travel letters from Africa and the Caribbean’, *Studies in Travel Writing*, xvii (2013), 62–77; E. Prevost, ‘Married to the mission field: gender, Christianity, and professionalization in Britain and Colonial Africa, 1865–1915’, *Journal of Modern History*, xlvii (2008), 796–826.

¹⁰⁵ A. Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998), ch. 3.

¹⁰⁶ O. Robinson, ‘Travelling ayahs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: global networks and mobilization of agency’, *History Workshop Journal*, lxxxvi (2018), 44–66; J. Bush, ‘“The right sort of woman”: female emigrators and emigration to the British Empire, 1890–1910’, *Women’s History Review*, iii (1994), 385–409; L. Chilton, ‘A new class of women for the colonies: the *Imperial Colonist* and the construction of empire’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, iii (2003), 36–56.

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana*, ed. G. Holbrook Gerzina (New Brunswick, NJ, and London, 2003); *South Asians and the Shaping of Britain, 1870–1950: a Sourcebook*, ed. R. Ranasinha with R. Ahmed, S. Mukherjee and F. Stadler (Manchester, 2013); M. Matera,

particular documenting the experiences of black women in the workplace. Cultural geographer Caroline Bressey has used census and parish records, photographs and newly digitized newspapers to glean insights into the work that working-class black women sought access to in late-nineteenth-century Britain, arguing that, despite the brevity of such documentation, ‘they are important moments, creating a space in the archives where black women become temporarily visible and present themselves in their own words’.¹⁰⁸ In the post-war context, research by Clair Wills has highlighted the unusual professional opportunities opened up to Afro-Caribbean women nurses who might otherwise have been sidelined to below their professional level by the uneven early development of the National Health Service.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Jessica P. Clark has argued that, in noticeable contrast to the domination by men of hairdressing in nineteenth-century Britain, the late twentieth century ‘gave rise to a small but significant cohort of black female beauty entrepreneurs’. They were ‘afforded not only economic opportunity but also the conditions of possibility for forging commercial spaces – and communities – for black clientele, while defying the racist policies of the day’.¹¹⁰

This innovative research is still in its relative infancy and there is a dearth of scholarship focused on addressing race and the making of professional society in modern Britain more generally. As it stands, historians are indebted to pioneering research taking place in other disciplines. Alongside Bressey’s scholarship in the fields of cultural geography and critical archive studies, ethnographer Linda McDowell has evidenced the racist discrimination some black nurses faced in post-war Britain, with white patients and staff members often understanding professional expertise as shaped by the skin colour of those treating them.¹¹¹ Literary scholar Anna Snaith, meanwhile,

Black London: the Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century (Berkeley, Calif., 2015); M. Ono-George, “‘Power in the telling’: community-engaged histories of Black Britain”, *History Workshop Journal Blog*, 19 Nov. 2019 <<https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/power-in-the-telling/>> [accessed 2 Apr. 2021].

¹⁰⁸ C. Bressey, ‘Invisible presence: the whitening of the black community in the historical imagination of British archives’, *Archivaria*, lxi (2006), 47–61; ‘Black women and work in England, 1880–1920’, in *Class and Gender in British Labour History: Renewing the Debate or Starting It?*, ed. M. Davis (Brecon, 2011), pp. 117–32, at p. 117; ‘Geographies of belonging: white women and black history’, *Women’s History Review*, xxii (2013), 541–58.

¹⁰⁹ C. Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: an Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London, 2017), pp. 94, 311–15. See also H. McCarthy, *Double Lives*, ch. 10.

¹¹⁰ J. P. Clark, *The Business of Beauty: Gender and the Body in Modern London* (London, 2020), p. 197.

¹¹¹ L. McDowell, *Working Lives: Gender, Migration and Employment in Britain, 1945–2007* (Chichester, 2013), 115–16. See also her *Migrant Women’s Lives* (London, 2016).

has stressed the centrality of anticolonialism and feminism to the writings of women such as Jamaican writer and broadcaster Una Marson, among other pioneering women who travelled to London from India, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa between the 1890s and the 1940s.¹¹² This scholarship has demonstrated that scrutiny of gender, race, ethnicity and class is not simply a profitable supplement to histories of professional identity and social change but is inextricable from and fundamental to their analysis.

New historical perspectives

The chapters in *Precarious Professionals* redress the balance of research into professional society, which has hitherto dealt to a much greater degree with forms of social control, sexist discrimination and class-based exclusion than with the related processes of inclusion and diversification which maintained the relevance and status of professional identity in everyday life. We contend that historians need to draw on the rich body of scholarship on the history of women and gender in and outside the archetypal professions in order to re-evaluate the relationship between professional selfhood and society. Making the construction of barriers between professional careers and quasi-professional work the starting point for any study of professional life more broadly has meant that scholars have often neglected the extent to which processes of professionalization have historically been elastic, fragile and threatened by the presence of ‘outsiders’. Exploring historical instances of *inclusion* of marginalized groups or individuals in professional work – whether through ‘professional projects’, ‘silent partnerships’ or simply in re-examining the importance of the expertise of those in supporting and service roles – can serve to challenge received wisdom about gender roles and relations and point to new ways in which professional identity might be re-imagined in the future.

This is not to say that historians of professional identity should abandon the excavation of inequalities, discrimination and oppression in the professions – quite the opposite. Shifting the balance towards inclusion does not mean denying the historical importance of social closure to the operation of professions in modern British society and culture. To the contrary, it illuminates how inclusion is contested in specific political conditions and often leads to unequal outcomes. The chapters in this book show that defining what it meant to be a professional or to live up to professional ideals, however, was never as straightforward as the powerful might have hoped.

¹¹² A. Snaith, *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890–1945* (Cambridge, 2014).

Thinking more deliberately about the various forms of labour involved in maintaining an individual or institutional identity within particular professions, and about a wider range of the life histories and experiences of individuals associated with them, opens up new ways of conceptualizing the gendered impact and injustices of different processes of professionalization and their reverberations in contemporary society and culture.

Across the twelve chapters that follow we will learn about the lives of lawyers and scientists, ballet dancers and secretaries, historians and humanitarian relief workers, social researchers and Cold War diplomats, among many others. A major contribution this book makes is its move beyond the ongoing scholarly emphasis on analysing discrete fields within narrow periods to more effectively consider points of convergence and contention across a wide range of different occupations over the long term. The chapters are organized chronologically to enable readers to reflect on the shifting social context but also to encourage the breaking down of a narrow, linear narrative of professional 'progress' and to raise awareness of the different models of professionalization taking place within these respective fields. When considered together, many of the chapters offer useful new points of comparison and continuity which do much to refine and develop understanding of key moments, issues and themes.

Benjamin Dabby's and Claire Jones's chapters direct our attention to the ways women reshaped the boundaries between amateurism and professionalism in two very different fields and emphasize the pervasiveness with which mainstream ideas about amateurism and professionalism were shaped by gender. Jones's contribution highlights the difficulties expert women in science faced when their work became associated with the 'popular'. She examines three women of successive generations – Eleanor Ormerod (1828–1901), Hertha Ayrton (1854–1923) and Marie Stopes (1880–1958) – who established strong professional identities in their respective disciplines as the landscape of science moved from 'amateur' and domestic to institutional settings over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Utilizing memoirs as well as contemporary correspondence to consider working lives in private and academic laboratories and learned societies, alongside newly experimental forms of research, Jones's chapter ultimately argues that the professionalization of science was bound up with highly gendered understandings of an individual's capability of becoming a scientific practitioner.

By contrast, Dabby's chapter focuses on two women who played a pre-eminent role in shaping the discipline of art criticism during the mid nineteenth century, Anna Jameson (1794–1860) and Elizabeth Eastlake (1809–93). His chapter shows that the writings of these women, far from

being marginal to contemporary discourses on fine art on account of their gender, were central to the way this intellectual field developed and was professionalized. In fact, it was Jameson's liminal position as an educated popularizer who consciously defined the femininity of her work against professional art institutions and the dilettantism of elite male collectors which 'redefined connoisseurship' from the outside. Through a careful excavation of print culture, Dabby's chapter demonstrates that there was considerable demand for an alternative to conventional patriarchal modes of art appreciation; Jameson's accessible style and Eastlake's claims for the power of historical female figures in Christian art appealed to a growing audience of periodical readers and museum visitors.

The chapter's focus on women's activities in the arts – fields often ignored in traditional accounts of the history of the professions – is a topic picked up in several other chapters, most notably in Laura Quinton's and Zoë Thomas's contributions. Quinton's chapter assesses the gendered dynamics in the world of ballet, a field which underwent a dramatic transformation from 'a feminized, low-ranking occupation' into a national art form by the Second World War. In particular, this chapter studies the central role played by Ninette de Valois (1898–2001) in changing the reputation of British ballet as a 'professional project'. Alongside charting her successes as a choreographer, teacher, writer and founding director of the Royal Ballet, it shows that de Valois consciously appealed to prevalent masculine and feminine notions of respectability in order to help build public esteem for precarious ballet practitioners and contest her field's historic associations with male homosexuality. As de Valois embraced male artists and opened up new spaces for their work within the field, she gradually eschewed her earlier experimentalism and female networks and strategically created an unassailable professional persona for herself. Quinton's chapter asks us to consider how women and men in a once-marginalized profession became imbricated in patriarchal and heteronormative processes of professionalization and the gendered impact this had on those continuing to work on the margins of their field.

Thomas's chapter moves beyond the formal and institutional spaces of creative professionalism by exploring the marriage and artistic collaboration of Edith Brearey Dawson (1862–1928) and Nelson Dawson (1859–1941). Although they had both initially worked as painters, Edith and Nelson turned to work in metalwork together after marriage – largely due to their financial status – and quickly became a prominent artistic force within the English Arts and Crafts movement. This chapter makes use of a hitherto unknown family archive of diaries, love letters, business correspondence, photographs and artworks to better contextualize the impact of pervasive

gender hierarchies on the Dawsons' artistic and marital collaboration but also to emphasize the ways they themselves sought to define and carve out new ways of living and working collaboratively. Thomas's chapter throws into greater relief the role of archival acquisition histories in shaping the legacy of professional couples, suggesting that women inhabited a precarious space within professional society even after their deaths.

This chapter also brings to the fore a discussion of how men have historically used masculinity to assert professional status; Nelson Dawson sought to align himself with dominant masculine modes of artistic self-fashioning through the use of portraiture and by joining male-only 'brotherhoods', for instance. This focus on masculinity is developed further in two more chapters in this collection which together seek to ignite interest in future histories of masculinity and professional society. James Southern's chapter extends this book's analysis of precarity, professionalism and masculinity to consider how these markers of identity intersected with the history of sexuality. It focuses on cultural attitudes and policies towards homosexuality in the British Foreign Office after the partial decriminalization of same-sex relationships between men in 1967. Using correspondence and policy documents, his chapter demonstrates that, during a period in which Britain's international status looked increasingly precarious, diplomats 'had to envisage and create a specifically Foreign Office version of homosexuality in order to keep gay men and lesbians out of the diplomatic service'. For the gay diplomats who worked in the Foreign Office before the bar was finally lifted in 1991, then, professional boundaries can be shown to have been drawn up 'within, rather than between, individuals'. The subtle analysis of the 'discursive processes' and lived experiences which informed ideas of sexual and professional deviance at the heart of the British state in this chapter provides ample evidence of the enduring role that elite institutions have played in shaping histories of class, race and gender during the second half of the twentieth century.

Ren Pepitone's chapter also takes us into the higher echelons of elite masculine professional society, but here the focus is the masculine preserve of the Inns of Court during the late nineteenth century. Through a close examination of the everyday lives of male barristers in the decades prior to the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, the chapter explains how and why the English and imperial legal profession was to remain 'a preserve of elite white men long after the formal barriers to women and minorities had been cleared away'. Pepitone argues that, in tandem with their role as the training ground for future generations of imperial lawyers, the late-Victorian Inns of Court served to inculcate men into embodied rituals of affective same-sex bonding and elaborate English heritage-inspired

‘performances of gentlemanly professionalism’. Pairing close analysis of homosociality with an in-depth study of material culture and the built environment, this chapter offers a new, cultural-historical methodology for unpacking the logics of resistance to change within white, patriarchal professions. Here, precarity is not simply registered as an outsider status but as an intimate, institutionalized reaction to the forces of metropolitan and cosmopolitan modernity.

Pepitone’s chapter opens up fascinating comparisons with Leslie Howsam’s contribution, which offers a close study of Eliza Orme (1848–1937), the first woman to obtain a law degree from the University of London. Howsam’s chapter reveals that, once they had gained access to education in the law, certain women were able to access ‘a lucrative and prestigious career’ which ‘challenged the very culture of expertise’ in the legal profession. Unable to enter the hallowed halls of the Inns of Court, Orme and a group of women colleagues established chambers nearby on Chancery Lane and quietly engaged in ‘legal paperwork’ for male barristers; precarious but innovative and prosperous, they were professional in all but name. Few of Orme’s personal papers survive, and this chapter pieces together her career over three decades, using census records, commercial directories and contemporary journalism, though it speculates that Orme must have built ‘an extensive and powerful network of connections’ which went ‘almost completely undocumented’.¹³ Bringing a wider culture of professional precarity and gendered exploitation into sharper focus, Howsam’s chapter nevertheless shows that Orme managed to strategically leverage her role on the margins of the gentlemanly culture explored in Pepitone’s chapter in order to advocate publicly for liberal feminist causes.

A key contribution of Howsam’s chapter is its reminder of the intellectual pay-off of such a close, considered study, painting in rich detail the ways specific individuals navigated through professional society, often with surprising results. Several other chapters have also deliberately used this close lens of analysis. Heidi Egginton’s, for instance, examines the problem of professional selfhood in later life in the Second World War diaries of Mary Agnes Hamilton (1882–1966), which recently came to light in the archive of one of Hamilton’s male contemporaries. Hamilton’s career spanned two world wars and defied easy categorization, moving in and out of the fields of journalism, politics, literature and the civil service. Drawing on her unpublished personal papers and two memoirs, the chapter assesses

¹³ Ch. 4 extends and updates the author’s earlier work on Orme: L. Howsam, ‘“Sound-minded women”: Eliza Orme and the study and practice of law in late-Victorian England’, *Atlantis*, xv (1989), 44–55.

the strategies Hamilton used, as a writer, to traverse the masculine arenas of professional recruitment, parliamentary politics and post-war planning, as well as everyday life in wartime London. Egginton's chapter problematizes the relationship between professional identities and conventional forms of autobiography by considering the gendered forms of evidence and cultural production available to women who devoted themselves to public service. Her chapter highlights the need for historians of professional society to analyse the gendered politics of collecting personal papers during the late twentieth century.

One of the most striking points about Hamilton's career was her construction of a variety of professional roles, often in the ongoing absence of institutional stability and support. This is a persistent theme in many of the chapters in *Precarious Professionals* and offers a refreshing alternative to the dominance of studies which use institutional cultures as the key lens through which to assess professional society. Laura Carter's chapter picks up on this, turning from scrutiny of one individual to survey the lives of over 200 twentieth-century women historians. It looks beyond the confines of university institutions and academic models of professional development to incorporate a wide spectrum of writers, activists, civil servants, curators and educators, delineating for the first time three distinct cohorts of women history makers. In the process, the chapter challenges existing notions of periodization in narratives of the development of the historical profession in Britain, demonstrating, for example, the involvement of women historians in transatlantic political discourses on race and nation as well as on class and gender. Revealing the technological mastery and literary invention cultivated by popular women historians within liminal spaces such as museum exhibitions, archive cataloguers' offices and BBC wireless broadcasts as well as in lecture theatres, Carter's chapter shows that the discipline of history was enriched and enlivened by precarious professionals before, during and after its 'professionalization'.

A particularly welcome element of Carter's chapter is the way it illuminates the activities of lesser-known, at times conservative, women who engaged in 'history-making' in the mid twentieth century, expanding our knowledge of an era often neglected in favour of the tendency to prioritize locating women's working lives within the context of women's suffrage advocacy or Women's Liberation Movement activism. Helen McCarthy's chapter builds on this point, considering the wider meaning of the discursive encounters between sociologists, professional women's organizations and working women in the 1960s. It examines discourses around women and professional work in the social surveys and public advocacy of researchers, including Viola Klein (1908–1973) and Pearl Jephcott (1900–1980), who

have previously played only a marginal role in the historiography of post-war social science. In tackling the problem of women's subjective feelings about paid work, family and professional identity, these women made important contributions towards public understandings of modernity and social change. At the same time as they displaced earlier prejudices towards women professionals, the chapter notes, they also articulated a privileged, individualist 'feminist politics rooted in the value of personal achievement, commitment and self-knowledge', an attitude that obscured issues of wider significance for working women across the class spectrum such as childcare. Read together, the chapters by Carter and McCarthy complicate and enhance understanding of the genealogies of women's contributions to intellectual life in Britain.

Another major contribution several of the chapters make is to move the framework of analysis beyond Britain. In particular, Susan Pedersen's and Ellen Ross's chapters position women's working lives in the context of the growing opportunities provided by international humanitarian and diplomatic organizations after the First World War. Both expand on the uneven development of the relationship between women's educational qualifications and skills and their status as professionals, even in fields and institutions which appeared to offer new opportunities for women to gain an equal footing with their male counterparts. Taking as its subject the professional happiness of the 'worker-educator' Francesca Wilson (1888–1981), Ross's chapter uses a biographical approach to vividly reconstruct the emotional and psychological texture of her engagement with refugee relief work during the interwar period. It explores the tension between women's class backgrounds, cultural expectations of employment for women university graduates and Wilson's own desire for 'foreign travel, adventure and challenges' in her life and career. Traditional, gendered assumptions about the suitability of Quaker women for care work and Wilson's own early experiences as a teacher indelibly shaped her contributions towards international aid, yet this chapter strongly argues that Wilson conceived of her experiences not simply as service but as *professional* work.

Pedersen's chapter examines the cohort of British women secretaries, translators, précis writers, press analysts and stenographers who became paid members of the League of Nations Secretariat during the 1920s and 1930s. Using an untapped seam of personnel files to excavate, the work culture and gendered assumptions that structured the League's everyday life, her chapter illustrates the importance of setting women's biographies in the context of the underlying patterns of inclusion and exclusion that shaped an individual's path through an institution. If women always remained 'a minority presence' at the League, the chapter argues, their visibility outside

its more formal bodies as efficient administrators and experts amounted to 'a sea-change in the practice of international politics that could never quite be undone'. Indeed, it was the 'adjunct and advisory roles' to which overqualified and under-remunerated women often found themselves relegated at the League that gave them not only a seat on committees packed with male political appointees but access to valuable resources, back-room networks and like-minded female collaborators. While they may ultimately have been dedicated to an ethos of anonymous public service rather than feminist activism, Pedersen's chapter makes it clear that it is impossible to fully understand the League's impact on international politics without noticing the women who staffed its Secretariat.

This book, therefore, argues that the experience and representation of precariousness – an insecure or marginal economic, social, cultural or psychological position – is vital to understanding the histories and mysteries of professional identity in modern Britain. In Harold Perkin's classic account, social transformation could ultimately be triggered only by those who had a strong position in professional hierarchies. '[I]ndependence, security of tenure, a firm base from which to criticize without fear of the consequences', as well as 'moral self-confidence and self-respect': it was this combination that gave the professional 'a secure position of leverage from which to move society, or his [*sic*] own particular corner of it, in the direction of change and reform'.¹¹⁴ In bringing into focus those professionals who had a less secure grip upon the levers of power, this edited collection will radically revise assumptions concerning the agency of precarious individuals and the development of professional cultures. If we are to fully understand the ongoing purchase of professionalism in modern Britain, we must see that gender hierarchies and precariousness have been woven into the very fabric of professional society.

¹¹⁴ Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 379–80.



Figure 1.1. Anna Brownell Jameson (née Murphy), by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, carbon print, 1843–7 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

I. Anna Jameson and the claims of art criticism in nineteenth-century England

Benjamin Dabby

As far as Daniel Deniehy (1828–1865) was concerned, Anna Jameson (1794–1860) was one of England’s most important women of letters, and he praised her criticism of art above all. She was, lectured this Australian man of letters after Jameson’s death in 1860, ‘as true and as thorough when she looked at historical fresco or at portrait, as William Hazlitt’ (1778–1830).¹ The comparison between Jameson and Hazlitt was also made by Hazlitt’s eponymous son and was repeated across the nineteenth century, suggesting a widespread understanding of Jameson’s important role in promoting and professionalizing art criticism in nineteenth-century England.² Jameson, however, did more to professionalize and to popularize art criticism than her predecessor, in part because Hazlitt worried that a popular appreciation of art might herald civilizational decline. He had been torn between the idea that art could ‘convey certain ideas ... to the eye and mind of all’³ and a suspicion that attempting to democratize aesthetic taste incurred a moral and social risk. ‘The diffusion of taste’, he wrote, ‘is not, then, the same thing as the improvement of taste ... which can only be decided upon by the most refined understandings.’⁴ The claim that the cultivation of a people’s aesthetic taste jeopardized their moral and social progress and that only an elite few were capable of ‘refined understandings’ was made

¹ *The Poets and Prose Writers of New South Wales*, ed. G. B. Barton (Sydney, 1866), p. 133.

² See, e.g., *Criticisms on Art: and Sketches of the Picture Galleries of England. By William Hazlitt. With Catalogues of the Principal Galleries, now First Collected. Second Edition. Edited by his son*, ed. W. Hazlitt (London, 1856), pp. 6, 75; [Anon.], ‘The poetical works of Edmund Spenser’, *New York Review*, viii (1841), 50–73; [Anon.], ‘Michael Angelo’, *Round Table*, vi (1865), 83–4, at p. 83; [Anon.], ‘The literature of the age of Elizabeth’, *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, x (1869), 628–30; [Anon.] ‘Art-publications’, *Art-Journal*, xv (1876), 255–6, at p. 256. See also K. Hayens, ‘Heine, Hazlitt and Mrs Jameson’, *Modern Languages Review*, xvii (1922), 42–9.

³ [W. Hazlitt], ‘Judging of pictures’, *Literary Examiner*, 2 Aug. 1823, 72–5, at p. 73.

⁴ W. Hazlitt, ‘An inquiry whether the fine arts are promoted by academies and public institutions’ (1814), in his *Essays on the Fine Arts* (London, 1873), pp. 4–23, at p. 16.

at greater length by Jameson's contemporary Elizabeth Eastlake (1809–93). Eastlake played an important role in developing art connoisseurship as the means of cultivating aesthetic taste for an elite few prepared to dedicate themselves to the training she offered in the pages of the *Quarterly Review*, in which she wrote for almost fifty years.⁵ For Jameson, however, Eastlake's model of art connoisseurship limited art's potential to effect moral and social improvement, and this chapter examines the pivotal contribution Jameson made to a different method of art criticism's professionalization in nineteenth-century England, which entailed much bolder claims for its potential to improve the nation and saw her challenge contemporary definitions of connoisseurial authority itself.

Jameson's career as an art critic and the claims she made for art's moral and social power were made possible by the dramatic expansion of the periodical press and the popular publishing industry in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. This expansion presented a greater opportunity for ambitious women to earn a living by writing in a range of publications widely understood to be important sources of self-improvement.⁶ The number of women and men writing across a range of periodicals grew even more from mid-century onwards, following the repeal of the stamp tax in 1855 and the paper tax in 1861, making literary production cheaper, and these publications were able to reach larger audiences thanks to improved literacy and advertising.⁷ Linda H. Peterson has shown that '[p]rofessional women of letters emerged, as a group, simultaneously with their male counterparts' at this time, constructing identities of professional authorship which reflected and perpetuated their cultural authority.⁸ This process of literary professionalization saw women writers negotiating gender stereotypes of men's and women's intellectual and moral characteristics. Some decided to degender these characteristics for the most part, arguing that the careful

⁵ H. Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking like a Woman* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 23–5.

⁶ B. Dabby, *Women as Public Moralists in Britain: From the Bluestockings to Virginia Woolf* (Woodstock, NY, 2017), p. 13.

⁷ See Dabby, *Women as Public Moralists in Britain*, p. 15; B. Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2000); H. Fraser, S. Green and J. Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 4–5; M. van Remoortel, *Women, Work and the Victorian Periodical: Living by the Press* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 4–5; F. Mann, 'Lifting the "universal veil" of anonymity: writers on art in the British periodical press 1850–1880', *British Art Journal*, xv (2014), 33–46; P. Fletcher and A. Helmreich, 'The periodical and the art market: investigating the "dealer-critic system" in Victorian England', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, xli (2008), 323–51.

⁸ L. H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton, NJ, 2009), pp. 3–4.

cultivation of expertise was as open to talented women as it was to talented men. As Sidney Smith had argued in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review* as early as 1810:

[a] great deal has been said of the original difference of capacity between men and women . . . All this, we confess, appears to us very fanciful. That there is a difference in the understandings of the men and women we every day meet with, every body, we suppose, must perceive; but there is none surely which may not be accounted for by the difference of circumstances in which they have been placed, without referring to any conjectural difference of original conformation of mind.⁹

Eastlake made this degendering of talent an important basis for her cultural authority and status as a professional woman of letters, as did other women of letters throughout the century. Jameson, however, saw an advantage in a gendered discourse quick to praise women's special capacity for moral sympathy and men's worrisome proclivity for vainglory, and in contrast to histories which place professional women of letters on the margins of nineteenth-century art criticism, this chapter shows how its practice was gendered by its most successful pioneer, who portrayed male critics as often focused on irrelevant and rarefied cultures.¹⁰

Anna Jameson was hailed as England's answer to France's pre-eminent woman of letters, Germaine de Staël, thanks to the critical esteem her literary moralism and travel writing of the 1820s and 1830s had earned. Her pioneering art criticism also began in these decades and rested on a claim to have mastered the critical faculty of 'disinterestedness'. She presented this faculty as the basis of any meaningful appreciation of art's moral power and degendered it by arguing that only women and men who possessed reason and sensibility in equal balance and were thus disinterested were able to understand and benefit from the moral power of visual art. Without it they were likely to succumb to the emotionalism that was sometimes described as typical of women or to the vanity which Jameson pointed out was often typical of men. This was the basis of her claim to practise a new

⁹ [S. Smith], 'Female education', *Edinburgh Review*, xv (1810), 299–315, at p. 299. The professional woman of letters Hannah Lawrance cited Smith's article in 1870 in her own reflection on shifting attitudes to gender stereotypes. See B. Dabby, 'Hannah Lawrance and the claims of women's history in nineteenth-century England', *Historical Journal*, liii (2010), 699–722, at p. 715.

¹⁰ T. Balducci and H. Belnap Jensen, 'Introduction', in their *Women, Femininity and Public Space in European Visual Culture, 1789–1914* (London, 2016), pp. 1–16; A. M. Von Lintel, "'Excessive industry": female art historians, popular publishing and professional access', in *Women, Femininity and Public Space*, pp. 115–30.

professional standard of art criticism: one predicated on her disinterested expert evaluations of paintings and their moral power, and on her superior standing outside patriarchal male institutions such as the Royal Academy. In this context, Jameson's decision to invite comparison between herself and de Staël was carefully made; de Staël's writings, Eastlake later wrote, 'cannot be pronounced to be either masculine or feminine, abounding as they do in ... the qualities of sound and impartial judgment, and true and exact definitions'.¹¹ Jameson was willing to take advantage of the intuitive sensibility conventionally ascribed to women, as well as the feminine register available to her, but her claim to have superseded gendered stereotypes authorized her art criticism and allowed her to position herself as the empowered successor to eighteenth-century moralists such as de Staël or indeed Hazlitt.

Jameson's professionalization of art criticism therefore saw her actively involved in constructing a gendered professional persona which was widely appreciated. Although she did not use the term 'professional' to describe herself, her contemporaries did, using it to denote the depth and breadth of her expertise as well as her commercial success as a critic. The *Literary Gazette*, for instance, referred to her as a 'professional writer', and *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* called her a 'professional author'.¹² She earned 'a very high rank as Art-critic', declared another periodical, deeming her a critic of 'taste and genius' next to whom 'Passavant is dull, Kugler an encumbrance, and Waagen unmistakably a bore'.¹³ This contrast in *Duff's Hibernian Magazine* between the democratic and accessible claims of Jameson's art criticism and the standard of elite connoisseurship promoted by the German art critics Johann Passavant (1787–1861), Gustav Waagen (1794–1868) and Franz Theodor Kugler (1808–1858) illustrates the important divergence in the claims of art criticism in this period, in which connoisseurship is sometimes seen as representative of the marginalization of women of letters as art critics. Jameson, however, played an important role in popularizing an awareness of German art critics in Victorian Britain by redefining connoisseurship in art as a skill accessible to a much wider audience of male and female middle-class readers; the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt (1827–1910) averred that 'he had learned "not a little" from Jameson's articles in the

¹¹ [E. Eastlake], 'Madame de Staël: a study of her life and times', *Quarterly Review*, clii (1881), 1–49, at p. 49.

¹² [Anon.], 'Rev. of *Winter studies and summer rambles in Canada*, by Mrs. Jameson', *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, mcxlii (1838), 772; [Christian Isobel Johnstone], 'Mrs. Jameson's Canada', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, vi (1839), 69–81, at p. 73.

¹³ R., 'Mrs. Anna Jameson', *Duff's Hibernian Magazine*, i (1860), 25–9, at p. 27.

Penny Magazine', suggesting that her criticism was probably 'influential for the whole Early Christian phase of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' itself.¹⁴ Jameson's art criticism, then, undoubtedly appealed to male and female readers alike, and this was demonstrated by the popularity of her art guides and histories, alongside her contributions to major periodicals such as the *Athenaeum*, the *Penny Magazine*, the *English Woman's Journal*, the *New Monthly Magazine* and Samuel Carter Hall's *Art-Journal*.¹⁵ Indeed, it was Jameson who opened the *Art-Journal's* issue of 1 March 1849. We 'are to have Art it seems for the million', she declared, positioning herself 'between the public and the artist as a sort of interpreter', ready to teach her readers to 'learn to distinguish ... merely conventional taste from the really purified perception of the Beautiful, which leads us through the love of Art to the love of Nature, and from Nature up to God'.¹⁶

The wider context in which Jameson worked reveals the variety of methods of art criticism in nineteenth-century England and the differences between her own background and that of her contemporaries. Jameson had had to work for a living since she was a teenager because her father, Denis Brownell Murphy, was a poorly paid miniature painter. It was his insecure income that prompted him to leave Dublin for England in 1798 in search of more work, and by the time his daughter Anna was sixteen she had started work as a governess to the marquess of Winchester's children. From then onwards it was fifteen years of work as a governess for several employers, until her marriage to the lawyer Robert Jameson in 1825.¹⁷ Other professional women of letters did not have to work so hard for a living from such a young age. Jameson's contemporary Hannah Lawrance (1795–1875), for example, who would go on to become a widely esteemed historian of medieval England, came from a more secure financial background: her grandfather John Stafford was the minister of the New Broad Street

¹⁴ A. M. Holcomb, 'Anna Jameson (1794–1860): sacred art and social vision', in *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts*, ed. C. Richter Sherman and A. M. Holcomb (Westport, Conn., 1981), pp. 93–121, at p. 113. On women of letters' role in translating German texts at this time see D. Levi, 'Fortuna di Morelli: appunti sui rapporti fra storiografia artistica tedesca e inglese', in *La Figura e l'Opera di Giovanni Morelli: Studi e Ricerche*, ed. M. Panzeri (Bergamo, 1987), pp. 19–54.

¹⁵ K. Haskins, *The Art-Journal and Fine Art Publishing in Victorian England, 1850–1880* (London, 2012), p. 147; A. Robinson, 'Stalking through the literary world: Anna Jameson and the periodical press, 1826–1860', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, xxxiii (2000), 165–77, at p. 167.

¹⁶ A. Jameson, 'Some thoughts on art. Addressed to the uninitiated', *Art-Journal*, xi (1849), 69–71, at pp. 69–70.

¹⁷ Dabby, *Women as Public Moralists in Britain*, p. 39.

Independent Chapel from 1738 to his death in 1799, catering to a wealthy community of Congregationalist dissenters.¹⁸ Her later career encompassed not only medieval history but a wide remit of cultural criticism, including a regular unsigned column as an art critic for over twenty years in the *British Quarterly Review*.¹⁹ The periodical was an important site for the formation of a new class of professional male and female critics in nineteenth-century England, and here the different claims Lawrance made illustrate the diversity of women of letters' contribution to art criticism's professionalization at this time.²⁰ Lawrance moved easily from reviews that provided succinct distillations of Immanuel Kant's aesthetic philosophy to articles that corrected the more egregious errors she found in John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843–60).²¹ She had built her own reputation for disinterested expertise as an historian and, like Jameson, she eschewed restrictive gender models in her art criticism.²² But she complicated the claims Jameson made for art's moral power by setting strict utilitarian criteria under which art could be used to elevate the nation. She argued that art was a secondary source of moral improvement and that only a system of education which 'precedes art, and is distinct from it' could secure its beneficial effect.²³ The claims she made for art's power to improve society therefore relied much more heavily on guidance from elite connoisseurs such as her or her more famous contemporary Elizabeth Eastlake.

Eastlake's father was the prosperous gentleman farmer and physician Edward Rigby, and her career was also made in the pages of a prestigious periodical, the *Quarterly Review*. Her tenure as its standing art critic was built on her scholarly translation into English of Passavant's *Tour of a German Artist in England* (1836).²⁴ She married the Royal Academician Charles Eastlake in 1849 and, as Hilary Fraser has pointed out, she and her new husband entertained Gustav Waagen along with her friend Anna

¹⁸ Dabby, *Women as Public Moralists in Britain*, p. 46.

¹⁹ Dabby, *Women as Public Moralists in Britain*, pp. 54, 128–54.

²⁰ See Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters*; F. Mann, 'Lifting the "universal veil" of anonymity', pp. 33–46.

²¹ [H. Lawrance], 'Our epilogue on books [July]', *British Quarterly Review*, xxvi (1857), 233–80, at pp. 240–42; H. Lawrance, 'Modern painters', *British Quarterly Review*, xxiii (1856), 442–67.

²² Dabby, *Women as Public Moralists in Britain*, pp. 45–70; H. Kingstone, *Victorian Narratives of the Recent Past: Memory, History, Fiction* (London, 2017), p. 45.

²³ [H. Lawrance], 'Fine arts in the Crystal Palace', *British Quarterly Review*, xx (1854), 301–34, at p. 333.

²⁴ J. D. Passavant, *Tour of a German Artist in England. With Notices of Private Galleries, and Remarks on the State of Art*, trans. E. Eastlake, 2 vols (London, 1836).



Figure 1.2. After David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, *Elizabeth, Lady Eastlake*, carbon print, 1843–8 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Jameson the following year, before Elizabeth ‘transmitted his work to a British readership through her translation in three volumes of his *Treasures of Art in Great Britain* (1854)’.²⁵ But the friendship between Eastlake and Jameson did not obscure the different claims they made for art criticism. Like her husband, Elizabeth Eastlake claimed that art connoisseurship was a difficult science, in contrast to Jameson’s claims for its easily accessible moral benefits.²⁶ In Eastlake’s case, her route to the status of a professional art critic was through her masterful assessments and translations of Passavant, Waagen and Kugler; she became a major proponent of the concerns later associated with aesthetic claims of ‘art for art’s sake’ later in the century.²⁷ But she acknowledged an intellectual debt to Jameson, who had done so much to raise the profile of art criticism and art history, and she completed her friend’s final work of art history, *The History of Our Lord* (1864), after Jameson died in 1860.²⁸ Jameson had played a vital role in making an ‘educated taste’ in art accessible through her scholarly but readable guides, which earned her widespread critical esteem and allowed her to contest the gendered terms John Ruskin used to dismiss female art historians, further demonstrating the diverse ways in which women of letters contributed to the professionalization of art criticism in nineteenth-century England.

Daniel Deniehy’s tribute to Anna Jameson would have left her with mixed feelings, had she known of it. On the one hand, the comparison of her art criticism and William Hazlitt’s recognized her status as a literary professional and the case that each of them had made for disinterested cultural criticism; Hazlitt had maintained that the mind was naturally disinterested in *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805).²⁹ On the other hand, the assertions of his art criticism were precisely what she believed her own art criticism had superseded. Both had taken advantage of a growing appetite for guides to art collections, fostered by the prevalent belief in visual art as a source of moral truth. Hazlitt’s criticism appeared in articles for the *London Magazine* and the *New Monthly* in the early 1820s, which were collated into *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries in England* (1824). But he was uneasy about the

²⁵ Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 22.

²⁶ L. Hartley, *Democratizing Beauty in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 44.

²⁷ *The Letters of Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake*, ed. J. Sheldon (Liverpool, 2009), p. 48.

²⁸ A. Jameson, *The History of Our Lord as exemplified in Works of Art: with that of his types; St. John the Baptist; and other persons of the Old and New Testament. Commenced by the late Mrs. Jameson. Continued and completed by Lady Eastlake*, 2 vols (London, 1864).

²⁹ [W. Hazlitt], *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action: Being an Argument in Favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind* (London, 1805).

democratization of art appreciation in which he participated, writing that 'public taste' was 'necessarily vitiated, in proportion as it is public', adding that 'it is lowered with every infusion it receives of common opinion'.³⁰ For Hazlitt the real appreciation and understanding of art was possible only for the 'poetic connoisseur'. Hazlitt's connoisseur was an expert capable of 'the most refined understandings', which the writer declared 'can never be properly understood by the generality of mankind', and he warned that 'the decay of art may be said to be the necessary consequence' of its democratization.³¹ Jameson reacted against Hazlitt's cultural pessimism and incarnation of the elite connoisseur, declaring in her *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London* (1844) that 'Hazlitt is about as bad a *guide* in a picture gallery as it is possible to have', belittling him as a 'delightful companion' whose encounters with Rubens or Titian leave him 'as one intoxicated with colour, drunk with beauty'.³² In contrast to this figure of the elite male connoisseur who is, in fact, an incompetent amateur, she offered an alternative model of the expert critic whose scholarly historicist criticism did not come at the expense of easily comprehensible training in aesthetic taste.

There was considerable demand for an alternative to Hazlitt's brand of rarefied connoisseurship, not least among readers disaffected by the gendered assumptions on which his claims rested: Hazlitt had 'never met with any woman who could reason', he wrote in a Saturday edition of the *Morning Chronicle* in 1813.³³ This helps to explain the sustained appeal of Anna Jameson's art criticism and histories. In these she disproved Hazlitt's denigration of a woman's intellectual potential and argued against the idea that art's popularization might render it an agent of social decay. She turned to this in her first major publication, *The Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826), which began to establish her expertise and to advance democratic arguments for the power of art to improve society; it was, reflected the *Art-Journal's* editor Samuel Carter Hall later in the century, 'the groundwork of her reputation'.³⁴ The intellectual

³⁰ W. Hazlitt, 'Whether the fine arts are promoted by academies' (1814), in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1930–34), p. 46.

³¹ M. McCue, *British Romanticism and the Reception of Italian Old Master Art, 1793–1840* (Farnham, 2014), p. 86; W. Hazlitt, *The Round Table: a Collection of Essays on Literature, Men, and Manners*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1817), ii, p. 260.

³² A. Jameson, *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London* (London, 1844), p. 236.

³³ W. Hazlitt, 'On classical education' (1813), in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. A. R. Waller and A. Glover (London, 1902), pp. 460–63, at p. 461.

³⁴ S. C. Hall, *A Book of Memories of Great Men and Women of the Age, from Personal Acquaintance* (London, 1877), p. 375.

basis of her expertise was clear from its literary form of a diary, which was a tribute to de Staël's *Corinne* (1807). In *Corinne* de Staël demonstrated women's ability to master the arts of culture and conversation and to do so independently of men. By drawing on her own experience of touring Europe with the Rowles family in the early 1820s, Jameson displayed her own knowledge and appreciation of Italian masters in contrast to a stereotype of the male 'connoisseur', whom she ridiculed as lost in antiquarian technicalities:

Here comes a connoisseur, who has found his way, good man! from Somerset House, to the Tribune at Florence: See him with one hand passed across his brow, to shade the light, while the other extended forwards, describes certain indescribable circumvolutions in the air, and now he retires, now advances, now recedes again, till he has hit the exact distance from which every point of beauty is displayed to the best possible advantage, and there he stands – gazing, as never gazed the moon upon the waters, or love-sick maiden upon the moon! We take him perhaps for another Pygmalion? ... No such thing; it is the *fleshiness* of the tints, the *vaghezza* [vagueness] of the colouring, the brilliance of the carnations, the fold of a robe, or the foreshortening of a little finger. O! whip me such connoisseurs! the critic's stop-watch was nothing to this.

Jameson renders this male connoisseur a helpless amateur, walking backwards and forwards, waving his arms, intellectually incapable of illuminating art's moral power. In contrast, Jameson's narrator presents herself as uncorrupted by the male tradition represented by this connoisseur from Somerset House, home to the Royal Academy of Arts until its move to Burlington House in 1837. If she had 'visited Italy in the character of a ready made connoisseur, I should have lost many pleasures', she explains, adding that 'a technical knowledge of the arts is apt to divert the mind from the general effect, to fix it on petty details of execution'.³⁵ Instead Jameson's narrator becomes a professional guide to 'good taste' and 'bad taste' in art throughout the book,³⁶ recommending to her readers, for example, the 'St. Sebastians of Guido and Razzi; the St. Jerome of Domenichino; the sternly beautiful Judith of Allori, the Pietà of Raffaele; the San Pietro Martire of Titian', which she deemed:

tragic *scenes*, wherein all that is revolting is kept from view, where human suffering is dignified by the moral lesson it is made to convey, and its effect on the beholder at once softened and heightened by the redeeming grace which genius and poetry have shed like a glory round it.³⁷

³⁵ [A. Jameson], *Diary of an Ennuyée* (London, 1826), pp. 331–2.

³⁶ Jameson, *Diary*, pp. 18, 47–8, 52, 67, 69, 104, 108, 126, 133, 149, 152, 206, 238, 265, 285–6, 331, 334, 349–50, 353.

³⁷ Jameson, *Diary*, p. 336.

Notwithstanding the role of painters Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807) and Mary Moser (1744–1819) as two of the founding members of the Royal Academy, Jameson's exclusion from what had become an exclusively male site of art appreciation is presented in the *Diary* as the basis of her superior moral and scholarly authority as a professional critic and one to which she drew her readers' attention, in contrast to her own professional persona.³⁸ Her later art histories repeated and expanded on the claims she first made for these works of art in the *Diary*³⁹ and became a standard reference for her peers engaged in art criticism, as well as more popular travel guides to Italy.⁴⁰

Jameson's *Diary* also demonstrates nineteenth-century art criticism's location in different literary genres before the development of discrete disciplinary boundaries at the end of the century. The unconventional form of the semi-autobiographical homage to de Staël's *Corinne* served as an excellent vehicle for Jameson to establish her authority at a time when the status of art criticism in England was lower than it was in Germany, despite a growing belief in the power of the imagination to recognize the timeless moral truths represented in great art, whether literary or visual. Jameson's cultural criticism encompassed literary moralism in *The Loves of the Poets* (1829) and *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (1832); art criticism in *The Beauties of the Court of Charles II* (1833); and wide-ranging cultural criticism and travel writing in *Visits and Sketches at Home and Abroad* (1834), a four-volume work based on her tour of German states which also included a new edition of *The Diary of an Ennuyée*. German romantics such as Friedrich Schelling had developed aesthetic philosophies of nature which were increasingly familiar to English readers: Samuel

³⁸ M. Clarke and F. Ventrella, 'Women's expertise and the culture of connoisseurship', *Visual Resources*, xxxiii (2017), 1–10, at pp. 3–4; Dabby, *Women as Public Moralists in Britain*, pp. 24–5; Jameson, *Diary*, pp. 331–2. Cf. K. J. Stern, *The Social Life of Criticism: Gender, Critical Writing, and the Politics of Belonging* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2016), p. 78.

³⁹ A. Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 2 vols (London, 1848), i, pp. 276, 80–81, 83; ii, pp. 24–5.

⁴⁰ Jameson was cited regularly in the weekly art journal the *Chromolithograph* in the late 1860s. See, e.g., [Anon.], 'Leeds exhibition. – No. ii. Italian, Spanish, and Flemish Schools', *Chromolithograph*, i (11 July 1868), 216–19, at p. 217; [Anon.], 'The infant saviour', *Chromolithograph*, i (25 July 1868), 239–40, at p. 239. More specialist publications also cited her as the authority on early Christian art. See, e.g., W. Sparrow Simpson, 'On the measure of the wound in the side of the redeemer, worn anciently as a charm; and on the five wounds as represented in art', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, xxx (1874), 357–74. For examples of Jameson's art criticism cited in travel guides see A. J. C. Hare, *Walks in Rome*, 2 vols (London, 1871); A. J. C. Hare, *Cities of Northern and Central Italy*, 3 vols (London, 1876); A. J. C. Hare, *Walks in London*, 2 vols (London, 1878); Susan and Joanna Horner, *Walks in Florence* (London, 1873).



Figure 1.3. Cristofano Allori, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, oil on canvas, signed and dated 1613, Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, for example, had each promoted a belief in art's moral and socially redemptive power, and Jameson had read them both in depth.⁴¹ Her publication of *Visits and Sketches* therefore took advantage of a growing demand for expert but accessible cultural

⁴¹ C. Thomas, *Love and Work Enough: the Life of Anna Jameson* (Toronto, 1967), p. 86.

guidance. While Coleridge, Carlyle and other Germanophiles had begun to familiarize English readers with German cultural icons such as Goethe and leading philosophers such as Schelling, it was Jameson rather than her male predecessors who made them attractive and intelligible to a wider audience in her simple expositions.⁴²

Jameson had positioned her *Diary* as England's answer to de Staël's *Corinne* and she laid claim to her French counterpart's persona once again in *Visits and Sketches*: her account of touring Germany was recognized by her contemporaries as the British equivalent of de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, which had attempted to vindicate the reputation of German culture in France.⁴³ It also consolidated Jameson's claim to represent a new standard of professional art criticism. On the one hand, there were paeans on German culture in the manner of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) or Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1836). 'But in forming our judgment, our taste in art', wrote Jameson in the dialogic introduction to *Visits and Sketches*, 'it is unsafe to listen to opinions springing from this vague kind of enthusiasm', echoing her caricature of the male connoisseur in the *Diary*.⁴⁴ On the other hand, criticism had swung in the direction of the pedantic connoisseur whose attempt to explain the moral power of art was lost in dry technicalities and stylistic differences between different artists. In place of these disobliging alternatives Jameson positioned herself as a 'reflecting and philosophical observer' whose expert knowledge and understanding of art, be it literary or visual, was superior to that of her contemporaries.⁴⁵

Jameson's persona of a disinterested critic supported her claim that she was ready to teach her readers to appreciate the 'grand universal passions, principles, and interests of human nature' revealed by great art.⁴⁶ The ability to describe an artist's technical skill was not enough to form an 'educated taste' in art, which she argued could be acquired in two ways: first, by training the mind 'to habitual sympathy with the beautiful and the good', and second, by historicizing the given work of art, learning a 'knowledge of the meaning,

⁴² By contrast, Coleridge's and Carlyle's expositions were regarded as abstruse: [W. Hazlitt], 'Coleridge's *Literary Life*', *Edinburgh Review*, xxviii (1817), 488–515; [A. Everett], 'Thomas Carlyle', *North American Review*, xli (1835), 454–82; [N. L. Frothingham], 'Sartor resartus', *Christian Examiner*, xxi (1836), 74–84; [C. I. Johnstone], 'Sartor resartus', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, v (1838), 611–12; [W. Sewell], 'Carlyle's *Works*', *Quarterly Review*, xlvi (1840), 446–503; [Anon.], 'The works of Thomas Carlyle', *Eclectic Review*, xvii (1845), 377–99.

⁴³ A. L. G. de Staël-Holstein, *De l'Allemagne* (London and Paris, 1813).

⁴⁴ A. Jameson, *Visits and Sketches at Home and Abroad with Tales and Miscellanies Now First Collected and a New Edition of the Diary of an Ennuyée*, 4 vols (London, 1834), i, p. 249.

⁴⁵ Jameson, *Visits and Sketches*, ii, p. 22.

⁴⁶ Jameson, *Visits and Sketches*, i, pp. 222, 246–8.

and the comprehension of the object of the artist'.⁴⁷ The exercise of sympathy was vital to this method of art appreciation and while, conventionally, it had been ascribed to women, Jameson presented it as a human faculty that women and men had a responsibility to cultivate alongside their powers of reason. In this context she explained the moral power of Renaissance or baroque works of art she had encountered on her travels, such as Peter Paul Rubens's *Saint Teresa of Ávila Interceding for Souls in Purgatory* (1630–35). Jameson's role as a critic was to direct her readers to copies of these paintings in order to benefit from their moral power by supplying the historical context to the artist's choice of subject. In this case, for example, she reminded readers of the religious story which Rubens's painting represented: the moment at which Jesus answers St Teresa's intercession on behalf of the souls in purgatory. 'This is only one instance out of many', she informed her readers, 'of the *moral* effect which has been produced by painting', later moving the popular travel writer Augustus Clare to point out that 'Mrs. Jameson truly observes that "what was strong, beautiful, true, and earnest, was in Teresa herself"', in his account of his own visit to Avila.⁴⁸

Jameson's recognized status as a cosmopolitan professional art critic allowed her to popularize what she saw as the principles of educated taste in art: sympathy with the art's moral message and a historically informed understanding of the artist's choice of subject. She deemed this indispensable to positive social change, and her professional reputation by 1840 saw her editing the first edition of Robert Ralph Noel's English translation of Gustav Waagen's *Peter Paul Rubens, His Life and Genius* (1840), for which she supplied her own introduction. Notwithstanding their personal friendship, Jameson was the obvious choice for Noel, given the formidable scholarship that underpinned her professional authority, in addition to widespread approval of her status as a professional at the vanguard of art criticism.⁴⁹ By 1838 the influential *Literary Gazette* classed Jameson as one of the 'professional writers' 'with a strong inclination towards the metaphysics of the German school' and, while it was suspicious of this foreign influence, it praised 'her own observant mind', confirming that 'we are both entertained and informed by her graphic power and cleverness'.⁵⁰ The widespread understanding of

⁴⁷ Jameson, *Visits and Sketches*, i, p. 249.

⁴⁸ Jameson, *Visits and Sketches*, i, pp. 248–9; Augustus J. C. Hare, *Wanderings in Spain* (London, 1873), pp. 252–3.

⁴⁹ A. Robinson, 'Stalking through the literary world: Anna Jameson and the periodical press, 1826–1860', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, xxxiii (2000), 165–77.

⁵⁰ [Anon.], 'Winter studies and summer rambles in Canada', *Literary Gazette*, mcxlii (1838), 772–4, at p. 772.

Jameson's professional expertise bolstered her cultural authority: it 'would be difficult now to comprehend the immense power exercised by the *Literary Gazette*' from the 1820s to the 1840s, Hall reflected in the late 1870s, adding that 'an author's fame was established when he had obtained the praise of that journal'.⁵¹ The *Athenaeum* also lauded Jameson, and its reviewer Allan Cunningham singled out her introduction to Waagen's work as particularly important, declaring it 'especially valuable for its philosophic criticism – a rare merit in these days'.⁵² This was probably gratifying to Jameson, given that her own praise of Waagen as 'an enlightened and philosophical critic' repeated the terms she had used to describe her own work in *Visits and Sketches*, republished in 1837 as *Sketches of Germany: Art – Literature – Character*.⁵³ Once again she had distinguished her criticism from that of the hapless critics of old, lost as they were in discussions of 'the petty details of execution' of the given artist. 'What shall be said', she asked, 'of that torrent of shallow conventional verbiage which is poured upon us from day to day and from year to year, and which calls itself *criticism?*', before continuing to emphasize the importance she attached to sympathy with a painting's subject:

To know *what* a picture represents, and with what degree of propriety and success it is represented, may be sufficient critical skill for the consideration of nine-tenths of the pictures which yearly cover the walls of our Academy; but to enable us to appreciate the creations of genius, and to reap all the pleasure and improvement which art can bestow, we must go far higher and far deeper.

Art criticism in England was in a poor state, and it was up to Jameson to improve the nation's taste in art if it was to benefit from the '*many-sided* and elevated spirit in criticism with which the Germans have long been familiar'.⁵⁴

There was an alternative to the method of art criticism espoused by Jameson, which her younger contemporary and friend Elizabeth Eastlake played an increasingly important role in articulating by mid-century. Known as Elizabeth Rigby until her marriage to Charles Eastlake in 1849, Elizabeth's route to the status of a professional critic also went through Germany. There she had spent two years learning German in Heidelberg,

⁵¹ Hall, *Book of Memories*, p. 285.

⁵² [A. Cunningham], 'Peter Paul Rubens, his life and genius', *Athenaeum*, dcliii (1840), 339–40, at p. 340.

⁵³ A. Jameson, *Sketches of Germany: Art – Literature – Character* (Frankfurt, 1837).

⁵⁴ *Peter Paul Rubens: His Life and Genius*, ed. and trans. R. R. Noel (London, 1840), pp. v–vii.

leading to her translation of the German art historian Passavant's *Tour of a German Artist in England*.⁵⁵ But Eastlake tended to present her method of art criticism as considerably harder to acquire than Jameson's. Understanding a painting, she argued, 'requires a wide range of intellectual qualifications; something of the astuteness of the lawyer, the diagnosis of the physician and the research of the antiquary and historian'.⁵⁶ By the 1850s Eastlake had also begun to disavow the moral basis of Jameson's art criticism, writing, 'Whether sacred or historical, landscape or domestic, art was *not* given to man either to teach him religion or morality.'⁵⁷ Nonetheless, her lengthy and stinging critique of John Ruskin's disparagement of Renaissance artists in the first volume of his *Modern Painters* (1843) explained his denigration of them on the grounds that he suffered a deficit of sympathy, the quality Jameson had identified as vital to an educated taste in art. How else, she argued, could he fail to recognize the power of Renaissance masterpieces such as Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* in Dresden?⁵⁸

Eastlake's argument that Ruskin lacked the sympathy vital to professional art criticism repeated one of the two principles Jameson had set out as vital to its disinterested practice: sympathy with the art's moral message, alongside a historically informed understanding of the artist's choice of subject. 'Is this the language of a man', Eastlake asked of Ruskin's criticism, 'whose heart and mind have been refined even by the commonest and most legitimate influences of art?'⁵⁹ She might have added that Jameson's art criticism had also done much to foster the wider appreciation of art on which the success of their professional careers depended.⁶⁰ Between 1843 and 1845 Jameson contributed forty-three articles on Italian art to Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine*, supporting Knight's attempt to provide cheap and easily accessible education that would, in his words, 'end art's "long reign of exclusiveness"' and provide "'the bulk of the people ... [with a]

⁵⁵ Passavant, *Tour of a German Artist in England*; J. Sheldon, "'His best successor': Lady Eastlake and the National Gallery", in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. K. Hill (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 61–74.

⁵⁶ [E. Eastlake], 'Giovanni Morelli: the patriot and critic', *Quarterly Review*, clxxiii (1891), 25–52, at p. 235.

⁵⁷ E. Eastlake, 'Modern painters', *Quarterly Review*, xcvi (1856), 384–433, at p. 404.

⁵⁸ Eastlake, 'Modern painters', pp. 391–3.

⁵⁹ Eastlake, 'Modern painters', p. 406. On Ruskin's lack of disinterest, see Judith Stoddart, *Ruskin's Culture Wars: Fors Clavigera and the Crisis of Victorian Liberalism* (Charlottesville, Va., 1998), p. 54.

⁶⁰ A. M. Holcomb, 'Anna Jameson: the first professional English art historian', *Art History*, vi (1983), 171–87.

perception of the beauty of Art”'.⁶¹ ‘The faculty of delight in beauty needs to be educated like all our faculties,’ Jameson wrote a few years later.⁶² And although in his criticism Ruskin limited what Jameson called ‘educated taste’ in art to a narrower circle of connoisseurs, and Eastlake accused him of being an unsympathetic critic, his opening claim in *Modern Painters* that on viewing a painting ‘the feelings are feebly touched, if they permit us to reason on the methods of their excitement’, repeated the principle Jameson had done so much to promote since the 1820s, that a technical knowledge of a painter’s style was not enough on its own to constitute good taste.⁶³

Ruskin agreed implicitly in *Modern Painters* with the claim Jameson had made over a decade before him: sympathy was an important means of appreciating the moral truth of beautiful art. But whereas Jameson claimed it was simple to develop this faculty using her guidance, Ruskin adopted a position similar to Hazlitt before him: he limited its acquisition to an elite few, writing that ‘sympathy [is] only to be felt by minds in some degree high and solitary themselves’, meaning ‘the true meaning and end’ of a painter’s art ‘must thus be sealed to thousands, or misunderstood by them’.⁶⁴ And while his distinction between a painting’s technical execution and its power to evoke sympathy echoed the principles of ‘educated taste’ in Jameson’s art criticism, he denigrated the Renaissance art she celebrated. Gothic art was a superior source of moral improvement, in his opinion, given that Renaissance art tended towards selfish personification which both led to and was symptomatic of social decay.⁶⁵ Jameson disagreed firmly in her articles for the *Penny Magazine*, which were collected into her *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters, and of the Progress of Painting in Italy: From Cimabue*

⁶¹ P. J. Anderson, ‘Pictures for the people: Knight’s *Penny Magazine*, an early venture into popular art education’, *Studies in Art Education*, xxviii (1987), 133–40, at p. 138; P. G. Nunn, ‘Critically speaking’, in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. C. C. Orr (Manchester, 1995), pp. 107–24, at p. 113; Holcomb, ‘Anna Jameson (1794–1860): sacred art and social vision’, p. 120; J. Johnston, ‘Invading the house of Titian: the colonisation of Italian art: Anna Jameson, John Ruskin and the *Penny Magazine*’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, xxvii (1994), 127–43.

⁶² A. Jameson, ‘Some thoughts on art. Addressed to the uninitiated’, *Art-Journal*, xi (1849), 69–71, at p. 70.

⁶³ A Graduate of Oxford [John Ruskin], *Modern Painters: Their superiority in the art of landscape painting to all the ancient masters, proved by examples of the true, the beautiful, and the intellectual from the works of modern artists, especially those of J. M. W. Turner*, 5 vols (London, 1843), i, p. xxv.

⁶⁴ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, i, p. 55; W. C. Wright, ‘Hazlitt, Ruskin, and nineteenth-century art criticism’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, xxxii (1974), 509–23; N. Bryson, ‘Hazlitt on painting’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, xxxvii (1978), 37–45, at pp. 38–9.

⁶⁵ John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, 3 vols (London, 1851–3), ii, pp. 321–2.

to *Bassano* (1845) and which challenged the idea that the cultivation of art and artistic taste in this period jeopardized moral and social progress. On the contrary, her study of the heights of Renaissance painting revealed a lesson for the present. ‘We often hear in these days’, she argued, ‘of “the spirit of the age”’; but in that wonderful age three mighty spirits were stirring society to its depth: – the spirit of bold investigation into truths of all kinds which led to the Reformation; the spirit of daring adventure, which led men in search of new worlds beyond the eastern and western oceans; and the spirit of art, through which men soared even to the “seventh heaven of invention.”’⁶⁶ And the following year Jameson developed her challenge to Ruskin’s celebration of J. M. W. Turner’s paintings at the expense of Italian masters in her *Memoirs and Essays Illustrative of Art, Literature and Social Morals* (1846):

‘But’, says my friend, ‘if you would have Venice, seek it in Turner’s pictures!’ True, I may seek it, but shall I find it? ... Canaletti gives us the forms without the colour or light. Turner, the colour and light without the forms ... if you would take into your soul the very soul and inward life and spirit of Venice – breathe the same air – go to Titian ...⁶⁷

The ‘real value, the real immortality of the beautiful productions of old art’, she reminded her readers, ‘lies in their *truth* ... we carry it with us into a wider, grander horizon’.⁶⁸ This lent further weight to the claims she had made in *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* the year before, which the *Athenaeum* hailed as an ‘indispensable’ guide to ‘that many-headed ignoramus, the Million’, teaching them the ‘rudiments of connoisseurship’; by 1891 ‘at least six editions of the book had been published’.⁶⁹ And while other art critics such as Hannah Lawrance found affinity with Ruskin’s valorization of Gothic as opposed to Renaissance art, his limit of an educated taste in art to a ‘very limited class of society’ was less appealing to her. On the contrary, argued this eminent historian of medieval England, a taste for beautiful and useful art in the Gothic period was the product of men’s and women’s combined efforts ‘from the noble even to the peasant’,

⁶⁶ A. Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters, and of the Progress of Painting in Italy: From Cimabue to Bassano* (London, 1845), pp. 6–9.

⁶⁷ Quoted in J. Johnston, *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 177.

⁶⁸ A. Jameson, *Memoirs and Essays Illustrative of Art, Literature and Social Morals* (London, 1846), pp. 17–18, 28.

⁶⁹ [G. Darley], ‘Memoirs of the early Italian painters. By Mrs. Jameson’, *Athenaeum*, cxxxix (1845), 817–18, at p. 817; C. Warr, ‘Anna Jameson (1794–1860): “primitive” art and iconography’, in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. J. Chance, 2 vols (Eugene, Oreg., 2005), i, pp. 25–36, at p. 28.

reiterating Jameson's principle that the more widely a society cultivated her principles of 'educated taste', the more quickly it would reap the moral and social benefits.⁷⁰

Jameson applied the principles of her art criticism to Christian iconography in her final art history series, *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1848), which was mostly composed of a series of articles she wrote for the *Athenaeum* between January 1845 and February 1846. This was followed by *Legends of the Monastic Orders as Represented in the Fine Arts* (1850), *Legends of the Madonna* (1852) and *The History of Our Lord as Exemplified in Works of Art* (1864), which was a posthumous publication completed by Elizabeth Eastlake. These were further guides designed to educate the nation: she encouraged her readers to collect prints of the works of art she covered in the book 'and arrange them in the same order' to lead the mind 'beyond the mere pleasure of comparison and criticism, to "thoughts more elevate, and reasonings high" of things celestial and terrestrial'. And at the start of *Sacred and Legendary Art*, she mocked once again the 'would-be connoisseurship' of her eighteenth-century predecessors and 'the very small stock of ideas on which people set up a pretension to taste – the false notions, the mixture of pedantry and ignorance, which every where prevailed'. Instead she directed her readers to her by now familiar claims of the 'larger principles of criticism as applied to the study of art', which revealed the moral significance of devotional and historical pictures: 'a thousand-fold pleasure is theirs', she wrote, 'who to a sense of the poetical unite a sympathy with the spiritual in Art, and who combine with delicacy of perception, and technical knowledge, more elevated sources of pleasure, more variety of association, habits of more excursive thought'.⁷¹ She had claimed that Renaissance and baroque art represented 'the bold spirit of investigation into truth of all kinds which led to the Reformation', effectively rendering it proto-Protestant to forestall any suspicion of its Catholicism. She performed the same intellectual move in her history of medieval iconography, arguing that it represented the 'eternal spirit of Christianity', adapted without difficulty in the present 'to good and glorious purposes'.⁷²

Jameson also used her art criticism of Christian iconography to claim that powerful historical women were responsible for civilizational progress: inspirational figures who challenged domestic models of femininity. The

⁷⁰ [Lawrance], 'Modern painters', pp. 444–6.

⁷¹ Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, i, pp. xiii–xiv, xxiv, xlvii.

⁷² Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, i, p. xxi. On anti-Catholicism in this context see J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford, 1998), p. 22; Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, p. 160.

third series of *Sacred and Legendary Art*, for example, was devoted to the Madonna, who appeared as one of her ideal heroines, akin to those she had celebrated in her works of literary criticism such as *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* (1831) and *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (1832). *Legends of the Madonna* had been foreshadowed by her study of Mary Magdalene in 1848, someone whom Jameson singled out as being ‘recognized and accepted in every Christian heart as the impersonation of the penitent sinner absolved through faith and love’. Contrary to standard accounts of the saint’s life, she portrayed the Magdalene as a loyal apostle; after Jesus’s crucifixion, in Jameson’s telling it was she who successfully ‘preached to the people’ of France, ‘reproaching them for their senseless worship of dumb idols’ before adopting the ascetic life of one of the desert fathers, visited every day by angels from heaven.⁷³ The illustrations Jameson supplied in her criticism showed the Magdalene ‘as a lone figure in public leadership’: her sketch of the portrait by Annibale Caracci shows the saint ‘without the characteristic alabaster box of ointment’; instead she holds ‘a book and a skull as a memento mori, the marks of a philosopher rather than a penitent’.⁷⁴ In this way, Jameson used her art criticism to challenge models of femininity which disadvantaged women in the present and helped to shift general attitudes towards Mary Magdalene. By 1860 the traditionalist fireside magazine *Good Words* could note that she was ‘a woman, of whose moral character the Scripture says not one disapproving word, [and yet] has been for ages the victim of a most abominable slander’.⁷⁵

On Jameson’s death in 1860, Frederick Denison Maurice spoke for many when he hailed her as a pioneering art critic and historian who used her expertise to popularize an educated taste in art. Jameson not only took advantage of what has been described as ‘the culture of connoisseurship’ in nineteenth-century England to claim the status of a professional art critic and historian, but she also played a decisive role in diversifying the discourse of connoisseurship by propelling a popular discourse of ‘educated taste’ in art that was widely respected.⁷⁶ Her work, wrote Maurice, showed the road ‘out of dilettantism, into that of which it is the counterfeit; out of criticism that crushes all creative power, into the criticism which reverences

⁷³ Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, pp. 332, 336–7.

⁷⁴ R. Styler, *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Farnham and Burlington, Vt., 2010), p. 89; cf. K. VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: the Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller and George Eliot* (Athens, Ohio, 2001), pp. 74–5; Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, pp. 190–200.

⁷⁵ [H. Stowell Brown], ‘Popular misapplication of scripture’, *Good Words*, i (1860), 84–6, at p. 84.

⁷⁶ Clarke and Ventrella, ‘Women’s expertise and the culture of connoisseurship’, pp. 1–10.



Figure 1.4. John Gibson, *Anna Jameson*, marble bust, 1862
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

and fosters it; out of the independence of the sexes which destroyed the work of both, into that fellowship and co-operation which is implied in their existence'.⁷⁷ The sentiments were shared widely and it was not long before Jameson's friend and fellow woman of letters Susan Horner was able to raise a subscription to commission John Gibson to sculpt a bust of Jameson, which was duly installed at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), before being transferred to the National Portrait Gallery in 1883. In Jameson's honour, Gibson reduced his usual fee from £150 to £50 for the bust: he had long respected her as his equal on questions of taste in art, writing to her in 1853 that he would 'always value yr. opinions, for you have given to the world proofs of yr feeling and judgment in art ... You and I know what is necessary to be a Judge on art.'⁷⁸ The bust was ready by the end of 1862, and the inscription on the marble pedestal aptly extols 'a distinguished critic,/and writer upon art./Endowed with poetic genius/and/a vigorous understanding,/... [she] awakened/a clearer comprehension/of truth and beauty/in art/as well as in nature.'⁷⁹

⁷⁷ F. D. Maurice, 'Female school of art; Mrs. Jameson', *Macmillan's Magazine*, ii (1860), 227–35, at p. 229.

⁷⁸ John Gibson to Anna Jameson, 27 Sept. 1853, in B. Erskine [Mrs Steuart Erskine], *Anna Jameson: Letters and Friendships (1812–1860)* (London, 1915), p. 288.

⁷⁹ R. Ormond, 'Anna Brownell Jameson (née Murphy)', in *Early Victorian Portraits* (London, 1973) <<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitExtended/mwo3438/Anna-Brownell-Jameson-ne-Murphy>> [accessed 11 Aug. 2019].

2. Women, science and professional identity, c.1860–1914

Claire G. Jones

Personally I do not agree with sex being brought into science at all. The idea of 'woman and science' is entirely irrelevant. Either a woman is a good scientist, or she is not; in any case she should be given opportunities, and her work should be studied from the scientific, not the sex, point of view.¹

This heartfelt plea for equality in science was made by the electrical engineer and physicist Hertha Ayrton in an interview with the *Daily News* in 1919. At this time, Ayrton was a public figure for her scientific work – including the design of anti-gas fans used on the front in the First World War – and for her support for the campaign for women's suffrage. In 1906 she had been awarded the prestigious Royal Society Hughes Medal for original research. Despite these eminent credentials, throughout her life Ayrton constantly felt the need to argue against any sex differentiation in intellectual work and to call for men and women to be treated equally whatever the career or profession they chose. This appeal was also a strategy to guard her scientific reputation from the charge that her achievements had been made in collaboration with her husband, rather than in her own right. The electrical engineer William Ayrton died in 1908, when his wife was barely halfway through her scientific career, yet even an obituary of Ayrton published on her death in 1923 asserted that she was 'far more subject to her husband's lead than either he or she imagined'.² Collaboration for any woman seeking to forge a professional identity in science was a complicated issue as, in Ayrton's words, 'no one will believe that if a man and a woman do a bit of work together the woman really does anything'.³ This systematic gender bias in the allocation of credit in science has been called the 'Matthew Matilda Effect' and its impact identified across various scientific disciplines

¹ E. Sharp, *Hertha Ayrton, 1854–1923: a Memoir* (London, 1926), p. 182.

² H. E. Armstrong, 'Mrs Hertha Ayrton', *Nature*, cxii (1 Dec. 1923), 800–801.

³ Sharp, *Hertha Ayrton*, p. 186.

C. G. Jones, 'Women, science and professional identity, c.1860–1914' in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 63–85. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

and professions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ Despite this unequal recognition, there were many scientific women who played an active role in the predominantly masculine scientific networks which operated around institutional and domestic settings at this time.⁵

The politics of collaboration is just one of the historical complexities to be addressed in order to understand how scientific women created their personal identities and navigated the landscape of science in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. This was a time when science was emerging as a profession and moving from a largely domestic setting to an institutional one; it was also when the growth of new industries such as electricity and other technologies was beginning to shape what a male, let alone a female, scientific professional looked like.⁶ Despite this, there was much variance between disciplines with, for example, sciences such as astronomy and botany remaining largely in the field and so relatively accessible to women, while others such as electrical experimentation transferred to the laboratory, leaving scientific women mostly behind in the domestic sphere.⁷ Professionalization was not manifested simply by a change in place of knowledge production from the home to an institution, however; it also intersected with gendered understandings of who was eligible to be, and capable of being, a scientific practitioner. This latter battle was played out especially in the context of increasing numbers of scientific societies and the competition between them for influence and standing. By excluding ‘amateurs’ and women from the fellowship in order to preserve status, elite scientific societies were complicit in the evolution of a process of demarcation which situated women as non-professionals, whatever their scientific eminence. In 1911, even Nobel Prize-winning physicist and chemist Marie Curie was refused a fellowship of the French Academy of Science, which elected its first female fellow in 1979.⁸ Meanwhile, in Britain, Thomas

⁴ M. W. Rossiter, ‘The Matthew Matilda Effect in science’, *Social Studies of Science*, xxiii (May 1993), 325–41.

⁵ As well as the women featured here see, e.g., *Darwin and Women: a Selection of Letters*, ed. S. Evans (Cambridge, 2017); R. Love, ‘Alice in eugenics-land: feminism and eugenics in the careers of Alice Lee and Ethel Elderton’, *Annals of Science*, xxxvi (1979), 145–58; and *The Role of Women in the History of Geology*, ed. C. V. Burek and B. Higgs (London, 2007).

⁶ See H. Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain, 1831–1918* (London, 2017).

⁷ For astronomy see M. Bailey Ogilvie, ‘Obligatory amateurs: Annie Maunder (1868–1947) and British women astronomers at the dawn of professional astronomy’, *British Journal for the History of Science*, xxxiii (2000), 67–84; for botany see A. B. Shteir, *Cultivating Science: Flora’s Daughters and Botany in England, 1760–1860* (Baltimore, Md., 1999).

⁸ V. Crnjanski Petrovich, ‘Women and the Paris Academy of Sciences’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxxii (spring 1999), 383–90.

Huxley, ‘Darwin’s bulldog’, prevented women’s admission to the Geological Society and engineered their exclusion from the Ethnological Society with the express intention of upgrading its professional status in relation to the breakaway anthropologists.⁹ Although some new societies, for example the British Astronomical Association (founded in 1886), emerged to cater for women, schoolteachers and other amateur enthusiasts, a hierarchy persisted and provided a barrier to women engaging on an equal level. As well as implying second-class amateur status, the exclusion of women from elite societies impacted on their ability to pursue scientific work, as access to the latest papers, specialist libraries and scientific meetings was a privilege often tightly confined to fellows.

Some of the harshest opponents of women’s admission to learned societies and professional networks based their beliefs on a science of sex that was sceptical of women’s intellectual capacity for such work. Since its inception, modern science had sought to establish biological differences between the sexes and this project acquired a new dynamic with the evolutionary understandings of intellectual difference which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin had argued that the chief distinction in mental powers between the two sexes was men’s ‘higher eminence’ in any activity, including science, which required ‘deep thought, reason or imagination’ – all qualities that evolution had not developed to the same extent in women.¹⁰ These ideas, which were taken up by doctors and leading men of science, naturalized contemporary prejudices with regard to women and turned tradition and habit into immutable scientific facts which limited women’s opportunities.¹¹ At the very time when the identity of a scientific professional was being negotiated, women were confronted with a scientifically validated theory that asserted their ineligibility for inclusion and reinforced prejudice against them.

If women’s intellectual capacity for science was questioned in the decades around 1900, what other factors influenced women’s access to, and negotiation within, a professional role? The shifting, developing idea of a professional scientist at this time created several possible identities for a professional man of science, including one that gave space for science alongside other pursuits befitting a gentleman of the liberal, educated

⁹ E. Richards, ‘Redrawing the boundaries: Darwinian science and Victorian women intellectuals’, in *Victorian Science in Context*, ed. B. Lightman (Chicago, 1997), pp. 119–42.

¹⁰ C. Darwin, *The Descent of Man* [1871] (London, 2004), p. 629.

¹¹ See, e.g., H. Maudsley, MD, ‘Sex in mind and education’, *Fortnightly Review*, xv (Apr. 1874), 466–83; and G. Romanes, ‘Mental differences between men and women’, *Nineteenth Century* (May 1887), 654–72.

elite.¹² However, despite the tradition of the ‘gentleman amateur’ in science – an individual who practised science at home and for altruistic rather than monetary reasons – persisting well into the twentieth century, women practising their science in a similarly focused context invited contrasting interpretations.¹³ Lord Rayleigh, FRS, winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1904, completed most of his life’s work at his home laboratory at Terling Place, yet his scientific pre-eminence was unquestioned. However, women were defined by the home in a way that men were not; for men, the absence of an institutional affiliation did not threaten acceptance of their expertise – something vital for professional practice in the public sphere – in the same way that it did for women. The persistence of this amateur tradition in science warns against using remuneration as a defining factor in seeking to understand the professional role in science. This ‘modern’ understanding of a paid professional is not completely valid until after the First World War, although men did increasingly assume salaried roles in science from c.1870 onwards, often with women working alongside them for nothing.¹⁴ This was in keeping with prescribed ideals which assumed that middle-class women would not receive payment for their work but rather pursued their science in the spirit of feminine service and philanthropy. As paid roles in science expanded from the beginning of the twentieth century, partly in response to opportunities created by the new technological industries, women did gain a foothold, but mainly in the low-status jobs and routine roles believed to be more fitting to their feminine abilities. For example, women (often graduates or equivalent) were employed as research assistants and calculators in the mathematics and engineering departments at Imperial College from its establishment in 1907;¹⁵ during the First World War women scientists took the place of male researchers away at the front;¹⁶ and in the interwar period women were employed as laboratory assistants and ‘women chemists’ in industrial manufacture.¹⁷

¹² See, e.g., J. F. M. Clark, ‘John Lubbock, science, and the liberal intellectual’, *Notes and Records*, lxviii (Mar. 2014), 65–87.

¹³ Rose suggests that it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that ‘professional’ scientists comfortably outnumbered the ‘gentlemen amateurs’ in the fellowship of the Royal Society. J. Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895–1919* (Athens, Ohio, 1986), p. 120.

¹⁴ For instance, the influential palaeontologist Dorothea Bate (1878–1951) worked for the Natural History Museum for nearly 50 years without pay or remuneration. See K. Shindler, *Discovering Dorothea: the Life of Pioneering Fossil-Hunter Dorothea Bate* (London, 2005).

¹⁵ H. Gay, *History of Imperial College London, 1907–2007* (London, 2007), p. 170.

¹⁶ P. Fara, *A Lab of One’s Own: Science and Suffrage in the First World War* (Oxford, 2018).

¹⁷ S. M. Horrocks, ‘A promising pioneer profession? Women in industrial chemistry in

Possession of qualifications and training is inextricably linked to the idea of the professional as a practitioner whose expertise is recognized and credible. More women were accessing a formal university training in science as the new colleges for women were established from the late nineteenth century onwards. Colleges of the universities of London and Cambridge were especially significant for science, having purpose-built laboratories and strong science interests by the mid-1880s.¹⁸ Formal academic study also opened the door to research collaborations in a professional setting and opportunities for scientific publication – both important for establishing professional status.¹⁹ However, as demonstrated below, women found that the possession of qualifications and a publication record were not enough to secure the same professional opportunities as men.

This chapter explores the changing landscape of science from c.1860 up to 1914 – and the gendered roles within it – through case studies of three women of successive generations, each of whom established a strong scientific identity as an expert in both public and specialist arenas. Despite their standing in their respective worlds, all these women faced challenges in shaping and preserving a professional identity due to tensions surrounding femininity and science. These scientific practitioners operated as peers within male scientific networks and were not shy in asserting their equality and rights. That they had to reassert their professional identity constantly is indicative not only of the structure of science, but also of the difficulties facing women in embodying and maintaining scientific authority. Economic entomologist Eleanor Ormerod (1828–1901); physicist and electrical engineer Hertha Ayrton (1854–1923); and geologist and palaeobotanist Marie Stopes (1880–1958) can all be understood as precarious professionals.

Eleanor Ormerod (1828–1901): economic entomologist

In the twilight of her scientific career, Eleanor Ormerod, economic entomologist, was admitted to the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by the University of Edinburgh, the first woman to be so honoured by the university. Eleanor's obituary, just one year later, repeated the gendered praise spoken by the Dean of Faculty at the degree ceremony:

inter-war Britain', *British Journal for the History of Science*, xxxiii (Sept. 2000), 351–67.

¹⁸ C. G. Jones, *Femininity, Mathematics and Science, c.1880–1914* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 119.

¹⁹ For instance, 60 women published more than 170 papers in the *Philosophical Transactions* and *Proceedings of the Royal Society* in 1880–1914, despite being barred from the fellowship. It can be estimated that numbers for less elite scientific journals would be much higher. Jones, *Femininity, Mathematics and Science*, p. 177.

The pre-eminent position which Miss Ormerod holds in the world of science is the reward of patient study and unwearied observation ... Her labours have been crowned with such success that she is entitled to be hailed as the protectress of agriculture and the fruits of the earth – a beneficent Demeter of the nineteenth century.²⁰

Of the three women whose lives are explored here, in many ways Ormerod can be seen as the one whose activities and role mostly closely resemble what we would recognize as those of a professional in science today. Ormerod is widely understood as a pioneering technological scientist and economic entomologist whose science and science communication activities made her instrumental in establishing and defining her discipline.²¹ As Britain's first practising economic entomologist, Ormerod shaped an identity as an expert in both public and specialist spheres, participated in international collaborative research, acted as an expert witness in legal cases and was commissioned as a consultant by government agencies and agricultural and educational institutions. In this way she had a major impact on England's agricultural productivity at a time when this was under threat by the farming depression of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In particular, Ormerod's annual reports, published from 1877 through to 1901, provided practical scientific guidance and choreographed the observations of farmers, gardeners, livestock producers and others to create a dynamic body of entomological knowledge. Combating pests and the economic damage they caused was central to this and Ormerod was well versed in and advocated the use of insecticide and other chemical interventions when appropriate. In 1897 she attracted public hostility from more sentimental quarters when she declared 'war against the sparrows' and called for the mass extermination of the house sparrow as a pest which threatened agricultural production.²² In addition to her reports, Ormerod distributed, at her own cost, thousands of leaflets on how to identify and counteract pests and found time to write various practical works such as *Manual of Injurious Insects with Methods of Prevention and Remedy* (1890) and *A Textbook on Agricultural Entomology* (1892).

In her memoir, Ormerod dates her entomological studies as beginning in earnest in 1852, when she became fascinated with beetles and began dissecting them in order to match the insects to descriptions in her textbook, which lacked any illustrations. This was a lesson the young Eleanor learned well; she realized the importance of illustrations in identifying and

²⁰ 'Miss E. Ormerod – obituary', *The Times*, 20 July 1901, p. 15.

²¹ J. F. M. Clark, *Bugs and the Victorians* (New Haven, Conn., 2009), p. 156.

²² E. Ormerod, *Autobiography and Correspondence*, ed. R. Wallace [London, 1904] (London, 2005), pp. 161–8.



Elliott & Fry, Photo

Walker & Bokerell Ph. Co.

Eleanor A. Ormerod

Figure 2.1. Eleanor Ann Ormerod, LL.D., frontispiece to *Eleanor Ormerod, LL.D., Economic Entomologist: Autobiography and Correspondence*, ed. Robert Wallace (New York, 1904). Source: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

combating insects, infestations and agricultural diseases.²³ The habits of a scientist were acquired by Eleanor much earlier, however. Growing up in privilege at Sedbury Park, her father's estate on the Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire borders, made her ideally placed to pursue her naturalist interests. She describes an idyllic childhood with opportunity to wander the estate and recruit the labourers who worked on it to aid her in her observations of bird, plant and insect life. Any snake found was brought to Eleanor and, if it was a remarkable one, she took a cast of it or 'had it buried in an ant-hill in order to set up its skeleton when the ants had cleaned the bones'.²⁴ As her father aged, Ormerod assumed increasing responsibility for the management of the estate and this gave her a practical appreciation of the challenges facing agriculture and farming. Indeed, it was the immense losses caused by a serious outbreak of turnip-fly and its ravages which led to the publication of her first special report in 1881.²⁵

Ormerod's acknowledged expertise and activities as an economic entomologist would seem to place her easily within the framework of science professionalism as it was emerging in the mid-century. She was self-taught and possessed no qualifications herself but, given the persistence of the amateur tradition in science, this was not particularly unusual for women or men. However, the importance of training became increasingly recognized in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Ormerod herself was instrumental in the development of training in the new field of economic entomology; she advised and lectured on this subject at the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester for several years, and at the South Kensington Institute she delivered a series of lectures to trainee schoolteachers. From 1896 to 1898, she also acted as an examiner in economic entomology at the University of Edinburgh. Despite this, Suzanne Le-May Sheffield recounts that in 1889, when the university set up a paid lectureship in agricultural entomology, its administrators consulted Ormerod about who should be appointed but assumed she would not be considered – because she was a woman.²⁶ Similarly, in 1882, when she became honorary consulting entomologist to the Royal Agricultural Society, she took up a post that gave this august organization free access to her expertise for the next ten years. This ineligibility for paid employment was the prescription

²³ Ormerod, *Autobiography*, pp. 53–4. J. F. Stephens's *A Manual of British Coleoptera, or Beetles* (London, 1939) was the standard textbook at the time.

²⁴ Ormerod, *Autobiography*, p. 17.

²⁵ 'Miss E. Ormerod', *The Times*, p. 15.

²⁶ Suzanne Le-May Sheffield, *Women and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2005), p. 85.

for women of the upper classes until the practice slowly eroded towards the end of the century in response to the growing movement for women's emancipation. Ormerod self-financed all her entomological activities and publications – something which, as an elite, unmarried woman with a hefty inheritance, she was able to do – and called her appointments her 'honorary official work' and her private work her reports.²⁷ Expenses were sometimes paid and Ormerod would usually accept this; for example, she received 'some small amount of money' when subpoenaed to give evidence as an expert witness in a dispute between a purchaser and producer about the origin and nature of an infestation within a shipment of flour being transported from New York to Durban.²⁸ Neither was she slow to exert her rights in this matter. When the £10 expenses she received for a series of lectures did not cover her outlay she did not try to hide her annoyance.²⁹

Ormerod's exasperation over insufficient expenses is representative of her underlying strong sense of self-worth as a scientific specialist. She assumed the identity of an expert professional in multiple additional ways, including in letters to *The Times* and other journals, and in her exhibitions on pests and diseases at local agricultural shows. Her letters were invariably signed with her full credentials, including 'Consulting Entomologist of the Royal Agricultural Society' and 'F. R. Met', to illustrate her expertise.³⁰ At the Bath and West of England Show in 1896, Ormerod contributed an authoritative account of over seventy kinds of insect injury to farm, fruit and livestock, explained in detail across seventeen display cases. After the show, this exhibition was donated to Edinburgh University for display as 'The Ormerod Collection of Agricultural Entomology'.³¹ Ormerod also validated her expertise by holding fellowships of the Royal Meteorological Society and the Entomological Society and honorary membership of many other agricultural and entomological bodies worldwide.³² These activities situated her in a professional context that was becoming characterized by collaborative networks, validated credentials and institutionalization. It is significant to note that Ormerod worked with her sister Georgiana, who produced most of the illustrations that were crucial to her publications. Georgiana, who had similar interests and expertise as her sister, is referred to

²⁷ Ormerod, *Autobiography*, p.77.

²⁸ Ormerod, *Autobiography*, pp. 69–71.

²⁹ Ormerod, *Autobiography*, p. 85.

³⁰ See, e.g., E. A. Ormerod, 'Sparrows', *The Times*, 13 Jan. 1885, p. 8.

³¹ Ormerod, *Autobiography*, pp. 283–4.

³² For a full list see Ormerod, *Autobiography*, p. 95.

by Ormerod as her ‘assistant’ or ‘collaborator’.³³ It is usual in male–female collaboration in science for the female to be cast as assistant, although this has also applied to less privileged male scientific workers whose contributions are now being recovered.³⁴ That this single-sex collaboration has been interpreted as wholly the work of Eleanor is testimony to the persistent tendency to look for one single ‘hero’ or ‘heroine’ of science and to ignore collaboration and teamwork, both of which are characteristics of professional science.

The work that arguably had the biggest impact on economic entomology in Britain – and one which was produced collaboratively via correspondence – was Ormerod’s series of annual reports. These were produced from the testimony of other experts and the farm workers and labourers who had first-hand knowledge of pests and the problems they caused. Working from home, Ormerod collected the testimonies and evidence together, made sense of them and added her own interpretation and guidance. In this way, she fashioned a professional identity and practice through correspondence. This places her within a contemporary *zeitgeist* of new popular science, which was part of the process of professionalization. This is represented by the emergence of accessible publications such as *Popular Science Review* (established 1862) and *Quarterly Journal of Science* (established 1864), which conceived of readers as ‘co-participants in the creation of knowledge’.³⁵ Ormerod’s publications also situate her in the tradition of women as science writers and popularizers, one of the few acceptable routes for women attempting to negotiate a way into science.³⁶ Writing or interpreting science for a popular or young audience was understood as belonging to the woman’s sphere, as it implied feminine deference to specialist male authority. Ormerod, however, clearly positioned herself as an expert despite, at times, putting a spin on her communications to align herself with traditional feminine ideals.

Ormerod has been understood as nurturing a public career as a technological scientist under the guise of accepted feminine philanthropy.³⁷

³³ Ormerod, *Autobiography*, p. 31.

³⁴ See, e.g., E. M. Tansey, ‘Keeping the culture alive: the laboratory technician in mid-twentieth-century Britain’, *Notes and Records*, lxii (2008), 77–95.

³⁵ B. Lightman, ‘Popularizers, participation and the transformations of nineteenth-century publishing: from the 1860s to the 1880s’, *Notes and Records*, lxx (2016), 343–59, at p. 343.

³⁶ See M. Benjamin, ‘“Elbow room”: women writers in science, 1790–1840’, in *Science and Sensibility: Gender and Scientific Enquiry, 1780–1945*, ed. M. Benjamin (Oxford, 1991), pp. 27–59.

³⁷ Clark, *Bugs*, p. 156.

This is certainly the message conveyed by the Edinburgh address which praised her as ‘the protectress of agriculture and the fruits of the earth – a beneficent Demeter of the nineteenth century’. This is also suggested by some of her letters, in which she speaks politely of communicating with ‘leading men of the world’ and being ‘personally honoured by being allowed to ask aid from [them] and in my humble way sometimes I can reciprocate’.³⁸ But there is evidence to suggest that this was a veneer in order to comply with the gendered prescriptions of the age and to reconcile her femininity with her role as a professional. Ormerod’s relations with the institutions she worked with in honorary roles were sometimes tense. She resigned from her role with the Royal Agricultural Society because she perceived that her work was being used without credit and she demanded a written promise that her help would be acknowledged. What is more, this disagreement was not kept private but was the topic of a letter she had published in *The Times*.³⁹ Here it is clear that she did not readily accept any gendered hierarchy of knowledge in economic entomology. Ormerod played with the feminine conventions of her time, but behind this was a steely confidence in her own ability and status. This may have been supported by the knowledge that she was practising a science which, in its association with botany and natural history, had a tradition of women’s participation. Ormerod was not the only woman whose work had a major impact on entomology. Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717), of German descent, was a world-travelling scientist, illustrator and writer and one of the first to document metamorphosis and the life cycle of insects. Merian’s life serves to illuminate science before the professionalizing process, when a lack of structure meant that individualism had freer rein.⁴⁰ Representing a generation after Ormerod, Margaret Fountaine (1862–1940) was an entomologist and traveller whose life questions any easy boundary between professional and amateur in natural history. As a result, she has been classified by history as a diarist and traveller rather than being given credit as the influential scientist and illustrator she was.⁴¹

It is significant that Ormerod operated during the mid to late nineteenth century. Her life suggests that, for (privileged) women, a professional role in

³⁸ Ormerod, *Autobiography*, p. 79.

³⁹ E. Ormerod, ‘The Royal Agricultural Society and Miss E. A. Ormerod’, *The Times*, 7 Sept. 1891, p. 6.

⁴⁰ K. Todd, *Chrysalis: Maria Sibylla Merian and the Secrets of Metamorphosis* (New York, 2007).

⁴¹ S. Waring, ‘Margaret Fountaine: a lepidopterist remembered’, in *Notes and Records*, lxi (Mar. 2015), 53–68.

science was more achievable at that time than later, when demarcation lines had been established and hardened, and gendered hierarchies of authority fully emerged. These were the challenges that faced physicist and electrical engineer Hertha Ayrton.

Hertha Ayrton (1854–1923): physicist and electrical engineer

In June 1899, Hertha Ayrton was the only woman among an elite group of scientists demonstrating at the annual Royal Society conversazione. The *Daily News*, reporting on the event the following day, remarked

What astonished the lady visitors, more perhaps than anything else, was to find one of their own sex in charge of the most dangerous-looking of all the exhibits – a fierce arc light enclosed in glass. Mrs Ayrton was not a bit afraid of it.⁴²

Despite practising her science in the generation that succeeded Ormerod's, in her work as a physicist and electrical engineer Hertha Ayrton arguably faced more scepticism due to her sex, even though she had some advantages and professional credentials that her predecessor lacked. Ayrton had studied mathematics as a university student and, following that, had embarked on more practical subjects at the new City and Guilds Technical Institute at Finsbury, London. However, her attempt to use this training to access a professional role equivalent to that a man might expect was largely unsuccessful, and she faced constant challenges in seeking access to laboratory space and elite scientific societies and networks. Indeed, the *Daily News* report above testifies to the perceived oddness of a woman engaged in electrical science. Ayrton was at a disadvantage in practising an active, experimental science that did not have a tradition of female participation, as did botany and natural history. It also required the use of a laboratory, a space that had become strongly masculine-gendered.⁴³ In addition, at the end of the century, Darwinist ideas of women's intellectual incapacity for science had hardened into scientific 'fact', creating an extra obstacle for scientific women to overcome, both in their own internal struggle for self-identity and in proving their abilities in the public sphere. Despite this, Ayrton published ground-breaking research, took out patents for various technological devices, gained considerable recognition (alongside some scepticism) and – for a part of her life, at least – managed a precarious professional career as a 'lady' among the engineers.

⁴² *Daily News*, 22 June 1899, quoted in Sharp, *Hertha Ayrton*, p. 143.

⁴³ See C. Jones, 'The laboratory: a suitable place for a woman? Gender and laboratory culture around 1900', in *Women and Work Culture: Britain c.1850–1950*, ed. K. Cowman and L. Jackson (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 177–96.

Although she came from unprivileged beginnings – an impoverished but respectable Jewish immigrant family – in 1876, Hertha Ayrton (then Sarah Phoebe Marks) became one of the few women to access a university education when she enrolled as a student at Girton College, Cambridge. She was able to take up her place thanks only to the help of feminist campaigner Barbara Bodichon (1827–1891) and her network of rich philanthropic friends, including the novelist George Eliot, who funded her studies. The character Mirah in Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* is said to be modelled on Hertha.⁴⁴ Ayrton took mathematics and 'graduated' in 1880 with a disappointing third. Like many of the early students, she was ill prepared for university as she had not benefitted from the preparatory education, similar to that available in boys' public schools, which was beginning to be offered to girls from around the mid-1870s due to the growth of new girls' high schools. As a woman, she was ineligible to be awarded a degree; this was a right that was granted to women at Cambridge only in 1948. The absence of a degree or credit-endorsing letters after your name was a limitation to any woman seeking to support herself in a professional capacity. This is evidenced by the approximately 720 women who travelled to Trinity College Dublin between 1901 and 1907, a period during which the college offered to confer a degree on any woman who could demonstrate a university training.⁴⁵ After Girton, Ayrton sought professional training in the new electrical industries by enrolling at Finsbury Park Technical College, where women could 'study electrical science without risk of alarming anybody or of doing any harm to themselves'.⁴⁶ These evening classes in electrical and applied physics attracted just three female students alongside 118 men. In 1885, Hertha married her tutor at Finsbury, the electrical engineer William Ayrton. This partnership facilitated Hertha Ayrton's access to professional networks and, although both spouses worked largely independently, it also provided a springboard to her career. However, unlike her husband, as a woman, Hertha never had access to a salaried career or enjoyed a paid position or remuneration for her scientific work. Hertha recognized this fully when she accepted Ayrton's proposal: she wrote in a letter announcing her marriage to her mother, 'He is also going to let me go on with my electrical work, and of course he can help me with it in every way.'⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Sharp, *Hertha Ayrton*, pp. 38–9.

⁴⁵ C. S. Breathnach, 'Anthony Traill (1838–1914), the first Provost to confer degrees on women graduates', *Ulster Medical Journal*, lxxxiv (2015), 179–81.

⁴⁶ *The Electrician* magazine, quoted in J. Mason, 'Matilda Chaplin Ayrton (1846–83), William Edward Ayrton (1847–1908) and Hertha Ayrton (1854–1923)' (unpublished MS, 1994, Bodichon Papers, Cambridge, Girton College Library and Archive), p. 6.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Sharp, *Hertha Ayrton*, p. 113.



Russell, Photo.

Mrs Ayrton in her Laboratory.

LONDON: EDWARD ARNOLD & CO

Figure 2.2. 'Mrs Ayrton in her Laboratory', frontispiece to Evelyn Sharp, *Hertha Ayrton: a Memoir* (London, 1926).

Ayrton's marriage gave her access to her husband's laboratories and student assistants, thus enabling her to undertake research at the industrially focused Central Institution, Kensington, which later became a part of Imperial College. This pattern conforms to the picture in an emerging body of scholarship which demonstrates that women needed male mentors or intermediaries in order to infiltrate the male networks and spaces of science.⁴⁸ In 1908, when her husband died, however, Ayrton was excluded from these facilities, despite her strong scientific reputation. For the remainder of her fifteen years as a scientific practitioner, she had no option but to carry out her research in a laboratory located in her London home. This domestic setting limited the work she was able to do and cast a shadow over her science as peers began to question the accuracy of her experimental methods and the adequacy of her equipment.⁴⁹ The ambivalence surrounding the idea of women in a laboratory is neatly revealed by an analysis of a photograph of 'Mrs Ayrton in her Laboratory' dating from 1906, the year she received a Royal Society medal.⁵⁰ Here, Ayrton is positioned in front of a bookcase; a potted plant and vase can be seen above each shoulder and paintings hang on the wall above her head. These include the famous image by Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery* (1766), which may indicate that Ayrton located herself within the tradition of modern, empirical science that emerged with the scientific revolution in the late seventeenth century. She stands in front of a table upon which is a barely visible glass tank; the edge of another glass tank can just be seen, resting on top of a table covered in a velvet cloth. These are the two tanks she used for her later research into the formation of sand ripples and water vortices. Ayrton herself is dressed as if to receive visitors; she wears jewellery and avoids our eyes by gazing out towards the right of the photograph in a classic, passive, 'feminine' pose. In this apparently domestic setting, there is no signifier of Ayrton's profession in the portrait. As a result, the effect is ambiguous: is this a scientist in the laboratory? Or a hostess in her drawing room? The visual subtext revealed by Hertha's portrait is that a woman's space is the home, not the laboratory. Historians have written extensively about the ways in which space has been divided according to gender and function, making it difficult for women to cross social and physical boundaries in the same way as men.⁵¹ Although many male scientists had home laboratories

⁴⁸ For instance, *Creative Couples in the Sciences*, ed. H. M. Pycior, N. G. Slack and P. G. Abir-am (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995).

⁴⁹ Jones, *Femininity, Mathematics and Science*, pp. 133–9.

⁵⁰ Sharp, *Hertha Ayrton*, frontispiece.

⁵¹ See *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. S. Ardener (Oxford, 1993).

– in keeping with the ‘aristocratic house’ tradition in science – by the late nineteenth century rarely were these their only experimental space. The existence of men’s additional home laboratories seldom impacted on the reception of their science or threatened masculine professional credibility.

Ayrton’s science was carried out at the margins in other ways too. Although she demonstrated her research at Royal Society *conversazioni* – one of a small handful of women scientists to be honoured with an invitation at the time – and received the Royal Society Hughes Medal for original research in 1906, her relations with this august institution were largely fraught. She was nominated for a fellowship twice, in 1902 and 1904, but the Royal Society refused to consider her due to her sex.⁵² In the years around 1900, there was coordinated lobbying by scientific women to gain admission to learned societies, often prompting acrimonious debate among male fellows, who feared that their society would be tainted with amateurism and triviality. When the Royal Geographical Society considered the issue, from 1892 onwards, the ensuing angry controversy broke out on to the letters page of *The Times*. Women were finally admitted as fellows of the Royal Geographical Society in 1913.⁵³ After similar debate, the Linnaean Society (established in 1788) admitted its first female fellows in 1904, and the Royal Astronomical Society (established in 1820) in 1916. The first two women fellows of the Royal Society were elected in 1945. Less prestigious societies were not so fussy, and Ayrton became the first female fellow of the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) in 1899. The IEE had been established in 1871 as the London-based Society of Telegraph Engineers; its members worked at the intersection of commerce and science and were in the vanguard of developing technical applications for public and private use. Ayrton’s admission papers show that she had been admitted under an exceptional clause and had not followed the same election process as the average male. This special clause did not require any electrical education or employment qualification, merely that the candidate ‘shall be so prominently associated with the objects of the Institution that the Council considers his [*sic*] admission to Membership would conduce to its interests’.⁵⁴ It was not until 1919 that the next woman was elected, in the same year as the enactment of the Sex Disqualification (Removal)

⁵² See J. Mason, ‘Hertha Ayrton and the admission of women to the Royal Society of London’, *Notes and Records*, xlv (1991), 201–20.

⁵³ M. Bell and C. McEwan, ‘The admission of women fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892–1914: the controversy and the outcome’, *Geographical Journal*, clxii (1996), 295–312.

⁵⁴ Hertha Ayrton election sheet, IEE Library and Archives.

Act. Exclusion from the Royal Society isolated Ayrton to an extent from developments in her field and was more than just a slight to her scientific vanity. In 1910 she was moved to write to the then president, Sir Archibald Geikie, to ask if she could have the privileges of a fellow in the one respect of receiving unpublished papers, as not having access had put her at ‘great disadvantage’.⁵⁵

Ayrton’s difficulties with the Royal Society were connected to the strong antipathy to women’s participation in science from some fellows and members of the council based on the perceived intellectual disabilities of the female sex. In his obituary of Ayrton, chemist Henry Armstrong wrote that she had ‘neither the extent nor depth of knowledge, the penetrative faculty, to give her entire grasp of her subject’ and suggested that William Ayrton should have had a ‘humdrum wife’ who ‘put him into carpet-slippers when he came home’ and ‘fed him well’, as then he would have been able to do more effective work.⁵⁶ These views, although not by any means universal (for example, Norman Lockyer, the founding editor of *Nature*, was strongly supportive of women), presented challenges to any woman seeking to be recognized as a professional scientific practitioner. Turning his aim to female science teachers, Armstrong used his report for the 1904 Mosely Education Commission to emphasize the ‘mental disabilities that evolution had bestowed on women’ and the consequent ‘ruinous effect’ of women entering the science teaching profession.⁵⁷ Three years after Ayrton’s death, Maurice Solomon wrote that Ayrton had been an ‘inspiration’ but her sex had been ‘a continual hindrance to her work’ as she faced ‘a constant struggle against prejudice and old-standing prohibitions ... which even in success had led too many to judge her achievements by the sex of the doer’.⁵⁸ This is a reflection that can also be applied, to an extent, to Marie Stopes.

Marie Stopes (1880–1958): geologist and palaeobotanist

On 16 June 1914, a day coinciding with the Royal Society annual conversazione, an anonymous correspondent to *The Times* gave a description

⁵⁵ H. Ayrton to A. Geikie, letter 10010, 26 Nov. 1910, Royal Society of London, Library, Archives and Manuscripts. Geikie’s response is not known; however, he was supportive of women in science.

⁵⁶ Armstrong, ‘Mrs Hertha Ayrton’, pp. 800–801.

⁵⁷ *Reports of the Mosely Educational Commission to the United States of America* (London, 1904). Report of H. E. Armstrong, pp. 7–25, at pp. 13–14.

⁵⁸ M. Solomon, ‘Review of Evelyn Sharp’s *Hertha Ayrton, 1854–1923: a Memoir*’, *Central Gazette*, xxiii (1926), 70–72, at p. 72.

of the handicaps facing her as a woman attempting to pursue a role in science. This 'Complaint against the Royal Society' listed the practical difficulties and moral injustices of excluding women scientists from the professional exchange and research networks which were becoming so essential to success in science:

Women high up in scientific positions, women with international reputations, women who would themselves bear the magic title F. R. S. if they could disguise from the world the fact of their sex – such women are shut out from the concourse of their intellectual fellows, shut out from the opportunities of meeting and talking with their scientific colleagues, unless they know by chance some bachelor Fellow.⁵⁹

This forthright letter was written by Marie Stopes. In it she criticized the practices of the Royal Society, among them the need of even the most distinguished woman of science to have a male fellow to 'communicate' her paper (this was also a requirement for male non-fellows) and women's exclusion from most meetings and the library. It was clear that when it came to pursuing a professional role in science, Stopes believed there was not a level playing field for both sexes. Despite this blistering complaint, Stopes had already received a major research grant from the Royal Society, had published in their prestigious publications, and had exhibited her fossil finds at the society's annual *conversazione* in 1909. Although she is remembered primarily for her work on birth control, for approximately sixteen years prior to this Stopes forged a significant and visible career in geology and palaeobotany. This saw her travel widely for research, accept government commissions, publish nearly forty academic papers and write books for non-specialist readerships. Stopes's first book was a study of plant life, published in 1906, which she hoped would encourage young people to become interested in the subject.⁶⁰ This places her as having started her scientific working life in the comfortable niche for women of constructing a professional, public identity in science through writing for children and young adults. However, Stopes established a prestigious reputation that reached well beyond a lay audience and became highly influential in her discipline. According to Helen Fraser and Christopher Cleal, her research produced novel and important insights, in particular into coal-forest ecology. Stopes was 'arguably the first to view the coal forests as a living

⁵⁹ 'Women and science: complaint against the Royal Society', *The Times*, 16 June 1914, p. 5. Author information held at News International Archive and Record Office, London.

⁶⁰ M. C. Stopes, *The Studies of Plant Life for Young People* (London, 1906). Stopes is careful to state her author credentials on the frontispiece as DSc (London), PhD (Munich), FLS, Lecturer in palaeobotany at the University of Manchester.

ecosystem rather than a series of dead fossils – an approach that was not really emulated again for nearly half a century’.⁶¹

Stopes’s interest in science was stimulated at a young age, when she accompanied her father on archaeological field trips and helped him prepare items and catalogue his collections. Her talents in this area were further nurtured at North London Collegiate School for Girls, which boasted an outstanding science department. Unlike Ormerod and Ayrton, Stopes was of a generation that was able to benefit from the growth in serious, academic schools for girls, which, as well as giving their pupils an education equivalent to that provided in a boys’ public school, also provided acceptable jobs as teachers for the increasing number of female ‘graduates’ from the new colleges for women. Stopes initially applied to major in chemistry at University College London (UCL); however, the department did not accept her. As with Ayrton, there was some resistance to women participating in laboratory-based science. At UCL in the late 1880s, one female student was discouraged from seeking admission to chemistry classes as it was believed that women would be ‘scarred for life and have their clothes burnt off them as the men threw chemicals around’.⁶² Stopes compromised and studied feminine-friendly botany as a major with chemistry and zoology as minor subjects. At the same time – and against UCL regulations – she enrolled as an external student at Birkbeck College and took on a double study load, going on to graduate with a BSc Honours in botany and geology in 1902 after only two years.⁶³ This success led to a temporary research assistant post and a scholarship to fund a year abroad to complete a doctorate in palaeobotany at the Botanical Institute at the University of Munich. Stopes was the first woman to work at the institute and her supervisor, Professor K. Goebel, had to have the rules of admission changed to enable her to graduate in 1904.⁶⁴ Her research dealt with cycad seed structure and function (cycads are woody plants that produce seeds; they are of especial interest due to their connection and similarity to ancient plants). On her return to England, Stopes took up a post as assistant lecturer in botany at Owens College, Manchester (later the University of Manchester), becoming the first woman to lecture there

⁶¹ H. E. Fraser and C. J. Cleal, ‘The contribution of British women to carboniferous palaeobotany during the first half of the 20th century’, in *Role of Women in the History of Geology*, pp. 51–82, at p. 60.

⁶² C. Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities, 1870–1939* (London, 1995), p. 33.

⁶³ J. Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 2nd edn (Stroud, 2007), pp. 39–40.

⁶⁴ S. Green, *The Public Lives of Charlotte and Marie Stopes* (London, 2016), p. 113.



Figure 2.3. Marie Stopes in her laboratory, Manchester, c.1904–6.
Unknown photographer; image restored by Adam Cuerden.
Source: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

in science. While at Manchester – and still aged only twenty-four – Stopes was awarded a doctorate from the University of London. According to her biographer, the University of Manchester had severe misgivings about her appointment as the ‘council were nervous of a woman and only ratified her after lengthy debate’. Stopes was warned that university authorities would be watching her progress carefully.⁶⁵ A precarious professional indeed.

Unlike Ayrton and Ormerod, Stopes took on paid commissions and earned (some) money from her science, something which both aligns her with twentieth-century ideas of professional practice and testifies to her public identity as an expert in her field. In 1910 the Canadian Geological Survey asked her to act as adjudicator in a scientific controversy surrounding the Fern Ledges of Saint John, New Brunswick. Stopes investigated for eighteen months and produced an extensive report of the flora, later developing her findings into a book which became one of her most significant

⁶⁵ Rose, *Marie Stopes*, pp. 52–3.

contributions to science.⁶⁶ Following this, the Natural History Museum in London engaged her to write a catalogue of the cretaceous plants in their collections.⁶⁷ From 1916, when coal as a source of power became an urgent issue, Stopes supported the war effort by collaborating in research on the constituents of coal for the government's Industrial Research Department. However, it is Stopes's eighteen-month research trip to Japan that reveals the most significant clues as to how she negotiated her personal and public identity as a professional scientist.

Stopes's sojourn in Japan was made possible by the award of a substantial Royal Society grant which enabled her to work at the Botanical Institute of the Imperial University in Tokyo. From August 1907 to January 1909, Stopes combined working at the institute with field trips to find carboniferous fossils, including angiosperms, in the hope of locating a petrified ancestor of the modern plant. A glimpse of her life here is revealed by her *Journal from Japan*, an account of her experiences published on her return.⁶⁸ Stopes spent some quiet days in the laboratory cutting and preparing fossils, usually working independently but at times collaborating with others or teaching male students at the university how to perform this intricate task.⁶⁹ However, the journal also describes her many adventurous expeditions in search of fossils. These were often to remote areas and involved arduous journeys and camping out in very difficult, uncomfortable terrain. One of her first treks was to the 'northern wilds' of Hokkaido, an expedition that required her to take an overnight train on her own, the only female passenger, followed by a steamer on which she shared a berth with two men, and finally to go on foot and by cart to a remote coal mine. Once she had arrived, in order to hunt for the fossils, she had to navigate and camp out alongside rivers and dense forest with a group of local male helpers and escorts, one of whom 'carries me on his back on the frequent occasions when it is necessary to cross the river'.⁷⁰ Back at the institute, conditions were, of course, far less gruelling. Stopes enjoyed being the centre of attention at the many formal functions and dinners scheduled, often in her honour, and basked

⁶⁶ H. J. Falcon-Lang and R. F. Miller, 'Marie Stopes and the Fern Ledges of Saint John, New Brunswick', *Geological Society, Special Publication*, cclxxxi (2007), 227–45.

⁶⁷ M. C. Stopes, *Catalogue of the Mesozoic Plants in the British Museum (Natural History)* (London, 1913–15).

⁶⁸ M. C. Stopes, *A Journal from Japan* [London, 1910] (Istanbul, 2015).

⁶⁹ Stopes, *Journal from Japan*, p. 124.

⁷⁰ Stopes, *Journal from Japan*, pp. 24–34.

in being the only woman present.⁷¹ *Journal from Japan* is a travelogue and an autobiographical account more than anything else, but Stopes's personal understanding of her core identity as a professional scientist is strong throughout. Indeed, the subtitle is 'A daily record of life as seen by a scientist' and the special status this implies – that a scientifically trained professional can provide a more authoritative understanding of life – is something Stopes retained when she became involved in birth control from 1916 onwards.

Stopes asserted a strong, individual professional identity in other ways too. She kept her own name on marriage, sending a circular letter to family and friends to advise them of this fact in response to some criticism: 'I have taken the necessary steps to retain my own name as my legal one ... and it is also the name I use in all my scientific work. It is, in short, my real name.'⁷² The horror with which she viewed 'compelling professional women to give up their professions on marriage' was made clear in a letter to *The Times* in 1914.⁷³ Stopes also inhabited a professional role via her membership of learned societies. For the most part, she benefitted from the campaigns around 1900 to open scientific institutions to women. After a long and bad-tempered campaign, the prestigious Linnean Society had admitted its first women as fellows in 1904; Stopes was elected in 1909.⁷⁴ However, she had to wait until 1922 to be admitted to the Geological Society, which changed its charter to enable the election of women only in 1919. A fellowship of the Royal Society, a body which had a reputation of elitism and exclusivity to maintain, eluded her, however.

An analysis of the experiences of these three women across successive generations indicates the fluidity of the notion of a professional in science in the years 1860–1914. Even when Stopes was practising in the first decades of the twentieth century, the identity of a professional scientist had not been fully demarcated – however, it was clear that the developing stereotype was gendered radically male. This may explain why Ormerod, working in economic entomology from the 1870s onwards, enjoyed more flexibility as the characteristics of a legitimate professional scientist were then only just beginning to emerge and take shape. Yet Ormerod was a wealthy,

⁷¹ 'At University they all marvel at me, as though I were some curious kind of butterfly!' Stopes, *Journal from Japan*, p. 23.

⁷² Rose, *Marie Stopes*, p. 94.

⁷³ M. C. Stopes, 'The ban on marriage', *The Times*, 6 Apr. 1914, p. 9.

⁷⁴ For controversy surrounding this issue see A. T. Gage and W. T. Stearn, *A Bicentenary History of the Linnean Society of London* (London, 2001), pp. 88–93.

privileged woman; the lack of these advantages would have precluded other women, and indeed most men, from a similar career in science. Ayrton and Stopes had access to higher education and professional training, but as these opportunities developed so did ideas of the appropriateness of certain disciplines for men or women. Ayrton, as physicist and engineer, was disadvantaged in practising in a branch of practical science that was gendered radically masculine. Ormerod and Stopes worked largely in the feminine-friendly traditions of natural history and there are many women that can be identified as participating in similar fields from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Although Stopes was one of the few to develop a significant career, over a third of British palaeobotanists working on carboniferous plants in the first half of the twentieth century were women.⁷⁵ Despite this, the fact of their sex impacted on all of these women in different but central ways. It coloured the language used to describe and understand their scientific activities; it limited their access to facilities, networks and remuneration; and it created a tension in their self-identity as professionals and women. For example, despite Ayrton's plea to disregard sex and concentrate on science, on her death *The Times* headed her obituary 'A distinguished woman scientist'.⁷⁶ This is still a tension confronting many women pursuing a professional career in science today.

⁷⁵ Fraser and Cleal, *Role of Women in the History of Geology*, p. 51.

⁷⁶ 'Mrs Hertha Ayrton: a distinguished woman scientist', *The Times*, 28 Aug. 1923, p. 11.

3. Brother barristers: masculinity and the culture of the Victorian bar

Ren Pepitone

In the 1890s, the newly minted barrister Gilchrist Alexander lived in a world of pristinely manicured lawns and rotting wooden floors, drab brick facades and double hammer-beam ceilings, draughty rooms and mahogany toilet seats and the nearly endless company of fellow men. He shared residential chambers in one of the four Inns of Court, ancient extra-governmental institutions in central London which regulated admission to and practice at the upper half of the English and imperial bars. Workday mornings Alexander and his flatmate, Jimmy Gray, woke early, but not before their laundress had lit the fire and cooked breakfast. Alexander dressed in dark clothes topped with a silk hat, then cut across the Inn to his set of business chambers, where he prepared briefs for his mentor, the successful barrister Willes Chitty. Alexander's amiable junior clerk, Arthur Smith, carried finished notes to Chitty's chambers at the top of the street. At the end of the workday Alexander headed for the common room, where he could find friends smoking cigars, chatting or reading newspapers. They indulged in a game of bowls or lawn tennis in fine weather, a game of chess in foul. Eventually they sallied forth from the Inns to one of the taverns on Fleet Street for dinner, then retired to somebody's chambers to drink and smoke before heading off to bed.¹

Alexander's life as a young barrister revolved around his links to other men in the profession – his flatmate, his mentor, his clerk, his friends – relationships deliberately cultivated by the Inns of Court. The purpose of the Victorian Inns, in essence professional societies, was not to instruct students in the technicalities of law nor to hone essential legal skills such as oratory but to instil in students the values and attitudes appropriate to British barristers. The Inns promoted these attitudes through a culture of fraternity, encouraging members to take part in dining rituals, socialization in common spaces and volunteer drill corps. Given the societies' emphasis

¹ G. Alexander, *Middle Temple to the South Seas* (London, 1927); *The Temple of the Nineties* (London, 1938); and *After Court Hours* (London, 1950).

R. Pepitone, 'Brother barristers: masculinity and the culture of the Victorian bar' in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 87–105. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

on sociality, methodologically this chapter departs from traditional works on the professions that examine education, training or formal processes to focus instead on professional culture.² It approaches the legal profession through the lens of cultural history in order to explain why the bar remained a preserve of elite white men long after formal barriers to women and minorities had been cleared away. Its analysis centres on masculinity.³ Unlike most studies, this chapter holds that the bar's 500-year male-only tenure was not incidental and that the very paradigm of 'barrister' was constituted by performances of gentlemanly professionalism. This particular form of masculinity was learned through socialization between junior and senior members of the bar, practised via embodied rituals in the historic spaces of the Inns and necessarily repeated across generations of successive members to reiterate barristers' elite standing and authority. By uniting analysis of material culture, the built environment and homosociality, this chapter accounts for entrenched and enduring conservatism in the legal profession and suggests a methodology for unpacking similar resistance to change across a range of historical – and contemporary – institutions.

The Inns of Court epitomized a homosocial culture of affective same-sex bonds. An expansive term coined by Eve Sedgwick, 'homosocial' leaves room for erotic desire in relationships between men but does not necessarily assert claims of homosexuality.⁴ Historians have deployed Sedgwick's concept of the homosocial to analyse a variety of same-sex social interactions and institutions, such as public schools and universities, sports teams and gentlemen's clubs.⁵ These fraternal worlds and activities would have been familiar to many members of the Inns; in fact, the societies would have been one of many homosocial spaces inhabited by law

² D. Duman, *The English and Colonial Bars in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983); R. Cocks, *Foundations of the Modern Bar* (London, 1983); *History of the Middle Temple*, ed. R. O. Havery (Oxford and Portland, Oreg., 2011); W. Joseph Reader, *Professional Men: the Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York, 1966); H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989).

³ For a similar approach to gender discrepancies in the contemporary bar see R. Collier, 'Fatherhood, gender and the making of professional identity in large law firms: bringing men into the frame', *International Journal of Law in Context*, xv (2019), 68–87.

⁴ E. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985).

⁵ P. Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850–1920* (Bloomington, Ind., 2005); E. Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siècle* (New York, 1990); A. Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: a Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late-Victorian Britain* (New York, 2011).

students and barristers.⁶ Like other Victorian homosocial spaces, the Inns were elite, all-male, focused on ceremonies and rituals which touted their ancient origins, and populated by the same cast of characters. But unlike the universities, for instance, whose all-male environs were connected to late adolescence, membership at and participation in the masculine world of the Inns of Court spanned a man's adult lifetime. Another counterpart to the Inns, gentlemen's clubs, likewise shared similarities with the societies. Membership at the Inns overlapped with that of London clubland, but clubs strictly removed professional life from fraternization. Whereas clubs prohibited all talk of 'business', socialization at the Inns – by design – forged professional solidarity.⁷ Law resembled other gentlemanly professions like politics or medicine that drew men of means. But neither politics nor medicine demanded the same centralized training across the country and empire as did law. To practise as a barrister in England or most of its colonies, one had to spend three years at one of the Inns; in comparison, medical schools abounded. Likewise, women in the nineteenth century made inroads into medicine as nurses and even doctors and achieved some success in local politics. Law excluded women from both the upper and lower branches until parliamentary intervention in 1919.⁸ Before then, as Leslie Howsam's chapter in this volume shows, women could undertake legal work that did not require formal qualification, but such women were few in number and their positions might hinge on the goodwill of barristers or solicitors inclined to feed them (and take credit for their) work.⁹ Thus the culture of the bar – concentrated, enduring and pertinaciously masculine – stands as an example par excellence of the gendered operations of Victorian professional life.

For the Victorians, the Inns of Court were a multivalent cultural symbol, an impressively ancient but sometimes fusty preserve of Old London. In the 1840s and 1850s, newspapers, guidebooks and fiction by Charles Dickens and other luminaries noted the antiquated infrastructure and decaying grounds of the Inns.¹⁰ These authors characterized the societies as physical

⁶ Duman, *English and Colonial Bars*, p. 24; Alexander, *After Court Hours*, p. 65; A. Munby, *Munby, Man of Two Worlds*, ed. D. Hudson (Boston, 1972), p. 10.

⁷ Milne-Smith, *London Clubland*, p. 13.

⁸ R. Pepitone, 'Gender, space, and ritual: women barristers, the Inns of Court, and the interwar press', *Journal of Women's History*, xxviii (2016), 60–83.

⁹ See also M. Mossman, "'The law as a profession for women': a century of progress', *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, xxx (2009), 138.

¹⁰ C. Dickens, *Great Expectations* [1860–61] (Oxford, 1993), pp. 340, 311; *Martin Chuzzlewit* [1842–4] (London, 1966), p. 612; *Sketches by Boz Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People* [1836] (London, 1852), p. 142.

manifestations of their 'shabby genteel' residents. In reality, the nineteenth-century middle-class exodus to London's suburbs reduced the number of mildewing residences and their mouldering occupants at the Inns.¹¹ Historians have outlined the growing spatial separation between home and work for middle-class professionals.¹² As part of this trend, chambers that had once been home and office alike increasingly came to be used by barristers as office alone. Middle-class professionals required the spaces they occupied to provide what historian Patrick Joyce terms 'liberal infrastructure', the material conditions that created the possibility for these individuals to function as self-disciplining liberal subjects.¹³ As such, mid-nineteenth-century tenants demanded running water and other modern amenities necessary to cultivate professional respectability and the Inns responded by gradually renovating their deteriorating buildings.

Calls for modernization and improvements did not, however, diminish the importance of the past for members of the Victorian Inns. A wide variety of scholars have examined the Victorian fascination with the past as it manifested in everything from literary and artistic movements to capitalist enterprise.¹⁴ For the legal societies, whose privileges stemmed from their ancient roots and the role of precedent in common law, the past legitimized their very existence. Architecture was critical. The Inns of Court cast their environs as remains of Old London, their medieval church and Elizabethan hall as material evidence of their ancient origins. Following their valuation of these buildings, the Inns deliberately shaped the rest of their built environment to reflect this particular lineage. Architectural renovations and new constructions purposely evoked the medieval and the Elizabethan, high points in the societies' history and extremely popular periods within Victorian culture more broadly.

Furthermore, the Inns' material environs did not just house but actively contributed to the societies' affective culture. As theorists Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja insist, not only do people make and remake space, but

¹¹ Census of Great Britain, 1851; Census of England and Wales, 1881, 1891.

¹² L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, 1987); J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, Conn., 2007).

¹³ P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (New York, 2003).

¹⁴ P. Mandler, *The Rise and Fall of the Stately Home* (New Haven, Conn., 1997); B. Melman, *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past, 1800–1953* (New York, 2006); *Representing the Nation: a Reader*, ed. D. Boswell and J. Evans (New York, 1999); M. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (New York, 1981); R. Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, 1830–1870* (New York, 2000); P. Readman, 'The place of the past in English culture c.1890–1914', *Past & Present*, clxxxvi (2005), 147–99.

space in turn shapes its occupants.¹⁵ The Inns' architectural spaces and embodied practices inducted members of the bar into a resolutely English, masculine sociability. As historians and literary critics argue, whether manifested in the Hellenistic friendships of Oxbridge aesthetes or in the robust comradeship of martial activities, idealized male affect occupied a privileged place in Victorian society.¹⁶ At the Inns, the societies relied on fraternization with older generations, rather than codified rules, to inculcate new members with the priorities of the legal profession. Sara Ahmed and others have explained 'how emotions become attributes of collectives', arguing that social groups can deploy affective rhetoric and praxis to mark insiders and outsiders.¹⁷ In letters, diaries and memoirs, barristers defined legal culture as one in which men studied together in the library, chatted in the common room, drilled with the Volunteer Rifle Corps in the garden and, most importantly, dined together in the hall. This latter practice was intended to instil a sense of brotherhood in members by enacting a series of formal rituals of medieval or early modern origin revived or re-emphasized by the Victorian societies.¹⁸

The Inns of Court may have asserted their role as preservers of history, but developments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries forced the societies to respond and adapt to the growth of the capital and the empire – concurrent cultural shifts – and the ravages of war. An increasing number of men from across the empire came to study at the Inns of Court, bringing with them unfamiliar religious, sumptuary, dietary and cultural needs and practices. Urban development projects, such as Victoria Embankment, disturbed the solitude of the Inns with the noise of construction, trains and traffic. The City remained the preserve of masculine professionals, but the West End, a short walk from the Inns, blossomed into a cosmopolitan pleasure zone. A variety of spaces still offered men the comforts of all-

¹⁵ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, 1991); E. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York, 1989).

¹⁶ E. Sedgwick, *Between Men and Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990); L. Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); C. Lane, *The Burdens of Intimacy: Psychoanalysis and Victorian Masculinity* (Chicago, 1999); Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men*.

¹⁷ S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 2014), p. 2; L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, (Durham, N.C., 2011), p.16; S. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), p. 98.

¹⁸ For similar practices in other contexts see E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (New York, 1983), pp. 1–14; D. Cannadine, 'The context, performance and meaning of ritual: the British monarchy and the "invention of tradition", c.1820–1977', in *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 101–64.

male company, but an increasing number of heterosocial spaces – music and dance halls, theatres and eventually cinemas – helped to change the expectation that men and women would socialize apart.¹⁹ The Boer War brought members of the Inns of Court Rifle Volunteers into active service for the first time, and a decade later the First World War depopulated legal London of young students and barristers. At war's end, the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act opened the legal profession to women for the first time in history.

Unlike most of the historical actors in this volume, then, white male barristers experienced professional precarity not because they were outsiders but because the forces of metropolitan modernity threatened the homogeneity of the bar. In the face of these disruptions, tradition and precedent became more important to legal culture than ever before. Indeed, the trope of the Inns, their occupants and their rituals as a ruin of Old London endured and gained force in the twentieth century, as a new generation of writers figured the Inns as a bastion of continuity with the past. Beginning in the 1890s and peaking just after the First World War, members of the societies published works entirely devoted to the Inns of Court. Drawing on mid-Victorian literary depictions, these works were steeped in nostalgia for a pleasingly deteriorated version of the Inns. Rather than the fragmented and fraught relations between men depicted in modernist literary works, members of the Inns focused their attention on a rosier, more Victorian notion of idealized friendship.²⁰ The books ignored or dismissed male outsiders to this world, particularly colonial subjects. They prized and reaffirmed the value of friendship between men and propagated a culture deeply resistant to women. Given the dissipation of formal barriers to women and minorities at the bar, late-Victorian and interwar members redoubled the emphasis on precedent, adopted a retrospective gaze and wielded historicism as an effective tool for maintaining a conservative status quo within the culture of the legal profession.

In the Victorian metropolis, the Societies of the Inner and Middle Temple were located on the City of London's western border, just north of the Thames; Lincoln's Inn and Gray's Inn lay a short distance north in Holborn.

¹⁹ J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), and *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven, Conn., 2012); P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830–1885* (London, 1978); *Metropolis, 1890–1940*, ed. A. Sutcliffe (Chicago, 1984); L. Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, Conn., 2000).

²⁰ S. Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2003).

Thus, the Inns of Court were not only among the oldest professional societies in England, but they also occupied some of the most ancient – and by extension, prestigious – real estate in the capital. Law was a particularly metropolitan profession. The concentration of lawyers in London stemmed in part from the centripetal nature of training at the Inns, which required students from across England and the empire to spend three years in the capital. Even after calls to the bar, most lawyers practised in the two square miles surrounding the Inns of Court; they made twice-yearly pilgrimages to serve provincial legal needs via the circuit courts. As a response to overcrowding in the profession, a small but growing number of barristers made a living in larger provincial cities or colonial outposts, but these options were viewed as inferior to practice in legal London. The exception came in the form of law students from the empire, the majority of whom returned to practise in their countries of origin.²¹

By the mid nineteenth century, the buildings and grounds of the Inns included a medieval church, an Elizabethan hall and row upon row of Georgian brown-brick chambers.²² Chambers primarily provided barristers and law students with offices and residences, making the Inns a majority-male enclave. Renting a set of chambers was customary rather than compulsory, but a successful barrister was likely to have chambers at his Inn. Residential chambers housed a dwindling population of barristers and law students, a number of clerks, a few tradesmen, some civil servants and house servants, known as laundresses.²³ Families were not unknown, but residents were overwhelmingly bachelors or widowers. Single women in residence tended to be servants, widows or the daughters of male tenants.²⁴ Chambers at the Inns thus provided the fellowship of other single men unrestrained by the tenets of conventional domesticity.

Throughout the nineteenth century, for a variety of reasons, the Inns experienced a decline in their rental rates. Members increasingly chose to live in purpose-built mansion flats or outside the city centre in growing suburbs like Islington, Kensington or Belgravia.²⁵ By the 1850s, there emerged a

²¹ Duman, *English and Colonial Bars*, pp. 1, 85, 122–3.

²² G. Tyack, 'The rebuilding of the Inns of Court, 1660–1700', in *The Intellectual and Cultural World of the Early Modern Inns of Court*, ed. J. E. Archer, E. Goldring and S. Knight (Manchester, 2011), pp. 200–203.

²³ Census of Great Britain, 1851; Census of England and Wales, 1881.

²⁴ G. Alexander, 'The modern outlook at the bar', *Law Times*, 20 Oct. 1950; Census of Great Britain, 1851; Census of England and Wales, 1861, 1871, 1881.

²⁵ W. Whateley, Esq., QC, Inner Temple Treasurer, in Inner Temple Archives, London (hereafter ITA), *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Arrangements in the Inns of Court* (London, 1855), p. 47; C. Hamnett and B. Randolph, *Cities, Housing and*

new professional practice of sharing chambers between several barristers, it being more 'convenient and more economical, for two or three to take a set of Chambers' rather than to each rent their own.²⁶ Such a strategy may have been necessary for members of a profession whose numbers at mid-century exceeded the demand for practitioners. Significantly, the trend of sharing not only chambers but also secretaries, clerks and cases grew to become standard practice for barristers by the twentieth century. As Raymond Cocks argues, practising together presented senior barristers with new means of regulating the conduct of young initiates and gave junior barristers greater impetus for seeking the approval of senior members.²⁷

The Inns' steady decline in occupants in part came about because of the disastrous state of their buildings at mid-century. The societies' descriptions of these 'very wretched' wooden structures conjured up images closer to the ramshackle housing stock of the city's poor than the homes and offices of the professional elite.²⁸ Chafing at the attendant discomforts of life at the Inns, mid-century residents complained of bleak conditions. In 1857, for example, a tenant explained that his chambers had become 'so ruinous and unsafe for habitation' that three years prior he had removed his 'furniture and books ... to a place of safety'.²⁹ Other members decried the failure of material interventions, such as heating and ventilation, to ensure the uninterrupted mental labour of the middle-class professional. In 1855, George W. Hastings claimed that he had suffered a serious illness from a cold caught in the Middle Temple Library, 'a cold and draughty room'.³⁰ Men of learning, members charged, could not carry out cognitive tasks in rooms that failed to provide for their basic bodily requirements.

Aware that their buildings were both insalubrious and unappealing to tenants, the societies undertook a great number of renovations and expansions between the 1850s and 1890s. The Victorian societies stressed the modern amenities with which these buildings would be equipped. When

Profits (London, 1988), pp. 17–20; J. White, *London in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2007), pp. 77–90. For the British love of semi-detached houses see Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 357–97; S. Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999), pp. 83–134.

²⁶ Duman, *English and Colonial Bars*, p. 4.

²⁷ Cocks, *Foundations of the Modern Bar*, p. 9.

²⁸ ITA, *Report of the Commissioners*, 1855, p. 47; Middle Temple Archives, London (hereafter MTA), MPA 1 1858, fo. 383.

²⁹ MTA, MPA 1 1857, fo. 177.

³⁰ ITA, *Report of the Commissioners*, 1855, p. 136.

the Inner Temple replaced its 1678 hall with a neo-Gothic building in 1870, for example, the society ensured that the structure was fitted with lavatories, gas lighting, hot water, heating and the 'latest modern appliances' in the kitchen.³¹ The cost of modern amenities marked wealth and status for the societies and their members. Equally important, these features rationalized the bourgeois interior, allowing for the greater subdivision of spaces according to their function and the removal or rapid elimination of waste and dirt from the body and the home.³²

At the same time, the Victorian societies deliberately chose architectural forms that would reflect the Inns' importance and the grandeur of their past. The medieval and Elizabethan eras had been high points for the societies, and the Inns embraced historicist architectural styles that represented these moments. In 1842, for example, the Inner and Middle Temples collaborated to restore the Temple Church to a medieval appearance. Originally constructed in the twelfth century, the church had been remodelled by the societies in 1682 to conform to the hybrid classical and baroque style (or English baroque) characteristic of the buildings of Sir Christopher Wren, the royal architect. The trustees of the Victorian Inns rejected English baroque in favour of Gothic Revival, which rose to prominence for the construction of churches in the nineteenth century as it highlighted the long tradition and history of Christianity.³³ In an attempt to realize a perfect medieval ideal, the project's architect mercilessly removed all traces of Wren from the church.³⁴ He laid a solid-coloured floor, installed new stained-glass windows and commissioned the colourful painting of the walls and ceiling.³⁵ Covered in bright images of the Gospels and elaborate scrollwork, they stood in sharp contrast to the formerly imageless and muted walls. The renovation received glowing praise from the press, which extolled the church's 'pristine beauty', its 'mystic and quaint devices'. Newspapers wasted no ink mourning the former Wren fittings, instead devoting paragraphs to the restoration's colours, paintings and stained glass. The Inns, papers contended, had

³¹ 'New hall of the Inner Temple', *Illustrated London News*, 12 Feb. 1870.

³² Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 382–3; J. Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home* (New York, 2004), pp. 324–40.

³³ A. Sutcliffe, *London: an Architectural History* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), pp. 36, 101, 106.

³⁴ W. R. H. Essex and S. Smirke, *Illustrations of the Architectural Ornaments and Embellishments and Painted Glass of the Temple Church, London, with an Account of the Recent Restoration of the Church* (London, 1845), as quoted in G. Noel, *A Portrait of the Inner Temple* (Norwich, 2002), p. 81.

³⁵ K. Baedeker, *London and Its Environs: Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig, 1911), p. 86.

done ‘all lovers of antiquity’ a great service in restoring the church to an ancient appearance ‘unparalleled in modern days’.³⁶

The Inns of Court’s topography significantly shaped members’ activities and the culture of the bar. Parts of the Inns abutted the City of London, for example, but the societies fiercely policed these boundaries. Such enforcement preserved the Inns as a local authority, but physical divisions also reiterated the symbolic distinction between the commercial city and the gentlemanly Inns. Indeed, much of barristers’ professional identity was defined by what a gentlemanly professional *was not* and did not do. Legal etiquette forbade barristers from engaging in trade, for example, and from working – or even having worked – as a solicitor. Barristers were paid an honorarium, not wages. They did not advertise in newspapers or court briefs from solicitors. Such behaviours were beneath the dignity of the profession, and barristers who engaged in them could be censured or disbarred by the Inns. Some barristers found the line between the permissible and the prohibited unclear. After all, legal etiquette was based on custom and precedent rather than codified rules. It was not written down until the second half of the nineteenth century, and then incompletely so.³⁷ This meant that a student could learn law from reading textbooks, but to learn the rules of the legal profession he absolutely had to socialize with established members of the bar.

A variety of activities forged homosocial relationships at the Inns – informal common-room chats, chess, lawn tennis, the debating and musical societies – but without a doubt members placed the greatest weight on dining in hall. In the mid nineteenth century, the only requirement for students to be called to the bar was to ‘keep term’ by dining in the societies’ halls at least three times each quarter. For some social commentators, this practice was a source of derision, a way of becoming ‘gastronomically-learned in the law’.³⁸ Mid-Victorian barristers, however, defended the dining requirement on professional grounds. Some of the highest-ranking members of the bar, including the vice-chancellor, insisted that ‘dining together not unfrequently [*sic*] in Hall’ gave students the ‘considerable advantage’ of ‘social intercourse’. Such opportunities were all the more important, he contended, given that ‘Members of the Inns of Court have ... ceased to

³⁶ ‘The Temple Church’, *Morning Chronicle*, 21 Nov. 1842; ‘The Temple Church’, *Illustrated London News*, 5 Nov. 1842; ‘The Temple Church’, *Ipswich Journal*, 29 Oct. 1842.

³⁷ C. Shaw, *The Inns of Court Calendar* (London, 1878); A. V. Dicey, ‘Legal Etiquette’, *Fortnightly Review*, ii (1867), 175; Duman, *English and Colonial Bars*, p. 43; R. Cocks, ‘The Middle Temple in the nineteenth century’, in *History of the Middle Temple*, p. 328.

³⁸ H. Mayhew and J. Binny, *The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of London Life* (London, 1862), p. 72.

reside in their precincts or vicinity'.³⁹ Dining in commons, legal luminaries argued, allowed students and young barristers to connect with older and more established members of the profession, even if those members had taken residence in some of London's new suburbs.

Other barristers maintained that dinners functioned as a conversational space for students to reinforce what they had learned from their law books and tutors. William Lloyd Birkbeck, the 1854 Reader on Equity, explained, 'it is impossible to fix a subject of such extent as Law upon [students'] memory without that sort of repetition which is induced by conversation'. The Middle Temple Treasurer likewise emphasized the importance of association for learning 'professional conduct'.⁴⁰ In encouraging conversations about law and professional practice, the Inns of Court significantly differed from counterparts like the gentlemen's clubs of the West End, where such topics were prohibited.⁴¹

In addition to dining in hall, members underscored another great source of pride: joining and drilling with the Inns of Court Volunteer Rifle Corps, or the 'Devil's Own'. According to a recruiting pamphlet, the corps had first been formed in 1584 to fight at Tilbury – a suspiciously grand beginning – and over the centuries had traditionally disbanded and reassembled as necessary.⁴² The Victorian corps re-formed in 1859 as part of the then popular Volunteer Movement, and remained in existence until its transformation into an Officers' Training Corps early in the First World War.⁴³ Less than a year after its re-formation, the Inns of Court Volunteer Rifle Corps had upwards of 260 members.⁴⁴ Featuring patriotic displays of robust masculinity, participation in the corps signalled the vitality of both its members and the nation. The societies supported the corps, allowing them to drill in the gardens and to dine later than usual in hall and providing headquarters and training space at Lincoln's Inn. They hung Devil's Own banners from the reign of George III in the societies' halls, sponsored cups for shooting matches and hosted the corps' balls and events.

Drilling with the corps, 'a delightful brotherhood within the

³⁹ ITA, *Report of the Commissioners*, 1855, p. 9.

⁴⁰ ITA, *Report of the Commissioners*, 1855, p. 122.

⁴¹ Milne-Smith, *London Clubland*, p. 13.

⁴² 'The Inns of Court Volunteers', *Law Journal*, 14 Dec. 1895, p. 748; London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA), CLC/527/MS17671, 'Inns of Court Officers Training Corps', Press Notices, undated, probably 1915.

⁴³ J. C. Jeaffreson, 'A book about lawyers', *London Quarterly Review*, xxviii (Apr. and July 1867); LMA, CLC/527/MS17631, Notes from Colonel Errington's Anecdote Book, 1928/9.

⁴⁴ 'The Volunteers', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 13 May 1860.

brotherhood of lawyers', reimagined legal fraternity as common physical exertion beyond the boundaries of the Inns.⁴⁵ Though the Volunteers sometimes drilled in the Temple or Lincoln's Inn, they most frequently gathered at the Deer Park in Richmond, far beyond London's bounds. William Grantham recorded frequent shooting practices with friends there, and Lord Justice Paul Ogden Lawrence, then a young man at the bar, recalled rowing away from camp with a friend or two to fish and drink beer. Drill could also be an important place to make connections with more advanced members of the profession, especially as 'distinctions of ranks were not observed'. Lawrence fondly recalled a lunch with the corps: 'I remember being frightfully thrilled that a Lord Justice ... should be handing me (a young law student) potatoes'.⁴⁶ Equally important for promoting this fraternal atmosphere was time spent roughing it in the outdoors. Grantham described a 'splendid day' as one in which he had to 'skirmish through a forest of juniper bushes' and ended up 'covered with mud if not with glory'. Yet despite mud and brambles and gruelling twenty-mile marches, almost every diarist or memoirist recorded singing together in the evening, noting favourite songs or vocalists.⁴⁷

When the Second Boer War began in 1899, fewer than fifty members of the Devil's Own shipped out to South Africa. These men experienced little action and few casualties, but newspaper contributors marked their participation in actual warfare as a significant departure from the past.⁴⁸ Fifteen years later, hundreds of members of the Inns volunteered or were drafted into the Great War. Almost all 'the young barristers', explained memoirist Stephen Coleridge, 'voluntarily joined the fighting forces' and 'vacat[ed] their chambers'. He lamented the Temple's 'temporary loss of character' brought about by the 'intrusion of a crowd of tenants having no connexion with the law, nor any personal distinction'. Coleridge also noted disturbances to the material Inns. The Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve drilled in the gardens, and a gun was mounted to the Victoria Embankment to fire at raiding German planes. At the end of the war, Coleridge was much relieved to find 'the reverend buildings [returned] to their proper

⁴⁵ For the growing emphasis on a more robust masculinity see Deslandes, *Oxford Men*, p. 155; B. Shannon, *The Cut of His Coat* (Athens, Ohio, 2006), p. 183.

⁴⁶ LMA, CLC/527/MS17651, extracts from the diaries of Sir Paul O. Lawrence, 1878–1882.

⁴⁷ LMA, CLC/527/MS17631, 'Memories of the "Devil's Own" by W. Valentine Ball O.B.E.'; CLC/527/MS17651, extracts from the diary of W. W. Grantham, later Mr Justice Grantham. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ LMA, CLC/527/MS17669, Scrapbooks of Inns of Court Cyclist Section, 1900–1901.

and dignified purposes'.⁴⁹ He imagined the societies as having successfully resisted dramatic changes wrought by the war on almost every other aspect of British life, making them a mainstay of continuity with the past.

The emotional resistance to change evident in Coleridge's memoir likewise informed much of the literary output from the twentieth-century Inns, as members published works devoted to the societies, nostalgic for fusty Victorian days. These works began to appear as early as the 1890s but were published with increasing frequency after the First World War. Authors most often categorized their works as histories of the Inns, though in reality the books spanned genres, incorporating aspects of antiquarianism, memoir and topographic guidebook. Like tourist guides, histories of legal London highlighted landmarks, legends and literary references of interest to visitors, but they fused this content with authors' memories of the pre-war Inns, musings on the present-day societies and short pieces of fiction. Unpreoccupied by accuracy or authenticity, the works connected the Inns to eminent political, literary and artistic moments and figures in Britain's past to claim prestige for the societies. In the face of the broad upheavals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, authors accentuated references and practices that figured the Inns as unchanging homosocial preserves.

Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century histories of legal London invoked romanticized images of serenity and decay from mid-Victorian literary depictions of the Inns and their environs. Members regularly quoted poems by William Makepeace Thackeray and Tom Taylor – who shared chambers at the Inner Temple – to cast the societies as a homey refuge of fraternity inhabited by impoverished, literary bohemians. An even greater number of these histories referred to Charles Dickens's description of the Middle Temple's Fountain Court in *Martin Chuzzlewit*: 'Merrily the Fountain leaped and danced.'⁵⁰ Dickens's animated language lent the Inns a playful, spirited atmosphere. Significantly, authors omitted his more ambivalent references to the societies in his other works, or even those within *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which described the Inns as lonely, decaying

⁴⁹ S. Coleridge, *Quiet Hours in the Temple* (London, 1924), pp. 101–2.

⁵⁰ Coleridge, *Quiet Hours in the Temple*, p. 17; C. P. Hawkes, *Chambers in the Temple* (London, 1930), p. 4; M. Bowen, *The Story of the Temple and Its Associations* (London, 1928); Colonel R. J. Blackham, *Wig and Gown: the Story of the Temple Gray's and Lincoln's Inn* (London, 1932); H. Ringrose, *The Inns of Court: an Historical Description of the Inns of Court and Chancery of England* (Oxford, 1909); W. J. Loftie, *The Inns of Court and Chancery* (Curdrige, 1893); W. M. Freeman, *A Pleasant Hour in the Temple* (London, 1932); H. Bellot, *The Inner and Middle Temple: Legal, Literary and Historic Associations* (London, 1902); H. Bellot, *The Temple* (London, 1914).

and haunted.⁵¹ By highlighting only select passages, authors capitalized on the cultural cachet of Dickens's London without sacrificing the picturesque image of the Inns.

Histories of legal London also ignored the modern amenities added to the Inns and conflated Victorian historicist renovations with surviving medieval and Elizabethan architecture. In *The Temple* (1914), Hugh Bellot imaginatively positioned the painted walls of Temple Church as a backdrop for mysterious medieval legends and secrets, even though its neo-Gothic interior had been created in the 1840s.⁵² Similarly, interwar histories obsessed over the Inns' Elizabethan moment, a period marked by monarchical favour and a population of fashionable gentlemen dilettantes.⁵³ The Elizabethan period tied the Inns to legends, events and figures that formed part of a British national heritage and identity. Histories of legal London lauded the Elizabethan Inns for their revels, festivals and plays, including the first performance of *Twelfth Night*.⁵⁴ Connecting Shakespeare to the Inns was one way that authors catapulted the societies from the local to the national, collective British past. Using material artefacts to attach Elizabeth I to the Inns also tied the societies to a national heritage. Many authors declared the benchers' table in Middle Temple Hall to be made of wood from Drake's *Golden Hinde*, referencing a triumph of Elizabethan imperial navigation.⁵⁵ These authors amalgamated archival research and oral or written legend, including in their works stories without historical evidence, so long as their connection to the Inns was long-standing.

Placing new value on longevity and connection with the past, authors linked the Inns' ancient architectural spaces to the historic practices they housed, especially dining to keep term. While mid-Victorian members emphasized the practicalities of this custom, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century authors defended keeping term as a historic ritual. For Edwardian and interwar members of the Inns, the societies and their rituals represented physical and embodied manifestations of valued pasts.⁵⁶ Histories detailed the Elizabethan features of the Middle Temple Hall, especially the dark wood panelling, elaborately carved screen and double hammer-beam

⁵¹ Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 612.

⁵² Bellot, *The Temple*, p. 38.

⁵³ Bellot, *The Temple*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ E. A. P. Hart, *The Hall of the Inner Temple* (London, 1952), p. 8. See also A. Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London, 2004).

⁵⁵ Bellot, *The Temple*, p. 146; Coleridge, *Quiet Hours in the Temple*, p. 42; Freeman, *A Pleasant Hour in the Temple*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in *The Invention of Tradition*.

roof, to impress on readers the hall's great age. At the Middle Temple, authors noted, dinner began with the sounding of a medieval summoning horn. A 1919 article in the *Globe* proudly described this as 'London's oldest custom'. Whether or not this was true, the article substantiated its claim by referencing William George Thorpe's *Middle Temple Table Talk* (1895), itself a mixture of archival research and oral legend. According to the *Globe*, before the start of the meal, an usher in a purple gown knocked twice on the floor with his staff. The seated barristers and students, in black gowns, rose and "dress[ed]" shoulder to shoulder, in military fashion'. The benchers then processed into the hall, led by the bearer of the ceremonial mace. While the other Inns had let such formalities go, the article lauded the Middle Temple for 'scrupulously' preserving the Inn's ancient rituals.⁵⁷

The same historic rituals and traditions that marked insider status for British members of legal London, however, equally denoted outsider status for foreign members of the Inns, a fact glossed over by most interwar authors. As early as 1885, 12 per cent of barristers and an even greater proportion of law students hailed from overseas, and their numbers only grew in the early twentieth century.⁵⁸ To a limited extent, the Inns made concessions to overseas students' varying sumptuary, dietary, religious or cultural backgrounds. In the 1890s, the Inner Temple agreed to provide more satisfying vegetarian meals for Mohandas Gandhi than the bread, boiled potatoes and cabbage he had been resigned to while dining in hall. The societies permitted foreign students to substitute other ancient languages for the Latin examination. In 1909 the India Office thanked the Middle Temple for their 'concession in regard to the wearing of Turbans' rather than wigs for Sikh students called to the bar.⁵⁹

Even with these concessions, overseas students nevertheless faced difficulties at the resolutely English Inns. Gandhi recalled that he and other married students from the subcontinent passed themselves off as bachelors to hide the shame of 'child marriages'.⁶⁰ While some law students, both English and colonial, claimed that all students intermingled, others maintained that English and colonial students kept apart. When asked by interviewers from the India Office if overseas students participated in the social life of the Inns via activities such as the Hardwicke Debating Society, B. S. Vaidya, an Indian law student at Lincoln's Inn, replied that they did

⁵⁷ 'London's oldest custom: Middle Temple's ox-horn summons to dinner: romantic relic of 1184', *Globe*, 14 June 1919. See also Hawkes, *Chambers in the Temple*, pp. 145–7.

⁵⁸ Duman, *English and Colonial Bars*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ MTA, MPA 1, 1909, fo. 8.

⁶⁰ M. Gandhi, *An Autobiography* (Boston, Mass., 1957), p. 93.

not. Their primary means of contact with English students was, he claimed, through dining, when they sat together ‘quite freely’. Even so, he admitted, though he went to court and dined in hall, he did not know any barristers ‘personally’.⁶¹

For their part, English memoirists rarely mentioned interactions – let alone friendships – with overseas students. Those who did described overseas students at the Inns as exotic others, not quite unwelcome but decidedly separate. Gilchrist Alexander, for example, noted the diversity of the Middle Temple, populated by ‘English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Colonial and others, with hundreds from India’s coral strands and Afric’s [*sic*] sunny fountains’. Alexander treated overseas members as a curiosity, recounting their ‘woolly heads’ in rows at the library as he might animals at the zoo.⁶² Few authors noted much socialization between Anglo-British and overseas students, barristers or residents. Some writers contended that while dining in hall men of all backgrounds ate with one another, but self-interest motivated these interactions. Diners in hall were divided into ‘messes’ of four people, and each mess allotted a certain portion of wine. As one author quipped, ‘for this reason a Mohammedan ... is welcomed eagerly in any mess, for his unconsumed portion goes to augment the never sufficient allotment of the other members’.⁶³ As histories of legal London made clear, Anglo-British and international students did not dine together to share in cultural exchange. In fact, though foreign cuisine reigned supreme in the nearby restaurants of the West End, with the Inns’ menus of ‘soup or fish, a joint with potatoes and vegetables, apple or gooseberry tart, cheese, bread, and butter’, the cuisine and culture within them remained reassuringly English.⁶⁴

Histories of legal London also contrasted their enduring, all-male professional world with caricatures of new female white-collar employees elsewhere in London. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, women made inroads into the business sector as secretaries and stenographers, but they remained shut out of work at the Inns. Authors like C. P. Hawkes compared ‘the shingled “lady-stenographer” with her long French heels and her wide English simper’ with the ‘Barrister’s clerk, discreet, omniscient, and with an air of well-deserved responsibility’.⁶⁵ Hawkes set stereotypes of the frivolous New Woman against the contained body of the responsible, male clerk. He also reaffirmed existent professional relationships

⁶¹ British Library, IOR/Q/10/3/4, 14 July 1921.

⁶² Alexander, *Temple of the Nineties*, pp. 66, 78.

⁶³ Hawkes, *Chambers in the Temple*, pp. 146–7.

⁶⁴ Alexander, *After Court Hours*, p. 73.

⁶⁵ Hawkes, *Chambers in the Temple*, p. 10.

and power dynamics between barristers and barristers' clerks. A good clerk knew how to win the best cases from solicitors for his barrister. In return he was paid a varying percentage (between 2.5 per cent and 5 per cent) of the barrister's fees. Thus, the success or failure of a barrister and a barrister's clerk was mutual. As a result, successive generations of barristers and clerks from the same families often had close ties and working relationships.⁶⁶ Men outside the bar might cultivate professional relationships with women, but histories of legal London celebrated barristers' perpetuation of a time-tested, thoroughly masculine work environment.

Authors of these histories uniformly ignored the most significant change in women's professional presence at the societies, the admission of women to the Inns of Court in 1919. Almost none of the histories of legal London written in the 1920s or 1930s acknowledged women barristers and law students at the Inns, despite women's presence there being highly publicized in the press.⁶⁷ As challenges to both precedent and the Inns' homosocial culture, women members disrupted the continuous traditions that authors intended their works to convey. Hawkes alone included an ambivalent section on 'Portia', in which he pondered whether women could adjust to the 'masculine *religion d'avocat* of the English Bar'. For Hawkes, women's integration into professional life was not impossible, but it required 'time and mutual understanding' to 'solve the difficulties of comradeship of men and women on circuit and in chambers'. Tellingly, Hawkes concluded his section by paraphrasing *The Merchant of Venice*: 'Portia may confidently trust that "The four winds blow in renowned suitors [*sic*]" (perhaps not only in the legal sense of the word) "in plenty to her chambers"'.⁶⁸ By invoking a Shakespearean female lawyer, Hawkes reminded readers of the connection between the bard and the Inns, and subtly indicated that women barristers were not entirely unprecedented. His parenthetical interjection about personal rather than professional suitors, however, conveyed his hope that women barristers would find husbands, presumably to carry them safely back to the domestic realm.

Histories of legal London ignored or denigrated women's presence at the Inns, but letters and diaries reveal that many members of the societies took advantage of the increased facility of interacting with women in their personal if not their professional lives. The Inns of Court Rifle Corps, that brotherhood within a brotherhood, offered a variety of new heterosocial activities that encouraged interactions between men and women. When

⁶⁶ C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (New York, 1970), iv, Part 1, p. 38.

⁶⁷ R. Pepitone, 'Gender, space, and ritual'.

⁶⁸ Hawkes, *Chambers in the Temple*, p. 74.

members of the mid-Victorian corps mentioned women at all, it was usually on those occasions when women materialized to admire men in uniform. In 1860, for example, William Grantham marvelled at his ‘good luck to win a lady’s ticket ... to see [the] Volunteer Review’. Sir Paul Ogden Lawrence’s 1878–82 diary mentioned several occasions on which female friends came to Richmond to watch drills on ‘ladies day’. By the end of the century, however, the Volunteer Rifle Corps was sponsoring annual concerts, dinners, balls and, perhaps the most whimsical of heterosocial events, the yearly gymkhana. In addition to regular jumping competitions, this event included horse races forcing riders to dress in drag, collect potatoes or smoke cigars. Certain races required competitors to partner with a lady who would have to draw an animal or guess a whistled tune before the rider could finish the race.⁶⁹ Unlike the solemn volunteer review, at the gymkhana women could laugh at the antics of their male peers or even participate in the comedy themselves.

The most noticeable changes to the Inns of Court came during the Second World War; when members left for the armed forces, the societies had neither funds nor staff to serve dinners in hall and German bombs transformed the Inns from figurative to literal London ruins. After the war, however, the societies gradually re-established their resolutely English, masculine character. Like their Victorian predecessors, the post-war Inns embraced historicist architecture, replacing bombed-out Georgian brick with new brick, neo-Gothic facades with newer neo-Gothic facades. Dining rituals resumed, and English male barristers and law students – temporarily in the minority – became the majority once more.⁷⁰

To this day, women and minorities at the bar are under-represented, particularly among senior counsel and the judiciary.⁷¹ For example, women and men are admitted to the profession in almost equal numbers, but despite improved maternity leave policies and support for flexible working, women are not equally retained. In a 2016 survey by the Bar Standards Board, two out of every five women said they had suffered harassment and discrimination at the bar, though only one in five had reported it, for fear

⁶⁹ LMA, CLC/527/MS17651, extracts from the diary of W. W. Grantham, later Mr Justice Grantham, 1859–1864; CLC/527/MS17651, extracts from the diaries of Sir Paul O. Lawrence, 1878–1882; CLC/527/MS17783, miscellaneous papers, 1896–1937.

⁷⁰ ‘Restored again after the damage of War’, *Illustrated London News*, 9 July 1949; B. Abel-Smith and R. Bocking Stevens, *Lawyers and the Courts* (London, 1967), pp. 247, 315, 358.

⁷¹ R. L. Abel, *The Legal Profession in England and Wales* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 79–85; ‘A current glance at women in the law’, *American Bar Association* (Feb. 2013); ‘Trends in the solicitors’ profession: annual statistics report 2012’, Law Society (2013); ‘Statistics’, Bar Council, 2006–10.

of negative career impact. The survey concluded that, rather than it being an issue with particular policies, it was 'elements of *the culture of the Bar* and legal profession more generally' that created a 'barrier to the retention of women'.⁷² Some contemporary commentators argue that the gradual increase in the number of women and minority barristers will slowly equalize the imbalances in the profession. This assurance, however, ignores the centuries-old fraternal logics of legal culture that persist and organize professional practice.

⁷² My emphasis. Bar Standards Board, 'Women at the bar', pp. 4, 58 <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media/1773934/women_at_the_bar_-_full_report_-_final_12_07_16.pdf> [accessed 27 Sept. 2018].

4. Legal paperwork and public policy: Eliza Orme's professional expertise in late-Victorian Britain

Leslie Howsam

For women in late-nineteenth-century Britain, a university degree in law could launch a lucrative and prestigious career that was professional in character but lacked a name because it challenged the very culture of expertise. Highly regulated by powerful institutions, the legal profession established conditions beyond precarity to exclude women until 1919 and the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act.¹ However, the universities, operating with different values, began cautiously in the 1870s to allow women to attend lectures and later to write examinations and, eventually, to graduate with the degree of Bachelor of Laws. Historical studies of women and the legal profession have stressed the heroic but ultimately futile attempts of these graduates to be admitted to the bar or to the ranks of solicitors.² Apart from that struggle, though, they found ways to apply their knowledge of the legal profession to establish a profitable foothold on its doorstep, and then to use their academic and occupational confidence to move into the public sphere. Eliza Orme (1848–1937), the first Englishwoman to achieve a law degree at the University of London, in 1888, is the focus of this study, but she was not an anomaly. She had partners and peers who were doing the same thing: Mary Richardson and, later, Reina Lawrence, both with London degrees, shared Orme's Chancery Lane chambers early in their careers, while Cornelia Sorabji, their counterpart at Oxford, found her own foothold in Indian legal practice. It is likely that further study will reveal more examples of similarly precarious, equally prosperous legal professionals.

Eliza Orme was thirty-nine years old and already in mid-career when she completed the degree she had begun some fifteen years earlier. Based

¹ M. J. Mossman, *The First Women Lawyers: a Comparative Study of Gender, Law and the Legal Professions* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 121–37; L. Howsam, “‘Sound-minded women’: Eliza Orme and the study and practice of law in late-Victorian England”, *Atlantis*, xv (1989), 44–55 <<http://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantis/article/view/5125/4323>> [accessed 28 July 2019].

² See, e.g., Judith Bourne, *Helena Normanton and the Opening of the Bar to Women* (Hook, Hampshire, 2017), pp. 55–65.

in a well-appointed suite in London's Chancery Lane, she and colleagues prepared the paperwork for property transactions, patent registrations, wills, settlements and mortgages – most of them documents that would be officially processed under the name of a male lawyer. Orme recalled in a 1903 interview: 'I "devilled" for about a dozen conveyancing counsel who kept me busily employed on drafts they wanted done in a hurry, and for twenty-five years I found it both an interesting and profitable employment.'³ What she was doing was highly skilled labour; it was identical to the quotidian tasks of most men working in law firms, men who held both academic and professional qualifications.⁴ The work of a law office – then and now – consists largely of high-level and very exacting clerical tasks associated with the preparation and management of legal documents.⁵ It must be undertaken by people who understand the principles behind what they are reading and writing, but there is a distinction between their functional skills and the professional qualifications normally associated with those skills. Eliza Orme and her associates found ways to manipulate that distinction to their advantage.

For women, legal education afforded three valuable prospects: a regular income from skilled work in a business setting; the opportunity to create a public identity associated with chosen causes; and freelance opportunities that enhanced their public identity without damaging their business and income. After an introduction to Eliza Orme's early life, this chapter addresses each of these three affordances and concludes with an analysis of her posthumous reputation (or lack thereof).

Family and education

Eliza's parents were Charles Orme, distiller and manufacturing chemist, and Eliza Andrews, who had once served as governess to the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Married in 1832, they lived in a large and comfortable home in London near Regent's Park and had six daughters and two sons,

³ 'Women and the Bar', *Law Journal*, 12 Dec. 1903, p. 620. To 'devil' meant preparing written legal work on behalf of a more senior barrister; normally this referred to a junior barrister (a qualified man), but because the fee paid was a private arrangement between 'devil' and senior barrister, someone not called to the bar but otherwise qualified could offer this service.

⁴ See Mossman, *First Women Lawyers*, ch. 3, for the intricacies of qualification for the bar in Britain (as a barrister) or for work as a solicitor, and for the Inns of Court.

⁵ See Mossman, *First Women Lawyers*, p. 132, for an explanation of why Orme was not a mere 'legal assistant'. The term 'paralegal' was not in use at the time, but her work, transposed to a modern setting, was more independent and professional (in the sense of trustworthy) than that term implies.

cared for by at least four domestic servants. One daughter, Rosaline, married the literary scholar David Masson, while another, Julia, married the pioneering neurologist Henry Charlton Bastian; both young families moved in for a time, while their younger sister Eliza Orme was growing up.⁶ Visitors to the family included Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill. The setting was prosperous, intellectual, politically and socially progressive and secure.⁷

It was in 1869 that Eliza Orme, barely twenty, was one of nine women who sat the first General Examination for Women at University College London (UCL); she passed with honours and embarked on higher education.⁸ She had already begun to express her political views and personal ambition by joining the Executive Committee of the National Committee for Women's Suffrage, but at this point her career ambitions may have been unclear. In 1870 she was awarded a University of London Special Certificate in physics and chemistry. Two years later she began studying law at UCL, though she also intended to take Special Certificates in mathematics and mechanics, and she studied political economy in 1872–3. The record shows that in 1874 she won a prize in jurisprudence, and that same year her article 'Sound-Minded Women' was published in the *Examiner*.⁹ She was twenty-five years of age when she opened her own business in Chancery Lane while continuing her studies. In 1876 she won first place in the Roman Law examination as well as the Hume Scholarship in jurisprudence (the latter over the objections of a male competitor), and in 1880 she passed with honours the first of two LL.B. examinations.¹⁰ The degree

⁶ Eliza Andrews (1816–1892) and Charles Orme (1806–1893) had eight children: Charles Edward (physician; 1833–1912), Emily Rosaline (1835–1915; m. David Masson); Helen Foster (1836–1857); Julia Augusta (1840–1928; m. Henry C. Bastian); Campbell (physician; 1842–83); Olivia Blanche (1844–1930; m. Howard Fox); Eliza (1848–1937); Beatrice Masson (1857–1949).

⁷ See 'Orme Family', in E. Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: a Reference Guide, 1866–1928* (London, 1999), pp. 479–80.

⁸ P. Carter, 'The first women at university: remembering "the London Nine"', *Times Higher Education*, 28 Jan. 2018 <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/first-women-university-remembering-london-nine>> [accessed 28 July 2019].

⁹ E. Orme, 'Sound-minded women', *Examiner*, 1 Aug. 1874, 820–21. Orme's degrees and awards were announced in the press, including the *Examiner* and the *Englishwoman's Review*.

¹⁰ Pascoe Daphne had missed the prize exam and asked to be allowed to write it anyway; he was outraged to learn that Orme had been awarded the prize, because he had not often seen her attending Professor Sheldon Amos's lectures. Her letter notes that she had

itself was finally awarded in May 1888, when she was already a respected public figure.

Most of what is known of Eliza Orme and her family must be pieced together from the public record – journalism, census records, wills, city directories and so forth. Her personal and business records have (apparently) been lost and it remains difficult to assess her motivations. One important exception, however, is a series of letters she wrote to Helen Taylor beginning on 7 December 1872; Taylor was a stepdaughter of John Stuart Mill and a leading figure in the movement for women's suffrage and so their remarkable correspondence has survived.¹¹

Few, if any, of the leaders of the contemporary women's movement harboured any practical ambition to enter the legal profession, where misogyny was enforced by strict regulation. Taylor and others were preoccupied with the enormous challenges associated with medicine, as well as with suffrage, and with opening a few respectable occupations to single women who needed a modest income. Orme, however, calmly sought Taylor's counsel before she set aside her scientific studies in favour of the law:

For some months I have been considering the best method of entering the legal profession. Professor and Mrs Cairnes, who have taken the kindest interest in the matter, approve my now writing to you for advice. Before stating my plans and difficulties it may be as well to explain, as shortly as possible, why I have undertaken what seems such a hopeless task. Since I have been actively working on the Women's Suffrage committee, I have become convinced that we probably have many years [*sic*] work before us and that nothing assists the question so much as practical work done by women. Mr Cairnes and Mr Fawcett also hold this opinion and my brother-in-law Mr Masson has always urged it very strongly. I therefore resigned my office of secretary of the Executive Committee of the London National Society [for Women's Suffrage] with the definite purpose of doing some practical work if possible and at the same time remaining a public supporter of the cause which seems to me to be of paramount importance.

sometimes arrived late but that she had indeed been present, despite having sat through the same course of lectures and having applied for the same prize the previous year. It does not mention the pressure of business in Chancery Lane during these months. UCL Library Special Collections, London, University College London Archives, letters from Pascoe Daphne to Sheldon Amos, 20 Nov. and 14 Dec. 1876; Daphne to the President and Council of University College London, 20 Dec. 1876; letters from Eliza Orme to Talfourd Ely, 9 and 11 Jan. 1877.

¹¹ I did not see these letters until after my 1989 article was published. There is a reference in Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, pp. 479–80; see also A. Robson, 'Legal proof of [John Stuart Mill's] dissertations and discussions', *Mill News Letter* (summer 1976).

I have made up my mind to study law (1) because I see work to be done in explaining to women their real position from the legal point of view; (2) because it is a lucrative profession which ought to be open to women. The manner of making such an attempt as this has such an important effect that I should be quite willing to give up all public action if experienced friends thought the time ill-chosen or that I was an unsuitable person to commence it. Otherwise I am prepared to work steadily at the subject, quite independently of whether I am admitted as a student, and to gather support and sympathy as I go along. In 1869 I passed the General Examination at the University of London and in 1870 took a Special Certificate in Physics and Chemistry. I intend taking similar certificates in Mathematics and Mechanics and in Political Economy next May, if possible. I am 24 years of age and am strong enough to work hard without its doing me any harm. I tell you these particulars because it seems unfair to ask your advice without giving you full information.¹²

Mill and Taylor responded quite kindly, offering financial as well as moral support.¹³ No doubt the names of supporters like David Masson, John Elliott Cairnes and Henry Fawcett were reassuring, and both Mill and Taylor were acquainted with Orme through the suffrage movement. Eliza Orme had set her career goal, with the mixture of personal ambition and strategic pragmatism that was to characterize the next thirty years of her life.

Legal paperwork

A year later, on 9 December 1873, Orme reported to Taylor on her first attempt to move into the practice of law. She became a pupil in the Lincoln's Inn chambers of the barrister John Savill Vaizey (1829–1916), whose wife, Harriet Vaizey, was part of the emerging feminist network. Aspiring practitioners normally entered the profession via admission to one of the Inns of Court, and it was these institutions which barred women. Vaizey, however, was prepared to accept her (at a hefty fee) on an unofficial basis but without making any commitment that Lincoln's Inn would allow Orme even to enter the ranks of 'conveyancers under the Bar', let alone become a full-fledged barrister. She regarded him as a good teacher, and he in turn recruited her assistance with his book on marriage settlements. Using the veiled language in which women referred to the indignities and dangers of moving into masculine precincts, she

¹² London School of Economics Library, British Library of Political and Economic Science, Mill–Taylor, xiv, item 67, Eliza Orme to Helen Taylor, 7 Dec. 1872. Hereafter cited as Mill–Taylor.

¹³ Mill–Taylor, copy of letter, Taylor to Orme, 7 Jan. 1873, item 68.

told Taylor: ‘The fact of my being alone has not caused any kind of inconvenience and I do not think my presence within the sacred precincts has attracted the slightest attention.’ Despite this tempered optimism, she realized that it was going to be difficult to ‘do anything profitable’ in this situation and had undertaken some tutoring in the evening to make ends meet.¹⁴ At some point another law student, Mary Eliza Richardson, joined her in Vaizey’s office.

This unsatisfactory arrangement went on for a couple of years, until 1875, when Orme and Richardson were introduced to another sympathetic barrister, William Phipson Beale.¹⁵ He advised them to abandon the idea of working inside Lincoln’s Inn and instead lease office space in nearby Chancery Lane and seek out work from barristers. His rationale was that this strategy would be cheaper, but also, as Orme told Taylor, ‘By taking rooms in Chancery Lane we shall excite less attention than if we were to try to engage any within one of the Inns of Court. Mr Beale is strongly of the opinion that we had better do some work before we make our claims to enter the profession and Miss Richardson and I both agree with him in this entirely.’¹⁶ Orme was too circumspect to give Taylor any details, but the discreet anonymity of the early days had obviously not persisted, and the two women were presumably now ‘exciting’ some onerous ‘attention’ – perhaps outright harassment – in and around the Inns of Court. Chancery Lane was squarely in London’s legal neighbourhood, but it was a commercial thoroughfare where barristers and solicitors practised, not a legal institution.

Another 1875 letter gives us a fuller picture of working life in the new chambers:

I am busy with Miss Richardson and Minnie Robertson, Mrs Cairnes’s niece, is living with us and working up for her examination. So we have a sort of miniature Girton! Miss Richardson and I have taken chambers at 38 Chancery Lane. They are suitable in every way and only £55 a year. We have a little boy to run errands &c and a very respectable laundress in the attics who looks after the whole house. Since we have been there we have as much work as we can do from Mr Vaizey our old Tutor and Mr Beale. The latter gives me half the fee he takes for any draft which I do completely enough to save him trouble. He also gives us invaluable help in explaining little technicalities which are difficult for us to pick up and in every way assists us in getting into the work. He thinks we

¹⁴ Mill–Taylor, Orme to Taylor, 9 Dec. 1873, item 75. For the culture of the Inns of Court, see the chapter by Ren Pepitone in this volume.

¹⁵ Beale (1839–1922) was also a Liberal politician; he was knighted in 1912.

¹⁶ Mill–Taylor, Orme to Taylor, 3 Aug. 1875, item 81.

should get work from solicitors in time even without being called and that if we never sign our drafts but do them in the character of outdoor clerks we can go on safely even without being called.¹⁷

To twenty-first-century ears, this sounds like a classic case of exploitation, but Beale's manipulation of the strict rules associated with legal writing did allow Orme and Richardson – mid-Victorian single women in their mid-twenties – to establish their own business, employ staff and plan their future. It also reminds us that male lawyers received extensive informal training beyond the LL.B. Being a pupil at one of the Inns of Court was a matter of consuming a minimum number of meals ('eating one's dinners') with established barristers and enjoying opportunities to learn about the various 'little technicalities' that were not accessible to their women counterparts.

Early in her time in Vaizey's chambers, Orme had lamented to Taylor that the law governing conveyancing (33 & 34 Vict c97s60) would not allow her to 'do anything profitable' apart from simple agreements, powers of attorney and testamentary instructions: 'These would not be sufficient to give a fair chance of success to a person debarred from drawing any more common form of conveyance.'¹⁸ By the time she was established in her office two years later, however, she was openly 'devilling' for qualified barristers, despite the legal prohibition against such a practice. Perhaps Beale, Vaizey and others were discreetly giving Orme and Richardson half the fees they received for ostensibly undertaking lucrative work on complex documents concerned with the transfer of property. Or perhaps the common practice in Chancery Lane entailed a tacit understanding that the letter of the law could safely be ignored. In any case, Orme and Richardson advertised themselves as conveyancers and as patent agents.¹⁹ The 1883 Patent Act had made patent registration a more complex process than earlier but had not designated specialized qualifications.²⁰ In addition to their two main services, Orme and Richardson became directors of the

¹⁷ Mill–Taylor, Orme to Taylor, 13 Nov. 1875, item 84. In the same letter Orme asked Taylor to join in helping Hertha Marks with her mathematical studies; Marks later became the physicist Hertha Ayrton.

¹⁸ Mill–Taylor, Orme to Taylor, 9 Dec. 1873, item 75.

¹⁹ *Englishwoman's Review*, Nov. 1875, pp. 510, 533–4 and 15 Jan. 1904, pp. 49–51; M. Birks, *Gentlemen of the Law* (London, 1960), p. 229. The 1883 *Royal Blue Book* (directory) lists the partners as conveyancers; *City of London Street Directories* from 1874 to 1889 call them patent agents. For the changing scene of the 1870s and 1880s see Mossman, *First Women Lawyers*, pp. 132–7.

²⁰ For the Patent Act see K. Boehm, *The British Patent System, vol. 1: Administration* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 30.

Nineteenth Century Building Society, one of the emerging institutions concerned with mortgage lending.²¹

A visit by an American admirer to a new office at 27 Southampton Buildings off Chancery Lane, fortunately recorded in 1888, offers a further vivid picture of the ‘miniature Girton’ where highly educated women worked together on tasks that required a disciplined intelligence and meticulous accuracy. There was a brass plate on the door, identifying the office as that of ‘E. Orme and M. E. Richardson’. Once indoors, the interviewer Jessie Wright found herself in a room where ‘the floors were carpeted, a blazing soft coal fire burned in the open grate, two large windows were lowered from the top, a book case stocked with reports was behind me’, and good prints hung on the walls. She found Orme’s colleague Reina Lawrence at work at a large table in the centre of the room with the office boy waiting ‘stiff as a ramrod’ at her side to run an errand; the table was furnished with revolving chairs and ‘loaded with papers, pamphlets, books – a fine chaos’. Apart from offering a healthy and comfortable working environment, this was a typical late-Victorian office, as found in publishing houses, colleges, universities and government services, as well as in the various branches of the legal profession and those who served it. It’s not surprising that George Bernard Shaw, creating in Vivie Warren the character of a prosperous young professional woman, may have turned to Eliza Orme and her Chancery Lane office for models.²²

Public policy

One might have expected Eliza Orme to keep a low profile apart from supplying her professional services to licensed lawyers, and perhaps some of her male mentors did anticipate that she would work quietly and discreetly at conveyancing and patent agency.²³ She chose, instead, to strategically

²¹ They were the first two women to serve in this capacity. Orme was re-elected as a director in 1909, aged 60. ‘The Nineteenth Century Building Society’, *British Architect*, 4 June 1909.

²² Mossman, *First Women Lawyers*, p. 13; quotes from a letter from Jessie E. Wright to the Equity Club, 23 Apr. 1888, in V. G. Drachman, *Women Lawyers and the Origins of Professional Identity in America: the Letters of the Equity Club, 1887–1890* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1993), p. 141. Mossman notes that George Bernard Shaw’s stage directions for Vivie Warren’s office in his play *Mrs Warren’s Profession* ‘bear a quite remarkable resemblance to [this] contemporary description of Orme’s office in Chancery Lane in 1888’. Mossman, “‘New questions’ about women’s access to the legal professions”, *Otago Law Review*, xi (2008), 591–2. For the observation that Shaw modelled the Vivie Warren character after Eliza Orme see M. Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, vol. 1: 1856–1898: The Search for Love* (London, 1988), p. 295.

²³ Some of those mentors were John Elliott Cairnes (1823–1875), professor of political economy at UCL; Leonard Courtney (1832–1918), Liberal MP and cabinet minister; and William Alexander Hunter (1844–1898), barrister and politician.

leverage the professional aspect of her identity to build up a reputation as an advocate for the causes she supported. These were primarily women's independence (through employment as well as suffrage) and the Liberal Party. Both Richardson and Lawrence developed similar reputations.²⁴

The public vehicles of Orme's advocacy were her journalism (writing books as well as articles in newspapers and periodicals and editing a periodical) and her appearances as a lecturer. These materials are vital evidence when it comes to piecing together an account of her life and career. However, they conceal what must have been an extensive and powerful network of connections, exercised behind the scenes of both feminist and Liberal causes and almost completely undocumented. Hints of Orme's influence surface occasionally, as when she urged Helen Taylor in 1875 to support the young and impoverished Hertha Marks or when she offered Saturday classes for 'ladies' on Debating and Public Speaking.²⁵ The fact that she wrote a biography of a leading member of the Women's National Liberal Association, *Lady Fry of Darlington* (1898), demonstrates that she was trusted to do so, and that she knew how to find a publisher. That she wrote an account of a miscarriage of justice in India and the London-trained lawyer who set it right (*The Trial of Shama Charan Pal*, 1897) suggests that this lawyer, Manomohan Ghose, wanted her to record his story.²⁶ These are suppositions that must be teased out of the public record, but they help to develop an understanding of a complex career, exercised with aplomb in a milieu whose gatekeepers had flatly declared it impossible.

Orme was a leading member of the women's suffrage movement during the 1870s and 1880s, but her name was not memorialized or celebrated by those who wrote the initial histories of their crusade. There are two probable reasons for this. She lived a very long life in retirement and out of the public eye, so that when she died in 1937 most of her contemporaries were dead. But some of those contemporaries probably believed she had betrayed their ideals and hence omitted or suppressed her leadership from the record. There is no evidence that she ever wavered from the cause, which she had told Taylor was of 'paramount importance'. Then as now, however, feminism was not a

²⁴ Richardson studied law at UCL alongside Orme and was also involved in the London National Society for Women's Suffrage; she was a member of the London School Board in 1879–85. Lawrence obtained her LL.B. at UCL in 1893; she served briefly (1907–9) as the first woman elected as a London borough councillor, with interests in housing, swimming baths and infant mortality.

²⁵ For Marks see Mill–Taylor, Orme to Taylor, 13 Nov. and 2 Dec. 1875, items 84 and 85. For the debates see *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 Feb. 1889.

²⁶ *The Trial of Shama Charan Pal: an Illustration of Village Life in Bengal*. With an introduction by Miss Orme, LL.B. Howrah Sessions, Nov. 1894 (London, 1897).

monolithic movement, and her approach diverged from that of the majority. Orme was on the Executive Committee of the National Committee for Women's Suffrage, and there are numerous press accounts of her lecturing, sometimes in drawing-room meetings, about the suffrage cause. But she saw the question of votes for women through the stereoscopic lens of liberal political ideology and Liberal Party policy; the former went back to her studies at UCL, while the latter was a matter of alliances with powerful Liberal families. From that perspective, she deplored the strategy of embarrassing the party over the question of women's votes at a time when they were struggling with Home Rule for Ireland. She expressed this view from her platform as editor of the *Women's Gazette and Weekly News*, the organ of the Women's Liberal Federation, from 1889 to 1892. Most members of the federation disagreed, however; they preferred to make the suffrage issue an official plank of the party platform. In 1892 women including Sophia Fry, Catherine Gladstone and Eliza Orme formed an alternative group, the Women's National Liberal Association.²⁷ Although the ideological rationale is probably the most significant aspect of her decision, it's worth noting that, unlike most of the women remembered as leaders of the contemporary women's movement, she may also have been motivated by the consideration that she had a business to manage and a professional reputation to protect, but did not have either a sympathetic husband or substantial private means for financial support.

Orme believed that financial independence – derived from an income through work and from the protection of property – was the most important goal for women of all classes, both married and single. In an early statement (1878) she described the vote as a means to that end: 'On the whole, the most direct means of obtaining for women those educational advantages and remunerative employments still withheld from them.'²⁸ She expressed this forcibly again in her 1897 article rejecting the concept that poverty was a necessary condition of unmarried women:

Let us suppose that [a young woman] enters some paying profession and earns perhaps £500 a year. She spends her time in doing what her talents specially fit her for, and in this way is a direct benefit to those for whom she works. Her time being thus employed she pays others to make her bonnets, her dresses, and her other clothing, and, being well off, she pays well for good work. She has a house of her own with servants, one of whom is very probably a lady help or

²⁷ C. Hirschfield, 'Liberal women's organizations and the war against the Boers, 1899–1902', *Albion*, xiv (1982), 32–5. An incomplete run of the *Women's Gazette and Weekly News* is held at the British Library and was microfilmed by Harvester. Further copies are to be found in the Special Collections Library at the University of Oregon.

²⁸ National Society for Women's Suffrage, *Opinions of Women on Women's Suffrage* (London, 1879), Leaflet 1 (1878), p. 3.

companion housekeeper, whose domestic tastes make the position pleasant as well as profitable. And very likely she helps a younger sister or niece to enter upon a life as useful and honourable as her own.²⁹

At the time, Eliza was living with – and perhaps supporting financially – her unmarried sister Beatrice in a substantial house in south London. There were nieces and other protégées who benefitted from Orme's generosity. Both in private family life and in building a public reputation for professional work, Orme modelled her own commitment to women's independence.

Freelance opportunities

The term 'freelance' is an anachronism for the 1890s, but it captures the precarious and flexible nature of Eliza Orme's career and identity. Maintaining a reputation among professionals as a trustworthy handler of highly specialized legal paperwork was relatively inconspicuous. Developing and controlling a reputation as an advocate for women's suffrage and financial independence was otherwise. With an eye for emerging opportunities, Orme twice managed to leverage those intersecting aspects of her identity to show how women could contribute – and what she herself was capable of – at the heart of government and public policy. But she was also prepared to take on humbler assignments that made use of her talents and supplemented her income.

The first opportunity to influence government policy came Eliza Orme's way in 1892, and the second in 1894; she was in her mid-forties. The Liberal government of the day formed a Royal Commission on Labour to investigate working conditions in several industries and appointed a team of four 'lady assistant commissioners' under Orme's leadership. The work was demanding, so much so that Orme declined an invitation to attend the Congress on Jurisprudence and Law Reform, held in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago; she barely had time to prepare a written paper for the event.³⁰ One of her supporters, Leonard Courtney, having been entrusted with the selection, chose her over Beatrice Potter. Potter's reputation, with that of her new husband, Sidney Webb, was developing in a more radical and pro-trade union direction. Eliza Orme thought trade unions might make sense for men, but she opposed them for women on the grounds that most working-class women's work outside the home was short term. Rather than combining for better wages and working conditions, women 'ought to have the power of withdrawing the money they had paid in [to a union] if they wished to leave the trade, just as they would

²⁹ Orme, 'How poor ladies live: a reply', *Nineteenth Century*, xli, (Apr. 1897), 613–19.

³⁰ Mossman, *First Women Lawyers*, pp. 137, 145.

be able to withdraw it from a Savings' Bank'.³¹ With this sort of attitude, she must have struck Courtney and others as a safe pair of hands to entrust with the delicate questions before their commission. In addition to supervising her three colleagues, she investigated the work of barmaids and waitresses, women employed in the nail-, chain- and bolt-making industries in the Midlands of England and women's work in Ireland. Her reports provide plenty of evidence for her conviction that women should not be excluded from any workplace, no matter how uncomfortable or dangerous.³² This put Orme, once again, in conflict with a strong current of contemporary feminist opinion – this time the campaign to protect women's health by keeping them out of heavy work such as blacksmithing and limiting the long hours worked in bars and restaurants.

Just two years later, Orme was invited by Herbert Gladstone to join a departmental committee on prison conditions, which he chaired as a member of parliament. Her questions to those giving testimony to the committee stressed the opportunities for women's paid work with respect to prisoners; she expressed her disapproval of the use of volunteer 'lady visitors' perhaps because prison matrons were unhappy with their interventions.³³ More of Orme's views about prisons for women can be gleaned from an article she wrote in 1898, 'Our female criminals': 'The real fact, is that women, instead of being reformed by prison treatment, are dragged down by it, and that our system ... is really calculated to manufacture habitual criminals and drunkards.' In her tartly expressed view, many of the policies in effect in prisons provided 'examples of the hideous mistakes which may be made by kindly-disposed men if they turn a deaf ear to female criticism'. A good example of valuable female advice is her suggestion that the matrons and warders in women's prisons should be treated with respect, as professional women with the potential for innovation and excellent management ('warders of the right sort with sunny tempers, bright hopeful spirits, and bubbling over with originality').³⁴

Orme was paid for her eighteen months' work on the Labour Commission at the rate of £25 per month.³⁵ Her prison committee work probably received

³¹ Reported in *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 Dec. 1888.

³² Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women: Reports by Miss Eliza Orme, Miss Clara Collet, Miss May Abraham and Miss Margaret Irwin (Lady Assistant Commissioners) on the Conditions of Work in Various Industries in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland* (Parl. Papers 1893 [C. 6894], xxiii).

³³ S. McConville, *English Local Prisons, 1860–1900: Next Only to Death* (Oxford, 1995), p. 647.

³⁴ Orme, 'Our female criminals,' *Fortnightly Review*, lxix o.s. (May 1898), pp. 791, 792, 795.

³⁵ McConville, *English Local Prisons*, p. 601. McConville notes that the other lady assistant commissioners received £20 per month and gives the archival source PRO HO

a stipend, and there may have been other lucrative short-term assignments that supplemented (or perhaps temporarily replaced) her main income from the business in Chancery Lane. Similarly, she earned fees from some of her journalism and lectures.

Another source of income, which later turned into a different sort of relationship, appeared when the novelist George Gissing sought Eliza Orme's help with the management of his domestic situation. Gissing's second wife, Edith, was deeply unhappy and expressed herself with violence and vulgarity. From his perspective, she was insane and unfit to care for their son, Walter. Orme and Gissing had met at a dinner party in 1894 and he turned to her three years later, when the situation had worsened. She took Edith off Gissing's hands, initially by installing her in her own home as a lodger at the rate of £200 per year.³⁶ By this time Eliza and Beatrice Orme were living together with their brother in south London. No doubt the household budget was aided by having a tenant in the spare bedroom. Later, Orme offered professional advice (that Gissing should seek a legal separation). She helped settle Walter with another family when Edith Gissing was arrested, and there is no record as to whether she was paid for this service. Nor has any record appeared of other occasions when Orme may have offered a private service to some individual in need of discreet advocacy and practical assistance.

There is, admittedly, a difference between serving on government commissions, being paid fees for journalism or royalties for books and taking in a boarder who needed special attention. No doubt there were further instances of Orme engaging in piecemeal assignments that enhanced her private income without damaging her public identity. Many of her feminist contemporaries were either married women, supported financially as well as ideologically by like-minded husbands, or single women living on the income from inherited investments. She was a single woman, self-supporting in a professional role so precarious that it had no proper designation.

45/9837/B10296/67, 171 and 176. See also E. Harrison, 'Women members and witnesses on British government ad hoc Committees of Inquiry 1850–1930, with special reference to Royal Commissions of Inquiry' (unpublished London School of Economics and Political Science PhD thesis, 1998).

³⁶ Gissing described the situation to his new wife, Gabrielle Fleury, in a letter of 6 Feb. 1899: 'I forgot that you did not know who Miss Orme was. She is the lady with whom that terrible person [Edith] lived for six months, in London, after my departure for Italy in late summer of '97. Her age is about 53 [she was 51], and she is a very strong-minded woman, who has been a good friend to me. In return to her kindness to that poor foolish creature, she was insulted and abused and all the peace of her home ruined.' *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, ed. P. Coustillas (New York, 1964), p. 105.

Her posthumous reputation

It was not until the 1980s that Eliza Orme became the subject of research, and the second decade of the twenty-first century was well underway before anyone had tracked down even a photograph.³⁷ Traces of contemporary comments were waiting in the archives or in books about other people. There was the law student who tried to prove Orme had cheated her way to a scholarship he deserved; and the moment when she joined the gentlemen in enjoying an after-dinner cigar. A vindictive woman assured her friend that Orme was ‘horribly ugly’, while a young man was disconcerted to find the friendly girl he had been flirting with was the formidable ‘Miss Orme’.³⁸ A younger law graduate, Cornelia Sorabji, worried about being seen as ‘a kind of Miss Orme [known to] put in train ugly divorce proceedings’. (This might possibly refer to some discreet involvement, on Orme’s part, on behalf of Charles Dilke in a divorce scandal of 1886, but the evidence here is inconclusive.)³⁹ Thanks to internet search engines, the tidbits in print are now easily accessible, as are many of her public appearances, and

³⁷ In a graduate class at York University *circa* 1983 I encountered George Gissing and wondered why his ‘Miss Orme’ was elsewhere referred to with the designation LL.B. It was not until about 30 years later that I learned that the Gissing scholar Pierre Coustillas had received a copy of a photograph from a descendant of one of Orme’s nephews. I am very grateful to him and to Hélène Coustillas for sharing it with me, and for telling me that the original photograph is inscribed and dated 1889.

³⁸ For Pascoe Daphne’s allegations of cheating see above, note 10; for Gissing and the cigar see below, note 41. A woman engaged in a dispute with Orme about founding clubs for women wrote to her friend that Orme was the author of an ‘obnoxious’ (and presumably anonymous) article: ‘she is a friend of Mrs Heatherley’s. She is a conveyancer, and has offices in Chancery Lane. I am happy to say that she is horribly ugly.’ *Letters between Samuel Butler and Miss E. M. A. Savage, 1871–1885*, ed. G. Keynes et al. (London, 1935), pp. 234–5. For the evidence of flirtation see E. Pratt, *Pioneer Women in Victoria’s Reign* (London, 1897), p. 82. A young man attending an evening party ‘had been for some time talking, without knowing it, to the fair winner of a prize essay on some abstruse point of law. When at last he discovered her name, the shock was so great that, without waiting to collect himself, he blurted out, “What! *You Miss Orme?* Why, I thought you hadn’t an idea in your head!” – a remark naturally treasured by that lady as one of her most cherished compliments.’

³⁹ Quoted in Mossman, *First Women Lawyers*, p. 220, from a letter of 16 Oct. 1898 from Sorabji to Lady Mary Hobhouse. Mossman surmises that this refers to the legal separation between George and Edith Gissing, which was unpleasant although not widely publicized. However, a letter from Orme to the Manchester philosopher Samuel Alexander, dated 9 Apr. 1886, refers to her being ‘much concerned’ in a situation that is almost certainly the Crawford divorce case of that year. Prominent Liberal politician Sir Charles Dilke was cited as co-respondent; and Alexander corresponded with Emilia Dilke on the same subject. John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, Samuel Alexander papers. For the case see K. Israel, ‘French vices and British liberties: gender, class and narrative competition in a late-Victorian sex scandal’, *Social History*, xxii (1997), 1–26.



Figure 4.1. Photograph of Eliza Orme, 1889. Private archive.

even a few letters in archives. But her private emotions and motivations remain unknown (as do other occasions when rivals may have undercut her precarious reputation). Why did Eliza Orme retire around 1910, in her early sixties? And what did she think of the suffragette militancy soon afterwards, or about the First World War, or indeed about the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919? What was the nature of her partnerships with Mary Richardson and Reina Lawrence? No evidence has surfaced that suggests they might have been sexual and intimate as well as business relationships, nor has any survived to demonstrate that they were not. (Lawrence was named the executor of Orme's will in 1885 and fulfilled her duties in 1937; that is a lifelong friendship.) How significant was the extended family network which included such distinguished and very public figures as her brothers-in-law David Masson in Edinburgh and Henry Charlton Bastian in London, as well as the competent women who were her sisters and nieces, her bachelor physician brothers Charles and Campbell Orme, and her nephews? A future biographer or historian might trace such connections. This chapter is intended to help shape the narrative as new research emerges, to frame one woman's feminist advocacy, her freelance opportunities and her quasi-legal practice as part of the emerging pattern of a new (and precarious) kind of paid work and professional identity for women. In Eliza Orme's own words, 'nothing assists the [ideological] question so much as practical work done by women'.

As we have seen, Orme was on the 'wrong' side of women's-movement history, first when it began to be written in the early twentieth century and again when second-wave feminist scholars began to celebrate the foremothers who had fought, unambiguously, for the vote and to protect working women's health. Her position in the annals of the history of women in the legal profession is more secure, but still somewhat problematic. The 'First 100 Years' and 'First Women Lawyers' movements have recognized her as a precursor to the breakthrough of 1919. But as a precursor, she is inevitably cast as a 'failure' – someone who sought entry to the profession without success.⁴⁰ She herself contributed to that discourse in the 1903 *Law Journal* article where she wrote that 'perhaps I ought to have tried harder'. However, it was unreasonable then, and it's ahistorical now, to suggest that the climate of the 1870s and 1880s would have permitted any woman to become a barrister or solicitor in Britain. What it did permit was for them

⁴⁰ For Orme and other 'pioneers' as 'failures' see the programme of the First Women Lawyers in Great Britain and the Empire Symposium of June 2016, organized by Dr Judith Bourne of the Centre for Law and Culture at St Mary's University (UK). See also the First 100 Years history project <<https://first100years.org.uk>> [accessed 19 June 2021].

to charge substantial fees to the legitimate practitioners whose legal training was acknowledged and right to public roles recognized.

As an important novelist, George Gissing has attracted the attention of scholars who have preserved much of his correspondence and conscientiously researched his turbulent life. Traces of Eliza Orme's encounters with him have been caught in that net, not least that first dinner party when 'she took a cigar as a matter of course'. She was the only woman in a party of four who dined at a restaurant and then went back to a place of business to smoke. Rather than behave conventionally in what may have been an awkward situation, she took the opportunity to assert a woman's right to participate fully in a cultural ritual.⁴¹ The novelist took advantage of his new friend's expertise and willingness to help. At the point when Edith Gissing's mental health had deteriorated and a second son had been born, Orme again provided a useful service, this time by sending young Alfred to Cornwall under the supervision of her sister Blanche Fox. Although the relationship began with Gissing paying Orme for her services, it seems to have moved on to one of voluntary assistance which included finding a lawyer to help with the breakdown of his marriage. In view of the painstaking efforts of Pierre Coustillas and others to document Gissing's correspondence and diaries, it is worth noting that the novelist was clearly blissfully oblivious to the extraordinary public and professional life of 'one of the busiest women living' who helped him so generously in his private tribulations.⁴²

Eliza Orme was a long-lived, highly competent woman who, from the 1870s to the 1910s, was quite well known in social and political circles in London and beyond.⁴³ While we remember her intellectual prowess and professional expertise and recognize the gender challenges she herself downplayed, let us also acknowledge that she could be very funny. She 'evoked' much laughter from an audience of women liberals with a 'humorous description of the

⁴¹ *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: the Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. P. Coustillas (Hassocks, Sussex, 1978), p. 353. H. W. Lawrence and A. H. Bullen, the other men at the table, were London publishers with an office in Henrietta Street where the smoking took place. Lawrence had presumably met Orme through his sister Reina.

⁴² Gissing to Henry Hick (13 Apr. 1897), in *Henry Hick's Recollections of George Gissing, together with Gissing's letters to Henry Hick*, ed. P. Coustillas (London, 1973), p. 37.

⁴³ Her name disappears from the public record in the early 1920s. She died on 22 June 1937, aged 88; the address on the death certificate was the family home of Reina Emily Lawrence. Then 76, Lawrence inherited Orme's real estate and was the residual heir after Beatrice Orme, who inherited the money and securities. Beatrice died in 1949. Information comes from Orme's will and the probate record (ledger 1937, vol. L-P, p. 658) and from the death certificate (where she is identified as a spinster of no occupation suffering from cardiovascular degeneration and senility).

antics of the Irish police' in an 1877 lecture.⁴⁴ We can listen to her referring blandly to 'kindly disposed men' making 'hideous mistakes' when they 'turn a deaf ear to female criticism'; or skewering the prevailing nostalgia for outmoded gender roles by praising the 'sound-minded woman' who could stand by a friend during a surgical operation and carried only a medium-sized umbrella. She once observed that while petticoats might be awkward, a barrister's courtroom wig was downright unhealthy, but 'If our judges and counsel are to be forgiven the little weakness of preferring fashion to comfort, the same leniency may be extended to self-supporting women of the educated classes' and their wardrobes.⁴⁵ But she was also cautious. Orme's humour, at least its expression in the media, was subtle and gentle enough never to make a barrister or politician feel too uncomfortable, or to put at risk the precarious edifice of business and reputation she had built in Chancery Lane.

The working lives of Eliza Orme and her colleagues illuminate the history of professionalism for both men and women in those tumultuous turn-of-the-century decades. While male barristers and solicitors held firmly to the tradition of restricting qualifications and accreditation within the 'sacred precincts' of the law, some found their practice to be much more efficient and profitable when they quietly employed women who had undertaken the appropriate academic preparation.⁴⁶ Women like Orme, Richardson and Lawrence, having taken degrees in subjects such as jurisprudence and Roman law, used the prestige associated with that knowledge to acquire related practical skills and secure profitable and prestigious employment. And like other professionals, they lived out their lives in public as well as in private – writing and organizing as advocates for everything from women's suffrage to barmaids' working conditions, from municipal politics to public swimming baths.

⁴⁴ *Women's Gazette and Weekly News*, 22 Dec. 1888, p. 126. This was a meeting of the Strand Women's Liberal Association, of which 'Miss Orme LL.B.' was then president. The newspaper reports several lectures by Orme on Irish land and other questions in 1888–9 and refers to her recent visit there.

⁴⁵ On female criticism see Orme, 'Our female criminals', p. 792. On surgery and umbrellas see Orme, 'Sound-minded women'. On wigs see Orme, 'Woman's work in creation: a reply', *Longman's Magazine*, ix (Dec. 1886), p. 131. The following paragraphs skewer medical doctors' conventional dress in comparison to 'the pleasant summer costume of what is called the advanced woman'.

⁴⁶ Other women with law degrees made different choices. Letitia Walkington, who also received her LL.B. in 1888, in Ireland, was 20 years younger than Orme. She had opportunities to enter the offices of solicitors which she did not accept because she would not have been able to practise formally. She coached other students and did voluntary social work, while remaining alert to opportunities for women lawyers outside Britain. Mossman, *First Women Lawyers*, p. 199.

5. Marriage and metalwork: gender and professional status in Edith and Nelson Dawson's Arts and Crafts partnership*

Zoë Thomas

In 1895, two years after their marriage, the Arts and Crafts metalwork partners Edith Brearey Dawson (1862–1928) and Nelson Dawson (1859–1941) decided to put together a photograph album for Edith's parents depicting their union. During this era, photography was becoming increasingly popular, used by growing numbers of middle- and upper-class Victorians to document family life. Edith and Nelson used photography to capture family gatherings, and later their caravan holidays and the childhood escapades of their daughters Rhoda and Mary.¹ But for the Dawsons photography also offered a useful new way to visually market their work and assert their professional roles as participants in the Arts and Crafts movement: to themselves, their family and the wider world. The album they composed is filled with images of them posing alone and together in front of their paintings and metalwork, experimenting with how best to represent themselves at their home at Wentworth Studios, Chelsea, London. These photographs, one of which can be seen in Figure 5.1, were intended to reassure Edith's Quaker parents about her marriage to precarious, 'penniless' Nelson.² The metalwork on display functioned as a material emblem of their new-found success after they turned to work in the field together after marriage, while the fringed sign positioned between them with the words *Laborare est orare* ('to work is to pray') framed their

* I am very grateful to Sue Field, David Field and Susan and Richard Wallington for inviting me to their homes to consult archival materials pertaining to Edith and Nelson Dawson and for Cynthia Field's extensive notes and transcriptions of various Dawson documents.

¹ Nelson apparently had another daughter, with a 'maid servant', before he married. See E. L. Perkins, 'Rhoda Nelson Bickerdike (née Dawson) (1897–1992)', *The Friend: A Quaker Weekly*, cl (1992), p. 765; Cynthia Field's notes. Private archive.

² R. Bickerdike, 'The Dawsons: an equal partnership of artists', *Apollo*, cxxviii (Nov. 1988), 320–25, at p. 321.



Figure 5.1. Edith and Nelson Dawson in their Chelsea studio home, 1895. Private archive.

dedication to their craft as a religious pursuit, something Edith's parents would have approved of. The same photograph featured in an article about the Dawsons in the *Architectural Review* the following year, emphasizing the pervasive power of photography in enabling such individuals to assert these new artistic, professional roles – and to showcase their intriguing artistic home – to public audiences as well as to loved ones.³

This chapter makes two key arguments. First, although scrutinizing formal educational and institutional hierarchies has positioned in sharp relief the class-based and gendered mechanisms shaping professional society (in the arts, several prestigious art organizations remained male only and resembled gentlemen's clubs well into the 1960s), histories of work have not yet adequately explored the breadth of ways people attempted to navigate the amorphous cultural landscape of the professions. The Dawsons' album, with its blurring of home, work and artistic commitment and its function as a domestic gift rich with affective and visual symbols, does not fit neatly within traditional narratives of professional society,

³ 'Nelson and Edith Dawson', *Architectural Review*, 1 Dec. 1896, 35–45.

which are instead routinely conceptualized as organized around education, training, institutions and financial stability, and assessed through analysis of institutional and published documents. But examining the Dawsons' use of their camera to photograph themselves at work – among their wider range of independent professionalizing strategies, explored in this chapter through a cache of little researched materials, including daily diaries, love letters, business correspondence, exhibition records, newspapers, objects and paintings – is critical in fully fleshing out the composition of 'professional society' by the dawn of the twentieth century.

The second, interconnected, argument made in this chapter is to foreground the growing belief certain middle-class and elite couples had during this era of the generative potential of marital collaboration when trying to foster fulfilling working lives. This photograph album was a collaborative endeavour which embedded the Dawsons' individual efforts to construct new working identities within an encompassing narrative about the productive role their partnership had played in achieving their aims. Scholarship has traditionally prioritized the histories of artistic women (usually painters) who became 'veiled in mystery' after marriage, although recently there has been a productive move to emphasize the activities of talented women artists who pursued work alongside their relationships to 'great' men.⁴ A wealth of insightful scholarship has accounted for the marriage of Mary Fraser Tytler to Victorian luminary G. F. Watts, and Mary's efforts to carve out an artistic space for herself post marriage, turning from painting to work in ceramics, among other fields, to avoid direct comparison with her famed husband.⁵ Despite this, there remains a popular conception that 'spinsterhood' was *the* necessary life choice for women seeking professional lives during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, marriage often made it impossible to maintain or further a professional role, especially in more formally regulated fields. But the focus on certain tightly regulated professions has led to an overlying assumption that marriage was uniformly restrictive in this regard, when in fact specific fields, including in the arts, held greater opportunities for women to attempt to continue working, and to potentially collaborate with others.

⁴ A. Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1870–1914* (London, 1979), p. 156. For more recent discussions see *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, ed. W. Chadwick and I. de Courtivron (London, 1996); V. Sanders, "'Mady's tightrope walk': the career of Marian Huxley Collier", in *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century: Artistry and Industry in Britain*, ed. K. Hadjiafxendi and P. Zakreski (Aldershot, 2013), pp. 145–66.

⁵ Most notably, L. E. Rose, *Suffragist Artists in Partnership: Gender, Word and Image* (Edinburgh, 2018).

In the Arts and Crafts movement in England, Ireland and Scotland there were many married and same-sex partners who collaborated artistically at certain points. Several worked in the same field and did not always have to navigate such extreme differentials of age and status as better-known figures such as Mary and G. F. Watts.⁶ Gender hierarchies continued to shape the activities of these couples, but the intention in this chapter is to open up a dialogue where their hopes, ideas and experiences – here by focusing on the Dawsons – can begin to be more audibly heard. Such an approach is crucial in fully understanding how the Arts and Crafts, and professional artistic culture, developed across this era. In the survey histories of the movement which dominate the scholarship the Dawsons are usually briefly referred to as leading participants in the revival of artistic metalwork, although (unsurprisingly) it is not unusual for Edith's contributions to be ignored, even in recent publications.⁷ Furthermore, Anthea Callen's 1979 path-breaking account of women in the movement portrayed Edith as receiving little recognition in contrast to Nelson during their lives and eventually collapsing from overwork, something Edith's daughter has since contested.⁸ As it stands, the Dawsons, who have an unusually extensive archive (Callen relied on the art press), deserve greater attention. By analysing this wide range of materials, this chapter complements the ongoing tendency to foreground what cultural representations – as assessed through print culture and artworks – tell us about married artists by more fully addressing the messiness and contradictions inherent in lived experience, the role played by emotional and affective ties, the individualized dynamics of historical

⁶ There were several Scottish collaborators who today remain well-known names, such as Frances Macdonald, who married Herbert MacNair, and her sister Margaret Macdonald, who married Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Arts and Crafts couples based in England included, among others: gilder Mary Batten and painter and illustrator John Dickson Batten; potters Louise and Alfred Powell; painter Evelyn and potter William De Morgan; metalworkers Georgina and Arthur Gaskin; sculptor and modeller Phoebe Stabler and silversmith Harold Stabler; sculptors Gertrude and Gilbert Bayes; sculptor Ruby Levick and architect Gervase Bailey. Likewise, in Ireland, collaborators included metalworkers such as Percy Oswald Reeves and Dora Allen. More generally, many artistic women formed professional collaborations with other women, several of which merged intimate and professional contexts, such as stained-glass workers and suffrage campaigners Mary Lowndes and Barbara Forbes, who lived and worked together in Chelsea across the early twentieth century.

⁷ See, e.g., R. P. Blakesley, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London, 2006), p. 63, which solely mentions Nelson Dawson's name.

⁸ Callen, *Angel in the Studio*, p. 156. For Rhoda Bickerdike's dismissal of her mother's collapse see Bickerdike, 'The Dawsons', p. 324. There is also a brief discussion of the Dawsons' partnership in T. Lesser Wolf, 'Women jewellers of the British Arts and Crafts movement', *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, xiv (1989), 28–45, at pp. 32–4.

relationships and the impact of these factors on professional artistic culture. This chapter brings to the fore a more sustained discussion of how men historically used masculinity to assert professional status and the interplay between the working identities of artistic women and men, topics which have received surprisingly little direct scrutiny.

The chapter begins by considering Edith and Nelson's individual methods of professionalization before marriage, as they navigated financial precarity and sought to garner cultural respect. Then it turns to consider their efforts to work in the field of 'artistic' metalwork together after marriage. In so doing, this research illuminates the strategies the Dawsons carefully implemented to position themselves as professional and serious artists, so as to avoid being perceived as dilettantes or even worse, as trade jewellers, with the associated connotations of diminished cultural cachet, uncertain class status and troublingly commercial focus. Strategies included creating an 'artistic' home, exhibiting widely, publishing authoritative books and giving intellectually driven talks. Following this, the chapter assesses how the Dawsons' partnership was influenced by expected gendered models of behaviour, how they articulated their positions to each other and to those around them and the ramifications of this. The chapter concludes by reflecting on how gendered archival processes across the twentieth century have further shaped the ways professional working lives have historically been memorialized or marginalized.

Edith Brearey Robinson and Nelson Dawson married in their early thirties, long after they had individually decided to dedicate their lives to art. Both had undertaken the customary step of professionalization of gaining training and were trying to build their reputations as watercolour painters. Edith had been captivated by painting from a young age and had trained at the newly opened Scarborough Art School before becoming 'drawing mistress' at the Society of Friends' Mount School, York. Nelson, meanwhile, had attended Stamford Grammar School, Lincolnshire, and then tried a range of jobs, including as assistant at an architect's office. This led to him deciding to become a painter and studying briefly as an external student at the Royal College of Art.

There were noticeable similarities in Edith and Nelson's circumstances and their consequent efforts when pursuing artistic roles before marriage. Both came from financially constrained families. The arts have always been difficult to pursue for those unable to access a steady trickle of family money, and Edith and Nelson faced an urgent need to prioritize moneymaking. Nelson, son of the chief baker in Stamford, Lincolnshire, was one of eight children, all of whom had to earn their own living from a young age. Edith's

painting was viewed as ‘somewhat frivolous’ by her ‘sober and pious’ Quaker parents until they realized she could make an income from it; then, it was welcomed due to her family’s ‘far from wealthy’ circumstances.⁹ Edith and Nelson’s courting letters reveal their growing sense of compatibility as they discussed, with increasing openness, their financial anxieties. Edith reflected on her sister Nellie’s forthcoming marriage to a local curate, writing that his family ‘are very conventional people – not at all like us – for one thing they have a good deal of money’.¹⁰ In this semi-private format artworks were openly ranked in terms of their potential to sell and popular subject matters were encouraged. In one letter Nelson hopefully discussed how: ‘Thy big oil will look well if it gets in + hung decently + should sell being a nice cheerful picture – summery + sunshiny.’¹¹

Edith and Nelson viewed the arts as offering the best way to make an income while simultaneously allowing them to construct a meaningful, creative lifestyle in an industrialized, capitalist society. Like many artists, they situated their strategies of artistic professionalization amid an encompassing vocational ethos which entailed cultivation of creative selfhood and maintenance of an immersive lifestyle which asserted absolute dedication to the arts. This was especially the case for those embedded in Arts and Crafts networks, where there was a pseudo-religious commitment to beautifying and reforming society through craft cultures. There was a deeply felt view, which permeated more widely in society, that artists should be motivated by innate calling and not by commercial aspirations. Moneymaking symbolized success but had to be discussed with a veneer of disapproval; when Nelson resorted to teaching art classes to aristocratic figures to make ends meet, he dramatically lamented, ‘I have at length sold my soul.’¹² Edith, Nelson and many of their peers spent their professional lives trying to navigate pressing financial needs while portraying themselves as ‘serious’, cultured artists unfettered by material concerns.

As a result, artists, especially those associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, rarely rhetorically positioned their activities as ‘professional’ and indeed often rejected certain processes of professionalization, such as overt regulation and a systematic approach, due to a concern that this dealt a crushing blow to creative expression and individuality. Nelson did study formally for a brief period, but he hated the stuffy life rooms and, like others, preferred to hone his skills by living a nomadic, independent lifestyle,

⁹ Bickerdike, ‘The Dawsons’, p. 320.

¹⁰ Edith B. Robinson to Nelson Dawson, undated, c.Aug. 1890. Private archive.

¹¹ Undated, c.1890. Private archive.

¹² Nelson Dawson to Edith Robinson, undated, c.Apr. 1890. Private archive.

meandering between picturesque coastal locations in the north-east and in Devon and Cornwall. Although the Dawsons focused on asserting their roles as artists (and later as ‘artistic metalworkers’), with the connotations of creativity, taste and serious dedication, the term ‘professional’ had considerable purchase for them and their contemporaries, and provides an appropriate frame when illuminating the wider world of the professions beyond the traditional fields that dominate historical enquiry. The strategies Arts and Crafts participants used to build their reputations relied on a model recognized in the contemporary milieu as loosely fitting within ‘professional society’, for example by engaging in processes of enclosure such as undergoing training and joining organizations.

In contrast to more tightly regulated fields, the arts offered greater potential for women to try to construct professional lives, and they participated in increasing numbers by the late nineteenth century. Edith is reflective of this trend. Her daughter Rhoda – who also became an artist and married an artist – later described Edith as ‘calmly getting on with what seemed to be a career’ before marriage, making £100 annually through art lessons, selling work at exhibitions and in shops and painting for commissions.¹³

Yet artistic culture continued to be shaped by gendered, classed and racialized understanding of who should get to be an artist and what constituted art. Nelson’s professional identity and reputation were markedly influenced by his acceptance within several artistic brotherhoods across his life (or ‘the fraternity’, as he called his special network).¹⁴ He was a founding member of the Chelsea Arts Club and a ‘Brother’ at the Art Workers’ Guild. Both these organizations were strictly male only: the Art Workers’ Guild changed its policy only in 1964, and the Chelsea Arts Club in 1966.

Belonging to this fraternity consisted of more than simply attending meetings. The unmarried men participating in these networks often lived conveniently close to one another in neighbouring ‘bachelor’ studios scattered across west London. Nelson’s neighbours at Wentworth Studios, Manresa Road, Chelsea, in the early 1890s included Frank Brangwyn and Ernest Dade. Here, this ‘Chelsea group’ of men worked at their art while consolidating their bonds of bohemian, brotherly solidarity by engaging in heavy drinking sessions, smoking and game-playing sessions together (see Figure 5.2). Before marriage Nelson produced many different works (such as cartoons for the 1880 General Election), clearly experimenting creatively while also trying to piece together an income. But like Brangwyn and Dade, his favourite scenes to

¹³ Bickerdike, ‘The Dawsons’, pp. 320–21.

¹⁴ Nelson Dawson to Edith Robinson, undated, c.Apr. 1890. Private archive.



Figure 5.2. 'A Chelsea Group, 1887', from P. Macer-Wright, *Brangwyn: a Study of Genius at Close Quarters* (London, 1940), p. 56.

paint were maritime and coastal.¹⁵ All three men were enchanted by boats and by working-class figures, usually male, such as sailors or fishermen, who made their livelihoods at sea.¹⁶ Fishing communities, whose lifestyles were being threatened by the growing number of steam trawlers, had become the focus of considerable middle-class interest at this point. This way of life symbolized a world that was seen to be dying out, and this fed into a wider anxiety about the need to restore traditional cottage industries, romanticization of the countryside and curiosity about historic work cultures. Anglo-Welsh Brangwyn, who had worked briefly in William Morris's workshops, produced

¹⁵ The Nelson Dawson collection, Stamford Museum Store, Lincolnshire Archives. For the cartoons see LCNST: <<https://www.lincstothePast.com/cartoon/451693.record?pt=S>> 806 [accessed 13 July 2021].

¹⁶ Nelson later produced etchings of fisherwomen in Étapes in the early 20th century.



Figure 5.3. 'Nelson Dawson, the Seaman', *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 November 1924, p. 5.

oil paintings such as *The Burial at Sea* (1890), while Dade, who had been a deckhand on board an American yacht before training in Scarborough (at the same school as Edith), was painting works including *The 'Amity' Leaving for the Fishing Grounds* (1892).¹⁷ As Martin Danahay has argued more generally, this fascination with depicting working-class men at work was ignited by anxieties about the positioning in the popular imagination of middle-class male painters as effeminate.¹⁸ Sailors and fishermen offered a model of muscular, physically active, working-class masculinity that male artists were keen to valorize. Figures such as Dawson, Dade and Brangwyn could claim cultural and professional authority for themselves and reassert their masculine credentials by focusing on such topics.

¹⁷ *The Burial at Sea*, Glasgow Museums; *The 'Amity' Leaving for the Fishing Grounds*, Scarborough Art Gallery.

¹⁸ M. Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art, and Masculinity* (Abingdon, 2005).

Nelson's interest in the sea not only influenced his painting but also his self-presentation and the manner in which he tried to assert his status before marriage and during the rest of his life as he continued to paint among such communities across Britain and Europe. Alongside several, expected, photographs of him in bohemian guise, clutching a paintbrush and wearing a creased artist's smock, he dressed as a 'Seaman' and again posed for the camera, as can be seen in a relaxed image, where he stands hand on hip on board a boat, looking out to sea (Figure 5.3). This photograph featured several years later in the *Christian Science Monitor*, in an article about the sale of an extensive collection of maritime objects Nelson had amassed – including ship's models, telescopes, globes, scrimshaw whale's teeth, carved figureheads – and was used to advertise his long-established authority and commitment to art and maritime cultures.¹⁹

Elsewhere, Nelson presented himself in line with established markers of middle-class masculine professional authority. He photographed himself wearing a suit and standing by a writing desk with a serious, contemplative expression and was depicted in a similarly commanding manner in an 1892 oil painting by John Cooke (now held in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), who worked in studios near to Nelson.²⁰ Formal, symbolic portraits of noteworthy men were prized in Victorian society. In this one, Cooke captured a solemn, heavily bearded Nelson in three-quarter profile, his status assigned through the slice of paint demarcating his white shirt and dark suit alongside the quasi-heraldic device of two paintbrushes and a metalworker's hammer overlaid with an ivy leaf in the top corner. It was at this point, shortly before marriage, that Nelson was experimenting with metalwork.²¹ Cooke's portrait was probably produced to bolster Nelson's status as a metalworker, painter and middle-class 'gentleman' at a moment when he had considerable concerns about his financial precarity and artistic reputation. This appears to have been well known in his 'fraternity'; in his memoir the painter George Percy Jacomb-Hood, who similarly lived at Wentworth Studios, discussed how Nelson was 'painting excellent water-colours, without, I fear, much financial success'.²² Indeed, many of the men living there, although feeling that they

¹⁹ Private archive; *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 Nov. 1924, p. 5.

²⁰ Oil painting of Nelson Dawson by John Cooke, 1892, Prints, Drawings and Paintings Collection, V&A E.1406-2001.

²¹ Nelson first became interested in metalwork around 1890. In an undated letter from Wentworth Studios sent before their marriage he detailed to Edith his 'Dark days – can't work. Fortunately have a carpenter's bench and a forge to fall back on, so the time hangs less heavily than otherwise.' Private archive.

²² G. P. Jacomb-Hood, *With Brush and Pencil* (London, 1925), p. 76.



Figure 5.4. Edith B. Dawson's 1888 sketchbook. Private archive.

'stood on the threshold of a new world', also faced 'a battle against poverty and disappointment', often failing to sell pictures and being reliant on potatoes and bread for sustenance.²³ In the painting, Cooke sought to take advantage of the cultural capital that could be garnered for his bohemian 'brother' through the established prestige of portraiture, alongside motifs, dress and Nelson's embodied masculinity. These were symbols recognizable to their peers and to wider society and, as such, the portrait emphasizes the opportunities available to artistic men such as Nelson, via multiple guises, to attempt to position themselves as figures of professional authority.

Creative friendships played a similarly significant role in the construction of Edith's artistic life and sense of selfhood pre-marriage. Her sketchbooks from this era contain several watercolours and sketches of groups of women painting together out of doors in picturesque rural settings, as can be seen in Figure 5.4. But these youthful female relationships did not have the same generative potential to solidify her status as an accepted participant in bohemian culture as those between Nelson and his male friends did for her future husband. Furthermore, although Nelson went off on peripatetic, independent adventures to capture seascapes, it was much more difficult for women to access such opportunities, due to anxieties about respectability and the belief that men were innately more suited to portraying such

²³ P. Macer-Wright, *Brangwyn: a Study of Genius at Close Quarters* (London, 1940), pp. 43–8.

scenes. This very probably shaped Edith's decision to paint cottage gardens and flower arrangements.²⁴ These were topics women were encouraged to focus on, although Edith's considerable skills should also be accounted for, as should her lifelong interest in gardening and nature and her evident satisfaction in depicting such environments.

Another difference between Edith and Nelson's pre-marital activities was Edith's avowed commitment to Quakerism. Her position at the Quaker Mount School, York, allowed her to reaffirm her commitment to religion and art on a regular basis. This was a gendered role: a girls' school, it is testament to the way in which women's professional activities were funnelled into feminized spaces and roles. Yet working there may have been a formative experience for Edith as the school was run by female superintendents who were passionate that women should receive the same education as men. Edith's religious beliefs would have made her receptive to Arts and Crafts tenets, as they resonated with the restrained living at the heart of Quaker thinking. The linkages between Quakerism, Arts and Crafts and professional status played out even in Edith's clothing. Although her plain Quaker bonnet and simple style of dress would have been viewed as unfashionable by many, dressing in a restrained, austere manner was a strategy for many women artists and professional 'pioneers' as they sought to demonstrate their commitment to 'serious' work through dress and self-presentation, materially eschewing what were perceived to be the vapid ornamental trappings of modern society.

Before marriage, then, Edith and Nelson separately engaged in strategies of professionalization which fit within recognized narratives, including receiving training. They were both influenced by prevalent norms which encouraged gendered models of professionalization, socialization and production and shaped the differing opportunities available to men and women. Scrutiny of these activities elucidates the wide range of tactics artists needed to engage in to try to avoid financial and cultural precarity; Edith and Nelson embraced a vocational ethos and rhetoric, exhibited, dressed the part and established artistic friendships, but they were also guided in their efforts by personal interests and motivations, be this a fascination with men's lives at sea or religious devotion.

The strategies Edith and Nelson implemented before their marriage continued to shape their professional activities throughout their lives, but

²⁴ Private archive. The V&A holds examples of Edith's watercolours, including one from c.1898 depicting two female students sitting at their easels at the Royal Academy schools and another of Nelson at work (undated). Prints and Drawings Study Room, V&A, E.435-1993 and E.434-1993.

marriage opened up several new opportunities for them both. Although they had primarily worked in watercolours before this point, they quickly turned their focus to establishing a metalwork business together, although they by no means gave up painting. Nelson did much of the designing, Edith the enamelling, and several workmen made these objects, which included wrought-iron and steel, gold, silver and enamel ornaments, jewellery, altar plates, architectural fittings, railings and gates, lamps and memorial tablets.

Metalwork enabled the Dawsons to situate themselves within a flourishing Arts and Crafts culture and to work on creative projects together – in fields less restrictive than the hierarchical landscape of the fine arts – researching their craft across the centuries and becoming experts in cloisonné, champlévé and Limoges enamelling techniques. They began their collaboration with Edith moving into Nelson's 'bachelor' rooms at Wentworth Studios, where the two 'camped out'; Edith bought their bed, due to Nelson's poverty.²⁵ In many ways, this turn to metalwork was implemented because they urgently needed to make money. Metalwork offered the potential to secure a more stable income than that from watercolours in an era when there was considerable interest in purchasing handcrafted artworks for the home, as the middle classes expanded and sought to show off their cultured statuses by purchasing objects demonstrative of their rejection of mass commerce.

By collaborating together, the Dawsons reached greater heights of success than they ever received alone. By the mid-1890s, their names featured in newspapers and the art press to an unprecedented extent and they received many significant commissions, including for the trowel and mallet used by Queen Victoria to lay the foundation stone of the Victoria and Albert Museum, for a casket presented to the King of Norway by the London Fishmongers' Company in 1906, and for another casket, given to President Woodrow Wilson when he visited England en route to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.²⁶ But despite this, Edith and Nelson were still faced with the need to repeatedly assert their artistic positions in society, to maintain their incomes and their reputations. Unlike other fields of work, where professional pathways could be more clearly structured, the Dawsons had to continuously think up designs that would come to be renowned for their ingenuity, produce charmingly crafted metalworks and engage in a performative process of asserting their artistic relevance, taste and expertise. This was enhanced by the fact they were working as pioneers in the field of Arts and Crafts metalwork; there were greater suspicions about the class status and reputations of those working in the applied rather

²⁵ Bickerdike, 'The Dawsons', p. 323.

²⁶ *Manchester Courier*, 4 Dec. 1906, p. 10; *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1941, p. 7.

than the fine arts. As such, figures like the Dawsons were under additional pressure to assert the refined ‘artistic’ nature of their work. Moreover, at certain moments, such as during and shortly after the Great War, finances continued to be a topic of fraught concern.²⁷

Their home played a central role in enabling Edith and Nelson to reaffirm their cultural authority. After marriage, this space became far more significant in the construction of their professional artistic lives. By 1896 they had relocated to the Mulberry Tree, Beaufort Street, Chelsea, approximately ten minutes’ walk from Wentworth Studios, a move which enabled them to remain embedded within the bustling artistic milieu of west London and was indicative of their growing prosperity. They later lived at houses including Swan House, Hammersmith, close to Arts and Crafts couples such as Phoebe and Harold Stabler. The Dawsons’ homes and workshops became popular venues for parties and exhibitions, discussed in rapturous letters from fellow artists and in the press.²⁸ These venues offered ample potential to mix socializing and the assertion of cultural authority with moneymaking. Nelson had held ‘at homes’ in his studio before marriage (he had to put a label on the door stating ‘friends only’ to stop ‘a stream of people ... that one never saw before + would wish never to see again’).²⁹ But despite this, he still viewed the marital home as opening up possibilities unachievable as a bachelor. To Edith he lamented the appearance of his studio, writing that it ‘wants doing up really + some money spending on it, which I certainly shall not do’, unless it ‘were our rooms Edie dear our home we wd not let things go like that’.³⁰

The Dawsons’ home was used by the art press to materially validate their status, which highlights the necessity of inhabiting such spaces and the difficulties which ensued for those artists unable to do so. In the late nineteenth century the rapidly expanding press was including ever more detailed interviews with celebrated artists – routinely male – conducted in their homes and studios, emphasizing the growing importance of print

²⁷ Edith discussed her worries about money with Nelson in several letters across this era. Private archive.

²⁸ One journalist stressed that ‘The prospect of seeing something good becomes a certainty’ when attending an exhibition of the Artificers’ Guild at the Dawsons’ home in 1901. The guild was established by Nelson and managed by him for a short period between c.1901 and 1903. *Morning Post*, 16 Dec. 1901, p. 8. Similarly, the artist Josephine Webb wrote about a ‘workshop party’ at the Dawsons’ which sounded ‘delightful and mediaeval’. Josephine Webb to Edith B. Dawson, 20 July 1904. Private archive.

²⁹ Nelson Dawson to Edith Robinson, undated, but early 1890s. Private archive.

³⁰ Nelson Dawson to Edith Robinson, 25 May 1893. Private archive.

culture in the making of professional artistic reputations and the belief in the power of descriptions of the home to unveil key insights about those living there. Much was made of the fact that the Dawsons lived in an 'old house' with 'beautiful old furniture' (although their daughter later claimed that these pieces had been selected because they were cheap).³¹ Such compliments were part of a wider positioning of the couple as figures 'patron-princes of the Middle Ages' would have commissioned work from.³² Their location in artistic, semi-rural, historically renowned Chelsea, 'surrounded by the studios of the Chelsea painters and sculptors', away from the hustle and bustle of central London, was proffered as a marker of their taste by the *Architectural Review*. The Mulberry Tree, with the Dawsons' workmen hammering away in a workshop nearby, approvingly described as 'so close that [the Dawsons] are able to watch the progress of their work', was contrasted to 'the pseudo-art of the big emporium', deemed incompatible with the environment necessary in creating 'true Craft', which needed the 'quiet, extended patience' so clearly present at this artistic home.³³ The *Studio* similarly sought to provide an immersive experience for readers, assuming complete captivation with the art on display: 'In the hall your eye is attracted by delightful and ingenious appliances in wrought copper, while the reception rooms ... are full of more fascinating experiments in all sorts of metal.' The journalists' voyeuristic gaze functioned as a discreet but effective marketing device, enabling readers to fantasize about how these artworks would look in their own homes.³⁴

Such articles demonstrate the emergence of an increasingly recognizable Arts and Crafts rhetoric in the late nineteenth century, used by artists and journalists alike. What is most noticeable is the ongoing balancing act required to accrue and maintain respect. There was much emphasis on the horrors of capitalist society, the moral deficits of trade and the bad-quality products masquerading as art. Journalists liked to inform readers that the Dawsons had become a remarkable success story in a short period of time and were having to turn away customers, but this popularity had to be carefully navigated. Becoming too popular could mean 'selling out' and losing these cultivated credentials; as the *Architectural Review* warned its readers, 'The Arts and Crafts Revival has been a wayward child, not above

³¹ 'Nelson and Edith Dawson', p. 35; 'Interview with Mr and Mrs Nelson Dawson', *Studio*, vi (1896), 174; Bickerdike, 'The Dawsons', p. 322.

³² 'Interview with Mr and Mrs Nelson Dawson', p. 177.

³³ 'Nelson and Edith Dawson', pp. 35, 38.

³⁴ 'Interview with Mr and Mrs Nelson Dawson', pp. 173, 176.

being petted by pretty, gilded toys.³⁵ Having a tasteful ‘artistic’ home and participating in this powerful rhetoric, which required continual assertion of ‘serious’, ‘honest’ intentions, was vitally important for the Dawsons and their peers and in the eyes of the artistically minded public.

Their home helped fortify their artistic, professional and social lives, but this was by no means the only way the Dawsons sought to present their collaboration to the world. Histories of artistic collaboration have prioritized the home as the key site in enabling creative partnerships, but for Edith and Nelson exhibitions played a critical role in widening knowledge of their endeavours and enabling them to position themselves as dedicated ‘artistic’ workers. They showed their work several times at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, which held its first exhibition in 1888. Nelson had already shown metalworks there in 1893, including a ‘bright hammered steel sconce’.³⁶ By 1896 Edith and Nelson were both members of the society and had exhibited enamels, a trowel, a christening casket, a cup and a triptych.³⁷ At the 1899 exhibition they presented a loving cup, a platter and an electric-light pendant.³⁸ In a similar way to the rhetoric being deployed to describe their activities in the press and the artistic environment at their home, the society’s exhibitions enabled the Dawsons to downplay any commercial motivation and underscore their commitment to the movement. During this era prices were not listed in the catalogue and enriching lectures were given by prominent men such as T. J. Cobden-Sanderson on ‘Art and Life’ and W. R. Lethaby on ‘Beautiful Cities’.³⁹

As well as this, the Dawsons exhibited regularly together elsewhere in Britain and internationally, at prestigious venues like the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon, and at regional shows in galleries, halls and shops.⁴⁰ In 1900, the couple held a major exhibition at the Fine Art Society, New Bond Street, London, which included over 200 paintings and metalwork items and was widely praised as ‘thoroughly artistic’.⁴¹ They also showed

³⁵ ‘Nelson and Edith Dawson’, p. 36.

³⁶ *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, Catalogue of the Fourth Exhibition*, 1893, pp. 18, 22, 53, 55.

³⁷ *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition*, 1896, pp. 39, 45, 48, 50, 58, 84, 91.

³⁸ *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, Catalogue of the Sixth Exhibition*, 1899, pp. 43, 60, 74, 77, 90.

³⁹ *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, Fifth Exhibition*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ ‘Nelson and Edith Dawson’, p. 45.

⁴¹ *Northern Whig*, 5 Dec. 1900, p. 6; *Stamford Mercury*, 14 Dec. 1900, p. 3.

their work together at venues such as the International Art Society in 1901, the Dowdeswell Galleries in 1903, the Leeds Arts and Crafts Exhibition in 1904 and the Leicester Galleries in 1906, among others.⁴² In so doing, Edith and Nelson introduced many new audiences to 'artistic' metalwork, played a central role in fostering an appreciation of enamelling as an art form, sold their work far and wide and projected their alternative model of artistic creativity to the world. This was a model which eschewed the dominant tendency to foreground individual exceptionalism and instead promoted the productive role marital collaboration could play in creative processes.

To further validate their positions, Edith and Nelson gave talks and wrote books about their art, which connected them with a wider intellectual culture that was theorizing and historicizing the social implications of art for modern society. In 1896, they gave a talk together at the Friends' Meeting House, York, titled 'About Metalwork and Enamels', complete with lantern slides and metalwork 'specimens'. Nelson offered a history of ironwork from 'the earliest known period', after which Edith educated the audience about enamelling.⁴³ Having refined these ideas further – often by giving separate papers – they later wrote books for Methuen, who published works by figures such as Oscar Wilde and Marie Corelli. Edith published *Enamels* in 1906; Nelson published *Goldsmiths' and Silversmiths' Work* in 1907. By cultivating press interest, establishing an 'artistic' home, exhibiting widely and engaging in intellectual cultures, the Dawsons managed to largely move away from their earlier, precarious statuses and to firmly position themselves as leading lights in the Arts and Crafts movement.

Clearly, then, marriage and metalwork offered the Dawsons new professional opportunities together, but how did gender hierarchies shape their collaboration and how their relationship was understood, and their contribution to the arts valued more widely? Surveying print culture – local, national and international newspapers, the women's press, art journals and books – reveals that the Dawsons were written about in a wide range of ways, reflective of the contested manner in which women's and men's creative activities were being debated more widely in society. As readers may expect, Edith's role was ignored or presented as subsidiary in several articles, for example in the *New York Sun*, where her worth was

⁴² *The Times*, 10 Oct. 1901, p. 10; *Illustrated London News*, 13 June 1903, p. 918; *Leeds Mercury*, 24 Sept. 1904, p. 3; *Manchester Courier*, 8 Dec. 1906, p. 6.

⁴³ *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 Feb. 1896, p. 3.

first ascribed to her marital status and association with Nelson, before she was briefly complimented. She was referenced simply as ‘his wife, who is a clever enamellist’, in contrast to the rapturous descriptions of Nelson’s visionary artistry.⁴⁴

Edith was positioned as noteworthy due to her status as the wife of Nelson in numerous ways. When *Enamels* was published in Methuen’s Little Books on Art series, which included ‘miniature’ histories and outlines of artistic topics by well-known figures, the small number of married women involved were all listed by their husband’s names, with the prefix of ‘Mrs’ (Edith was ‘Mrs N. Dawson’). Male contributors had their names listed in the initial, surname style, as did unmarried author N. (Neta) Peacock, expert in Greek art. During this era, it was the custom to refer to married women in this way, and many women chose to write their names like this, perhaps because they had no apprehensions about doing so or because they preferred to focus on issues of greater concern to them. Maybe they revelled in signalling their connection to their husband and the respect this could conjure, particularly if they were married to a renowned figure whose class status and reputation could reinforce notions of their own social worth. At the same time, marital naming practices and anxieties about the effacement of married women’s professional contributions were topics being discussed with increasing fervour in suffrage and artistic networks.⁴⁵ After *Enamels* was published, Edith’s friend, the Irish artist Josephine Webb, wrote to her in dismay that Edith had been presented as ‘Mrs N. Dawson’.⁴⁶ Scrutinizing the hierarchies embedded within language, and the use of titles and taken-for-granted customs, paints in richer detail the continual reinscribing of ideas about gender difference in public life which could lead to a diminishing of the role played by married women in creative and intellectual cultures.

There are, however, many examples where the duo were considered on more equal terms. As the *Globe* newspaper told its readers in 1903:

These works ... illustrate well the accomplishment of two artists who have done much to help ... the present-day movement which aims at improving the standards of design and craftsmanship in jewellery and ornamental objects ...

⁴⁴ *New York Sun*, 24 May 1903, p. 5.

⁴⁵ P. Levine, “‘So few prizes and so many blanks’: marriage and feminism in later nineteenth-century England”, *Journal of British Studies*, xxviii (1989), 150–74, at p. 157.

⁴⁶ ‘I’d have liked Edith better than Mrs. on the cover – but perhaps you don’t call yourself Edith Nelson Dawson – and the public would not know E.B.D. as well.’ V&A Archive of Art and Design, London (hereafter V&A AAD), Nelson and Edith B. Dawson papers, AAD/1992/4/8/21, Josephine Webb to Edith B. Dawson, 28 Oct. 1906.

They have sound taste as designers, and they know perfectly how to treat combinations of materials so as to produce a general effect which will be, in the best sense of the word, artistic.⁴⁷

The *Manchester Courier* discussed ‘their superiority in silverwork’ and ‘invention, refinement, and technical skill’, while the *Graphic* stressed that they, alongside Hubert von Herkomer and Alexander Fisher, had been centrally responsible for reviving interest in ‘artistic’ metalwork.⁴⁸ In many of these newspaper articles ‘the Dawsons’ were positioned as jointly responsible for their work and ideas – ‘They have sound taste’, ‘they know perfectly’ – rather than emphasis being placed on the creative elements they had been personally responsible for. This contrasted with the elite art press, which tended to offer longer, more specific descriptions, usually focused on Nelson, with individual works clearly labelled.⁴⁹ As such, within newspaper cultures Edith and Nelson often received credit for creative processes they may not have been specifically involved in but which offered a better portrayal of their overall efforts and accentuated the generative potential of collaboration for them both.

Despite their commitment to collaboration, Edith and Nelson have left behind very few (surviving, at least) accounts detailing the creative model they constructed. Neither do they appear to have written about whether they felt women and men were best suited to specific professional and marital roles, or about the gendered hierarchies permeating the arts. One reason for this is because – before their marriage, in any case – there is little to suggest that either Edith or Nelson felt especially concerned about the impact of marriage on their professional aspirations; their financial situation and zeal for creative expression made it clear that they would both contribute. Edith and Nelson did perhaps discuss this topic in person but, if this were a considerable issue, they would surely have addressed this in their letters, as they were regularly parted for considerable lengths of time. Instead, the lack of any sense that they perceived it to be unusual that they would both continue to work deserves acknowledgement. Doing so offers rare insight into the perspectives of a couple who did not come from the same social background as the more elite women artists (usually painters) who have dominated scholarly interest and for whom paid work appears to have been a topic of greater concern.

⁴⁷ *Globe*, 10 June 1903, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *Manchester Courier*, 8 Dec. 1906, p. 6; *Graphic*, 16 June 1900, p. 863.

⁴⁹ Edith did, at times, receive considerable praise in the art press. For instance, she was photographed for the *Year's Art* in 1900, the only image of a woman artist to be included for several years. Bickerdike, ‘The Dawsons’, p. 323.

The Dawsons clearly recognized the benefits of them both being artists. The majority of married women in the Arts and Crafts movement had married artistic men and the outcome for those who married individuals working outside of the arts tended to be more professionally stifling.⁵⁰ As such, Nelson's artistic commitments, alongside his investment in Edith's work, would have offered her reassurance. It is unlikely they would have become acquainted, let alone engaged, had they not both been artists; they met through the headmaster of Scarborough Art School, who introduced Nelson to Edith as a known local artist.⁵¹ Their early letters to each other focused on painting as the expected topic of conversation. This offered the justification for communicating, was a source of considerable joy and enabled them to assert their artistic dedication. Nelson wrote exuberantly that he had been revelling in 'thinking of thee slaving away all this week – a coarse apron on, finger marks on thy dear face + tously hair'. He encouraged her to send him her watercolours in the post, praising her and offering suggestions and telling her of the compliments he had received about her work from figures such as Walter Sickert and 'Watson', 'a very clever w. colour man'.⁵² Nelson, too, benefitted from Edith's investment in him. He reached a higher degree of recognition when he collaborated with his wife and appeared more emotionally fulfilled. Before marriage, his letters were littered with anxieties about the fraught intensity of preparing work for exhibitions and the fear it would be rejected. Channelling his spare time into writing to Edith appears to have given him a greater sense of self-worth, which bolstered his masculinity and offered a respite from his efforts to make a name for himself.⁵³

Among Nelson's enthusiastic scrawls about Edith's work and his concerns about his own artistic position there is one letter which stands out in the rare glimpse it offers of the awkward way Nelson addressed gender hierarchies when the topic was accidentally stumbled upon. Writing about his enjoyment in attending meetings at an (unnamed) artistic club which had become 'a decided success', he appears to have remembered – with what reads as a jolting sense of realization – that Edith would not be able to participate. Nelson skirted around this, avoiding any direct

⁵⁰ Z. Thomas, *Women Art Workers and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Manchester, 2020), p. 132.

⁵¹ Bickerdike, 'The Dawsons', p. 321.

⁵² Nelson Dawson to Edith Robinson, 24 Mar. 1892, and no date. Private archive.

⁵³ Nelson compared waiting for letters from Edith with his artistic worries, writing that 'The postman did not bring thy letter this morning + I was quite troubled – much more so than when the [letter from] the [R.A.] President + Council arrived last night'. Nelson Dawson to Edith Robinson, undated, but early 1890s. Private archive.

discussion of how this would affect Edith's strategies of professionalization. He instead informed her that members of the club had been considering holding an occasional 'ladies' evening', 'but it is in embryo at present owing to the difficulty of preventing the men bringing models, who may be very nice people really, but still it is handling the thing'.⁵⁴ The formal writings produced by the newly established men's artistic groups which flourished during this era routinely avoided discussing why they would not allow women to participate. They instead focused on proclaiming their supposedly meritocratic intentions to encourage radical new artistic ideas to blossom. The offhand remarks expressed in Nelson's private letter to Edith are therefore important in revealing the anxieties his peers felt about the need to maintain male-only spaces of artistic association, and the concerns when it was suggested that artistic women may, even occasionally, be allowed to participate. Furthermore, although Nelson's artistic 'brothers' were undoubtedly influenced in their attitudes by wider societal classed and gendered notions of respectability, the fact that they appear to have been happy for women to attend as artists' models (a position which tended to be performed by working-class women) but would not accept middle-class women's participation as professional artists, speaks volumes.

After marriage, the Dawsons, hard at work building their reputations, continued to have inchoately expressed perspectives about such topics. Nelson's focus on designing the majority of their works, alongside managing their workmen and apprentices, while Edith often made the enamels in a separate room at home, is suggestive of their adherence to expected gendered codes to a certain extent (through the spatial segregation of these tasks, the dominant assumption that women were 'naturally' suited to making men's designs and Edith's focus on enamelling, seen as requiring the supposedly feminine attributes of nimble fingers and patience). Although Edith did contribute some designs – and surely made suggestions – certain other married women active in the 'artistic' metalwork scene overturned gendered norms to a greater extent. Charlotte Newman, for instance, was married to fellow designer Philip H. Newman (and similarly had two children), but it was she who established and managed the famed jewellery business 'Mrs Newmans' and produced the designs.⁵⁵ Still, Edith wrote joyfully in *Enamels* about having her own 'workroom ... seated at a table spread with the implements of the enameller's craft'.⁵⁶ This domestic workroom was conveniently positioned so her daughters could visit each morning after

⁵⁴ Nelson Dawson to Edith Robinson, undated, but c.1890. Private archive.

⁵⁵ Z. Thomas, 'Charlotte Newman', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2021.

⁵⁶ E. Dawson, *Enamels*, pp. 1–3.

breakfast and ‘Reading’ (the equivalent of family prayers).⁵⁷ Furthermore, she confidently asserted that ‘Enamelling must be taken seriously’, and took this approach into her everyday working life.⁵⁸ In a letter to silversmith Harold Stabler – one of several which reiterates Edith’s involvement in the smooth running of the business – she confidently informed him, ‘I am sending the enamel for the mason’s jewel as before, it’s only just done and is wanted by March 6 punctually ... If in doubt about anything please refer to me.’⁵⁹

In these ‘business letters’, of which carbon copies survive in the Dawsons’ stock and letter books, Edith used a wide range of approaches when presenting herself.⁶⁰ She often signed off as ‘Mrs ED’ but occasionally simply scrawled her name as ‘Nelson Dawson’, eradicating ‘Mrs’ entirely and writing as though she were her husband (even though to those who knew them, their handwriting was noticeably different). Her approach was undoubtedly shaped by prevalent patriarchal currents, upon which it was taken for granted that the husband would be the dominant partner. Edith probably sought to utilize the established kudos associated with Nelson’s name by this point. Perhaps this approach offered an element of gender play, as she discreetly signed as him, unbeknown to the recipient. But it seems Edith did not feel concerned that it was Nelson who had greater name recognition, especially as he was often responsible for the more mundane management tasks in their business.

Edith’s focus in *Enamels* on the considerable skills needed for her craft and the Dawsons’ notable silence on circulating debates about ‘sex difference’ were themselves strategies of professionalization. Despite the scholarly tendency to focus on women ‘devoted to using the feminine virtues of selflessness, purity and empathy for social ends’ during this era, it is important to delineate more closely the language different women used to express their desire to work.⁶¹ Edith’s book is devoid of the heightened maternalistic or feminized rhetoric typically associated with women’s justification for working. It is noteworthy that Edith did not mention Nelson in it, even though she discussed contemporary metalwork, suggesting that the book

⁵⁷ Bickerdike, ‘The Dawsons’, p. 323.

⁵⁸ E. Dawson, *Enamels*, p. 197.

⁵⁹ V&A AAD 9/181-1991, Edith B. Dawson to Harold Stabler, 27 Feb. 1912, signed as ‘Faithfully Nelson Dawson (Mrs ED)’.

⁶⁰ See V&A AAD 9/181-1991 to AAD 9/182-1991, which relates to 1912–18.

⁶¹ P. Mandler and S. Pedersen, ‘Introduction’, in *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, ed. P. Mandler and S. Pedersen (London, 1994), pp. 1–27, at p. 5.

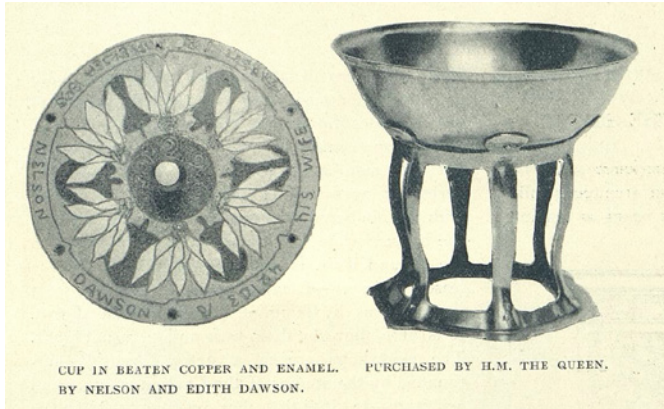


Figure 5.5. Edith and Nelson Dawson's beaten copper cup with a cloisonné lid.
'Nelson and Edith Dawson', *Architectural Review*, 1 December 1896, p. 36.

was a space she wanted to reserve for asserting her own expertise. She did, however, dedicate the book to her two 'gems' (her daughters), offering a fleeting signpost to readers of her role as parent as well as artworker. Nelson implemented a similar approach elsewhere in print culture, including in his own book (which had no dedication), although when journalists excessively focused discussions on him, he did attempt to change the narrative. In the *Studio* interview he emphasized Edith's involvement, stating, 'My wife and I work together in this', while in a speech for the Croydon Art Society he informed his audience how fortunate he was to work with Edith as she was 'very artistic'.⁶²

Perhaps it was frustration at the effacement of Edith's contributions in certain articles, joy at their collaboration, or greater ease in using art to convey meanings than writing, that led to the Dawsons creating a beaten copper cup with a cloisonné lid in the mid-1890s, inscribing it with the words 'Nelson Dawson and Edith his wife made me' (Figure 5.5). This cup was selected for purchase by Queen Victoria and was shown at the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition. It exemplifies the impossibility of neatly categorizing the Dawsons' collaborative efforts. The object functioned as a celebration of their partnership and its physical marking with both their names ensured Edith's recognition for posterity, although this was unevenly framed around Edith's position as 'his wife', with Nelson

⁶² 'Interview with Mr and Mrs Nelson Dawson', p. 175; *Croydon Guardian and Surrey County Gazette*, 9 Nov. 1907, p. 9.

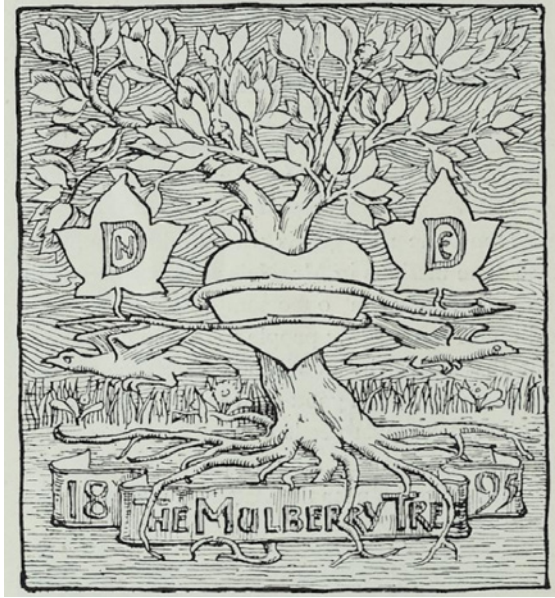


Figure 5.6. Edith and Nelson Dawson's design depicting the collaborative nature of their activities. 'Interview with Mr and Mrs Nelson Dawson', *Studio*, vi (1896), p. 178.

positioned centre stage.⁶⁵ However, the Dawsons also devised a design to use as a signature that portrayed their collaboration on more balanced terms. It took various forms although always included their names enclosed within separate, symmetrical sycamore leaves on the branch of a tree, evidently intended to symbolize the mutually beneficial nature of their partnership. (Intriguingly, some of Nelson's watercolours include his initials next to a lone sycamore leaf.) Their joint 'signature' featured as the frontispiece of the photograph album for Edith's parents and printed versions featured in the *Studio* and the *Architectural Review* (Figure 5.6). Offering this image for inclusion in the art press was strategic; it was an eye-catching visual reminder of their collaboration – to a Victorian audience who delighted in such symbolism – even within articles where the journalists dwelt little on Edith's contributions.

So far, this chapter has focused on Edith and Nelson's artistic efforts. However, unlike their joint investment in their metalwork, Nelson was very

⁶⁵ 'Nelson and Edith Dawson', p. 36. Bickerdike describes this piece as having the wording 'Nelson and Edith Dawson me made'; this suggests they may have made other pieces but more probably indicates that she had remembered the wording differently, more in line with her understanding of her parents' partnership. Bickerdike, 'The Dawsons', p. 323.

much economically in control of their lives, as was customary in married relationships of their era. He gave Edith a set amount for household management and on special occasions such as her birthday and their anniversary.⁶⁴ This could cause Edith considerable difficulties, as is revealed in one fraught letter she sent to him in 1919 when he had been away for some time on a sketching trip. She despairingly wrote: 'I am so poor ... We came home to find the gas just going to be cut off, I hope they don't come to do it tomorrow ... I am sorry my dear I am very hard up indeed. Please at least send the gas money. I have never been in such straits ... hope thou will get some good sketches.'⁶⁵

On top of this Edith had the daily task of the domestic management of their household and overseeing the care of their children to deal with. Nelson occasionally undertook tasks such as interviewing servants and some manual domestic duties, but this was usually when Edith and the servants were away.⁶⁶ These pressures of domestic management – in particular Edith's never-ending quest to find a 'cook general' – became a consistent feature of her letters to Nelson after their marriage. Edith wrote several letters to her friend Josephine Webb on the topic, too, and Webb responded, sympathizing that these household duties 'must take a large share of your thoughts and energies – and you can have only a limited amount of time for Art'. Despite her disapproval at Edith being described as 'Mrs N. Dawson', as discussed earlier in this chapter, Webb ultimately felt that in regard to the division of artistic and domestic labour 'you can't be quite equal'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, although Nelson rarely spoke of his family in 'business letters', Edith's offer telling clues as to the ongoing pull of the domestic and the impossibility of neatly dividing the professional and personal sections of her life. When informing the painter Alfred Rawlings about their new jewellery stock in 1912 she moved fluidly between discussing this and his wife's illness and lamenting that she needed a 'cook general badly have been without so long', a point she underlined out of evident frustration.⁶⁸

Middle-class women rarely expected husbands to participate in domestic labour, even within progressive households, during this era. Still, the persistency with which Edith discussed domestic pressures after marriage – with Nelson and those in their network, if not in publications – indicates that

⁶⁴ This is evident from their letters, and from Edith's diaries across the early 20th century, which routinely list when Nelson gave her money. Private archive.

⁶⁵ Edith B. Dawson to Nelson Dawson, 14 Sept. 1919. Private archive.

⁶⁶ Nelson Dawson to Edith B. Dawson, letters pertaining to the 1890s. Private archive.

⁶⁷ Josephine Webb to Edith B. Dawson, 24 Jan. 1897. Private archive.

⁶⁸ V&A AAD 9/181-1991, Edith B. Dawson to Alfred Rawlings, 10 Nov. 1912.

this was her way of raising awareness of the issue. The difficulties Edith felt in trying to balance work and family life come across clearly in one reflective letter she wrote to Nelson when she was away with their first daughter:

I have just got Rhoda off to bed ... We spent yesterday afternoon at the Peak ... but it brought my thoughts to five years ago when thou + I were there + I couldn't help longing for the old days back again when we could look about and sketch with no burdens in the way of houses + workshops and Marthas and people. But it was only just the sight of the old place + I don't wish for those days back as a general thing for really we are much happier now.⁶⁹

This final sentence, where Edith effectively shut down the topic, demonstrates how guilt and a deep sense of familial responsibility shaped how she thought about and ventured to momentarily discuss these issues. This feeling of unease about not being grateful – complicated further by the romantic ties the Dawsons felt for each other, which constituted a prominent part of their letters – clearly influenced the professional decisions she and other contemporary women made, and how they justified and reconciled their various life choices.

Scrutinizing the hierarchies at play in the maintenance of the Dawsons' home reveals that they are by no means the only figures to consider. Edith and Nelson relied on a cast of different working-class participants who appear as shadowy figures in surviving archival materials but whose labour was crucial in enabling them to position themselves as 'artistic' metalworkers and participants in elite creative cultures. Although they began with only one servant, a 'boy' who cooked them kippers on their studio stove, across the early twentieth century their employees included a clerk, a 'general help', a nursemaid, a nanny, workmen and an 'old goldsmith who lives close by making fresh stuff for us'.⁷⁰ Grace Cherry, whom the Dawsons employed as a clerk and who lived with them for a period, also offered support in multiple areas. As well as helping with paperwork, she assisted Edith with enamelling and performed domestic duties. In one letter Nelson wrote to Edith he jokingly remarked that he had seen 'Grace making bread in the kitchen – I only hope there may be no cloisonné or other deleterious material in it.'⁷¹ In another, asking Edith to send 'the enamel when ready', he reminded her that 'We ought not to let anyone except ourselves + G.C.

⁶⁹ Edith B. Dawson to Nelson Dawson, 18 Sept. c.1898. Private archive.

⁷⁰ Bickerdike, 'The Dawsons', p. 322; V&A AAD 9/181-1991, Edith B. Dawson to Alfred Rawlings, 10 Nov. 1912; Census of England and Wales, 1901.

⁷¹ Nelson Dawson to Edith B. Dawson, 2 July 1897. Private archive.

touch these things'.⁷² There is little to suggest that these contributions were ever publicly acknowledged. Elsewhere, the Dawsons maintained a spatially and rhetorically gendered and classed approach in the employment of their staff. They made much of the authenticity of unnamed working-class male labour (such as the 'old goldsmith' and the 'decent set of chaps' in the workshops), as was common in the Arts and Crafts movement, but the female domestic labour that ensured that their home life ran smoothly – which was vital to their professional success – was discussed in more frustrated terms.⁷³ Despite their positioning as an artistic duo, their statuses were maintained through a much wider range of collaborative efforts, which as well as working-class labour included familial support, with their daughter Rhoda helping in the workshop from the age of sixteen.⁷⁴

Nelson, like his fellow artistic 'brothers', especially benefitted from these social norms, as they gave him the vital space and time to pursue his artistic ambitions. This, alongside the persistent cultural assumption that artists were men (in contrast to the differentiated 'lady artist') and the formal institutional hierarchies which barred women's participation, meant that the opportunities for Nelson to flourish were persistently greater in all the different areas where the Dawsons together sought to make their reputations. He was asked to give far more talks for prestigious art organizations across Britain, and it was he, not Edith, who was chosen to join the Committee of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1899 after they had both exhibited there in the 1890s.⁷⁵

By the early twentieth century, Edith and Nelson were pursuing their own artistic agendas to an increasing extent. They continued to produce metalwork together but, like many artists, their interests were pulled in a range of creative directions. Among other crafts, Nelson became interested in etching and Edith in weaving.⁷⁶ As well as travelling regularly to find artistic inspiration – often without Edith – Nelson pursued projects such as fitting a workshop at the British and Foreign Sailors' Society (a Christian society that helped seafarers and their families), so that 'classes for arts and crafts' could be held there and objects made and sold.⁷⁷ Edith, meanwhile, became preoccupied with several women's art organizations that sprang up during this era. In a milieu where women continued to be barred from

⁷² Nelson Dawson to Edith B. Dawson, 1890s. Private archive.

⁷³ Nelson Dawson to Edith B. Dawson, 2 July 1897. Private archive.

⁷⁴ Perkins, 'Rhoda Nelson Bickerdike', p. 765.

⁷⁵ *Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, Catalogue of the Sixth Exhibition*, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Bickerdike, 'The Dawsons', p. 325.

⁷⁷ *Bognor Regis Observer*, 4 May 1910, p. 7.

many prestigious groups for men, women's networks played a formative role in constructing the wider infrastructure of a professional life. Her daily diaries show she was a member, committee member, attendee, exhibitor and speaker at groups such as the Women's Guild of Arts, the Women's International Art Club, the '91 Art Club, the Lyceum Club and the Halcyon Club. Furthermore, she participated in the Society of Painters in Tempera, the Society of Gravers-Printers in Colour, the Caravan Club and Quaker meetings. Edith's frenetic engagement across this range of organizational activities – alongside artistic parties, 'at homes' and trips abroad for holidays and to consult artworks and historical monuments – evidences her enjoyment of her life and her sense of growing professional opportunities at the dawn of the twentieth century. It is important to acknowledge this, even while recognizing the stifling institutional and cultural sexism she and her female peers faced.

Within women-focused environments Edith appears to have been more prepared to voice her opinions about the gender inequalities permeating the art world. She was part of a large group of women at the Women's Guild of Arts who wrote a joint letter raising concerns when the guild formed the category 'associate members' to include men, to encourage mixed-sex interactions, and, even worse, made this membership free (female members had to pay). Edith ultimately resigned in protest along with several others, including tempera painter Mary Sargent Florence and Edith's good friends, illustrator Alice B. Woodward and her sister the metalworker E. C. Woodward.⁷⁸ The women voicing their frustrations tended to be involved in suffrage campaigning and their activities demonstrate the growing overlap between the professional and the political for some artistic women at the time. This was a model Edith appears to have increasingly aligned herself with as in the years leading up to the protest at the guild she faithfully marked in her diary the activities of both militant and constitutional suffrage groups.⁷⁹ Moreover, she bound together her religious and political interests by becoming involved in the Friend's Council for Women's Suffrage and later the Friend's League for Women's Suffrage. Such examples show how suffrage groups enabled certain women to explore their views about gendered hierarchies within nurturing environments and to

⁷⁸ Z. Thomas, *Women Art Workers*, pp. 195–8. See also Z. Thomas, "I loathe the thought of suffrage sex wars being brought into it": institutional conservatism in early twentieth-century women's art organizations', in *Suffrage and the Arts*, ed. M. Garrett and Z. Thomas (London, 2018), pp. 23–42.

⁷⁹ In her 1910 diary she noted on 9 July, 'Votes for Women – Trafalgar Square'; on 23 July the 'Women's procession'; and the following year the Women's Coronation Procession on 17 June 1911. Private archive.

self-actualize politicized outlooks which would go on to permeate their professional activities.

Considering Edith and Nelson's activities before and during marriage in this chapter has revealed that rather than simply becoming 'professionals', the Dawsons had to continuously engage in a wide range of cultural activities in order to construct and then maintain their artistic professional reputations throughout their lives. Indeed, both continued to pursue artistic opportunities until their deaths, Edith's in 1928 and Nelson's in 1941.⁸⁰ But what has happened to understanding of their collaborative partnership and professional lives since this point? Across the mid to late twentieth century, Rhoda Bickerdike sought to keep knowledge of her parents' activities alive by donating their archives to collections across England. Their 'business records' (including account books, lecture notes and photographs of their art) and their artworks and designs were deposited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, many of Nelson's art works went to Lincolnshire Archives, and items of Edith's clothing were gifted to the Museum of London.

In contrast, a substantial array of materials deemed more personal were not donated: the Dawsons' love letters, many of their photographs of each other – including the photograph album which opened this chapter – Edith's letters from friends and professional acquaintances, her daily diaries and her pre-marital sketchbooks. Bickerdike left most of these materials to female family members, who, since her death in 1992 have spent considerable time organizing and transcribing them, even sending Edith and Nelson's letters back and forth through the post, allowing other descendants to explore the intriguing history of their bohemian, artistic relatives.

Such an approach has been common across the twentieth century and has led to public institutions being more likely to hold substantial collections detailing the professional activities of men, while 'private', family collections – and attics – often contain hidden treasures relating to women's creative, personal and professional lives. Although this is clearly testament to an ongoing, gendered understanding of the relative worth of different archival materials, exacerbated by the fact that many public collections have historically refused to accept women's collections, deeming them insignificant, that is not the whole story. Bickerdike felt strongly about her mother's professional role; she wrote an article for *Apollo* about

⁸⁰ After Edith's death Nelson quickly remarried, his new wife a family friend named Ada Mansell, which caused difficulty with his daughters. Obituaries of Rhoda discuss her 'increasing estrangement from her father' after this point and also suggest a rather more difficult side to Nelson more generally, of his 'dominant personality and thunderous moods'. Perkins, 'Rhoda Nelson Bickerdike', p. 765; *Independent*, 2 Apr. 1992, no pagination. Private archive.

their ‘equal partnership’.⁸¹ She may have intended for these archives to end up in public collections after they had first been read and enjoyed by family members. The decision made here does, however, speak to an understanding that ‘private’ letters and documents hold the potential to elicit a greater emotional response, which family descendants in particular may wish to enjoy, and a sense that Edith’s letters, daily diaries and sketchbooks are of a curiously social, domestic nature, rather than artistic and professional.

The archival division of the Dawsons’ activities has undeniably shaped the historiography, reifying the perspective that the Arts and Crafts movement revolved around the activities of a small corpus of exceptional men and the positioning of artistic women as cloaked in mystery after marriage. In their ‘business’ records, donated by Bickerdike to the Victoria and Albert Museum and largely catalogued in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Edith appears as a rather subsidiary figure in the partnership.⁸² Although traces of her activities can be found – as shown in this chapter through her letters confidently discussing her enamelling and her exasperated hunt for a ‘cook general’ – Nelson’s public, professional persona features far more prominently. Thankfully, another family descendent donated a discrete collection of Edith’s letters and daily diaries from 1914–18 to the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. This enabled me to make contact with the family, who generously allowed me to consult the much wider wealth of Edith’s ‘private papers’ gifted to them by Rhoda and spread between descendants living in Birmingham, Surrey and London.⁸³

As a result, this chapter has been able to include valuable new insights from Edith’s daily diaries and sketchbooks, from the Dawsons’ photographs and from their letters to each other, and to assess them in conjunction with the Victoria and Albert Museum papers. Together these materials reveal more fully Edith’s expansive, multi-faceted role in their partnership, through her artistic skills, domestic labour and general support. They also offer a pertinent reminder of the wider network of working-class and familial labour which facilitated the Dawsons’ collaboration. This ultimately gives a richer sense of the range of restrictions and opportunities Edith negotiated upon entering her partnership with Nelson, the breadth of ways their partnership was discussed and the need to take account of the affective, emotional ties which have historically played such a central role in shaping men and women’s entangled professional and personal life decisions in modern Britain.

⁸¹ Bickerdike, ‘The Dawsons’.

⁸² See V&A AAD 7-1987, AAD 8-1988, AAD 9-1991, AAD/1992/4.

⁸³ Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, Jessica Barry (née Robinson) papers, File B(a), B(b), B(c), B (i), B (iii), C.

6. ‘Giggling adolescents’ to refugees, bullets and wolves: Francesca Wilson finds a profession*

Ellen Ross

Francesca Wilson (1888–1981) came from a relatively well-off Newcastle Quaker family, but her father’s fur business was failing and she would probably have to be self-supporting in adulthood.¹ In her biographical writings she presents herself as a homely and bookish child with three lovely younger siblings; at school, Francesca was a talented and engaged pupil.² Her father supported her alone among the children in academic ambitions; he insisted that she go to high school, the Central Newcastle High School for Girls. In 1906, at the age of eighteen, Wilson began her history studies at Newnham College, Cambridge. In her cohort, only a third of Newnham graduates would eventually marry and, indeed, although Wilson went on to have an active love life, a global friendship network and a large family

* I am grateful to Francesca Wilson’s niece Elizabeth June Horder (1920–2017) for her hospitality and friendship during several visits from 2014 to 2017, to Dina Copelman and Nicoletta Gullace for reading this chapter, to Laura Carter and Kerrie Holloway for research assistance, and to participants in the Changes in Impact: Feminist Strategies after 1918 panel at the conference on Women’s Suffrage and Beyond: Local, National and International Context, University of Oxford Women in the Humanities, 5 Oct. 2018, and to Heidi Egginton and Zoë Thomas for their patience, good humour and editing skill.

¹ E. J. Horder, *A Life of Service and Adventure* (privately printed, 1995), Part I, pp. 2, 9, 11, 42, 48. Horder compiled and edited this book, which incorporates, as Part I, Wilson’s unpublished autobiography through the early 1940s as well as excerpts from diaries, which are apparently now lost. In this chapter I will refer to *all* of the material from Part I as Wilson’s ‘autobiography’. Part II is a collection of reminiscences about Wilson by friends and family members.

² Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 2. A detailed and thoughtful biography of Wilson, invaluable for this study, is S. Roberts, ‘Place, life histories and the politics of relief: episodes in the life of Francesca Wilson, humanitarian educator activist’ (unpublished University of Birmingham PhD thesis, 2010). Roberts has also published articles on Wilson’s life and on women humanitarians. See particularly S. Roberts, ‘A “position of peculiar responsibility”: Quaker women and transnational humanitarian relief, 1914–24’, *Quaker Studies*, xxi (2016), 235–55.

E. Ross, “Giggling adolescents” to refugees, bullets and wolves: Francesca Wilson finds a profession’ in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 155–180. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

circle, she would remain single.³ Hence, finding sustaining employment was essential, and Wilson's search for happiness in work provides the framework for this chapter. It first looks at her half-hearted choice to be a teacher, then at her exciting episodes as a relief worker on the continent, and finally at her success, by 1945, in redefining herself as a humanitarian relief professional. By that time Wilson had aided refugees at intervals from 1916 through to the late 1940s in the Netherlands, France, Tunisia, Serbia, Austria, Hungary, Russia, Germany and Spain.⁴ The trajectory of her life illustrates the expansion and modernization of humanitarianism that began with the First World War.

Wilson's life also illuminates her generation of graduates emotionally and materially contending with an occupational marketplace that virtually cornered them into the teaching profession.⁵ When she left Newnham in 1909, Wilson was part of a gifted cohort of no more than a few hundred

³ P. Thane, 'The careers of female graduates of Cambridge University, 1920s–1970s', in *Origins of the Modern Career*, ed. D. Mitch, J. Brown and M. H. D. Van Leeuwen (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 207–24, at p. 218. See Table 10.1, p. 213, and pp. 14–15; also P. Thane, 'Girton graduates: earning and learning, 1920s–1980s', *Women's History Review*, xii (2004), 347–62, at p. 354. On Newnham students' marriage rates see G. Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-class Women and Work in Britain 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 33. On single women in Britain in this period see A. Oram, 'Repressed and thwarted, or bearer of the new world? The spinster in inter-war feminist discourses', *Women's History Review*, i (1992), 413–33, at p. 425; K. Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914–60* (Manchester, 2007).

⁴ On humanitarian relief in Europe from the First World War and throughout the mid-1920s see K. Storr, *Excluded from the Record: Women, Refugees and Relief, 1914–1929* (Oxford, 2010); L. Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action: Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children, 1876–1928* (Basingstoke, 2009); and F. Wilson, *In the Margins of Chaos: Recollections of Relief Work in and between Three Wars* (London, 1944; New York, 1945). See also M. Hilton et al., 'History and humanitarianism: a conversation', *Past & Present*, ccxli (Nov. 2018), e2–38, doi:10.1093/pastj/gty040. For a report on an international conference on gender and humanitarianism that suggests the range and value of this scholarship on women and humanitarianism see *Tagungsbericht: Gender & Humanitarianism: (Dis-)Empowering Women and Men in the Twentieth Century*, 29.06.2017–01.07.2017, Mainz, in H-Soz-Kult, 28.09.2017 <www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-7338> [accessed 19 Nov. 2020].

⁵ On interwar women's work in general see G. Anderson, *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers since 1870* (Manchester, 1988); R. Adam, *A Woman's Place, 1910–1975* (New York, 1975); D. Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918–1939* (London, 1989); H. Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914–1950* (Harlow, 2000); S. Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (London, 1995), Part 3; M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1999*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke, 2000) and *We Danced All Night: a Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London, 2008).

female Oxbridge graduates.⁶ In 1915, after just a few years of teaching, she rediscovered herself as a humanitarian aid worker on the European continent and did not return to teaching until 1925. Wilson and her many humanitarian contemporaries in this era of war and dislocation are admired for their courage, political commitment and compassion, but charting this generation through the problematic of their careers reveals another motivation for their service abroad: the stifling occupational landscape at home for even the best educated women.

Wanted: jobs for graduates

Many suffragists assumed that some women's new civil status as voters in 1918 would simultaneously generate occupational equality for women, but this was far from the case. The fierce masculine determination from shop floor through to Parliament that pushed women of all social ranks working across a wide range of occupations out of their war jobs in 1918 and 1919 did not abate with time.⁷ Employment discrimination characterized the entire UK female labour market for decades, its extent monitored and fully understood by the activist women's groups. The work lives of women were blighted by low wages, barriers such as protective legislation, the fact that there were lower benefits offered compared to men and marriage bars. In 1922–4 the average woman's wage was 57 per cent of the male average.⁸ The situation had not improved in 1935, when feminist Ray Strachey published her study of careers for women.⁹

To be sure, interwar modernity brought about advances that richly benefitted Wilson and her friends: more comfortable clothing and a weakening of taboos about sexuality and the display of the female body;

⁶ Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, p. 21. For 1900–1901 the figure was just under 600 combined for Oxford and Cambridge (presumably current) women students. In all of England, Wales and Scotland the figure was under 3,000 women university students. The numbers of graduates were, of course, greater.

⁷ R. Strachey, *The Cause: a Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* [London, 1928], (Port Washington, NY, 1969), pp. 370–71; B. Haslam, *From Suffrage to Internationalism: the Political Evolution of Three British Feminists, 1908–1939* (New York, 1999).

⁸ Figures from A. Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900–39* (Manchester, 1996), p. 25. In the 1970s, when I first began teaching women's studies courses in the US, women earned 59 cents for every male dollar earned. In the UK in 1970 their earnings were 65% of male earnings, according to S. Harkness, 'The gender earnings gap: evidence from the UK', *Fiscal Studies*, xvii (1996), 1–36, at p. 1.

⁹ R. Strachey, *Careers and Openings for Women: a Survey of Women's Employment and a Guide for Those Seeking Work* (London, 1935).

more opportunities for travel; greater access to birth control; more open discussion of homosexuality. For young girls there were new job options, more autonomy within their families. Discursive spaces opened up, giving the first enfranchised generation opportunities to display some of their talents in the 1920s and 1930s. Stories of female aviators, racing-car drivers and athletes could be found in movies, magazines and newspapers. Women demonstrated unprecedented participation in public life. They were political activists on behalf of peace, labour, democracy, children, health and women's rights. Their voices could be heard on the BBC. They were a prolific generation of writers of fiction and commentary. The era created a cornucopia of new women's organizations – political, educational and recreational – and lively feminist activism. More women were involved in local government, and there were opportunities to serve as magistrates and even as MPs. Women joined constituency parties, especially the Labour Party.¹⁰ But only handfuls could be found in the high-status and well-remunerated professions that Wilson's male peers at Cambridge took for granted: in medicine, the higher levels of the civil service, law, art, music, architecture and so on – intellectually challenging work offering varied opportunities, both prestigious and well paid – the kinds of positions Wilson might have thrived in.

Ray Strachey's statistical study of pay discrimination in 1935 concluded that 'to earn £250 a year is quite an achievement even for a highly qualified woman with years of experience'.¹¹ Virginia Woolf read Strachey's survey (1935) and references it with a bitterness that grew from page to page in her *Three Guineas* (1938). She concentrated her outrage on the specific salary of £250 that Strachey had acknowledged as 'quite an achievement' for even a gifted woman – a phrase which Woolf quotes verbatim three times in the next four pages.¹² Writing on behalf of educated women like Wilson, Woolf frames the battle against patriarchal power in terms of women's *access to the professions*, personified in one young woman's desire to become a doctor in the face of fierce opposition first by her father and later by several bodies of medical professionals.¹³

¹⁰ P. Thane, 'What difference did the vote make? Women in public and private life in Britain since 1918', *Historical Research*, lxxvi (2003), 268–85.

¹¹ Strachey, *Careers and Openings for Women*, pp. 69–84, at p. 70. See also 'Changes in Employment', in E. F. Rathbone et al., *Our Freedom and Its Results, by Five Women*, ed. R. Strachey (London, 1936), pp. 119–72, at pp. 121, 126, 131. In *A Room of One's Own*, of course, Woolf puts in a claim for more than this: £500, plus the room.

¹² V. Woolf, *Three Guineas* [London, 1938] (San Diego, Calif., 1966), citing Strachey's *Careers and Openings for Women*, p. 70. For Woolf's citations from Strachey's book see *Three Guineas*, pp. 44–5, 54–5, 58.

¹³ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, pp. 64–6.

Historians of women in education confront an ugly conjuncture at close range. 'The world opened up by education subsequently closed down, leading to bitterness and resignation for some, and successful adaptation on the part of many others', as Alison Oram soberly defined the situation for women graduates between the wars.¹⁴ Wilson did not do so directly, but some of her contemporaries spoke of their career disappointment. Mary Gavin Clarke was a Scottish Girton graduate who was slotted into teaching by her parents. She eventually became a successful high-school headmistress, but teaching did not come naturally to her: 'I was prepared to do my best but did not look forward to a teaching career with enthusiasm or with any sense of vocation.'¹⁵ Oram's teacher interviewees included several who would have preferred 'medicine, art, academic research, archive work, journalism or law'.¹⁶ Carol Dyhouse's respondents listed journalism, social work and the civil service as careers preferable to teaching.¹⁷ There is no doubt that Francesca Wilson would have chosen a different profession if she had left university in 1970 or 2000. The experiences she most sought were foreign travel, adventure and challenges. Wilson used words like 'fun' and 'excitement' in reference to work she loved, work which, as this chapter will argue below, made her happy. But this was not the language she used when describing her work as a teacher.

Women and the professions

Wilson did not want to become a physician or a solicitor. Perhaps journalism would have made sense as a profession for her; eventually, she did a good deal of freelance writing for newspapers and authored several books. But though some women had been managing successful journalism careers, Wilson does not seem to have considered it when leaving Newnham.¹⁸ Perhaps she knew something about the vicious gender politics of journalism

¹⁴ Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*, p. 36.

¹⁵ M. G. Clarke, *A Short Life of Ninety Years* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 24–5.

¹⁶ Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*, p. 29.

¹⁷ C. Dyhouse, 'Signing the pledge? Women's investment in university education and teacher training before 1939', *History of Education*, xxvi (1997), pp. 207–33, at p. 219.

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Women in Journalism at the Fin de Siècle: Making a Name for Herself*, ed. F. E. Gray (Basingstoke, 2012). In the early 1920s Wilson began writing for the *Manchester Guardian* women's pages, like her friend Evelyn Sharp. See B. Green, 'Documentary feminism: Evelyn Sharp, the women's pages, and the *Manchester Guardian*', in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939: the Interwar Period*, ed. C. Clay et al. (Edinburgh, 2018), pp. 267–80.

in the early twentieth century, described so vividly by Sarah Lonsdale.¹⁹ In any case, Wilson found her final two years of university so absorbing that it seems she had not been thinking about her future career, and, like so many of her peers, she drifted into teaching without weighing up specific alternatives.

The modern profession of teaching, based on the mastery of specific skills and bodies of knowledge, was a construct that had developed in the nineteenth century as new discoveries accumulated in fields such as chemistry, medicine and public administration. Privileged social groups – almost always men and the wealthy – established and consolidated power in professions through restricting training opportunities and establishing entrance criteria; their monopoly was a source of prestige and income for their members.²⁰ The men who so passionately opposed higher education for women were surely displaying a fear that educated women, their peers, might become competitors in the professions they controlled, such as medicine, law and the ministry.²¹

Yet there is no doubt that secondary teaching, with its growing female workforce, fitted the model of a profession. Well-connected women were founders of the pioneering privately funded girls' boarding schools, and educationalist Frances Mary Buss insisted that teaching be recognized as one of the 'learned professions, and not simply a trade'.²² Girls' secondary education was a growth industry in the late nineteenth century, with over 200 new high schools established by 1900.²³ Such schools, whether

¹⁹ S. Lonsdale, "'The sheep and the goats': interwar women journalists, the Society of Women Journalists, and the *Woman Journalist*", in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture*, pp. 463–76.

²⁰ A. Witz, *Professions and Patriarchy* (London, 1992); K. M. Macdonald, *The Sociology of the Professions* (London, 1995); K. Cowman and L. A. Jackson, 'Middle-class women and professional identity', *Women's History Review*, xiv (2005), 165–80; M. Malatesta and A. Bolton, *Professional Men, Professional Women: the European Professions from the Nineteenth Century until Today* (London, 2011); H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989), pp. 3–20.

²¹ R. McWilliams Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge: a Men's University – though of a Mixed Type* (London, 1975), pp. 118–19.

²² Quoted from J. Pedersen, 'Schoolmistresses and headmistresses: elites and education in nineteenth-century England', in *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching*, ed. A. Prentice and M. R. Theobald (Toronto, 1991), pp. 37–70, at p. 46.

²³ D. M. Copelman, *London's Women Teachers: Gender, Class and Feminism, 1870–1930* (London, 1996), p. 18. M. Vicinus points out that in 1898 there were 80,000 girls over the age of 12 in secondary schools of varying quality. See her *Independent Women: Work & Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (Chicago, Ill., 1985), p. 166. See also Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, ch. 2.

privately or publicly funded, continued to expand throughout the interwar period, especially after 1926, when the Hadow Report divided schools into primary and senior departments. Edith Morley's 1914 *Seven Workers in Seven Professions* defined a university education as the 'academic and professional training' of a teacher, and the prestigious secondary schools tried to hire their faculty from among the relatively scarce graduates with honours degrees (Wilson's was a second-class degree).²⁴ But female graduates with any kind of degree were scarce. In 1900–1901 there were 3,000 women university students in the entire country. A decade later, there were only 27,000 university students nationally, and they were overwhelmingly male.²⁵ So women teachers, whether in privately funded or state schools, were an elite in the female workforce, respected, secure and well paid.²⁶

Teachers stood out as the sole female professionals, at least in the formal sense of the word. Vera Brittain, so bullish on work for women – especially for educated women – reluctantly admitted in 1928 that 86 per cent of the total number of professionally employed women clustered in the two traditional fields of teaching and, to a lesser extent, nursing.²⁷ Handfuls of women had appeared in such fields as accounting and veterinary medicine, but numbers were so small that the women were showcased as oddities.²⁸ The legal profession, despite having been opened to women through legislation in 1919, was barely better: by 1935 there were only 116 female solicitors and only 79 female barristers.²⁹ The medical profession, the destination of so many fiercely determined women from the mid nineteenth century, boasted somewhat larger numbers, but almost all of the UK's 2,810 women doctors

²⁴ Copelman, *London's Women Teachers*, p. 24; E. J. Morley, *Seven Workers in Seven Professions: a Survey of Their Economic Conditions and Prospects*, Studies Committee of the Fabian Women's Group (London, 1914), p. 32.

²⁵ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, pp. 166–77; Copelman, *London's Women Teachers*, pp. 9–18; Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, p. 21; figure of 27,000 from Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, p. 20.

²⁶ Copelman, *London's Women Teachers*, p. 24. I am grateful to Dr Copelman for recently sharing her ideas on teaching and professionalization (email exchange 24 Apr. 2019).

²⁷ V. Brittain, *Women's Work in Modern England* (London, 1928), p. 59.

²⁸ J. Hipperson, 'Professional entrepreneurs: women veterinary surgeons as small business owners in interwar Britain', *Social History of Medicine*, xxxi (2018), 122–39, at p. 128. See the comprehensive survey by M. Ward, *Female Occupations: Women's Employment 1850–1950* (Newbury, 2008).

²⁹ H. Sommerlad and P. Sanderson, *Gender, Choice and Commitment: Women Solicitors in England and Wales and the Struggle for Equal Status* (Aldershot, 1998); J. Bourne, *Helena Normanton and the Opening of the Bar to Women* (Eastbourne, 2016); R. Pepitone, 'Gender, space, and ritual: women barristers, the Inns of Court, and the interwar years', *Journal of Women's History*, xxviii (2016), 60–83.

in 1931 were general practitioners, excluded from hospital and academic positions.³⁰ A total of 744 women held higher civil service positions, with their comfortable salaries, in 1934. Social work was an expanding field, and one that interested Francesca Wilson, but while its US counterpart had begun a process of professionalization, this was not the case in the UK. Even in the 1950s the welfare workforce was still overwhelmingly amateur and unpaid.³¹ However, as this volume on precarious professionals amply demonstrates, women with or without university degrees managed to construct livelihoods outside of the formal professions – as writers, interior decorators, actors, designers, photographers – in what Britain called careers ‘open to talent’.³²

‘Teaching was the career *expected* of the standard middle class Girton graduate at least up to *the 1960s*’, as Pat Thane presents it in her study of Girton from 1918 up until the 1980s.³³ Secondary-school teaching was indeed a popular choice. Many teachers would eventually earn that rare £250 annual income, or more; pay scales for teachers resembled those of the executive grade of the civil service. Furthermore, the differential in salary between female and male teachers, about 20 per cent, was probably the lowest in the labour market at that point.³⁴ Other benefits available to teachers were long holidays and chances for promotion. Dyhouse’s survey of women graduates from six non-Oxbridge English universities before 1939 found that, like the Girton graduates, large majorities became teachers – almost 80 per cent of Manchester graduates.³⁵ In 1931 half of all single professional women aged thirty-five to forty-five were teachers.³⁶

³⁰ K. Michaelsen, “‘Union is strength’: the medical women’s federation and the politics of professionalism, 1917–1930”, in *Women and Work Culture: Britain c.1850–1950*, ed. K. Cowman and L. A. Jackson (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 161–76. See also C. Dyhouse, ‘Women students and the London medical schools, 1914–39: the anatomy of a masculine culture’, *Gender & History*, x (1998), 110–32; S. P. Walker, ‘Professions and patriarchy revisited: accountancy in England and Wales, 1887–1914’, *Accounting History Review*, xxi (2011), 185–225.

³¹ Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*, p. 224; K. Bradley, *Poverty, Philanthropy and the State: Charities and the Working Classes in London, 1918–1979* (Manchester, 2009); K. Bentley Beauman, *Women and the Settlement Movement* (London, 1996), pp. 133–7, at p. 208.

³² Brittain, *Women’s Work in Modern England*, p. 59.

³³ My emphasis. P. Thane, ‘Girton graduates: earning and learning, 1920s–1980s’, *Women’s History Review*, xii (2004), 347–62, at p. 354.

³⁴ Copelman, *London’s Women Teachers*, pp. 75–7; Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*, p. 25; *The Road to Success: Twenty Essays on the Choice of a Career for Women*, ed. M. L. Cole (London, 1936), pp. 20–21.

³⁵ Dyhouse, ‘Signing the pledge: women’s investment in university education and teacher training before 1939’, *History of Education*, xxvi (1997), 207–23, at pp. 210–11.

³⁶ Holden, *Shadow of Marriage*, p. 39.

'A sense of disappointment': Francesca Wilson chooses teaching

Yet a significant number of young women choosing careers after university shunned teaching. While Wilson did not, she did find teaching and school culture uninspiring. It seems to have left her restless and perhaps bored; almost from the beginning she was looking for ways to add interest to her working life.

The work of primary and secondary educators differs, perhaps, from that of many other professions in its deep emotional demands. Without seriously engaging with the enormous literature on children and pedagogy, it is safe to say that teaching in a school involves much more than a set of skills.³⁷ Though the profession changes from decade to decade, constants include close personal contact with the bodies, minds and emotions of children and the need to enforce discipline in some form; further, a teacher often works alone – that is, without another adult – in the classroom. It is a unique and difficult job. A happy and satisfied London headmistress in 1936 wrote that at the end of every day a teacher would normally be as exhausted as 'a squeezed sponge'; the children would replenish her energy, she asserted.³⁸ Wilson, on a similar note but far less enthusiastically, said later that she had put great effort into motivating and awakening her adolescent students during her years as a teacher in Birmingham, '[b]ut it was exhausting. A hundred young things make inroads into one's vitality'.³⁹

Job advice literature for women discussed the problem of the aversion to teaching among large numbers of female graduates. In a 1936 compilation on women's careers the Hampstead headmistress quoted above declared teaching 'a very happy job; but only "if you like it"'.⁴⁰ A 1912 pamphlet published by the Students' Careers' Association pointedly titled 'Openings for university women other than teaching' claimed prematurely that the emergence of new careers for women meant that teaching was no longer 'the only possible opening'. Graduates would therefore no longer have to risk 'a breakdown in health, or ... a sense of disappointment and distaste for work'.⁴¹ Noted a different career manual, teaching was a fine career,

³⁷ A statement I make after a day's reading of literature on teaching at my local public library; for some examples, P. Cunningham and P. Gardner, *Becoming Teachers: Texts and Testimonies, 1907–1950* (London, 2004); *Silences and Images: the Social History of the Classroom*, ed. I. Grosvenor, M. Lawn and K. Rousmaniere (New York, 1999).

³⁸ *Road to Success*, pp. 14–15.

³⁹ Horder, *Life of Service*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ Emphasis in original. *Road to Success*, pp. 14–15.

⁴¹ Anon., *Openings for University Women Other than Teaching* (London, 1912), p. 1.

but ‘for the person who does not like the job nothing is more detestable’.⁴² No more than half of the Girton graduates in Thane’s study who became teachers were enthusiastic about their choice. Many decades later, in the late twentieth century, female college graduates finally had access to a far wider range of occupations and collectively delivered a devastating denunciation of teaching as a career: the proportion of Girton graduates employed as teachers in the year 2000 was a meagre 2 per cent.⁴³

Francesca Wilson, after earning the Cambridge teaching certificate, joined the teaching profession in 1912.⁴⁴ Her first position was a short, unhappy assignment at the coeducational Bedales School; she then moved to Bath High School for Girls from 1912 to 1914, followed by Gravesend County School for Girls. Her own evaluations of her new profession generally carried a negative valence. ‘Teaching should have meant more to me than it did’, she wrote in her autobiography, apparently referring there to her teaching life in Birmingham from 1925 to 1939; ‘[i]t stimulated me and I spent hours preparing my lessons.’ She believed that she had ‘some talent for teaching, and some success in inspiring young people’ and admitted that teaching could be ‘enlivening’. But there was also the ‘boredom’ of correcting papers and the irritation of ‘giggling adolescents’. With regret she admitted that she should have ‘taken a far greater interest in her students’. At least teaching was far ‘more human and worthwhile than working all day at a typewriter!’⁴⁵

Wilson’s mismatch with teaching did not undermine her classroom effectiveness or deprive her of any enjoyment in her work. She was energetic, certainly well educated and, according to some of her nieces, she had personality traits among those often recommended for teachers, such as a love of knowledge, an interest in children and a sense of humour.⁴⁶ Working at Bath High School with her close college friend Muriel Davies, Wilson experienced ‘considerable joy in teaching and discovered a certain dramatic talent in [her]self’. And at Gravesend, she ‘began to enjoy teaching and even felt a vocation for it’ – though within a year or two she sought an exit through her first relief assignment.⁴⁷

⁴² Strachey, *Careers and Openings for Women*, p. 70. Also see ‘Changes in Employment’, in Rathbone et al., *Our Freedom and Its Results, by Five Women* (London, 1936), pp. 119–72, at pp. 121, 126, 131.

⁴³ Thane, ‘Careers of female graduates’, pp. 217–18. My emphasis.

⁴⁴ A Girton student who completed the same programme in 1904 found it largely useless, however. See Clarke, *A Short Life*, p. 24; Horder, *Life of Service*, p. 131; Roberts, ‘Place, life histories’, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Horder, *Life of Service*, pp. 114, 135.

⁴⁶ Horder, *Life of Service*, Part II, p. 8; also, personal interview with Elizabeth June Horder, London, Oct. 2014.

⁴⁷ Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 134. Roberts, in ‘Place, life histories’, using the

In 1925, after a break from teaching of nearly ten years, during which she was for the most part involved in the humanitarian projects described below, Wilson began what was to be the longest and happiest of her teaching positions. She became a senior history mistress at Edgbaston Church of England College for Girls (ECECG), one of three prestigious girls' day schools in Birmingham. Her annual salary was £290.⁴⁸ She remained on the faculty there until 1939 – with several leaves of absence mostly for relief work in Spain. In many ways, it was a congenial situation. Wilson's school head, Freda Godfrey, was flexible and warm, and her colleagues were likeable and helpful – but among the staff Wilson felt like 'a rather freakish outsider'. She had arrived in Birmingham depressed and bitter after a failed love affair and was in any case probably too 'modern' and, in her tastes, too intellectual.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the ECECG magazines covering those years depict Wilson as an active and inventive member of the community. She staged lectures for her students on current political issues and on one occasion participated in a dog show. The many field trips she organized, including an immersive visit to a colliery, perhaps showed the influence of the Montessori and New Education movements Wilson had encountered in Vienna in the early 1920s. Wilson's performance as 'a Chinese cut-throat' in a school play was admired; in her classroom, she often dramatized historical events. Her enormous personal collection of *Punch* cartoons enlivened her lessons.⁵⁰ But, like a small number of the unfulfilled teachers whom Dyhouse interviewed, Wilson eagerly took the chance to leave the teaching profession when other job opportunities opened up.⁵¹

Humanitarian relief as vocational opportunity

'The most interesting and stimulating of my activities was in relief work', Wilson declared in her autobiography, and she felt lucky that this work did not then require diplomas or other credentials. At the beginning she was an amateur,

Newnham College Register, lists her service there as continuing to 1916 (p. 122, n. 38).

⁴⁸ Roberts, 'Place, life histories', p. 122. See Roberts's chronology of Wilson's early teaching career, pp. 121–2.

⁴⁹ Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 114.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp. 124–8; Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 114; see also the discussion of Wilson's years as a teacher in Birmingham in Roberts, 'Place, life histories', pp. 122–7, based on Roberts's study of the surviving copies of the school magazine which she (Roberts) managed to collect.

⁵¹ Dyhouse, 'Signing the pledge', p. 222. See the example of Mrs Smith, whose university scholarship required a multi-year commitment to teaching – which she disliked. In 1939 she managed to substitute postal censorship in London for the remainder of her teaching commitment, as she had specialized in German (p. 219).

her only qualifications being ‘education, a vaguely Quaker background and importunity’.⁵² She proudly pointed out that none of her competent British team aiding Serbian refugees in Corsica and Tunisia during the First World War had been trained as social workers, though all were graduates.⁵³

The period 1914–24, in which Wilson was almost continuously active in aid projects, has been called an era of ‘humanitarian war’: a period of disaster, forced migrations, starvation and disease extending years past the end of the fighting.⁵⁴ Humanitarian organizations had expanded and become a full component of the European state system, feeble antedotes to its nation states’ poisonous and bellicose politics. Some relief expertise had its origins in Britain’s imperial experiences, especially in Ireland and India; among international donors, the US and Britain were most prominent, but the thousands of aid volunteers came from a wide range of countries.⁵⁵ As one recent scholar put it, ‘[a]long with the victim, the rescuer was the other important figure born of the new humanitarian activism’.⁵⁶ Many of these ‘rescuers’ were women.

In August 1914 Belgian refugees landed with their meagre belongings at Tilbury, and this was Wilson’s chance to test the relief waters. She was moved by their stories and befriended a few young women who needed shelter. By 1915 she had applied for an assignment in Europe with the Friends, although she was rejected at this first attempt. Despite Wilson’s relative inactivity as a Friend and her odd childhood membership in the Plymouth Brethren due to her mother’s (but not her father’s) conversion, Wilson’s Quaker birth proved to be an important part of her lifetime cultural capital.⁵⁷

⁵² Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 105.

⁵³ Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 107.

⁵⁴ Branden Little uses this phrase in ‘An explosion of new endeavours: global humanitarian responses to industrialized warfare in the First World War era’, *First World War Studies*, v (2014), 1–16, at p. 1.

⁵⁵ T. Sasson, ‘From empire to humanity: the Russian Famine and the imperial origins of international humanitarianism’, *Journal of British Studies*, cv (2016), 519–37; B. Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge, 2015); G. Bass, *Freedom’s Battle: the Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York, 2008); Dzovinar Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire: les acteurs européens et la scène proche-orientale pendant l’entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 2004); J. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: the American Red Cross and a Nation’s Humanitarian Awakening* (New York, 2013); M. Tusan, *Smyrna’s Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide and the Birth of the Middle East* (Berkeley, Calif., 2012).

⁵⁶ Cabanes, *Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism*, p. 302. Today, humanitarian aid is not a profession in the conventional sense. According to a 2017 manual, team members often have qualifications in such fields as medicine, nursing or nutrition, but there are no specific ‘humanitarian aid worker’ degree programmes. See C. Reis and T. Bernath, *Becoming an International Humanitarian Aid Worker* (Amsterdam, 2017).

⁵⁷ For Wilson’s rejection by Ruth Fry see Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p. 3. Wilson sustained

From 1916 to 1923 Wilson went from one relief mission to another. In 1915 Quakers and cooperating organizations assigned her to projects in the Netherlands, then France, and then to Corsica and North Africa with Serbs who had survived the deadly trek west when Austrian forces invaded. After the war Wilson spent a year in devastated Serbia itself. From late 1919 to 1922, she served as Hilda Clark's interpreter in Vienna. Here, fifty to sixty workers, mainly British Quakers and Save the Children volunteers, ran a feeding programme for pre-school children.⁵⁸ In autumn 1922, Wilson was sent to the Volga province of Samara with the Friends' Russian famine-relief programme, one of many agencies at work in Russia. It is estimated that 6 million people died there.⁵⁹ After this, Wilson reported on and travelled in the US and England with the Viennese pioneer children's art educator Franz Cižek and his student art exhibit; she was now also a part-time journalist, writing mainly for *The Friend* and the *Manchester Guardian* women's pages. She did not return to the classroom, to the new position in Birmingham, until 1925, at the age of thirty-seven.

Wilson documented her months in Republican Spain in so many ways – letters, reports, newspaper articles, sections of a book – and in them she demonstrates that humanitarian relief was indeed her vocation. Her connection to Spain began in the 1930s, in Birmingham, where she was an active opponent of Nazism, and in 1936 she joined the campaign for British aid to the beleaguered Spanish Republic. Touring Spain with a fact-finding delegation in the spring of 1937, Wilson was asked by the Friends to take responsibility for some of the refugees from the Fascists' violent February invasion of Málaga.

Wilson's assistance to thousands of refugee Málagaans, carried out in the drab city of Murcia, reveals not only her dedication to the Spanish

a Friends connection throughout her life. Her autobiographical writing includes several chapters on her notable Quaker ancestors. Wilson's father and other relatives remained firm Quakers. Wilson left the Brethren for good when she began university. Roberts notes her attendance at Quaker meetings in Newcastle and then in Birmingham. Many of Wilson's friends in the later decades of her life, however, thought of her as an agnostic. Roberts, 'Place, life histories', p. 156.

⁵⁸ See H. Clark, 'Vienna', *The Friend*, 15 Aug. 1919, p. 510; H. Clark, 'Friends' relief work in Vienna', *The Friend*, 28 Nov. 1919, pp. 723–4; also J. Ormerod Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters* (York, 1975), pp. 225–32; Storr, *Excluded from the Record*, pp. 246–52; S. Spielhofe, *Stemming the Dark Tide: Quakers in Vienna 1919–1942* (York, 2001). Wilson discusses her years in Vienna in *Margins of Chaos*, ch. 7, and in F. M. Wilson, *Rebel Daughter of a Country House: the Life of Eglantyne Jebb, Founder of the Save the Children Fund* (London, 1967), pp. 198–203. Excellent detail on Wilson in Vienna is found in Roberts, 'Place, life histories', pp. 34–111.

⁵⁹ References to Russian famine relief can be found in the 'Women and the Humanitarian Infrastructure, 1914–39' section below.

Republic as a cause – though, officially, the Friends were neutral – but also, as Siân Roberts points out, her deep interest in the Republic’s progressive and sophisticated educational policies, some of which Wilson, still a teacher, put into practice herself in Spain in the form of new schools, workshops, and literacy projects.⁶⁰ She deeply enjoyed relief giving as a form of *work* rather than of service, Christian charity or as Quaker witness. ‘I am shocked to think how little dedication I can find in myself,’ she wrote in her autobiography.⁶¹ She declared that she was not ‘high-minded’ like some of the relief workers whom she knew and did admire – here she listed her friend Margaret McFie, who founded and worked in a school for the blind in Serbia after the First World War, and Dr Katherine MacPhail, a friend and co-worker in Corsica, who founded a number of hospitals in Serbia. Francesca Wilson was sociable and generous, but her relief interest is best described as *professional*. She was eager for work that was demanding enough to ‘take me out of myself’.⁶² A sentence she added to the New York edition of *Margins of Chaos*, her account of her relief career up to 1943, seems to define the professionalism she was seeking: skill, hard work, service and enjoyment. She wrote, ‘[a]nonymity should be the ideal of the relief worker – her reward not only a good task performed, but all of the experiences and adventures she has in its performance’.⁶³ While Wilson valued service to others, she often grammatically structured it as incidental, an afterthought. As anthropologist Liisa Malkki put it more recently, describing twenty-first-century Finnish International Red Cross workers in her study, *The Need to Help*, it was indeed ‘a desire to lose themselves in sustained and demanding work’ that drew these (mostly) women to this profession.⁶⁴ They, too, were put off by terms that invoked righteousness and goodness. Some of the Finnish nurses most relished the periods in the field when extreme concentration and endurance were called for, which they called ‘the burn’ or ‘the burning’ – occasions for ‘intense and unpredictable creativity’.⁶⁵ In her sample of 150 humanitarian activist women of Wilson’s

⁶⁰ S. Roberts, “‘In the margins of chaos’: Francesca Wilson and education for all in the “Teachers’ Republic””, *History of Education*, xxxv (2006), 653–68.

⁶¹ Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 109.

⁶² Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, pp. 105, 109.

⁶³ F. M. Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p. 304. As mentioned below, Wilson inserted some thoughts on women as humanitarian relief workers in the New York edition of her book, published about a year after its first London publication.

⁶⁴ L. H. Malkki, *The Need to Help: the Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Durham, NC, 2015), ch. 1. Note Maalki’s characterization of her interviewees’ desire to lose themselves in the intensity of sustained demanding work, a ‘pleasurable self-loss’ (p. 11).

⁶⁵ Malkki, *Need to Help*, pp. 26–30, 43.

generation, historian Sybil Oldfield also emphasized the skill and focus they brought to their work rather than their altruism. True, the great majority of Oldfield's sample had some kind of Christian affiliation, but they also shared an 'exceptional problem-solving intelligence and the will and ability to co-operate in the field'.⁶⁶

After 1914, humanitarian relief had become part of the discursive and occupational space in which Wilson and many of her cohort moved. Roberts demonstrates the intense concern with international relief among a community of Quaker women based in Birmingham between 1914 and 1924.⁶⁷ Periods of relief work were woven into many women's careers, as they were into Wilson's. Elise Sprott, for example, having joined the BBC in 1924 at the age of thirty-nine, had done war service in a Voluntary Aid Detachment followed by relief work with Hoover's American Relief Administration, European Children's Fund.⁶⁸ Relief colleagues were often recruited from among groups of friends or former classmates. A number of Wilson's Newnham friends and contacts did stints with her aid projects: Marjorie Leon worked alongside Wilson in Vienna in the early 1920s, and Margaret Hume did research there on malnutrition; Ka (Katherine) Cox was a co-worker in Corsica.⁶⁹ Other aid workers in Europe between 1914 and 1939 included Florence Barrow, Violet Bonham Carter, Dr Hilda Clark, Kate Courtney, Margery Fry, Eglantyne Jebb, Eleanor Rathbone, Muriel Paget, Edith Pye, Maude Royden, Dr Audrey Russell and Evelyn Sharp. Hundreds, probably thousands, of others were involved in relief. Women from Britain would be found as aid workers – to mention only the European and Middle Eastern sites, in France, Serbia, formerly Ottoman countries, Greece, Austria, Poland and parts of Russia – during and long after the First World War. In the 1930s hundreds aided the Spanish Republic and the many thousands of Spanish escapees in French camps in 1939; others assisted socialist and Jewish refugees from the Nazis, or, in Wilson's case, Poles who had fled to Hungary in 1939 and Jews who had arrived in Britain and needed help. Several women in Wilson's long-lived and internationalist female generation were, like her, at work again in 1945.

⁶⁶ S. Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians: a Biographical Dictionary of British Women Active between 1900 and 1950: Doers of the World* (London, 2001), pp. xiv–xv. A large majority were single or childless and all 150 subjects came from wealthy or well-off middle-class backgrounds.

⁶⁷ Storr, *Excluded from the Record*; on Florence Barrow and the Friends' large mission in Poland in the early 1920s, see Roberts, 'Position of peculiar responsibility', pp. 247–8.

⁶⁸ K. Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: a History of Early Women at the BBC* (London, 2016), p. 4.

⁶⁹ Roberts, 'Place, life histories', p. 119; Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp. 110–11.

The humanitarian workplace

What kind of day-to-day profession was ‘international aid worker’ when Wilson became part of it? The work required what Wilson relished: travelling to different places, meeting people far removed from her normal contacts and facing new challenges. In general, it did not pay well; most positions seem to have provided only transportation and living expenses. Wilson raised funds herself to support some of the programmes she organised in Spain. Relief often involved, Wilson said self-deprecatingly, ‘humdrum emergency stuff ... children’s breakfasts, milk canteens, soup-kitchens, distributing dry rations, and clothing the naked out of cast-off wardrobes of Britain and America’. But, as noted above, like a well-chosen profession, a relief assignment could be an occasion for a satisfying deployment of skill and creativity: delicate collaborations with refugee leaders and local personnel; speedy analysis of local needs and resources; and competence at such tasks as accounting, filing and storage.⁷⁰

Wilson enjoyed aid work, but of course she witnessed many scenes of human suffering, a regular part of relief givers’ daily work lives: the wagons loaded with the bodies of those who had succumbed to starvation or disease in Russia’s famine; thousands of the newly orphaned in Russian children’s homes, without shoes, books, paper or pencils; sick children and young men dead or maimed in Spain; the haunted Jewish survivors of the concentration camps in 1945. Despair and burnout were lurking hazards for relief workers. What we would perhaps today label stress affected two of Wilson’s Murcia co-workers within a short period, one of whom was repeatedly ill with gastric complaints, and the other overwhelmed by anxiety. The first was a competent American Quaker administrator, the second an experienced and dedicated New Zealand nurse whose Spanish sweetheart went missing in action; both women had to return home.⁷¹

Relief givers themselves were not immune from the material dangers and hardships facing the refugees, though humanitarian aid work today may be still more dangerous.⁷² In 1919 Wilson made a winter trip from

⁷⁰ See the list of contemporary relief workers’ tasks in E. James, ‘The professional humanitarian and the downsides of professionalisation’, *Disasters*, xx (2016), 185–206.

⁷¹ Descriptions of Russian tragedies from Wilson’s letter from Buzuluk, Samara, 19 Nov. 1922, part of a small archive held by Wilson’s niece, Elizabeth June Horder, accessed Oct. 2016. The papers have since been donated to the Library of the Society of Friends, Friends House, London (hereafter LSF), MS.1006. See M. Derby, *Petals and Bullets: Dorothy Morris, New Zealand Nurse in the Spanish Civil War* (Brighton, 2015), p. 71. The American, Esther Farquhar, is discussed in F. Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War* (Lewiston, NY, 2002), pp. 59–60.

⁷² On the danger of aid work see A. John, *Evelyn Sharp: Rebel Woman, 1869–1955*

Dubrovnik to Belgrade, travelling in cattle wagons or in wrecked trains without windows, seats or heat.⁷³ The story of her frightening night encounter in a sled with a wolf closely following 'in the middle of the lonely steppe' with which she entertained other Russian humanitarians also became a favourite of her young nieces.⁷⁴ In Russia in 1921–2 many relief workers, like the local population, lived without basic sanitation or heat. A group of American Quakers there managed to keep themselves warm by chopping up and burning thirty-five abandoned log houses.⁷⁵ State and military violence were also a threat to aid workers. In 1940 Wilson was jailed for a terror-filled night in Hungary while attempting to help Polish refugees there. Some humanitarians were hit by stray bullets; others came under deliberate enemy fire. This was the case with Wilson's lifelong friend the physician Audrey Russell, who was among thousands shot at repeatedly from the sky by Franco's gunners as she escaped from Catalonia in 1939.⁷⁶ Invading Italian armies in Serbia in 1941 captured Wilson's co-worker from her First World War days, Dr Katherine MacPhail, who was running a children's hospital there.⁷⁷ Disease was a still greater threat. Evelina Haverfield, who had paraded as Joan of Arc on horseback in a suffrage demonstration and founded the Women's Reserve Ambulance Corps and the Women's Voluntary Reserve – died of pneumonia in 1920 at an orphanage she had established in Serbia.⁷⁸ Before DDT became available in the 1940s – its dangers then unknown, it was used with abandon – to quickly delouse thousands, typhus was probably the biggest danger to relief workers or refugees. It caused millions of deaths in the Russian famine of 1922 and Wilson would have been fully aware of the intense suffering of its

(Manchester, 2009), pp. 81, 137; Anon., 'Death of another worker', *The Friend*, 3 Feb. 1922, p. 88. In 2013, worldwide, the toll on aid workers was huge: 155 killed, 171 wounded and 134 kidnapped. On contemporary aid workers see Reis and Bernath, *Becoming an International Humanitarian Aid Worker*, p. 29, n. 1, citing the Aid Worker Security Database.

⁷³ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp. 59–63.

⁷⁴ Wilson playfully describes the incident as well as the folklore, boasting and mythmaking among Russians about wolves in a *Manchester Guardian* article of Nov. 1923, reprinted in *Living Age*, 16 Feb. 1924, p. 330. See also P. Julian Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe, 1890–1945* (Oxford, 2000), ch. 1 and pp. 163–82.

⁷⁵ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp. 152–3; Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 108.

⁷⁶ A good brief account of these events at the end of the Spanish Civil War is S. Gemie et al., *Outcast Europe: Refugees and Relief Workers in an Era of Total War, 1936–48* (London, 2012), ch. 1.

⁷⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p. 103.

⁷⁸ M. Krippner, *The Quality of Mercy: Women at War Serbia, 1915–18* (Newton Abbot, 1980), p. 210.

victims. Typhoid fever and pneumonia killed artist Mabel Dearmer, who was nursing in Serbia, in 1915, and four members of the Serbian Relief Fund's Skopje hospital staff; Violet Tillard and Muriel Candler were among those who died nursing typhus victims in the Russian famine district.⁷⁹

Women and the humanitarian infrastructure, 1914–39

In Wilson's early years in the field, international aid operations were growing in complexity and size. Save the Children, founded in 1922, was incorporated as a separate international body a few years later. In famine-beset Russia in 1921 Herbert Hoover was again at work on a large scale after taking charge of supplies to Belgium during the war and, later, to Germany and Austria.⁸⁰ Greece and the new Middle East mandates were also settings for enormous humanitarian undertakings in response to post-war Turkish violence and mass expulsions. Among the largest operations in the Middle East were those of the American Red Cross, Near East Relief, the American Women's Hospitals and – after late 1923 – the League of Nations Refugee Settlement Commission, all of which spent millions and supported hundreds of thousands of refugees.⁸¹

As relatively new enterprises, and often hastily enlisting personnel, many humanitarian organizations accepted women applicants. Relief work was, according to Keith Watenpaugh, 'a new and *to some extent gendered practice*'.⁸² Well-off European women had a long association with aiding the needy and had been involved for decades in early forms of social work practice. And, of course, many talented women found themselves locked out of interesting and well-paid professional work in their home countries. The gender landscape in relief organizations thus differed dramatically from

⁷⁹ John, *Evelyn Sharp*, pp. 81, 137. Muriel Candler's death at Pavlovka was announced in *The Friend*: Anon., 'Death of another worker', 3 Feb. 1922, p. 88. On typhus in Russia in these years, see Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide*, ch. 1.

⁸⁰ Sasson, 'Empire to Humanity'.

⁸¹ D. Rodogno, 'The American Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross: humanitarian politics and policies in Asia Minor and Greece (1922–1923)', *First World War Studies*, v (2014), 83–99, at pp. 86–7; E. P. Lovejoy, *Certain Samaritans*, rev. edn (New York, 1933). On the relationship between the many 'Red Cross' agencies see D. P. Forsythe, *Humanitarian Politics: the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Baltimore, Md., 1977). Particularly vivid on refugees' experience is D. Giannuli, 'Greeks or "strangers at home": the experiences of Ottoman Greek refugees during their exodus to Greece, 1922–1923', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, xiii (1995), 271–87, at pp. 280–81.

⁸² K. D. Watenpaugh, 'The League of Nations' rescue of Armenian genocide survivors and the making of modern humanitarianism, 1920–1927', *American Historical Review*, cxv (2010), 1315–39, at p. 1320. Emphasis in original. See also his *Bread from Stones: the Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Berkeley, Calif., 2015).

that in most of the professions. The growing literature on structures of humanitarian relief before 1939 includes several female-run organizations, including the Scottish Women's Hospitals (founded in 1914) and the American Women's Hospitals (founded in 1918) – signs of female enterprise and also of their exclusion. Quaker relief teams in First World War France, though often headed by men, were probably the most gender-mixed of their era; Save the Children was also mixed, but Hoover insisted that his famine-relief personnel in Russia be all male.

Assets for aid work that were usually unremarked were Wilson's and many other relief practitioners' class background. Oldfield's survey of 150 humanitarian women of this era found very few (only twenty-five) from modest family backgrounds.⁸³ Middle-class and rich women had access to incomes that could subsidize at least some volunteer or low-salaried work and they had absorbed traditions of travel and of authority in foreign lands. Many of them were comfortable outdoors and knew how to ride, hunt and fish. They could cope with cold and discomfort (Wilson was fond of both), a capacity fostered perhaps by the nation's chilly country manor houses.⁸⁴ Many had a fluent knowledge of two or more European languages, usually French and German. With her low, rather loud voice and remarkable language proficiency, Wilson proved invaluable as a translator, troubleshooter and investigator. She was fluent in French and German, learned Serbo-Croatian in 1917–18, Russian in 1922 and Spanish in 1937. Her quintessential relief technique was to roam around and talk to people, hearing their stories and finding out their concrete needs. Wilson disapproved of the mainly monolingual American relief workers she had met, who were often flanked by translators and gravitating toward desk jobs over fieldwork.⁸⁵

Murcia

To demonstrate the ways in which relief work provided Wilson with the enjoyment and stimulation she missed in her first profession, this chapter

⁸³ Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians*, pp. xiv–xv. Like Wilson, a large majority were single; some of the married humanitarians had no children or just one. Wilson thought a great deal about her life as a single and childless woman, a subject I take up in other work about her.

⁸⁴ Horder, *Life of Service*, Part II, p. 6.

⁸⁵ Comment by Rosalind Priestman, another of Wilson's nieces, in Horder, *Life of Service*, Part II, p. 8. My remarks on Wilson's voice are based on a personal conversation with Elizabeth June Horder, London, Oct. 2014. Another niece considered Wilson's voice 'austere and strident' (Horder, *Life of Service*, Part II, p. 6). Wilson puts the thought about American's poor education in languages in the voice of her American friend Dorothy North in Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p. 162.

includes a brief narrative of one of her projects in Republican Spain. The specific crisis to which the Friends were responding took place in February 1937, when at least 100,000 inhabitants of the southern city of Málaga and its notoriously impoverished hinterland escaped in terror and panic as Francoist troops invaded the district. Carrying babies and household goods, they were under fire from the air and from battleships as they raced along the single narrow seaside road on which they were permitted to travel the 110 miles to the Republican zone.⁸⁶ As many as 5,000 died during the seven- to ten-day trip. The first large Republican town the refugees reached, Almería, offered them food and medical care through British Hispanophile Sir George Young's British Universities Ambulance Unit. Almería officials soon sent some of the refugees on to Murcia, a garrison town a few hours' drive away, and already crowded with refugees.⁸⁷

In Murcia, local welfare officials had been helping the Málagaans, but the first foreign aid worker on the scene in late April 1937 was Francesca Wilson, who, according to her friend the academic Hispanicist Helen Grant, had volunteered for the job when it was proposed to her.⁸⁸ Earlier, the two women had been travelling in relatively peaceful government-controlled Catalonia and visiting well-tended experimental schools. Now, with Grant back in England, Wilson confronted a new aspect of the civil war in the form of approximately 4,000 cold, ill and hungry Málagaan refugees sheltered in an abandoned and mostly unfinished apartment block. It was 'a horrible state of affairs', she wrote to Grant on 23 April, 'so incomparably much worse than anything we saw before'.⁸⁹ Yet within just days Wilson's mood

⁸⁶ On the mass exit from Málaga, in which Canadian doctor Norman Bethune and photographer Hazen Sise participated and which they did much to publicize worldwide see R. Stewart and S. Stewart, *Phoenix: the Life of Norman Bethune* (Montreal, 2011), pp. 183–92. Bethune and Sise quickly published a pamphlet in three languages with photographs. N. Bethune and H. Sise, *The Crime on the Road: Málaga–Almería* (Madrid, n.d. [1937]). On recent anniversaries of the exodus (the 75th was in 2012), Francesca Wilson's photographs of Málagaans in the Murcia region have often been used and her efforts to aid Málagaans recalled.

⁸⁷ Wilson's thoughts and work in Murcia are richly documented in her reports to the Friends in London, in personal letters, in several of her published articles and in her autobiographical *Margins of Chaos*, published only a few years later. Ch. 4 in Roberts, 'Place, life histories', is a detailed and comprehensive study of Wilson's work for and in Spain.

⁸⁸ In her much later, undated, interview with historian Jim Fryth, Grant mentioned Wilson's desire to remain in Spain to help women and children refugees. Eventually, Grant said, 'it emerged that [Murcia] was the place to go'. Interview in Imperial War Museum, London, Oral History Collection, 13808-1-1.

⁸⁹ Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL), Correspondence and Papers of Helen Frances Grant, Add 8251/VI/74, Francesca Wilson's letter to Helen Grant, 23 Apr. 1937. The

changed to elation, and she later declared that it was 'the privilege some inexplicable fate gave me when I arrived alone in Murcia'. The work there was enthralling, she implied: 'I got sucked in to start work for Málaga refugees in Murcia, and over-stayed my leave [from teaching].'⁹⁰ Though she returned to Birmingham in June, within a few months Wilson was back in Spain, declaring, 'Murcia still had my heart.'⁹¹

Recognizing the Málaga's extreme deprivation, Wilson had to exercise agency. She planned to supply breakfasts (cocoa and three biscuits each) to approximately 700 refugee children and to lactating and pregnant women. Her first effort to get the provisions she needed through Sir George Young in Almería was a wild-goose chase, with Young away from the clinic's premises.⁹² Wilson's initial haste and frustration might suggest panic at the suffering that surrounded her; her subsequent single-minded focus on locating supplies indicates an experienced humanitarian worker's skill at what is today called 'affect management'.⁹³ She made contact with the representatives of the Friends and the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief – sharing facilities in Valencia – and within six days had a lorry full of condensed milk at the door of the Murcia shelter, a supply that did not diminish. Wilson's first panicky postcard to Grant is dated 23 April; her excitement is unmistakable in another dated 8 May, not much more than two weeks later and after she had made contact with the Friends office: 'Tremendous rush of work here. Its [*sic*] rather exciting. Greatest imaginable need. Valencia's splendid, sending along tons & tons of food.'⁹⁴ Was Wilson experiencing the exhilaration of 'the burn', in the Finnish nurses' parlance?⁹⁵

'Feeding the hungry' was the default activity of the relief worker and Wilson had done this many times during her humanitarian career. But the traumatized, hungry and disoriented Málaga, despised in northern Spain as illiterate and uncouth, presented particular problems. Wilson's several accounts of this first Murcia project represent her as enthusiastic and collaborative but also as a risk-taker, too ambitious for the situation. Her confidence in her skill and experience probably explains why she made

quotation marks are Wilson's.

⁹⁰ Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, pp. 108, 127.

⁹¹ Francesca Wilson, 'Relief work in Murcia', *The Friend*, 11 Feb. 1938, p. 110.

⁹² CUL, Add 8251/VI/74, Wilson to Helen Grant, 23 Apr. 1937.

⁹³ See, e.g., Malkki, *Need to Help*, pp. 54–9.

⁹⁴ CUL, Add 8251/VI/78, postcard, Wilson to Grant, 8 May 1937. The Friends Service Council listed a somewhat different meal schedule. LSF, FSC/R/SP/5, *Friends Service Council Bulletin*, xi (24 May 1937), p. 12.

⁹⁵ Malkki, *Need to Help*, p. 43.

surprisingly little effort in her written accounts of these events to portray herself as a seasoned relief professional. Probably the Málaga's reputation for 'wildness' gave Wilson authorial leeway, though – unlike some other British observers – she wrote of them with affection. Her concern here seems to have been to write a lively and publishable narrative rather than displaying mastery in the field. Her early difficulties included trouble recruiting helpers among the local population. Another setback was finding that her unwise distribution of information cards to the mothers had led to a mass boycott of the programme. The breakfast project lacked cups, saucers, tables and benches and the Murcian relief officials with whom she conferred advised her to wait until these could be supplied. But, anxious to help, Wilson decided to serve the cocoa in soup bowls. She wrote frankly to the Friends in London of her impetuosity, 'I wouldn't listen. I said I had come to feed the hungry and I would feed them all – at least all the children.' Not surprisingly, when the hot drink was first served to a large group (after a smaller turnout the first day) and in cups, there was great disorder, even danger, as children and mothers scrambled around the hot vats of cocoa. At one point Wilson asked the local welfare committee 'to send me Carabineros', hardly a feather in a relief worker's cap and ignored by the deadpan local committee. Some of the children pushed and fought, but the mothers were still more violent, 'tearing each other's hair and the clothes off each other's backs. They shrieked and gesticulated. It was not a breakfast – it was hell.'⁹⁶

The breakfast programme Wilson set up did succeed. The arrival of two young British women skilled at entertaining children as they waited in line and the Málaga's growing confidence that the breakfasts would continue ensured that the meal became orderly. It was extended to adults and to other shelters in the town and a second daily meal was now also provided. Wilson wrote with pride to Friends House in mid-June 1937 that the cocoa served at all the shelters was 'a good strong mixture as I did not want hungry people to be fobbed off with a weak drink'. She went on, '[i]t is very satisfactory to feel that 2,000 people who would otherwise be without breakfast are being fed, largely through the generosity of the Cadburys'.⁹⁷ Over a total of about nine months in Spain across four different visits to Murcia and its environs Wilson sustained extraordinary creativity and energy. Her second project,

⁹⁶ LSF, FSC/R/SP/3/1, Francesca Wilson, letter to Friends Service Council, 19 May 1937; Wilson, 'Feeding the hungry', *Manchester Guardian*, 15 July 1937, p. 8. 'Carabineros' is not italicized in the original. Suggesting that the chaos and even risk of injury in Wilson's initial reports did not offend the Friends Service Council in London, the council reprinted an excerpt in the *Friends Service Council Bulletin*, xii (5 July 1937), p. 1. The request for carabineros was the only part of her story omitted in the bulletin.

⁹⁷ LSF, FSC/R/SP/3/2, Francesca Wilson to Friends' Service Council, 19 June 1937.



Figure 6.1. 'Malagan refugees at breakfast in Pablo Iglesias, Murcia, 1937', in Francesca M. Wilson, *In the Margins of Chaos: Recollections of Relief Work in and between Three Wars* (New York, 1945), opp. p. 176.

immediately after the breakfast programme was up and running, and carried out within a week or two, was to initiate and equip a hospital for thirty children. In addition, Wilson organized workshops in which adults and teenagers could learn to sew clothing or make sandals for themselves, and helped build, equip and staff seaside camps for older children, often raising funds through newspaper advertisements and public speaking in the UK. (One of the camps was at the seaside near Benidorm, then a tiny village.)

As Wilson later noted, her months in Spain were 'the most creative time' for her. The breakfast programme ultimately gave her a great deal of pleasure and she felt a special pride in having rapidly organized staff and supplies for the badly needed hospital. Much later, she wrote, 'The most privileged of relief workers are those who are the pioneers, the first on the scene of a disaster. This privilege some inexplicable fate gave me when I arrived alone in Murcia, soon after the wild hordes of refugees from Málaga had arrived there.'⁹⁸ In reading her communications while she was at various relief sites,

⁹⁸ Horder, *Life of Service*, Part I, p. 108. It is not clear when Wilson wrote the diary entry excerpted here.

and her later reflections on Spain, it is clear that Wilson often experienced the excitement of ‘the burn’; or, to invoke a different vocabulary, she was happy. If we follow feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed’s *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, happiness is not a fixed state but instead the attainment of a longed-for status or situation – one Wilson had perhaps been seeking since she left university – and that situation was carrying out humanitarian relief, with the Spanish setting particularly enjoyable and fulfilling.⁹⁹ Wilson often wrote of ‘happiness’, ‘fun’, ‘pleasure’ and ‘joy’ in accounts of her months in Spain. Clearly, she had found the right ‘profession’.¹⁰⁰

Advice to relief workers, 1944

The year 1945 crystallized Wilson’s identity as a humanitarian specialist. During the Second World War she had been based in London with the International Commission for War Refugees, helping displaced people find housing and training Quaker relief personnel.¹⁰¹ Now in her mid-fifties, she joined the newly formed United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration as a principal welfare officer and, with her team, started out on 7 May 1945 for Germany from UNRRA’s training centre in Normandy. The following year, in recognition of Wilson’s mastery of Serbo-Croatian and her knowledge of Serbian history, UNRRA asked her to tour its programmes in Tito’s Yugoslavia.

As the Allies’ enormous relief structure was taking shape in 1943–4, Francesca Wilson displayed her humanitarian expertise by compiling a guide for the thousands of workers whom UNRRA and other agencies would eventually employ. The guide was included as an appendix to Wilson’s autobiographical account of her own relief career, *In the Margins of Chaos: Recollections of Relief Work in and between Three Wars*.¹⁰² The appendix was also published as a separate pamphlet, *Advice to Relief Workers Based on Personal Experiences in the Field*, which includes a bibliography and detailed practical guidelines, such as ‘All drugs should carry the chemical

⁹⁹ S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 2014), p. 199.

¹⁰⁰ To take just one example, ‘It was good fun getting this [the breakfast program] going.’ LSF, FSC/R/SP/3/2, Wilson’s letter to Friends House, 19 June 1937, cited above.

¹⁰¹ Comments by Tony and Eirene Gilpin, in Horder, *Life of Service*, Part II, p. 6; Horder, *Life of Service*, Part II, p. 10.

¹⁰² Wilson’s *Margin of Chaos* was reprinted twice after its initial 1944 edition by John Murray. A New York edition was published in 1945, with (close to) the same appendix of advice to aid workers. Of special interest are the two large paragraphs Wilson inserted into the later American edition on the superiority of women to men as aid workers: more adaptable, more compassionate, cooler in emergencies and commanding more respect (at pp. 303–4).

formula and dosage in the language and system of the country in which they are to be dispensed.¹⁰³ Another recommendation reflects the moments of disgust and dismay Wilson and her colleagues must have experienced in Corsica in 1917, and elsewhere. In war zones, she says, there are very few babies as rates of conception are low and mortality high; the 'vast amount of exquisite baby clothing' sent to stricken populations is an utter waste. She emphasizes the value of craft supplies in helping refugees to keep busy and productive: raw wool, leather, cloth, yarn, shoemaking equipment and raffia. Refugees are desperate for news, so radios, with loudspeakers if necessary, and newspapers are essential. Wilson stressed that most relief work can and should be done by the refugees themselves; aid workers must promote self-government and initiative. In a broader register, she articulates the need for an international charter guaranteeing refugees' rights, invoking in particular the thousands of Spanish exiles who had escaped to France in 1939 and were 'left to die on the sands of Argelès'.¹⁰⁴ In the nearly four decades remaining of her life Wilson was a vigorous advocate for refugees through broadcasts, lectures and articles; she wrote several books on their history, needs and rights.¹⁰⁵

True, in her 1944 guide and her bid for recognition, Wilson mobilized her *experience* rather than her credentials. Yet her authority was acknowledged by J. L. Hammond, historian and journalist, in the book's foreword, in reviews and, later, in obituaries of Wilson.¹⁰⁶ UNRRA had hired Wilson as a principal welfare officer – with a male assistant. She wore UNRRA's khaki uniform with 'scarlet shoulder flashes', collected a large salary (for a woman)

¹⁰³ F. Wilson, *Advice to Relief Workers Based on Personal Experiences in the Field* (London, 1945).

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp. 272–3, 275, 277, 279.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson's writings on refugees include *Aftermath: France, Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia, 1945 and 1946* (West Drayton and New York, 1947); *They Came as Strangers: the Story of Refugees to Great Britain* (London, 1959); *Displaced Persons – Whose Responsibility?* (London, 1947); and *Strange Island: Britain through Foreign Eyes, 1395–1940* (London, 1955); 'Hope and heartbreak: what is to happen to the "left-over" refugees?', *The Friend*, 14 Oct. 1949, pp. 825–7; 'A Hungarian camp', *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Apr. 1957, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ R. Priestman, 'Francesca Wilson', obituary in *The Friend*, 27 Mar. 1981, p. 375. Here Priestman, Wilson's niece, notes the publishing success of *Margins of Chaos*. Reviews of *Margins of Chaos*: M. A. L., 'Relief work', *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1944, p. 3; Anon., 'Relief work in Europe', *Scotsman*, 6 July 1944, p. 7. See also K. C. Kaufman, 'How victims of wars are given relief', *Chicago Tribune*, 18 Mar. 1945, E14. Hilda Clark very positively reviewed *Margins of Chaos* as a book 'of wide interest' and 'political importance' in *International Affairs*, xx (Oct. 1944), p. 575. Wilson's *Aftermath: France, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, 1945 and 1946* was also widely reviewed and is often quoted by historians of UNRRA and the period just after the Second World War.

and confidently published her own judgements on the skill and energy of many of her co-workers.¹⁰⁷

On the last page of *Advice to Relief Workers* Wilson commented on the kinds of skill and on the professions that equip people for relief work:

[A]ny experience in organizing or dealing with people in numbers may come in handy. Teachers make good relief workers if they have not become rigid. There are many linguists among them, interested in the cultural lives of other peoples. Moreover, relief work often concentrates on youth where their experience is invaluable.¹⁰⁸

Wilson was, a bit reluctantly as the word 'rigid' suggests, acknowledging the powerful links between her two professions.

¹⁰⁷ UNRRA salaries were intended to make its jobs 'attractive' but were scaled to average rates in each worker's country, the US being the highest, the UK next. Of course, women were paid less than men, yet most of the women found that they were earning more money than they had previously. See G. Woodbridge, *UNRRA: the History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, 3 vols (New York, 1959), i, pp. 250–59; see also Gemie et al., *Outcast Europe*, pp. 150–56.

¹⁰⁸ As it is found in Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p. 280.

7. Women at work in the League of Nations Secretariat

Susan Pedersen

When Dame Rachel Crowdy speculated, many years later, about how she came to be appointed the only woman to head a section in the Secretariat of the League of Nations, she had few illusions about how it probably happened. She could easily picture the scene, she said: a committee of tired men eager for their luncheon, a list of unfamiliar female names. Hers was near the top of the alphabet; she had a reputation for capably organizing volunteer workers in wartime; nothing certain was known against her. Why not just appoint her and go off to eat?¹

It is impossible to know whether this is indeed how Crowdy got her job, but this story does rather capture the peculiar relationship of women to the League of Nations. Women were within the League and outside it. They had to be included, but most male politicians assumed only in small numbers and only in restricted spheres. In 1919, the great international women's organizations had pressed peacemakers to include the 'women's work' of social reconstruction in the League's mandate and to give them a full role in that work.² That pressure was successful, for the League Covenant did include the obligation to combat the traffic in women and to promote social welfare; equally importantly, it stipulated that all positions in the new organization would be open equally to men and women. In 1919, then, the women's organizations had been given an opening, and they intended to take advantage of it, believing that the League could be a vehicle for fostering feminist reforms and feminist networks around the globe.

It would be easy to dismiss that optimism of 1919, for those hopes were only very partially fulfilled. But we would be wrong to do so, for if women

¹ University of Bristol Library Special Collections, Rachel Crowdy Papers, Bundle K, Draft autobiography [loose papers].

² For this deputation, see D. H. Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant*, 2 vols (New York, 1928), ii, pp. 361–2, and for women's activism at the Peace Conference more generally, M. Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms: the Global Battle for Women's Rights after the First World War* (New York, 2020), pp. 12–50.

S. Pedersen, 'Women at work in the League of Nations Secretariat' in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 181–203. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

remained a minority presence in Geneva, their visibility – at the Assembly, in committees and on commissions, and in the Secretariat – nonetheless marked a minor diplomatic revolution, a sea-change in the practice of international politics that could never quite be undone. That presence was a crucial aspect of what journalists at the time called ‘the spirit of Geneva’ – a spirit at once pragmatic, cosmopolitan and hopeful – that undergirded the League’s work. That spirit had two high points: the immediate post-war period, when the League was at once at its most disorganized and its most visionary, its staff and supporters intervening to address the cholera epidemic and refugee crisis in Russia and Poland and the financial collapse in Austria; and the Locarno period of the mid- to late twenties, when Germany joined the League, the United States signed the Kellogg–Briand Pact, and hopes for permanent peace ran high. Those two moments delimit the period of women’s greatest incorporation into the League – a period that coincided with Crowdy’s leadership of the Social Section. Matters deteriorated thereafter, but women remained a striking presence at the Palais des Nations in the 1930s, especially when we remember that women were still at that time barred from the Foreign Office in Britain and voteless in France.

Historians are now recovering the place of women in that League landscape. That work is still fragmentary – it is found mostly in dissertations and journal articles, book chapters and biographies – but it is growing. Driving that scholarship is the question of whether and how internationalism could be a vehicle for feminist progress: scholars have thus focused especially on the construction and activism of transnational feminist, humanitarian and pacifist movements and lobbies, and on the various League initiatives and offices they sought to influence.³ We know less, however, about the scope

³ The most thorough study of women’s activism in and on the League remains Carol Miller’s ‘Lobbying the League: women’s international organisations and the League of Nations’ (unpublished University of Oxford DPhil thesis, 1992); see also C. Miller, ‘“Geneva – the key to equality”: inter-war feminists and the League of Nations’, *Women’s History Review*, iii (1994), 219–45; M. Lake, ‘From self-determination via protection to equality via non-discrimination: defining women’s rights at the League of Nations and the United Nations’, in *Women’s Rights and Human Rights*, ed. P. Grimshaw, K. Holmes and M. Lake (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 254–71. More recent overviews include M. Herren, ‘Gender and international relations through the lens of the League of Nations’, in *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, ed. G. Sluga and C. James (New York, 2015), pp. 182–201, and G. Sluga, ‘Women, feminism and twentieth-century internationalisms’, in *Internationalisms: a Twentieth-Century History*, ed. G. Sluga and P. Clavin (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 61–84. For women’s international organizations see L. J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: the Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), pp. 210–17, and K. Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950* (Stanford, Calif., 2000), ch. 12. For the engagement of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom with the League see L. Beers,

and content of women's work as officials – as cogs in the machinery of internationalism, one might say, rather than as supplicants beating on its doors. So, while this chapter surveys women's presence across the League landscape, it concentrates on women who became paid members of its Secretariat (and whose personnel files are available in the League archives in Geneva), and especially on that cohort of British secretaries, précis-writers, translators and typists who talked their way into its ranks in the immediate post-war years and remained in Geneva, often in vital if unobtrusive roles, for much of the following two decades. Despite their small numbers, those female officials mattered, not only because of the innovative practices a few – especially Crowdy – built into this still malleable international institution, but also for the way in which they pioneered a change in the culture of work.

Women representatives on League bodies

Before turning to those women officials, let me briefly sketch the landscape of the League, noting the occasional clusters of women within it. Although the League of Nations was much smaller, less well funded and more dominated by the European states than was the United Nations, its structure foreshadowed that later organization. At its apex were two representative bodies. One was the League Council (similar to the Security Council today), which met four times a year and was capable of swift executive action; all the great Allied powers of the First World War, apart from the United States (that is, Britain, France, Italy and Japan), were permanent, and often dominant, members. The second was the League Assembly, like the United Nations General Assembly a more outspoken, idealistic and publicity-conscious body, which met once a year for approximately three weeks in September. Each member state had one vote at the Assembly but could send up to three delegates, along with experts and substitutes. Yet the day-to-day work of the League depended less on the Council and the Assembly than on the Secretariat, a permanent civil service of some 600 officials of all nationalities, theoretically owing their allegiance to the League alone, and on the numerous technical committees and commissions established to devise and promote particular policy agendas. The International Labour Office was formally autonomous, but the League included many other

'Advocating for a feminist internationalism between the wars', in *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, ed. G. Sluga and C. James, pp. 202–21. For Save the Children Fund see E. Baughan, "'Every citizen of empire implored to save the children!': Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain", *Historical Research*, lxxxvi (2013), 116–37. Recent works on particular League sections or initiatives are cited in the next section.

specialized bodies – on trafficking, trade, transit, health, slavery, intellectual cooperation, film, disarmament, mandates and so forth – which were convened at intervals to draft conventions, assess progress, or advise the Council or the Assembly.

It will not surprise anyone to learn that as we move down the ladder of institutional power and prestige, the women become thicker on the ground. The League Council remained a virtual masculine preserve. Only one woman set foot in the Council in its entire history – this was the Soviet Union's Alexandra Kollontai – and she was there only for a single session and at a point when the Council had ceased to be a significant force. By contrast, quite a few women, more than fifty overall, served as national delegates to the Assembly, albeit often as substitutes and many only once. About 20 per cent of member states – the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, Britain, Australia, Canada, Romania, Hungary and Lithuania – routinely included one woman (it would have been unheard of to include two), but they deployed those women differently. Distant and democratic Australia and Canada regularly appointed a woman, but almost always a different one each year, clearly viewing the chance to attend the Assembly as a favour to be shared as widely as possible among activist women. Thus, although Australian and Canadian female delegates were able to use their international moment as a form of political capital back home, they had little impact on the League itself.⁴

At the other end of the spectrum were the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, which, while almost always including a woman in their delegations, tended to appoint the same very prominent woman year after year. Denmark's Henni Forchhammer, president of the Danish National Council of Women, attended fifteen assemblies; Clasine Kluyver of the Dutch National Council of Women attended eleven; the Swedish lawyer, social reformer and feminist Anna Bugge Wicksell attended eight; after Wicksell's death, the Swedish liberal politician Kerstin Hesselgren attended a further eight. Norway also subscribed to this pattern, sending the prominent zoology professor and women's rights activist Kristine Bonnevie to the first five Assemblies and the medical doctor Ingeborg Aas to a further seven. These women – well educated, sometimes single, with professional positions and strong reputations – became a fixture at the assemblies, setting a standard for the competence and international spirit of both women and the Nordic countries from an early date. Also a fixture,

⁴ For that dynamic see, e.g., F. Paisley, 'Citizens of their world: Australian feminism and Indigenous rights in the international context, 1920s and 1930s', *Feminist Review*, lviii (1998), 66–84.

although embodying a different tradition of titled women's responsibility for philanthropic work and cultural life, were three long-serving Eastern European women: the Countess Apponyi of Hungary, president for three decades of the Alliance of Women's Associations of Hungary and wife of its most important international politician; Sofija Čiurlionis, literary figure and wife of the Lithuanian artist M. K. Čiurlionis; and Hélène Vacaresco, the Francophone Romanian literary exile and internationalist who attended eighteen assemblies.

Revealingly, no great power allowed an individual woman to play such an important role in the formal representative structures of the League. France, Germany, Italy and Japan appointed no women to their delegations – although, admittedly, a few glamorous aristocratic salonnières like Anna de Noailles or Marthe Bibesco came to Geneva for the Assemblies and kept a kind of Francophile female influence in play. Britain trod something of a middle course. It was the only great power routinely to include women in its delegations, but its appointees were usually well-connected party women with reputations in the voluntary sector rather than – as with the Scandinavians – women who had made their name in pacifist or feminist causes. Edith Lyttelton, acolyte in the rarified coterie clustered around A. J. Balfour in the 1890s and later active in a host of women's imperialist and philanthropic causes, was repeatedly named as a substitute delegate by the Conservatives in the 1920s; in the 1930s, good party women like Florence Horsbrugh took over this role.

All delegates and substitute delegates were named to one of the Assembly's six committees, and it will surprise no one to learn that the women were all, as Louise Weiss put it, relegated to 'the trifles of the fifth commission', to discuss women, children and social problems.⁵ Their gender overrode other claims to expertise: thus, despite Helena Swanwick's capacious knowledge of European politics and arms control, she was made responsible for questions relating to women and children when she was appointed by the 1924 Labour government. Yet even though women were a small part of the Assembly and sidelined into social issues, in that area they unquestionably made a mark, routinely speaking up in favour of what was thought of as a 'forward policy' by the League on humanitarian and social questions. It is true, of course, that those activist women partook – as did the League more generally – of a civilizational rhetoric that presumed it was the job of Western states and Western women to raise standards in what even Crowdy unabashedly called 'more backward' countries. Yet it is also

⁵ L. Weiss, *Mémoires d'une Européenne: combats pour l'Europe*, 3 vols (Paris, 1979), ii, p. 247.

true that the porous, multivalent processes of the League could be used to challenge that paternalism – as Arab women did, for example, by presenting petitions against British and French administration of their homelands or by demanding the inclusion of ‘Eastern women’ in any expert body set up to look into the legal status of women.⁶

It is when we move from the formal bodies of the League into those commissions and committees that we begin to see women exercising a more significant role.⁷ That role was made possible very largely by the decision –

⁶ For which see E. Fleischmann, ‘The emergence of the Palestinian women’s movement, 1929–39’, *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, xxix (2000), 16–32; and N. Robinson, “‘Women’s point of view was apt to be forgotten’: the Liaison Committee of International Women’s Organizations’ campaign for an international women’s convention, 1920–1953”, in *The Institution of International Order: From the League of Nations to the United Nations*, ed. S. Jackson and A. O’Malley (New York, 2018), pp. 136–62.

⁷ Women’s role in the League’s various advisory committees on health, welfare, refugees and trafficking is discussed most fully in B. Metzger, ‘The League of Nations and human rights: from practice to theory’ (unpublished University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2001), but there are a number of important articles on international activism around sexual trafficking and child welfare in particular, including (for trafficking) B. Metzger, ‘Towards an international human right regime during the inter-war years: the League of Nations’ combat of traffic in women and children’, in *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c.1880–1950*, ed. K. Grant, P. Levine and F. Trentmann (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 54–79; J. R. Pliley, ‘Claims to protection: the rise and fall of feminist abolitionism in the League of Nations’ Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, 1919–1936’, *Journal of Women’s History*, xxii (2010), 90–113; M. Rodríguez García, ‘The League of Nations and the moral recruitment of women’, *International Review of Social History*, lvii (2012), 97–128; S. Legg, “‘The life of individuals as well as of nations’: international law and the League of Nations’ anti-trafficking governmentalities”, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, xxv (2012), 647–64; and D. Petrucelli, ‘Pimps, Prostitutes, and Policewomen: the Polish women police and the international campaign against the traffic in women and children between the world wars’, *Contemporary European History*, xxiv (2015), 333–50; and (for child welfare), D. Marshall, ‘The rise of coordinated action for children in war and peace: experts at the League of Nations, 1924–1945’, in *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s*, ed. D. Rodogno, B. Struck and J. Vogel (New York, 2015), pp. 82–107; and J. Droux, ‘Children and youth: a central cause in the circulatory mechanisms of the League of Nations (1919–1939)’, *Prospects*, xlv (2015), 63–76. For women’s involvement with the apparatus of mandatory oversight see S. Pedersen, ‘Metaphors of the schoolroom: women working the mandates system of the League of Nations’, *History Workshop Journal*, lxvi (2008), 188–207. Efforts to use the League to promote women’s civic and political rights are discussed by K. Leppänen, ‘The conflicting interests of women’s organizations and the League of Nations on the question of married women’s nationality in the 1930s’, *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, xvii (2009), 240–55; and by L. Guerry and E. Rundell, ‘Married women’s nationality in the international context (1918–1935)’, *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, xliii (2016), 73–94. For the cross-cultural tensions and racial assumptions embedded in that activism see M. Sandell, “‘A real meeting of the women of the East and West’: women and internationalism in the interwar period”, in

taken by the first Assembly – to allow the burgeoning ‘technical’ committees of the League to appoint experts or ‘assessors’ as non-voting members. It’s hard to overstate how innovative and important this was. While a few League bodies included women members as a matter of course (Marie Curie on the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, for example), most of the commissions or committees dealing with the so-called non-political or technical issues – health, transit, welfare, opium, trafficking, refugees, slavery, mandates and so forth – were composed of members appointed by specific states. Since almost no state was willing to name a woman as the sole guardian of their interests, those commissions could easily have ended up entirely male (although the Scandinavians did sometimes come to the rescue, at one point using their ‘slot’ to appoint Anna Bugge Wicksell as the sole woman on the Permanent Mandates Commission). However, by allowing those commissions to appoint ‘assessors’, the Assembly made it possible to insert not a single tame or token woman but rather a phalanx of activist and committed women into committees composed of male political appointees. Indeed, it may have been Rachel Crowdy’s irritation at the prospect of trying to mount an effective campaign against, say, the traffic in women with a committee composed of a dozen or so men appointed by states sometimes notorious for their laxity on the question that turned her into such a strong advocate for the inclusion of assessors. For it was stipulated and considered quite natural that those assessors would come from the great international organizations with long records of humanitarian intervention – from the Red Cross, Save the Children, the International Vigilance Association, the combined International Women’s Organizations and so on, some of which set up headquarters in Geneva and came to function as a sort of second-order Secretariat.

The assessor system gave feminists too outspoken ever to have been appointed as government representatives access to the valuable networks and resources of the League: Eleanor Rathbone, although unable to win any British party’s backing for her campaign for family allowances, used her position as assessor on the Child Welfare Committee to amass information about programmes in other countries and generate support for her cause.⁸ This system also enabled key American women to take part as experts in the League’s social work, even though the US was not a League member. In 1928, the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women included not

Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars, ed. D. Laqua (London, 2011), pp. 161–85, and N. Robinson, “‘Women’s point of view was apt to be forgotten’”.

⁸ S. Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 2004), p. 209.

only such important feminists as Germany's Gertrud Bäumer and France's Avril de Sainte-Croix but also the US director of the Children's Bureau, Grace Abbott. Abbott and Eglantyne Jebb, founder of the Save the Children Fund, were two of the eight women on the Advisory Committee on Child Welfare.⁹ Well versed in their subject, and with independent sources of information and support, these women could usually out-argue the national representatives, and – now with the possibility of securing American funds for particular projects as well – could sometimes force a much more activist stance on committees than would otherwise have been adopted. Abbott argued that any worthwhile inquiry into trafficking must rely not on self-reporting by governments but on information gathered by an impartial expert travelling commission. That commission, funded by the American Bureau of Social Hygiene and not by the League, produced the first landmark study of international trafficking.

Even from this brief sketch, it's possible to see some patterns emerging. Despite being clustered in adjunct and advisory roles, women were able to take advantage of flexible League structures and pre-existing networks to maximize their impact on a few areas of League work – primarily child welfare and trafficking, but to some extent also refugees, health and opium control. The fact that the same woman often inhabited multiple roles made them more effective. Anna Bugge Wicksell was one of the Swedish delegates to the Assembly, a member of the League's Permanent Mandates Commission and an officer in a number of Swedish and Scandinavian women's organizations; Norway's Kristine Bonnevie was an Assembly delegate, a member of the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation and an officer in various Norwegian civil and educational bodies; Uruguay's Paulina Luisi was a key figure in League bodies aimed at suppressing trafficking and in international and national women's organizations, and had served once as a delegate.¹⁰ Such overlapping positions meant that ideas worked out in women's organizations flowed easily to League advisory bodies, and then on to the Assembly floor; alternatively, women could rise in the Assembly to urge the League to undertake investigations or back policies which they would then have a role in implementing.

If this web of relationships was to function effectively, however, it needed one further thing: the sympathetic support of key figures within the League administration itself. These did not have to be women, of course:

⁹ F. Brewer Boeckel, 'Women in international affairs', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, cxliii (1929), 235.

¹⁰ For Luisi see C. J. Little, 'Moral reform and feminism: a case study', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, xvii (1975), 386–97.

in practice, however, it is striking how much of the women's agenda at the League, especially in the first decade, depended for coordination and support on the Secretariat's tiny, underfunded Social Section, and particularly on the imagination and capacity of one woman – its chief, Dame Rachel Crowdy. Crowdy's role deserves special attention for she not only played a crucial if forgotten role in the establishment of perhaps the League's most successful body, its Health Organization, but also put in place many of the mechanisms (those assessors and commissions) that helped to compensate for women's marginal position within the formal, state-centered structure of the League.¹¹ Crowdy left the Secretariat – or rather, was forced out – in 1930, but some of the mechanisms she had put in place survive: indeed, in some small measure, the important statutory role for women's non-governmental organizations that has continued to this day is Crowdy's legacy. Yet Crowdy's experience at the League, although important, was also ambiguous: although effective in feminist terms, she was marginalized bureaucratically. Her story, then, is illuminating not only for what it can tell us about women's activism in Geneva but also for what it can tell us about a rather different subject – the struggle of women for a full place in the bureaucracy of the League itself.¹²

Women in the League Secretariat

For the half-century after the League's demise, the League Secretariat attracted little scholarly attention. Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer's standard book-length study from 1945 remained the only comprehensive account.¹³ But the personnel files of the some 3,000 men and women who worked in the Secretariat are now attracting new attention, and while these files are circumspect and indeed sometimes deceptive about political conflicts, they are deeply revealing of the work culture and gendered assumptions

¹¹ For Crowdy's role in hiring Ludwik Rajchman, the energetic and effective director of the League's Health Organization, see League of Nations Archives, United Nations Library, Geneva (hereafter LNA), personnel file of Ludwik Rajchman; and M. A. Balińska, *For the Good of Humanity: Ludwik Rajchman, Medical Statesman* (Budapest, 1998).

¹² We have, unfortunately, no biography of Crowdy, but her central role in Geneva is discussed thoroughly in the dissertations by Carol Miller and Barbara Metzger cited above, and in D. Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 52–81. For Crowdy's tiny Secretariat section see especially C. Miller, 'The social section and advisory committee on social questions of the League of Nations', in *International Health Organizations and Movements, 1918–1939*, ed. P. Weindling (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 154–76.

¹³ E. F. Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: a Great Experiment in International Administration* (New York, 1945).

that structured the League's everyday life.¹⁴ No other woman played as critical a role in that bureaucracy as Crowdy: she was the only woman ever to head a section and indeed the only woman able to influence League policy directly. However, a small number of women served in the institution's administrative ranks and hundreds in its clerical staff, and, for several reasons, a high proportion of those women were British. How did they come to those positions, what did they do, and what might their experiences tell us about the changing culture of internationalism in this period?

Let us return to the summer of 1919, those months when the creation of the League had been agreed, but it had not yet been formally brought into being. Sir Maurice Hankey, the British Cabinet Secretary, had been approached about whether he might like to be the first League Secretary-General but had decided that coordinating the Committee on Imperial Defence was a bigger job; the position went to Sir Eric Drummond, a Foreign Office official and aristocratic younger son who had been Balfour's personal secretary at the peace conference. Drummond was a cautious, deliberate soul, but he had his moment of daring that May, when he accepted this new post and decided that the League Secretariat should be composed not of officials seconded from national administrations (as Hankey had imagined) but of genuinely international civil servants, a group of 'really capable men and women of broad vision and flexible mind', who would 'divest themselves of national preoccupations and devote themselves wholeheartedly to the service of the League'.¹⁵ Note the inclusion of women in that statement.

¹⁴ Klaas Dyckmann sampled some personnel files for his article 'How international was the Secretariat of the League of Nations?', *International History Review*, xxxvii (2015), 721–44, and historians at Heidelberg constructed a database of individuals and organizations active in interwar internationalism that locates some League officials. See <<http://www.lonsea.de>> [accessed 11 Oct. 2019]. Most importantly, Professor Karen Gram-Skjoldager of Aarhus University is heading a multi-year research project, 'The Invention of International Bureaucracy', aimed at providing a comprehensive portrait of the personnel and practices of the League Secretariat. See <<http://projects.au.dk/inventingbureaucracy/>> [accessed 11 Oct. 2019]. Of the many publications now emerging from that project, see especially *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. H. A. Ikonomou and K. Gram-Skjoldager (Aarhus, 2019); and K. Gram-Skjoldager and H. A. Ikonomou, 'Making sense of the League of Nations Secretariat – historiographical and conceptual reflections on early international public administration', *European History Quarterly*, xlix (2019), 420–44.

¹⁵ Circular by Drummond, 29 May 1919, quoted in M. D. Dubin, 'Transgovernmental processes in the League of Nations', *International Organization*, xxxvii (1983), 469–93, at p. 472. Drummond's leadership of the Secretariat is comprehensively treated in J. C. Barros, *Office without Power: Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond, 1919–1933* (Oxford, 1979).

When it came to hiring the first Secretariat members, however, it was as if those sexually inclusive sentiments had never existed. In the summer and autumn of 1919, Drummond set up shop in temporary rooms in Sunderland House near Whitehall and began hiring staff – that is, hiring men. He turned, first of all, to those inter-allied organizations that had been set up to regulate shipping and raw materials during the war, placing the directors of those bodies, together with a number of Anglophile Allied diplomats who had spent the war years in London, at the head of the emerging League sections. Jean Monnet, the economist Arthur Salter and Norway's Erik Colban, all of whom had worked for inter-allied coordination, became respectively Deputy Secretary-General, director of the economic section and director of the minorities section; Paul Mantoux, a professor and historian who had acted as a translator at the Peace Conference, was to head up the political section. Drummond also began hiring 'members of section', those officials one rung down from the directors, who were expected to do most of the responsible work of the League, and looked mostly to bright young men recommended by friends in Whitehall – thus transferring to Geneva the British civil service preference for a 'type' the Secretariat's first historian aptly termed the 'boyish master' rather than the 'dignified mandarin' of continental administrations.¹⁶ Yet Drummond was also deluged by applications from women candidates and, in the end, hired some of them. Who were these women and where did they come from?

Some were the assistants and secretaries of men hired from wartime posts. Monnet, Colban, Salter and Drummond himself had come during the war to rely on their intelligent, capable English secretaries, and when they moved to Geneva they brought those women – or other women very like them – with them. In London in 1919 there was a vast pool of experienced women administrators and office workers, mostly aged between late twenties and early forties, eager for work. The wartime expansion in government services, coupled with the drive to release men for the trenches, had increased the number of women employed in the British civil service from about 60,000 to almost 230,000; at the war's end, women made up more than 56 per cent of the British civil service. True, most of those women were confined to routine clerical work and certainly to lower official job categories, but as the war dragged on more responsible tasks necessarily fell into women's hands. There were plenty of stenographers and typists, of course, but the female career office worker – someone more likely to be organizing the office, doing research, handling confidential correspondence or writing memoranda or reports – also emerged as a feature of wartime life.

¹⁶ Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *International Secretariat*, p. 407.

The moment of reconstruction cut short those women's hopes of further professional advancement. Ironically, just as the government passed the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 – an act intended to allow women into previously closed professions, but which failed to achieve much of its ostensible purpose – the Treasury began planning ways to reduce its dependence on women. Meta Zimmeck has tracked this process of constriction, showing how the Treasury's preference for ex-servicemen, its reimposition of the marriage bar (the requirement that women resign on marriage) and its adherence to separate job categories and promotion ladders for women and men forced women out. By 1928, before the Depression hit, the number of women staff had been cut to under 75,000, and the civil service was, once again, 75 per cent per cent male.¹⁷

For some women who had found in the war years new opportunities for interesting and politically worthwhile work, this steady effort to curb their chances must have been a tremendous disappointment. For many, too, it was economically catastrophic, for the war that had scythed down potential marriage partners also halved the value of those private incomes that had enabled so many middle- or upper-class women to devote themselves to social work and voluntary organizations in the Edwardian years. More middle-class women now *needed* to work. Some could turn, of course, to the usual paid professions – teaching, social work – but some were drawn to politics. Women were now (if aged over thirty) voters and understandably wanted a share in building (and widening women's place within) that 'country for heroes' Lloyd George and other politicians had so rashly promised. The expanding bureaucracies of the political parties drew in some of these women, and local government others, but some – the most ambitious, idealistic, multilingual and willing to move – turned to Sir Eric Drummond, sitting in Sunderland House, and asked to join the Secretariat of the League of Nations.

It isn't surprising that the League Secretariat looked attractive. Not only was the League – like war work – a great and idealistic cause, but it was also formally committed to the principle of gender equality. Thanks to that early feminist lobbying, all positions at the League were by statute open equally to men and women, and the Secretariat claimed (although practice was a bit murkier) to adhere to the principle of equal pay. Unlike the British civil service, the Secretariat had no marriage bar, and the League provided maternity leave and helped sustain an international school for the children of Secretariat officials. To top it off, salaries were relatively high, and for

¹⁷ M. Zimmeck, 'Strategies and stratagems for the employment of women in the British civil service, 1919–1939', *Historical Journal*, xxvii (1984), 901–24, at p. 912.

those relocating to Geneva from abroad were free of tax and supplemented by allowances for housing and travel. Moreover, while League positions were open to all nationalities, English was (with French) one of the two official languages, and the initial hiring of Secretariat staff took place in London, so Englishwomen had the edge when applying for posts. And indeed, quite a number of Englishwomen were hired. The League had a staff of over 300 by the time it moved, by special hired train, to Geneva in 1920, and within a few years the figure had climbed to over 600. Of that number, almost half were women – and, among those women, British women formed the largest national group.

This makes it all sound rather rosy; the reality was rather different. Of the hundreds of women who worked for the League Secretariat, almost all were clustered in the lower ranks. Over the course of the League's life, only twenty-two women made it into the coveted First Division (a category that included the important leadership posts as well as those 'members of section' who did the core analytical, research and administrative work); the proportion of women among First Division staff never reached 10 per cent. That is not to say that most women worked in the smaller, locally recruited Third Division, the classification for the caretakers, lift and telephone operators, drivers and errand-runners responsible for physical plant. In fact, most women found themselves in the Second Division, which comprised approximately 57 per cent of all staff and was home to what was considered routine clerical and technical work – work, that is, thought to require a good educational standard and superior technical skills but not administrative ability or initiative. Unlike the First and Third Divisions, the Second Division was 'overwhelmingly feminine'.¹⁸

But does this mean that the women who joined the Secretariat in 1919 and 1920 were confined to routine tasks? It does not. For what happened in practice is that Drummond filled as many of those desirable member of section positions as he thought he could reserve for British staff with highly recommended young men from Oxford, the Foreign Office and the liberal professions, and left his female assistant to explain apologetically to these capable women applicants that there were no more positions available – except, perhaps, temporary posts in the typing pool. Some women, sick of the war and eager for a change, took those offers, establishing from the outset the phenomenon – much noted by continental observers – that the League's clerical staff, and especially its British contingent, was both socially more elite and educationally much better qualified than the office staff of any other national administration. (They had to be, Drummond admitted,

¹⁸ Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *International Secretariat*, pp. 286–9, 407.

for that bilingual secretarial staff had to work for – and sometimes cover up for – male superiors from a host of lands who not only had no experience of British administrative traditions but were sometimes not fluent in either of the League's official languages.) Indeed, it is a sign of how many overqualified women there were in the League's lower ranks that fully 75 per cent of the women who finally crawled their way up to member of section rank were promoted out of the Second or even the Third Division, compared to a mere 5 per cent of men who entered the First Division in this way. That some Englishwomen managed to climb this ladder is even more remarkable given Drummond's sensitivity to complaints that the Secretariat was (as indeed it was) British- and French-dominated, and his reluctance, once in Geneva, to admit any more British and French staff to its upper ranks. Indeed, the creation in 1923 of an 'Intermediate Class' of better-paid but still formally Second Division positions may have been a strategy for accommodating some of those ostensible office workers doing what was quite obviously 'administrative' work.¹⁹

The veneer of equal opportunity concealed, then, a rather more complex reality. All posts at the League were open to men and women, and pay was based on the rank of the job, not the sex of its holder. Yet even women with superior skills were usually first hired into the Second Division clerical ranks and had trouble advancing out of those ranks even when they found themselves doing 'administrative' and not 'clerical' work. Crowdy was well aware of these patterns. Women and men were paid equally when in positions of the same grade, she told one interlocutor, but they were not always in the grade appropriate to their skill or to the work they were doing.²⁰ She herself was a good example of this, for while she was one of the dozen or so section heads in the Secretariat, she was not given the rank of director held by many male section heads, but rather that of head of section – a rank that was, conveniently, remunerated at about 50 per cent of a director's salary. It is a measure of just how incommensurate women's administrative ranks were with the actual content of their jobs that often, when a woman left her post, her male replacement was unblushingly appointed at a much higher rank.

This pattern of women doing work beyond their grade holds all the way down the scale. Take the now well-known case of Mary McGeachy, a young Canadian woman who talked her way into a job with the Secretariat's information section in 1928. McGeachy stayed at the League until 1940

¹⁹ Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *International Secretariat*, pp. 269–70, 283, 328, 407–8.

²⁰ Crowdy repeatedly told interlocutors that women were given equal pay when they occupied jobs of the same rank as men but were not always given access to those higher-ranked and better-paid posts. See Carol Miller's discussion of Crowdy's comments in 'Lobbying the League', p. 91.

and never climbed out of the Second Division, but she handled liaison work with women's organizations and press work with Canada, attended conferences as a representative of both the League and the International Labour Organization, and made several speaking tours across Canada to explain the League's work, in the course of which she briefed the Prime Minister and other Canadian politicians.²¹ Nor was this the most extreme case. That honour must surely go to Nancy Williams, a highly intelligent young woman with a first in classics from University College Wales, who, as a secretary to a member of parliament, had spent the war analysing secret telegrams from Russia and the Middle East and preparing briefs for the Air Minister. Williams was, she wrote in 1920 (then all of twenty-nine), 'very keen on the idea of the League of Nations', and when told there was no administrative post available, she accepted a position as a stenographer.²² Very quickly, and while still holding the formal rank of a Second Division clerk, Williams was running virtually the entire personnel side of the League. Only after many years did she succeed in being promoted to member of section, but when she finally left personnel, the Czech diplomat who replaced her was immediately accorded the elevated rank of director and a salary several times higher than the one she had been receiving.²³

Williams bore her anomalous status without complaint, but some did not. Take the case of Gertrude Dixon. Dixon had a DSc from King's College, London, and had been working as a science teacher and biology lecturer when she took a job as assistant secretary to the wartime commission on wheat supplies. Before long, she found herself staffing the inter-allied wheat executive and helping with the work of the Supreme Economic Council during the Peace Conference – work which landed her the job of private secretary to Deputy Secretary-General Jean Monnet. She stayed at the League when Monnet left but found it irritating to be placed under one of those golf-playing good chaps Drummond so liked to appoint. After threatening to resign, she took over the editing of the *League of Nations Official Journal* and by 1922 was responsible for the final checking of a good

²¹ McGeachy is the subject of a recent biography by M. Kinnear, *Woman of the World: Mary McGeachy and International Cooperation* (Toronto, 2004); see chs. 3–4 for her time in the Secretariat. McGeachy's life was also the inspiration for Frank Moorhouse's two marvellous novels about life in the League Secretariat, *Grand Days* (New York, 1993) and *Dark Palace* (New York, 2000).

²² LNA, personnel file of Nancy Williams, Williams to Miss Horn, 17 Sept. 1920, and Horn to Williams, 25 Sept. 1920.

²³ LNA, Williams to Chairman of Appointments, 20 Oct. 1926, and note stellar reviews by de Madariaga, 15 Dec. 1922, and Paulucci, 8 Sept. 1931 and 3 Nov. 1932; also Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *International Secretariat*, p. 369.

many crucial League Council and Assembly documents.²⁴ Her protest to Drummond in 1922 that she was doing work easily as complex as that of a member of section (a claim hard to dispute) was unavailing; not until 1929, when both the head of the French *précis*-writing section and the Italian under-secretary at the League objected that Dixon was doing much more responsible work than most officials far outranking her, was she made a 'Member of Section, Class B'.²⁵ She had, her supervisor pointed out:

great intelligence, an unusually keen mind; a complete mastery of Committee work, and the gift, when translating speakers' corrections into English, of guessing what they meant to say even though they might have written in broken, chaotic French; a firm sense of method and order; extraordinary speed in thought and execution; great presence of mind in days and nights of rush.²⁶

Anyone who has used those League document series and marvelled at their accurate and literate prose has Dixon to thank – not least because she did a First Division job at Second Division rank and pay for a decade.

Or consider Constance Harris, who joined the Secretariat in 1919 as – despite her Oxford degree – a shorthand typist, and ran the office of the minorities section to the 'entire satisfaction' of its demanding director, Erik Colban, for many years.²⁷ Or Jean Howard, Drummond's secretary and gate-keeper – faultless, organized, feared by the younger staff; even the imperturbable Drummond wrote that she might 'perhaps usefully remember that no-one is always right'.²⁸ Or Phyllis Horne, hired as a stenographer but by 1924 acting as the office administrator for the entire economic section; pleas by its director, Arthur Loveday, to raise her grade were turned down.²⁹ Or Nina Spiller, French by birth, English by marriage, who joined the secretariat in 1920 as the secretary of Paul Mantoux and remained as secretary of the political section until 1934. Her position, the League under-secretary admitted, was not challenging enough for someone of her intelligence, but given her nationality (English, given the marriage laws) and the virtual freeze on promotions, she never moved to a better

²⁴ LNA, personnel file of Dr Gertrude Dixon, Dixon to Colban, 28 Dec. 1920; memorandum to Dixon, 14 June 1921; and Chair, Staff Committee, to Dixon, 29 Aug. 1921.

²⁵ LNA, personnel file of Dr Gertrude Dixon, Dixon to Drummond, 3 Mar. 1922 and Drummond to Dixon, 18 Mar. 1922.

²⁶ LNA, personnel file of Dr Gertrude Dixon, report of 14 Mar. 1928.

²⁷ LNA, personnel file of Constance Harris, report by Colban, 14 Nov. 1923.

²⁸ LNA, personnel file of Jean Howard, report by Drummond, 26 Oct. 1926.

²⁹ LNA, personnel file of Phyllis [Horne] van Ittersum, requests by Loveday dated 3 Dec. 1924, 10 Nov. 1925 and 8 Oct. 1926.

post.³⁰ More successful was Lady Mary Blennerhassett, who joined the Secretariat as a translator in 1919. Blennerhassett had, it seems, perfect English, French, German and Italian, capable Spanish and Portuguese, and – her deceased husband having been a political officer in India – a bit of Hindi. Within a year, her Italian supervisor protested to Drummond that since she was his best translator she should certainly be given the same rate of pay as the men, and this time Drummond (who had a soft spot for titles) agreed.³¹ Blennerhassett was promoted in 1932 to head the English interpreters' section, in which post she raised its high standards even higher. 'As a woman in charge of a section consisting largely of men', her 1932 evaluation stated, 'her success is worthy of note.'³²

Cogs in a now defunct machine, these women have been forgotten, but they led consequential lives. Although not treated equally, they worked for the League as equals and more than equals, in the process widening the roles open to women and changing – incompletely but significantly – the culture of work. Their presence made it possible for women to craft the sorts of back channels that men had always enjoyed, with women delegates and assessors relying on female officials to smooth their way in Geneva. The relative social equality of the First and Second Division staff fostered cross-sex friendships, collaborations and indeed sexual liaisons – those products of the excitement and attraction that are always generated when men and women work at high pressure together. It's thought Crowdy had a liaison with Lord Robert Cecil's right-hand man (and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate), Philip Noel-Baker, and McGeachy with the leftist firebrand Konni Zilliacus, but these relationships do not seem to have affected their workplace reputations. They socialized easily with men, but – like many of their male co-workers – they were in some sense married to the League.

Women officials under pressure

All marriages have their tensions, however. Women had secured a place in Geneva at a moment of transnational enthusiasm for peace and progress, but they held that ground through administrative capacity, not idealism. That was to be expected: the problem was that, once the Depression hit and liberal internationalism was forced on the defensive, feminism (or even femaleness) began to be viewed in Geneva almost as a liability.

³⁰ LNA, personnel file of Nina Spiller, report by Avenol, 6 Jan. 1932.

³¹ LNA, personnel file of Lady Mary Blennerhassett, memorandum for the Secretary-General from Dr Parodi, 26 May 1920, and note by Drummond, 28 May 1920.

³² LNA, personnel file of Lady Mary Blennerhassett, annual review for 1932, note by G. P. Dennis, 13 Sept. 1932.

The international women's organizations were formally affiliated to the League, and the Secretariat routinely dispatched a liaison to some feminist international meetings. (This was often Gabrielle Radziwill, a well-connected, multilingual officer in the press section who, as the only nominal Lithuanian in the Secretariat and pleasingly a princess to boot, could be promoted to a rank commensurate with her duties.) But could an international official be a feminist and a social reformer – or did a fervent commitment to sexual equality or 'progress' transgress the requirement of political impartiality? Drummond, who had the thankless task of trying to keep in check the progressive 'Fascistization' of the Italians within the Secretariat, pragmatically (but, for women, very unfortunately) increasingly saw the League as a tool of inter-state diplomacy, rather than of Covenant-driven activism, and looked askance at political enthusiasms of all kinds.³³ Thus in 1933, when Nina Spiller asked to be allowed to attend the International Women's Suffrage Alliance as a delegate for the Women's Freedom League rather than as an observer, Drummond wondered anxiously whether the position of delegate was 'consistent with membership of the Secretariat'. Only after consulting with the legal section and securing a promise that she not discuss any matters under consideration by the League did he allow it.³⁴

Not surprisingly, though, it was Rachel Crowdy herself who transgressed Drummond's increasingly conservative view of the international official's role the most, and paid the price for it. Crowdy had always conceived of her role as to *promote* the League Covenant, not simply to reconcile various governments' opinions, and her forceful presence and innovative practices could not but discomfit Drummond. Crowdy's personnel file at the League contains not only Drummond's schoolmasterly reprimands about the faulty drafting of some Social Section documents but also explicit warnings to Crowdy not to try to force 'a forward policy ... on Governments or Delegations which are opposed to it'.³⁵ Crowdy was not willing to take such criticisms lying down. In a remarkable letter written in July 1929, she insisted that, while she was certainly trying to educate public opinion in 'the most backward countries', the most she could be accused of was of not working to *retard* progress, which some of the national delegates clearly

³³ See Elizabetta Tollardo's thorough discussion of the way Mussolini's ambitions at the League challenged Secretariat practices and Drummond's personal authority in *Fascist Italy and the League of Nations, 1922–35* (London, 2016), ch. 4.

³⁴ LNA, personnel file of Nina Spiller, Drummond to Spiller, 16 Mar. 1933, and related correspondence.

³⁵ LNA, personnel file of Rachel Crowdy, certificate as to grant of annual increment, 25 Aug. 1925; see also certificate comments in 18 Aug. 1927 and 29 June 1929.

wished her to do. She also criticized Drummond directly. During the war in France, she pointed out, she had been responsible for some 4,000 to 5,000 nurses organized in 170 units, had hired and supervised a capable staff, and had enjoyed the complete support and confidence of her chief; at the League, by contrast, her hopes of running her own show had been 'bitterly disappointed'. Initially, she had been given no staff, and then only incompetent assistants who for political reasons she had not been allowed to fire; not until 1928 did she have, finally, an adequate deputy and a loyal, competent staff.³⁶

By that point, however, Drummond had already decided to let her go. Her formal contract, agreed in the summer of 1922, was for a seven-year term, and in August 1928 Drummond told Crowdy it would not be renewed. His letter included a long rationalization of what was, essentially, a sacking. It was in the interests of the League for top positions to turn over, he wrote, and while he had prolonged the contracts of a few senior officials he considered essential, in her case 'I fear ... both the nature of the duties and the nationality favour a termination'.³⁷ Crowdy was shocked, and the international women's and humanitarian organizations for whom she was a critical liaison were outraged. They deluged the League with telegrams and letters pleading to extend her contract – or at least to replace her with another woman.³⁸ If anyone thought such tactics likely to soften Drummond's heart, they could not have been more wrong. In a conciliatory gesture, he extended Crowdy's contract for a single year, then replaced her (at higher rank and salary) with a Swedish diplomat not noted for his enthusiasm.

Crowdy's departure was a serious blow to the international women's organizations, who had found in her a ready collaborator. After her departure, Secretariat officials would work to limit their access and sever those ties, in particular by curbing the powers and number of 'assessors' on the social committees, the position through which philanthropic and humanitarian women had most influenced League policy.³⁹ Crowdy's dismissal also diminished women's standing in the Secretariat itself, for no woman would hold such a high office again. Indeed, throughout the 1930s, women's position in Geneva steadily deteriorated. All the trends of the 1930s were against them. The pioneers of 1919 were ageing; increasingly right-wing governments had little interest in progressive causes and even less in

³⁶ LNA, personnel file of Rachel Crowdy, Crowdy to Drummond, 26 July 1929.

³⁷ LNA, personnel file of Rachel Crowdy, Drummond to Crowdy, 25 Aug. 1928.

³⁸ LNA, personnel file of Rachel Crowdy, telegrams and letters from international women's and social organizations, most between Nov. 1928 and Feb. 1929.

³⁹ The reining in of the assessors is dealt with by Pliley, 'Claims to protection', pp. 102–4.

appointing women; and considerable pressure was put on the Secretariat not to favour the appointment of British officials. Women officials who retired or resigned were not replaced by women.

Drummond, however, did not simply purge his female staff – unlike his indolent French successor as Secretary-General, Joseph Avenol, who, living with his English mistress in the Secretary-General's opulent mansion, exercised his animus against those professional, energetic, very competent and now middle-aged British women who were the administrative backbone of the League. Avenol bore grudges and never forgot a slight, and he appears to have taken pleasure in cutting the number of women in the First Division sharply in the first five years of his disastrous reign.⁴⁰ In quick succession he told the formidable Jean Howard she was now redundant,⁴¹ put through a staff reorganization that made the outspoken feminist Nina Spiller's position obsolete,⁴² terminated the contract (it seems) of the brilliant and dedicated Nancy Williams on grounds of ill health⁴³ and sacked Gertrude Dixon in an economy drive.⁴⁴ Not even Lady Blennerhassett survived.⁴⁵ Well before the massive lay-offs of 1939–40 that reduced the League Secretariat to a shadow of itself, many of the senior women officials were gone. They went quietly: certainly, none threatened – as the left-wing socialist and League official Konni Zilliacus did – to expose Avenol's mismanagement of the League in a British election campaign.⁴⁶

The women in the Second Division, flying below the radar, survived the travails of the Avenol years better, their professionalism and corporate spirit proving one of the League's strongest resources in the dark days after 1933. Unlike the politically sensitive First Division, the largely female Second Division never came under the same pressure from states eager to claim their share of highly paid posts or (worse) to insert informants into internationalism's citadel. In the 1920s, Mussolini's government had forced Drummond to appoint a fascist under-secretary in Geneva

⁴⁰ E. F. Ranshofen-Wertheimer, 'International administration: lessons from the experience of the League of Nations', *American Political Science Review*, xxxvii (1943), 872–87, at p. 876; and for Avenol's mismanagement of the League more generally, J. C. Barros, *Betrayal from Within: Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 1933–1940* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1969).

⁴¹ LNA, personnel file of Jean Howard, Avenol to Howard, 13 Feb. 1933.

⁴² LNA, personnel file of Nina Spiller, Avenol to Spiller, 17 March 1934.

⁴³ LNA, personnel file of Nancy Williams.

⁴⁴ LNA, personnel file of Dr Gertrude Dixon, Avenol to Dixon, 11 Mar. 1939.

⁴⁵ LNA, personnel file of Lady Mary Blennerhassett, Avenol to Blennerhassett, 13 July 1937.

⁴⁶ LNA, personnel file of Konni Zilliacus, esp. Zilliacus to Avenol, 9 Aug. 1938.

who then ensured that all Italian Secretariat officials reported directly to him; as authoritarian governments proliferated in the 1930s, the number of officials who could not be trusted with confidential matters grew. In this situation, the unimpeachably loyal Second Division staff became ever more critical: high officials charged with confidential negotiations knew they could trust their secretaries and stenographers to hold their tongues. When Japanese agents offered large sums to be given a copy of the highly sensitive Lytton Report on the Manchuria crisis before its official publication, they found no takers. What problems the League had with leaks and spying – and by the 1930s, they were serious – did not come from the clerical ranks.⁴⁷

Throughout its existence, and thanks in large part to its overqualified and largely female Second Division staff, the Secretariat retained its high reputation for dedication, efficiency and impartiality. The behaviour of these secretaries and translators, press analysts and stenographers, helps us understand what it means to work – even as a secretary – for a cause. These women believed fervently in the League and were committed to its ideals. They knew they were working beyond their rank and their pay but accepted their treatment not willingly but philosophically, aware that the opportunities they had found in Geneva, however constricted, were greater than those available to them in their home countries. The romance of the internationalist cause sustained them. As Mary McGeachy explained to the novelist Frank Moorhouse (who based his historical novel *Grand Days* on her experiences):

Everything in my life was connected – there was no separation of work and life. Every waking moment went to the League ... It was an experiment. There were no precedents. We were all intense, and we had a sense of mission. Especially the British.⁴⁸

This 'sense of mission' stayed with them. In 1946 Lady Blennerhassett, who had been forced to retire in 1937 (at the age of sixty-one), wrote to Valentin Stencsek, the League's last head of personnel, and to Sean Lester, its last secretary-general. The two had spent the war years supervising a skeleton staff in London and Geneva; with the founding of the United Nations, all that now remained was a final Assembly to turn the assets over. Blennerhassett wanted to be there, to interpret. 'Mainly for sentimental

⁴⁷ The pressures put on the Secretariat by the obvious need to have a wide representation of nationalities and the increasingly anti-democratic sentiments of some member states are intelligently discussed by Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *International Secretariat*, pp. 249–55, 294, 351–64.

⁴⁸ Moorhouse, *Grand Days*, appendix.

reasons I am extremely anxious to be present at the end,' she wrote, 'sad though it is for those of us who believed in the League and served it with conviction.' She wasn't out of practice, she assured Lester, for although then seventy she had spent the war years translating for the Ministry of Information.⁴⁹ Lady Blennerhassett was back at her post when the delegates arrived to wind the League of Nations up.

Conclusion

The League of Nations is often thought of as a byword for political failure, but in many ways it was an agent of transformation, recasting international politics in ways that could never quite be undone. As much a political arena and set of practices as a legal compact, the League turned matters previously dealt with through private diplomacy into subjects for lobbying, press comment and transnational mobilization. Journalists, reformers and appointed or self-appointed spokesmen for would-be nations and causes converged on Geneva. Politicians came to engage in back-room bargaining and to play to the crowd.

'Women' – a distinct and recognized interest with a formidable transnational representative structure – were well poised to take advantage of the relative openness of the League system. Although only weakly established (if at all) in national legislatures and bureaucracies, women were able to use their position in humanitarian and internationalist causes to win representation on important League committees and hence some influence over key policy areas. We can see the legacy of this system today in the statutory role for NGOs in the United Nations and in the growth of UNICEF, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and other humanitarian branches.

Yet the history of women in Geneva had another side as well – less visible, more pragmatic, but important nevertheless. This was their role in the Secretariat. As this chapter has shown, that position was fragile: women were hired mostly into low-grade posts often out of keeping with their qualifications; they were promoted only grudgingly; and while they were to carry out the policies of the League, any sign of zeal in doing so tended to be repressed rather than rewarded. And yet, for all that, through their competence and loyalty they made a difference. Just as it proved impossible in 1919 to imagine international activism on refugees or trafficking without women workers in the field, so too it would be impossible after 1939 to

⁴⁹ LNA, personnel file of Lady Mary Blennerhassett, Blennerhasset to Lester, 9 Feb. 1946, and Blennerhasset to Stenczek, 8 Feb. 1946.

envisage international administration without women on the staff.⁵⁰ Geneva was in the forefront of this change: when national politicians visited the League headquarters, most went away astounded by the visibility and responsibility of its women officials. Loyal to a bureaucratic ethos of impartial and anonymous service, few of these women campaigned openly for women's rights. Instead, by embodying women's capacities, they made equality imaginable.

⁵⁰ That said, while the United Nations has taken a proactive stance on promoting gender equality, Kirsten Haack points out that women officials in its own organization still tend to face 'glass walls' – that is, to be channelled into presumed gender-appropriate agencies and roles. See K. Haack, 'Breaking barriers? Women's representation and leadership at the United Nations', *Global Governance*, xx (2014), 37–54.

8. Ninette de Valois and the transformation of early-twentieth-century British ballet*

Laura Quinton

At the end of Ninette de Valois's ballet *Checkmate* (1937) a woman in a chequered leotard thrusts a sword through the chest of a feeble old man. As he collapses, the ruthless Black Queen removes the Red King's crown from his head and raises it triumphantly in the air.

Danced by the Vic-Wells Ballet, the company founded by de Valois in Islington in 1931, *Checkmate* premiered at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris.¹ An allegory of death's triumph over love, the ballet had quick, angular choreography abounding with dramatic tension, striking geometric designs by the American artist Edward McKnight Kauffer and an expressive score by the British composer Arthur Bliss. A work of modernist synthesis, *Checkmate* bolstered de Valois's position as a choreographer and director at the forefront of British dance. The ballet's closing image of a lone woman in power, moreover, alludes to an underexplored, abiding feature of her professional project.² As a dancer, teacher, choreographer, writer and founder-director of the company that became the Royal Ballet, Ninette de Valois (1898–2001) played a formative role in ballet's transformation into a national high art in Britain during the twentieth century. Chronicling her early work, this chapter considers how she moved through and shaped Britain's changing ballet landscape before the Second World War. De Valois's experiences are indicative of women's evolving roles within this profession, but her rise to its peak was exceptional.

* I am grateful to Lynn Garafola for her extensive feedback on this chapter, and to Jennifer Homans and Guy Ortolano for their continued support of my work.

¹ De Valois's company was renamed the Sadler's Wells Ballet in 1941. After receiving a royal charter in 1956, it became the Royal Ballet.

² Significant studies of de Valois's life and work include K. Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Illusions* (London, 1987); B. Genné, *The Making of a Choreographer: Ninette de Valois and the Bar aux Folies-Bergère* (Pennington, NJ, 1996); R. Cave, *Collaborations: Ninette de Valois and William Butler Yeats* (Alton, 2011); and *Ninette de Valois: Adventurous Traditionalist*, ed. R. Cave and L. Worth (Alton, 2012). Still, her immense cultural impact demands further exploration.

L. Quinton, 'Ninette de Valois and the transformation of early-twentieth-century British ballet' in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 205–232. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

When she became a professional ballet dancer in the 1910s, de Valois entered a feminized, low-status field. In the second half of the 1920s, after dancing with the Ballets Russes, the Russian touring company founded by the impresario Serge Diaghilev in 1909, she moulded herself into a formidable teacher and choreographer, training a new middle-class tier of female ballet students and joining a small cohort of serious women choreographers working in London. In 1931, she became one of the few women in Britain to manage and direct her own ballet company. Having ascended the ranks of a female-dominated field, however, she swiftly proceeded to bring men into her company, appointing them to influential leadership posts and altering the gender hierarchy of British ballet.

While there is considerable scholarship highlighting women's entrances into male-dominated fields in Britain during the First World War and after the landmark Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, de Valois's company reflects an unorthodox trend: the once all-female Vic-Wells Ballet started, in this moment, to embrace men in its ranks.³ On the face of it, this reconfiguration affirms a social phenomenon articulated by historian Joan Thirsk. According to Thirsk's Law, throughout English history women have pioneered new cultural organizations, only to see them, once 'firmly established ... always fall under the control of men'.⁴ But even as de Valois promoted her male colleagues, she still dominated Britain's ballet scene.

In the interwar period, de Valois established herself as her company's pre-eminent leader and as a singular authority in British ballet more broadly. Rather than being inevitably sidelined by patriarchal forces, as Thirsk's Law suggests, de Valois actively invited men into the Vic-Wells Ballet. She recognized that foregrounding male dancers in her choreography and strengthening her ties with male artists and patrons would allow her to achieve her larger goal of elevating, legitimizing and gaining respect for her company and for British ballet in general.⁵ Her apparent dependence on men did not entail a straightforward abdication of her own professional

³ Studies of women's careers in interwar Britain often highlight their changing roles in government, medicine, education, media, retail, clerical and industrial work. Foregrounding de Valois and dance, this chapter expands the literature on women working in the arts: *The History of British Women's Writing, Volume eight, 1920–45*, ed. M. Joannou (Basingstoke, 2015); J. Dowson, *Women, Modernism and British Poetry, 1910–1939: Resisting Femininity* (Aldershot, 2002); *Women's Contributions to Visual Culture, 1918–1939*, ed. K. Brown (Aldershot, 2008); M. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage, 1918–1962* (London, 1996).

⁴ J. Thirsk, 'The history of women', in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, ed. S. Wichert and M. O'Dowd (Belfast, 1995), 1–11, at p. 2.

⁵ On de Valois and this larger quest see B. Genné, 'Creating a canon, creating the "classics" in twentieth-century British ballet', *Dance Research*, xviii (2000), 132–62.

power. Drawing on her vast performing experience, class and family background and writing skills, from the mid-1920s de Valois styled herself as a ruthless, discerning thinker, teacher, choreographer and administrator. Talented, ambitious and persistent, she remained at the centre of her company, consolidating her power as the interwar period progressed. If de Valois's decisions meant that other women eventually lost out on creative and administrative leadership opportunities in British ballet, her trajectory also reveals how one woman steered what would become one of the nation's most elite cultural fields. Echoing the final image of *Checkmate*, the power of men in British ballet was precarious, subject to de Valois's will.

When Ninette de Valois was born, at the tail end of the nineteenth century, ballet was a feminized, low-ranking occupation in Britain. Young, single, working-class women filled the large ensembles – the *corps de ballet* – that appeared in music halls and large-scale exhibitions: called 'ballet girls', they laboured for long hours in hazardous conditions, receiving minimal pay. Many subsidized their families, trudging home between rehearsals and performances to prepare meals and launder clothes for younger siblings and sickly parents. With limited training, these dancers were unlikely to advance beyond the *corps de ballet*.⁶

Reflecting contemporary entertainment trends, the popular venues where ballet girls performed were identified with pleasure and spectacle.⁷ By the 1890s, fantastical productions had become long-running attractions in variety programmes: marked by colourful costumes, extravagant sets, sparkling music and electric lighting displays, these acts covered patriotic, orientalist and supernatural themes. Often wearing revealing costumes, ballet girls processed across the stage, posed in decorative formations and performed simple movements in unison. Producers hired foreign (usually Italian) ballerinas to star in these shows, their sophisticated pointe work and vertiginous turns adding to the overall pyrotechnical wizardry. Notably, women choreographed many ballets that appeared at the Alhambra and the Empire, two of London's most prominent music halls.

⁶ I. Guest, *Ballet in Leicester Square: the Alhambra and the Empire, 1860–1915* (London, 1992); A. Carter, *Dance and Dancers in the Edwardian Music Hall Ballet* (Aldershot, 2005); B. Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo: the American Careers of Maria Bonfanti, Rita Sanagalli and Giuseppina Morlacchi* (New York, 1984); B. Barker, *Bolossy Kiralfy, Creator of Great Musical Spectacles: an Autobiography* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1988); B. Gregory, 'Staging British India', in *Acts of Supremacy: the British Empire and the Stage, 1790–1930*, ed. J. S. Bratton (Manchester, 1991), pp. 150–78.

⁷ M. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850–1910* (London, 1981); L. Jackson, *Palaces of Pleasure: From Music Halls to the Seaside to Football, How the Victorians Invented Mass Entertainment* (New Haven, Conn., 2019); *The Edwardian Sense: Art, Design, and Performance in Britain, 1901–1910*, ed. M. O'Neill and M. Hatt (New Haven, Conn., 2010).

The relatively few men who danced on these stages never numbered among the *corps de ballet*. Mime and character artists and international virtuosos appeared on occasion, and *porteurs* materialized to lift female stars.⁸ More often, women dancers performed male parts, dressing as men (*en travesti*) and partnering other women.⁹ This division of labour led the British public to associate ballet with erotic female bodily display, a perception reinforced by prostitutes who lingered in music hall promenades.¹⁰ Although some social reformers defended ballet girls – one 1897 article called them ‘very much slandered and very little understood’ – others castigated them for becoming courtesans or accepting wealthy male benefactors.¹¹

As British ballet girls toiled on stage, de Valois was enjoying a privileged childhood. Born in 1898 to an Anglo-Irish military family, she spent her early years in a grand manor house in Blessington, Ireland. In 1905, however, her family abruptly moved to England: like other members of the landed gentry of the time, they could no longer afford their estate.¹² Living with her grandmother in Kent, de Valois, who loved dancing the Irish jig, began taking classes in social dancing. These lessons, in which she curtseyed and skipped across the floor wearing ‘party frocks’ and ‘fine lace mittens’, were associated with Britain’s burgeoning physical culture movement.¹³ In the late nineteenth century, girls’ education programmes across Britain increasingly included graceful movement practices, which some policy-makers and physical culture advocates argued would improve the health of the nation’s future mothers and refine female posture and deportment.¹⁴ For de Valois, these lessons provided foundational movement training.

⁸ See J. Pritchard, ‘Enrico Cecchetti and the restoration of the danseur in ballets presented on the London stage at the end of the nineteenth century’, in ‘Selected papers from “An international celebration of Enrico Cecchetti”’, Society for Dance Research, University of Chichester, 31 July 2005, 1–11.

⁹ Notable dancers who performed such roles include Julia Seale and Carlotta Mossetti.

¹⁰ J. Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven, Conn., 2012); J. Donohue, *Fantasies of Empire: the Empire Theatre of Varieties and the Licensing Controversy of 1894* (Iowa City, 2005).

¹¹ ‘Club Chatter’, *To-Day*, 9 Jan. 1897, p. 335.

¹² N. de Valois, *Come Dance with Me: a Memoir, 1898–1956* (Dublin, 1992), p. 17; P. Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven, Conn., 1997); D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, Conn., 1990).

¹³ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 24.

¹⁴ I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880–1939* (Oxford, 2010); F. Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity in Interwar Britain* (Oxford, 2013). See also T. Buckland, *Society Dancing: Fashionable Bodies in England, 1870–1920* (New York, 2011).

In 1907, de Valois's mother took her to see the Danish ballerina Adeline Genée in *The Belle of the Ball* at the Empire Theatre. Trained in the exacting style and technique of August Bournonville and the Royal Danish Ballet, Genée had headlined the Empire's ballets since arriving in London in 1897. For de Valois, Genée was like a 'porcelain princess ... aloof and dignified' with 'impeccable technique', the epitome of classicism amid the music hall's 'smoke and noise'.¹⁵ Departing from the bravura of her foreign – mainly Italian – predecessors, Genée's dancing stimulated de Valois's interest in ballet. In this production she also saw Phyllis Bedells, a young British dancer with strong technique who, inspired by Genée, would become the Empire's leading ballerina in 1913. Signalling changes in the British dance scene, both Genée and Bedells would encourage new admiration for ballet in British audiences more broadly.

Before turning eleven, de Valois moved to London, arriving at a critical moment for British dance. Classical dancers from Russia's Imperial Theatres began to appear in the city. In 1908, the ballerina Lydia Kyasht replaced Genée as the star of the Empire – de Valois saw her in *Round the World* (1909).¹⁶ The dancer Adolph Bolm soon joined Kyasht, and in 1909 Tamara Karsavina appeared at the Coliseum. In 1910, Anna Pavlova danced with Mikhail Mordkin at the Palace Theatre and Olga Preobrajenska performed at the Hippodrome. Enormously popular, these dancers exposed London theatregoers and de Valois to the superior technical standards and artistic riches of Russian ballet.¹⁷

Following these performers, in June 1911 the Ballets Russes made its sensational London debut. Reviewing the company's opening performance in *Le Pavillon d'Armide* (1907) at the Royal Opera House, one critic marvelled at its conception of ballet as 'not merely a frivolous excuse for showing pretty girls'. Gone were 'the glitter of spangles and glare of colour which offended the eyes in most ballets in London'; instead, audiences entered a world of compelling orchestral music, 'graceful movement' and opulent 'spectacle' exceeding 'anything yet seen in this country'. The dancing of the company's male star Vaslav Nijinsky even 'border[ed] on the miraculous'.¹⁸

Inspired by German composer Richard Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or 'total artwork', the Ballets Russes fused movement,

¹⁵ N. de Valois, 'Kaleidoscope', in Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois*, p. 50.

¹⁶ N. de Valois, 'Modern Choreography: Part I', *Dancing Times*, Jan. 1933, p. 436.

¹⁷ N. Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed by Critics in England and the United States, 1911–1929* (London, 1975).

¹⁸ Quoted in Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed*, p. 32.

music and design in trailblazing productions. Male artists dominated its collaborative teams: *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, for instance, featured choreography by Michel Fokine, a score by Nikolai Tcherepnin and designs and a libretto by Alexandre Benois. The company's sophisticated, sensual works filled the Opera House for six weeks that summer, presenting ballet as a serious, sumptuous high art on a par with opera. According to the British critic Arnold Haskell, the Ballets Russes changed Britons' 'entire attitude to ballet'.¹⁹ Over the following three years, performing for extended seasons at the Opera House and elsewhere in London, the company amassed an influential following among local aristocrats, socialites, intellectuals, aesthetes, artists and politicians. By 1914, its middle-class fan base was also growing.²⁰

While the art of the Ballets Russes entranced British audiences, de Valois among them, its male dancers shocked them. The company's *corps de ballet* included men as well as women, and male stars headlined its productions. De Valois marvelled at these 'men galore, whirling like dervishes, or hurling themselves above as war-like tartars', and particularly at Nijinsky, who 'showed Western Europe the heights that a male classical dancer could reach'.²¹ Like de Valois, British spectators understood these dancers, who were chiefly Russian and Polish, as powerful, exotic foreigners. In London, they became beautiful objects of audience desire – especially Nijinsky, who traversed gender conventions on stage in androgynous roles and whose own romantic relationship with Diaghilev was an open secret.²² The Ballets Russes thus spurred the female *travesti* dancer's disappearance from British music halls. It also led the British public to associate high-art ballet with male same-sex desire and 'effeminacy' – a perception de Valois would grapple with when she later established the Vic-Wells Ballet.

Further stimulating the British dance scene, in 1912 the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova presented a historic London season with her own ballet company. Avid theatregoer and future photographer Cecil Beaton would

¹⁹ A. Haskell, 'The birth of the English ballet', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, lxxxvii (1939), 784–806, at p. 787.

²⁰ L. Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (Oxford, 1989); S. Jones, *Literature, Modernism, and Dance* (Oxford, 2013).

²¹ De Valois, 'Kaleidoscope', p. 53.

²² See L. Garafola, 'The sexual iconography of the Ballets Russes', in *From Russia with Love: Costumes for the Ballets Russes, 1909–1933*, ed. R. Leong (Canberra, 1999), pp. 56–65, and her 'Reconfiguring the sexes', in L. Garafola, *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance* (Middletown, Conn., 2005), pp. 179–93; K. Kopelson, *The Queer Afterlife of Vaslav Nijinsky* (Stanford, Calif., 1998); P. Stoneley, *A Queer History of the Ballet* (London, 2007); R. Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* (London, 1995).

compare Pavlova to a ‘floating miracle in white’, blending earthly and spiritual qualities with ‘the delicate precision and discipline of the ballet technique’.²³ Like Beaton, de Valois admired Pavlova’s ‘extraordinary sense of dedication’ as well as her ‘abandon ... frailty ... [and] ecstasy’.²⁴ Until 1914, Pavlova performed one-act ballets, divertissements, and classical, romantic, exotic and Grecian-styled solos and extracts in successive seasons, appearing not only in London but also in many regional music halls.²⁵ Amassing a vast following, she appealed especially to British audiences concerned with Edwardian social ideals of female propriety and respectability. Historian Lynn Garafola has argued that, off stage, Pavlova’s simple, tailored, feminine attire signalled ‘expressive containment’.²⁶ Scholar Carrie Gaiser Casey has shown how Pavlova consciously presented her art as ‘educating, idealizing, moralizing, and uplifting’, requiring a disciplined female body ‘far removed from the corporeality assigned to the ballet girl’.²⁷ A ‘household sensation’ by 1913, from 1912 Pavlova taught ballet to a small group of well-to-do British girls at the house she bought in London.²⁸ Some of these dancers would eventually join her company.

Amid this activity, de Valois, who now continued her ‘fancy dancing’ lessons at an Edwardian School of Deportment in London, began studying ballet at a theatrical training school. Genée, Bedells and the visiting Russians inspired her and other young British women to envision careers in dance beyond the music hall and the *corps de ballet*. Though the image of the ballet girl lingered and a stage career remained an ‘unsuitable’ option for ‘well-bred girls’ in the eyes of many class-conscious Britons, de Valois’s father among them, her entrepreneurial mother, who believed that her daughter had potential and needed an independent income, pushed de Valois forward.²⁹ Adopting a regal French stage name that her mother

²³ C. Beaton, *Ballet* (London, 1951), p. 10.

²⁴ De Valois, ‘Kaleidoscope’, p. 51.

²⁵ K. Money, *Anna Pavlova: Her Life and Art* (New York, 1982).

²⁶ L. Garafola, ‘Anna Pavlova: a ballerina of taste’, paper presented at ‘Ballerina: Fashion’s Modern Muse’, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 6 Mar. 2020.

²⁷ C. G. Casey, ‘The ballet corporealities of Anna Pavlova and Albertina Rasch’, *Dance Chronicle*, xxxv (2012), 8–29, at pp. 16, 18.

²⁸ J. Pritchard, with C. Hamilton, *Anna Pavlova: Twentieth Century Ballerina* (London, 2012), p. 87.

²⁹ B. Genné, ‘Ninette de Valois’, *International Encyclopedia of Dance* (Oxford, 2005) <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0493>> [accessed 8 Sept. 2020]. On de Valois’s mother, the glassmaker Elizabeth Graydon-Stannus, see C. Hajdamach, *20th Century British Glass* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 86–97.

selected (de Valois's birth name was Edris Stannus), de Valois was by 1913 dancing for and touring with her training academy's performing group, the Wonder Children. With this troupe, de Valois, like many child performers in this era, danced a version of Pavlova's signature solo, *The Dying Swan* (1907). With an approach that would serve her throughout her career, de Valois based her interpretation on 'laborious' notes she took while watching Pavlova perform.³⁰

The outbreak of the First World War marked a temporary end to London visits by the Ballets Russes and other international dancers. Diaghilev's troupe travelled to the United States and appeared in Italy, France and Spain, while Pavlova decamped with her company and spent the next five years touring North and South America. By 1915 the Alhambra and the Empire had ceased presenting in-house, large-scale ballets, sending weary ballet girls to search for work elsewhere. As London's dance scene changed, de Valois, now a young professional, pursued work in popular entertainment, where patriotic and escapist fare flourished and soloist opportunities opened up for British women dancers. In December 1914 she became the star of the Grand Ballet in the annual pantomime at the Lyceum Theatre, a role she held until 1919. She later characterized this production, which featured clowns, animal impersonators and dames, as 'strong in its homely tradition' and Victorian conventions: the women of the waltzing *corps de ballet* were 'buxom and heavily corseted', the extravagant transformation scenes full of 'miraculous lighting', and the spectacular finales 'always found one standing in a golden chariot, or reposing on a cloud, or lying in a seashell'. Alongside this engagement, de Valois performed in music halls and West End revues, greeted by whistles as she appeared between 'trick cyclists, acrobats, [and] wire walkers'.³¹ In autumn 1918 she appeared with the Beecham Opera Company: crucially, for this engagement, she experimented with staging her own dances.

While performing across a variety of genres, de Valois pursued intense, self-directed training. She began studying with the esteemed Moscow-born ballet master Edouard Espinosa, then living in London. As she could afford only a few classes a week with him, she carefully 'wrote all my lessons down, and executed them every day' for hours.³² She later studied with Hilda Bewicke, a Scottish dancer who had performed with the Ballets Russes and with Pavlova's company. According to Jane Pritchard, curator

³⁰ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 31.

³¹ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, pp. 34–6, 51.

³² De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 38.

of dance for the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, while de Valois's performing career in this period resembled that of other British women of her generation who studied at London's main theatrical academies, her fastidious training set her apart.³³ To pay for her classes, de Valois began teaching ballet, travelling to Eastbourne to give thirty-minute private lessons for over seven consecutive hours.³⁴ Once the war ended, she sought further training with the Italian pedagogue Enrico Cecchetti, who opened a ballet studio in London in 1918 while working with the Ballets Russes.

In the summer of 1919, de Valois became *première danseuse* of the international opera seasons at the Royal Opera House. While her new featured role was a reward for her hard work during the war, she continued to juggle multiple additional engagements in revues and musical comedies. However, in October 1921, she took an important professional step and assembled her own modest touring group. This troupe, which included eight women and one male dancer, the Russian artist Serge Morosoff, played various music halls, performing light divertissements for which de Valois designed both the choreography and the costumes. Although one of her dancers described the group as 'ahead of its time', de Valois later downplayed its significance, calling it 'mildly successful' and noting that it lasted only six weeks.³⁵ Narrating her career later in life, she preferred to accentuate the founding of the Vic-Wells Ballet as the moment when she became a company director and manager. Notably, her decision to include Morosoff in this group, rather than following the once popular tradition of employing a cross-dressing woman, underscored her belief that men needed a presence in ballet.

After this venture, de Valois joined a small company directed by the Ballets Russes stars Léonide Massine and Lydia Lopokova. She had met Lopokova in Cecchetti's classes and later described the ballerina as a close friend who was 'particularly kind and helpful to me'. Touring England and Scotland with this group, de Valois experienced an artistic awakening. Immersed in the creative principles of the Ballets Russes, for which Massine was a major choreographer, as well as the rigours of Russian training, she found the work to be 'of an order undreamt of in any of my previous experiences': the choreography and 'disciplined routine of class and lengthy rehearsals ... filled me with a sudden feeling of dedication that was an entirely new sensation'. Following this rewarding venture, in January 1923 she joined

³³ J. Pritchard, 'From bad fairy to gramophone girl: Ninette de Valois' early career in English popular theatre', in *Ninette de Valois: Adventurous Traditionalist*, p. 9.

³⁴ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 38.

³⁵ Quoted in Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois*, p. 25; de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 49.

a new revue at the Opera House. Pitched as a modern ‘jazzaganza’, this poorly conceived show involved comedians, chorus girls and blackface. It also featured a ballet choreographed by Massine, with music by the French composer Darius Milhaud and designs by the British painter Duncan Grant. Reinforcing her interest in the Ballets Russes’s vision of art and Massine’s complex choreography, de Valois described a duet she performed in this segment of the production as ‘intensely’ challenging.³⁶

The Ballets Russes was a constant presence in London from the autumn of 1918 until the spring of 1922. By the time she joined the company in September 1923, de Valois had acquired ample experience performing in old and modern music hall productions, pursued serious training, gained experience as a teacher and even managed her own short-lived performing group. Working long days and performing in multiple productions simultaneously like other British women dancers in this period, she found she had ‘reached saturation point and a dangerous state of boredom’.³⁷ Collaborating with Massine and Lopokova had opened up possibilities unknown to her through her work in British entertainment, and she recognized that, to push her career and her art forward, she needed to leave Britain. On the recommendations of Cecchetti and Lopokova, she became one of a handful of British dancers in Diaghilev’s company.

If joining the Ballets Russes marked a peak in de Valois’s dancing career, it also fed new professional ambitions. She described the overall experience as ‘an up-grading of ... sensibility and a fundamental change in outlook’: ‘through Diaghilev ... I became aware of a new world’.³⁸ Travelling across Western Europe with the company for the following two years, she adjusted to the disciplined training routine of its dancers, absorbed the methods of its leading Russian choreographer, Bronislava Nijinska, and observed Diaghilev’s creative and managerial approach. The experience motivated her to develop a serious interest in choreography, to aspire to direct her own company and to devise a new artistic vision for British ballet.

Initially, de Valois found the atmosphere of the Ballets Russes ‘a little terrifying’. While many of her previous engagements required doing ‘the same thing every night for nine months or a year’, now, as the member of a repertory company that performed three or four different ballets on a programme, she

³⁶ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, pp. 41, 48–9. De Valois detailed her friendship with Lopokova in N. de Valois, ‘Lydia Lopokova and English ballet’, in *Lydia Lopokova*, ed. M. Keynes (London, 1983), pp. 106–15.

³⁷ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 52.

³⁸ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, pp. 57–8.

needed to absorb a 'tremendous' workload and 'various styles'.³⁹ She admired her Russian colleagues' classical technique, rooted in the rigorous methods of the Imperial Ballet School, and found that they 'lived intensely and worked very hard'. For de Valois, this disciplined new environment set a standard to emulate, and she decided that the world of British entertainment was, by contrast, 'empty and unproductive ... lonely and without purpose'.⁴⁰ Working for Diaghilev, she paid special attention to his company's gendered make-up: Diaghilev's 'big repertoire', she remarked, 'was very much for the males', and there were 'about twelve more men in the company than ... women' when she joined.⁴¹ This dynamic was strikingly different from not only British music hall troupes but also the main ballet companies in Russia.

Bronislava Nijinska was the most significant artist whom de Valois came in contact with while dancing for the Ballets Russes. In 1921, Nijinska became one of Diaghilev's choreographers – the only woman to assume this position in his company's history. Having rejoined the company after working in post-revolutionary Russia, Nijinska taught technique classes and staged new ballets that de Valois found far from 'orthodox'.⁴² Though grounded in the classical schooling of the Imperial Ballet, Nijinska's classwork integrated her experimental choreographic theories. For de Valois, this sophisticated approach 'open[ed] up my mind and strengthen[ed] my body', encouraging 'new ways of thinking' and stirring a 'deep interest in choreography as opposed to mere execution'. De Valois also worked closely with Nijinska to learn soloist roles in her ballets *Aurora's Wedding* (1921) and *Les Biches* (1924). For the latter, the choreographer used the young dancer to work out the choreography for her own role of 'The Hostess'. Nijinska was 'good to me', de Valois later said, and her example 'proved to be a very great influence on my future outlook'.⁴³

Of the many works de Valois performed with the Ballets Russes, she was most impressed by Nijinska's austere, radical *Les Noces* (1923). This ballet, de Valois later claimed, was one of the 'greatest' ever produced.⁴⁴ She found the weighted choreography a 'tremendous thrill' and took extensive notes

³⁹ Quoted in J. Drummond, *Speaking of Diaghilev* (London, 1997), p. 223.

⁴⁰ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, pp. 71, 66.

⁴¹ Quoted in Drummond, *Speaking of Diaghilev*, p. 226.

⁴² Quoted in Drummond, *Speaking of Diaghilev*, p. 224. See L. Garafola, 'An amazon of the avant-garde: Bronislava Nijinska in revolutionary Russia', *Dance Research*, xxix (2011), 109–66.

⁴³ N. de Valois, *Step by Step: the Formation of an Establishment* (London, 1977), pp. 21–2.

⁴⁴ N. de Valois, *Invitation to the Ballet* (London, 1937), p. 47, quoted in Drummond, *Speaking of Diaghilev*, p. 225.

in order to learn its challenging rhythms.⁴⁵ If performing in this production influenced de Valois's later choreographic style, it also further encouraged her to use note-taking and writing as important creative tools. Indeed, she found that her 'detailed' written study of *Les Noces* revealed 'a clear picture of the geometrical beauty' of the ballet's 'inner structure' as well as the music's relationship to the movement.⁴⁶ The notes de Valois made when choreographing her own ballets in the 1930s could be described in remarkably similar terms.

A merging of tradition and innovation was also present in Diaghilev's larger artistic policy for the Ballets Russes. The company performed versions of nineteenth-century Russian works as well as new one-act ballets based on his vision of artistic integration. Initially, de Valois resented the older productions: she held *Swan Lake*, for instance, 'in great contempt', arguing 'we did it pretty badly ... it was dreadful' and 'terribly old-fashioned'. When she founded her own company in 1931, however, she would deliberately follow Diaghilev's example, embracing both tradition and innovation. With the same terms she used to describe her plans for British ballet, she later declared that Diaghilev was about 'evolution always' – 'the balance was very good'.⁴⁷ In fact, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) – a work Nijinska revived for the Ballets Russes in London in 1921 – would become a cornerstone of her company's repertory.

As well as stimulating de Valois's developing artistic vision, Diaghilev set an example for her as a company director. She found him to be 'the most extraordinarily frightening man' – daunting and domineering, but with a vast knowledge of art and ballet that enabled him to 'light the path of the unknown and untried'.⁴⁸ She appreciated how, while he demanded hard work from his dancers, Diaghilev always ensured they were sufficiently paid. Observing him up close and immersing herself in the structure of his company, she discovered that she was able to see his organization 'as a whole', and she became accustomed to 'the criticisms, the attitude, the spacing of rehearsal sheets'. Speaking about her subsequent administrative and creative achievements, she reflected, 'I owe everything I know to that

⁴⁵ Quoted in Drummond, *Speaking of Diaghilev*, p. 223.

⁴⁶ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 64.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Drummond, *Speaking of Diaghilev*, pp. 223, 228. See B. Genné, 'Evolution not revolution: Ninette de Valois' philosophy of dance', in *Ninette de Valois: Adventurous Traditionalist*, pp. 18–29.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Drummond, *Speaking of Diaghilev*, p. 227; de Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 60.

company.⁴⁹ Absorbing the inner workings of the Ballets Russes, de Valois acquired rare knowledge that would inform her future work in Britain.

At the end of July 1925 de Valois left the Ballets Russes. Despite having grown tremendously as a dancer with the company, she was sick of touring and felt she ultimately 'did not really belong' among the Russians.⁵⁰ She was also ready for new challenges. Returning to London, de Valois found her mind 'overflowing with schemes, ideas and plenty of frustration'.⁵¹ It was a turning point in her career. Inspired by Diaghilev's example, she resolved to create a permanent repertory ballet company, staffed by British dancers and based in Britain, and to elevate the art's standing nationally.⁵² Following Nijinska, in the coming years she also fashioned herself as a sharp, intellectual choreographer and a demanding teacher. Although other British dancers and dance-lovers had endeavoured to establish permanent companies in Britain in the past, de Valois's efforts would eclipse those of her forerunners.⁵³

Setting to work, in February 1926 de Valois published her first article. Entitled 'The future of the ballet', the piece appeared in the *Dancing Times*, Britain's most widely circulated dance publication.⁵⁴ Outlining her creative philosophies and arguing in favour of modern and experimental ballets, the article established her as a leader in her field who could articulate her ideas to a serious reading public. It exhibited traits that would mark her future publications: an analytical, rational and impersonal tone, an extensive knowledge of ballet history and international dance forms and an assertive take on contemporary debates in her field. Writing would subsequently become a means by which de Valois not only communicated her opinions and policies but also advanced her personal authority: it was a significant skill, rare among British dancers, that became even more important as literacy rates and the mass media expanded in the interwar period. Publishing articles and books helped her to promote and validate her artistic project, to shape and determine her own legacy. To an extent, writing also enabled her to control the larger narrative of British ballet.

Seeing improved training as an important step in achieving her goals, de Valois opened a dance academy in Kensington in March 1926. Her own

⁴⁹ Quoted in Drummond, *Speaking of Diaghilev*, p. 228.

⁵⁰ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 71.

⁵¹ De Valois, *Step by Step*, p. 9.

⁵² De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, pp. 72–3.

⁵³ On previous attempts see Genné, *Making of a Choreographer*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ N. de Valois, 'The future of ballet', *Dancing Times*, Feb. 1926, pp. 589–93.

early training – which she characterized as ‘wasted years’ – filled her with ‘anxiety’ and a desire to give British dancers ‘some security and definite standards’.⁵⁵ She devised a wide-ranging curriculum for her students: ballet classes featured French, Italian and Russian methods, and her own lessons drew from the Swiss music educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s system of eurhythmics and incorporated ‘modern-classical movement’ inspired by Nijinska and Massine.⁵⁶ Her students also learned mime, British and Central European character dances, and dance composition. Alongside this technical training, de Valois promoted the study of theatre design and make-up, anatomy, history, drama, languages and literature, framing ballet as a rigorous form requiring broad cultural knowledge.⁵⁷ Initially, all of her students were young women.

De Valois’s school and her mission to position ballet as a serious artistic practice benefitted from an influx of affluent female practitioners. Training opportunities had grown in Britain since the late nineteenth century, when visiting artists who appeared on London stages taught short-term courses at local schools. By the mid-1920s, prominent foreign teachers such as Serafina Astafieva, Marie Rambert and Nikolai Legat had started training British students in the capital. The pre- and post-war performances of Pavlova, who from 1920 began appearing regularly in Britain again, and the Ballets Russes spurred the opening of dance schools across the country. The training methods, like the dance content, varied from studio to studio, and increasingly after the First World War organizations such as the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing and the Association of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain (renamed the Royal Academy of Dancing in 1935) worked to improve national standards of classical training, promoting codified syllabi and regular examinations for dance teachers and students.⁵⁸

Changing middle-class attitudes went alongside this expansion of training. Historian Karen Eliot notes that Pavlova especially attracted ‘well educated and socially well placed’ admirers, and it was largely she who ‘made it acceptable for girls from “good” families to study, teach, and perform ballet’.⁵⁹ By admitting large numbers of British women to her company,

⁵⁵ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois*, p. 63.

⁵⁷ K. Neatby, *Ninette de Valois and the Vic-Wells Ballet* (London, 1934), p. 23; Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois*, p. 65.

⁵⁸ K. Eliot, *Albion’s Dance: British Ballet during the Second World War* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 7–28; Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, pp. 224–31; Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois*, p. 60; G. Morris, ‘Developing a training style: Ninette de Valois and the cultural inheritance of the early twentieth century’, in *Ninette de Valois: Adventurous Traditionalist*, pp. 41–6.

⁵⁹ Eliot, *Albion’s Dance*, p. 9.

Pavlova helped to dispel a widely held notion that, unlike the Russians, ‘the English cannot dance’.⁶⁰ By the mid-1920s, middle-class parents willingly enrolled their daughters in ballet lessons: reflecting changing ideas about this career path, a 1926 *Manchester Guardian* article emphasized how a dancer’s success depended on her musicality, grace, discipline, and ‘high ideal[s]’, as well as her being ‘sufficiently well off to afford a moderate capital for the years of training’.⁶¹ As the stigmatized image of the nineteenth-century ballet girl gradually receded, de Valois welcomed a new, privileged tier of young girls to her school.

Underscoring the prominence of female leaders in this evolving interwar ballet field, in 1926 de Valois formed a vital professional partnership with the theatre manager Lilian Baylis. Having decided that the best home for a permanent ballet company would be one of Britain’s established repertory theatres, de Valois first brought her plans to Barry Jackson at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. When Jackson turned her down, she went to Baylis, the manager of London’s Old Vic. A suffragist whom de Valois described as being ‘possessed with the fervour of a Salvation Lass’, Baylis had inherited the Old Vic from her aunt, the social reformer Emma Cons. Practical, economically stringent and devout, Baylis was fiercely committed to her aunt’s vision of bringing high culture to working-class audiences by presenting Shakespeare and opera at low prices. Impressed by de Valois’s qualifications, Baylis initially hired her to give the Old Vic’s actors movement training, to stage dances for the theatre’s plays and operas and to choreograph short ballets as curtain-raisers. Although space and money were limited, de Valois recalled, Baylis ‘promised me, that as time went on and things got better, my more ambitious plans would receive her full consideration’.⁶² Baylis planned to acquire and revamp the dilapidated Sadler’s Wells Theatre in Islington: there, she suggested, de Valois might form her ballet company. Like de Valois, Baylis believed that dance should be placed alongside drama and opera as an esteemed art within British theatre.⁶³ In her published writings, de Valois’s repeated praise for Baylis underscores the significance of this meeting of female minds to the future of British ballet.

In the coming years, as she directed her school and worked at the Old Vic, de Valois joined other branches of the ongoing repertory theatre movement. From late 1926, she worked as a choreographer for theatre director Terence Gray’s expressionist productions at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, and

⁶⁰ P. Noble, *British Ballet* (London, 1949), p. 11.

⁶¹ E. Bette, ‘Ballet-dancing: an arduous career’, *Manchester Guardian*, 31 May 1926, p. 4.

⁶² De Valois, *Step by Step*, pp. 35, 32.

⁶³ L. Baylis, ‘Foreword’, in Neatby, *Ninette de Valois and the Vic-Wells Ballet*, p. 7.

from 1928 she staged movement for the Irish poet W. B. Yeats's productions, including his *Plays for Dancers*, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.⁶⁴ Through this work, de Valois became acquainted with new experiments in lighting and avant garde stagecraft. She brought students from her school to perform in incidental dances and Greek choruses she staged for both theatres, giving her young dancers key performing opportunities. She also built important connections with male artists. Her work with W. B. Yeats, and his efforts to 'uplift' Irish theatre through the productions he programmed for the Abbey, emboldened her especially.⁶⁵

Throughout the late 1920s, de Valois crafted a ruthless professional persona which enhanced her growing authority. Theatre director Norman Marshall, who worked at the Cambridge Festival Theatre at the same time as de Valois, described his colleague as 'desperately earnest', with a 'stubborn determination' and an 'abrupt and dictatorial manner ... serious to the verge of pomposity'. During rehearsals, she invoked her family's class and military background, shouting at performers in a clipped accent and directing them as if giving orders. Marshall speculated that de Valois's 'brusque, school-marmish manner' and 'scolding, goading, and exhorting' may have masked personal insecurities. But her disciplinarian tactics paid off: she won his respect and, crucially, that of other influential men in British theatre.⁶⁶

Experimenting as a choreographer within these contexts, de Valois began creating audacious, intellectual works. According to Marshall, her choreography for the Festival Theatre's 1926 *Oresteia* trilogy 'reduced one's memories of all other Greek Choruses ... to a series of pretty posturings'. Her ballet *Rout* (1927), premiered by an all-female cast at the Festival Theatre, mixed spoken text with grounded, architectural and asymmetrical movements: Marshall called it 'harsh, angry' and 'pretentious', the dancers 'deliberately and ruthlessly drained of individuality'.⁶⁷ At the Abbey, she devised poetic movement for productions which, in her words, absorbed bodies, emotions and individuals 'into the whole'.⁶⁸ Expanding her creative range, she experimented with masks and drew from Japanese Noh theatre.

As she began to define herself as a writer, teacher and choreographer, de

⁶⁴ Jones, *Literature, Modernism, and Dance*, pp. 34–40, 83–5; Cave, *Collaborations*; T. Gray, *Dance-Drama: Experiments in the Art of the Theatre* (Cambridge, 1926). It is worth noting that Gray was de Valois's cousin.

⁶⁵ De Valois, *Step by Step*, pp. 179–86. De Valois worked with Gray until 1931, and with Yeats until 1934.

⁶⁶ N. Marshall, *The Other Theatre* (London, 1948), pp. 139–40.

⁶⁷ Marshall, *The Other Theatre*, p. 140.

⁶⁸ De Valois, *Step by Step*, p. 183.

Valois continued to perform occasionally. She danced as a guest artist with the Ballets Russes, in London with the British dancer and former Ballets Russes star Anton Dolin, and in works she created for the Abbey. In 1928, she took part in another international season at the Royal Opera House. In her memoir, *Come Dance with Me*, de Valois explained that she 'accepted these engagements as a means of making extra money so as to continue my hold on the repertory theatre'.⁶⁹ Her choice of the words 'my hold' here indicate that she was consciously carving out a singular place within this cultural scene.

When Baylis's rehabilitated Sadler's Wells Theatre opened in January 1931, de Valois finally established her company, the Vic-Wells Ballet, with a group of six female dancers. At Baylis's request, de Valois relocated her school to the theatre. She proposed that Baylis, whose chronically low finances were exacerbated by the 1929 stock market crash, pay her dancers and the school's new headteacher; de Valois, meanwhile, would direct, choreograph, teach, perform and supervise the day-to-day operations of her company for free until the following September. De Valois found that she was now 'virtually self-sold to one institution for which, during nearly five years, I had worked with this one end in view'.⁷⁰ Though working without pay, she would dictate all facets of her company's operations.

Baylis gave de Valois complete freedom to devise the Vic-Wells's artistic policies. Rejecting the approach of London's commercial theatre managers, who hired artists for the length of a single production and prioritized profitability, de Valois determined to provide her dancers with long-term, year-round employment and financial stability.⁷¹ Following Diaghilev's example, her programmes would include modern as well as historic ballets, and they would prioritize British dancers and artistic collaborators. Baylis's moral vision of art and Sadler's Wells's reputation as a 'people's theatre' catering to broad audiences undoubtedly buoyed her efforts to raise ballet's stature in Britain. Yet, given her past experiences, she also probably intuited that her enterprise would remain inferior if ballet continued to be seen as a feminized form.

Initially, the Vic-Wells Ballet performed fortnightly. Soon, it was appearing weekly: Baylis described these early performances as 'uniformly successful', noting how 'it was ballet, to a tremendous extent, that put Sadler's Wells on

⁶⁹ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 99.

⁷⁰ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 102.

⁷¹ De Valois, *Step by Step*, p. 28.

the map'.⁷² In May 1931, the company gave its first full evening of ballet in a programme in which de Valois danced alongside twenty-one female company members and four male guest artists. Two months later, the Vic-Wells Ballet premiered one of de Valois's most significant choreographic works, *Job* (1931), at a performance sponsored by the Camargo Society in the West End.

An indication of how attitudes towards ballet and its status were changing in Britain, the Camargo Society began meeting in London in late 1929, following Diaghilev's death in August and the subsequent collapse of the Ballets Russes that year.⁷³ Steered by an advisory committee of Diaghilev's elite followers and prominent figures within the British dance world, including de Valois, the group determined to salvage the impresario's collaborative model of ballet.⁷⁴ For its programmes, which began in October 1930 and were attended by a select subscriber audience, the society commissioned sophisticated new ballets by young and prominent British choreographers, visual artists, composers and writers. Its illustrious steering committee included the economist John Maynard Keynes, the dancer (and Keynes's wife) Lydia Lopokova, the music critic Edwin Evans and the writer and musician M. Montagu-Nathan; Camargo Society subscribers included the painter Augustus John, Lady Ottoline Morrell and Bloomsbury writers Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf.

Before the Camargo Society disbanded in 1934, it promoted a great deal of female talent. In addition to de Valois, Penelope Spencer, Wendy Toye, Sara Patrick, Anny Boalsh and Trudl Dubsy choreographed productions for the group. This cohort demonstrates that a number of women were working as professional choreographers in interwar Britain. Creative women also contributed to other aspects of the society's work: the visual artists Vanessa Bell, Edna Ginesi and Gwen Raverat designed sets and costumes for some of its ballets, and one concert included musical interludes by the composer and suffragist Ethel Smyth – notably, playing music during intermissions was also a feature of many Diaghilev performances. Still, de Valois's unparalleled performing experience, repertory theatre work and the fact that she had her own company gave her a unique stature within this group. De Valois sat on the society's advisory committee, and by 1933 she had choreographed more ballets for this group than any other woman. Her Vic-Wells dancers also served as one of its main creative resources.

⁷² Baylis, 'Foreword', p. 8.

⁷³ See K. Sorley Walker, 'The Camargo Society', *Dance Chronicle*, xviii (1995), 1–114.

⁷⁴ Some historians argue that their determination grew out of a desire to revive a pre-war 'civilization': Eliot, *Albion's Dance*, p. 27; J. Homans, *Apollo's Angels: a History of Ballet* (New York, 2010), pp. 407–22.

De Valois's involvement with the Camargo Society allowed her to strengthen her ties with elite male ballet patrons, particularly Keynes, as well as the male artists the society engaged. Significantly, it brought her into closer contact with male dancers and choreographers. Along with members of the Vic-Wells Ballet, the society's programmes featured dancers from the Ballet Club, a small group formed in 1930 by the Polish émigré and former Ballets Russes dancer Marie Rambert.⁷⁵ Based at the Mercury Theatre in Notting Hill Gate, the Ballet Club was home to a talented group of choreographers, among them Frederick Ashton, Susan Salaman, Andrée Howard and Antony Tudor. At her school at the Mercury Theatre, Rambert nurtured a small, strong group of male dancers. As the only two female company directors in this period, both steering formidable groups vying for artistic and financial recognition, de Valois and Rambert were simultaneously collaborators and rivals. Many of Rambert's artists, however, would leave their mentor and join the Vic-Wells Ballet; de Valois offered more money and creative opportunities. The influx of men into her company signalled de Valois's continued advance to the forefront of British ballet.

As well as encapsulating de Valois's interwar choreographic style and approach, *Job* underscored her growing interest in developing and foregrounding male dancers.⁷⁶ Based on the English artist William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1826), the production grew out of a collaboration between de Valois, the physician and author Geoffrey Keynes (brother of J. M. Keynes), who wrote the ballet's libretto, the engraver Gwen Raverat and the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. (The project was initially offered to Diaghilev, but he chose not to pursue it.⁷⁷) The Camargo production starred Anton Dolin, a British dancer who joined the Ballets Russes in 1923, in the title role. A dramatic, pastoral ballet, *Job* chronicled the struggles and achievements of a single hero. Its success raised de Valois's reputation among local dance critics, many of whom were men.⁷⁸ For the writer Cyril W. Beaumont, *Job* captured 'the deeply religious feeling of Blake's drawings'

⁷⁵ On the Ballet Club see M. Rambert, *Quicksilver: the Autobiography of Marie Rambert* (London, 1972); M. Clarke, *Dancers of Mercury: the Story of Ballet Rambert* (London, 1962); J. Pritchard, *Rambert: a Celebration* (London, 1996). This group was renamed Ballet Rambert in 1934.

⁷⁶ On *Job* see R. Zimring, 'Ballet, folk dance, and the cultural history of interwar modernism: the ballet *Job*', *Modernist Cultures*, ix (2014), 99–114; J. Lawson, *Choreography and Ninette de Valois* (London, 1947); J. Lawson, *Job and The Rake's Progress* (London, 1949).

⁷⁷ Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 369.

⁷⁸ See P. Richardson, 'The theatrical sense in ballet: the secret of Ninette de Valois's success', *Dancing Times*, Dec. 1931, p. 251.

and used levels, groupings and a large staircase to create architectural scenes of ‘super-natural power’.⁷⁹ Arnold Haskell, who viewed ballet in quite narrow terms, found that, although *Job*’s blend of expressionist, folk and classical movements meant that ‘one hesitated’ to call it a ballet, the work showed de Valois to be ‘neither smug nor cantankerous, but someone with a great deal to express and the necessary craft with which to express it’.⁸⁰ *Job* exemplified de Valois’s belief in artistic unity, a Diaghilevian principle that guided much of her choreography. It exhibited her ability to meld diverse movement forms and her interest in characterization, dramatic effect, inventive lighting and narrative. The ballet also showcased her close attention to detail and emotion in music and dance. Using a technique that became her standard approach to choreography, de Valois pre-planned the entire production, sketching out specific phrases, groupings, lighting and stage effects on paper and analysing the score numerically.⁸¹ While *Job* reflected the stylistic flexibility and adventurousness present not only in de Valois’s work but also in British ballet more generally in this period, it also indicates how spaces for British male dancers and artists were opening up in this field.

Back at Sadler’s Wells, de Valois cultivated a severe presence and a military-like culture while leading classes or rehearsing her company. Aiming to instil discipline akin to that of her Ballets Russes colleagues, she gave highly technical, bracingly fast classes and led exacting rehearsals. Margot Fonteyn, the future principal dancer of the Vic-Wells Ballet who joined the Sadler’s Wells ballet school in 1934, recalled how, perhaps emulating the behaviour of her own ballet teachers, de Valois would scream and slam a cane on the floor during technique classes. Finding her teacher ‘alarming’ and ‘volatile’, Fonteyn only later discovered that ‘it was a compliment to be shouted at all day long’.⁸² Recalling similar outbursts, the dancer Beryl Grey, who entered the school in 1937, claimed she was ‘more frightened of [de Valois] than the bombs’ during the Second World War.⁸³ In rehearsals,

⁷⁹ C. W. Beaumont, *Vic-Wells Ballet* (London, 1935), pp. 18–19. The epic nature of these scenes could be said to evoke music hall ballet productions.

⁸⁰ Haskell, ‘The birth of the English ballet’, p. 795.

⁸¹ Notebook for *Job*, undated, collection of material relating to Ninette de Valois, Royal Ballet School Special Collections, Surrey, England, 3208 RBS/NDV. See also A. Farjeon, ‘Choreographers: dancing for de Valois and Ashton’, *Dance Chronicle*, xvii (1994), 195–206, at pp. 196, 198; Genné, ‘The Notebook’, in *The Making of a Choreographer*, pp. 81–119.

⁸² M. Fonteyn, *Margot Fonteyn: Autobiography* (London, 1977), pp. 42, 37.

⁸³ Quoted in ‘De Valois as colleague and collaborator: a discussion led by Gerald Dowler’, in *Ninette de Valois: Adventurous Traditionalist*, p. 195.

de Valois was said to 'drill all the personality out of her cast, counting the music till mathematics had driven the atmosphere away'.⁸⁴ She insisted that her soloists appear in the *corps de ballet*, curbing her dancers' expectations, egos and demands. However, tempering her approach with moments of generosity, de Valois succeeded in making dancers heed and respect her. She also inspired loyalty and devotion. Fonteyn called de Valois 'a supreme leader', adding, 'we would one and all unhesitatingly defend and obey her commands. We would, metaphorically speaking, have died for her'.⁸⁵

Tightening her grip at Sadler's Wells, de Valois welcomed men into her company. In late 1931, she invited the composer and conductor Constant Lambert to become one of its creative leaders, naming him music director. Lambert, who travelled in rarefied social and artistic circles, had previously conducted for the Camargo Society: his credentials included being one of the few British composers from whom Diaghilev had commissioned a score. De Valois respected Lambert's intellect and taste; she later stated that his 'first-class musical mind' helped enhance the company's orchestra, the dancers' musicality and the musical arrangements of the new ballets.⁸⁶ With gratitude she replicated over the years when discussing her male colleagues, she later attributed much of her company's success to Lambert, reminiscing, 'he gave his life to us ... a wonderful man, the core of English Ballet in my opinion'.⁸⁷

In 1932, de Valois offered six-week contracts to six male dancers, despite persistent prejudices against male dancing. Although by the mid-1920s the social status of female dancers had risen, ballet remained an unacceptable path for men. Frederick Ashton, the son of a diplomat and one of the few men to begin studying ballet in early 1920s London, described hiding his new passion from his parents: 'my father was horrified ... you can imagine the middle-class attitude. My mother would say: "He wants to go on the stage." She could not bring herself to say "into the ballet."' ⁸⁸ In 1927 Arnold Haskell noted how, since Nijinsky's pre-war Ballets Russes performances, a 'popular fallacy that the classical male dancer must necessarily be an effeminate creature' had taken hold in Britain.⁸⁹ By the mid- to late 1920s, the Ballets Russes had a growing and conspicuous gay male audience that

⁸⁴ Haskell, 'The birth of the English ballet', p. 795.

⁸⁵ Fonteyn, *Margot Fonteyn*, p. 80.

⁸⁶ N. de Valois, 'Introduction', in G. Anthony, *The Vic-Wells Ballet: Camera Studies* (London, 1938), p. 20.

⁸⁷ Quoted in J. Walsh, 'Doyenne of the Dance', *Independent*, 6 June 1998, p. 22.

⁸⁸ Quoted in 'Sir Frederick Ashton', *The Times*, 20 Aug. 1988, p. 10.

⁸⁹ A. Haskell, *Some Studies in Ballet* (London, 1927), p. 87.

reinforced this view.⁹⁰ In his numerous popular and influential writings throughout the interwar period, however, Haskell attempted to combat these associations, praising ballets that featured heterosexual relationships and contrasting the physical virility of male dancers to the grace of ballerinas. A ballet with an all-female cast, he claimed, was ‘insipid’, showing ‘no very great interest’.⁹¹ As her company advanced through the 1930s, de Valois, inspired by the Ballets Russes’s male-dominated model and intent on making the Vic-Wells Ballet a revered national institution, digested these assertions. In her book *Invitation to the Ballet* (1937), she disparaged the bygone era of female-dominated music hall ballet and argued that ‘as a profession ballet has never been [the ballerina’s] undisputed property’, airing her frustration at seeing ‘worthy British parents’ sending their male children to become ‘bank clerks’.⁹² In her effort to recruit male dancers, de Valois would endeavour to appeal to conventional social hierarchies as well as notions of ‘respectable’ middle-class masculinity and femininity.

As de Valois embraced male artists, she also pivoted away from her earlier creative experimentalism. Instead, she focused on building her company’s classical repertoire. In 1932 she invited Nicholas Sergeyev, the former chief rehearsal master of the Imperial Ballet in St Petersburg, to re-stage several nineteenth-century works for her company. By 1939, Sergeyev had produced versions of *Giselle* (1841/1884), *Coppélia* (1870), *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker* (1892) and *Swan Lake* (1895), using the Stepanov scores he had taken from Russia, supplemented by his own memory and experiences. Along with offering a technical challenge to the Vic-Wells dancers, these ballets allowed de Valois to claim an exalted heritage for her company, linking it directly to a Tsarist forebear. Moreover, she used them as vehicles for male as well as female guest artists, whose appearances helped boost the company’s visibility and revenue.⁹³ These guests, many of whom were former Ballets Russes dancers, indicated the Vic-Wells’ indebtedness and ties to Diaghilev, a connection de Valois further fortified by adding former Ballets Russes productions to the Vic-Wells repertory, among them *Les Sylphides* (1909), *Le Spectre de la rose* (1911), and *Carnaval* (1910).

As the art and gendered make-up of her company changed, de Valois gained support from J. M. Keynes. In 1933, Keynes arranged for the Vic-

⁹⁰ The iconography and performances of Serge Lifar from 1924 to 1929 reveal this phenomenon especially. Garafola, ‘Sexual iconography of the Ballets Russes’, pp. 56–65.

⁹¹ Haskell, *Some Studies in Ballet*, p. 103.

⁹² De Valois, *Invitation to the Ballet*, pp. 121, 294.

⁹³ Ballets Russes stars Alicia Markova, Anton Dolin, Lydia Lopokova and Stanislas Idzikowski all performed as guest artists with the Vic-Wells Ballet.

Wells Ballet to perform at the Royal Opera House during the World Economic Conference. Dancing excerpts from *Coppélia* and *Swan Lake*, the company appeared alongside Lydia Lopokova and the English Ballets Russes star Alicia Markova. When the Camargo Society closed down in 1934, Keynes, in his capacity as the society's treasurer, transferred many of its ballets, along with their scenery, costumes and music, to the Vic-Wells company. In *Come Dance with Me*, de Valois praised Keynes and Lopokova for assuming 'the care of British Ballet', recounting how she found their home in Gordon Square 'a refuge from everyday life' where she went 'for advice in all my troubles'.⁹⁴ As scholar Helena Hammond notes, Keynes's personal endorsement bestowed on the Vic-Wells Ballet the 'precious cultural kudos and capital' of the Bloomsbury group, bringing the company closer to the upper echelons of British culture and society.⁹⁵

As her school and company grew and coalesced artistically throughout the 1930s, de Valois did not completely sideline women. She wanted a home-grown prima ballerina to emerge from her system, and she began shaping Margot Fonteyn to fill that role. De Valois described Fonteyn as a disciplined, demure, 'exceptionally tidy and beautifully placed' dancer, evocative of Pavlova.⁹⁶ She embodied what de Valois viewed as ideal qualities for a ballerina – and for a middle-class British woman. Nurturing Fonteyn's talent, de Valois opened up a limited space for one woman in her company, developing her as an exceptional dancer and allowing her to accrue significant visibility as an artistic celebrity.

Simultaneously, de Valois continued foregrounding male talent in her new ballets. In 1935 the company debuted one of her most successful works, *The Rake's Progress*. Based on a series of paintings by William Hogarth, this production included a new score by the composer Gavin Gordon and designs by the visual artist Rex Whistler: here, as in many of her ballets, de Valois chose to collaborate exclusively with men. With sources drawn from folk, court dance, classical and expressionist forms, this moralizing, highly dramatic production followed its muscular hero's journey into physical and psychological dissolution. The work later led the critic Joan Lawson to reflect that 'it is often said that Ninette de Valois creates her best dances for men, and that her women's dances are not the same quality'.⁹⁷ Certainly,

⁹⁴ De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, p. 114.

⁹⁵ H. Hammond, 'Ninette de Valois, the Bloomsbury Group, and the role of visual culture in the formation of the early Royal Ballet', in *Ninette de Valois: Adventurous Traditionalist*, p. 185.

⁹⁶ Quoted in K. Money, *The Art of Margot Fonteyn* (London, 1965), n.p.

⁹⁷ Lawson, *Choreography and Ninette de Valois*, p. 26.

unlike Nijinska or other women choreographing in interwar London, de Valois rarely created ballets which centred on women, delved into female psyches or expressed female perspectives.

In 1935, de Valois got married. Her husband, Arthur Connell, was a doctor: they met when, amid de Valois's various health struggles over the years, he performed an operation on her.⁹⁸ The wedding was small, and de Valois reportedly kept it secret from her closest Sadler's Wells colleagues.⁹⁹ Her decision might be explained by the fact that, in 1932, a marriage bar had been instituted in many professions, mandating that women leave the workforce once they married. But it was arguably at this point that de Valois began to assume yet another role. Pressing forward with her administrative and creative work, she now juggled her professional responsibilities with traditional wifely duties, making time in her overloaded schedule to respond to her husband's patients' phone calls, organize his appointments and cook for him and visitors to their home.¹⁰⁰

As the influence of men in her company mounted, de Valois appeared to retreat. In late 1935 she hired Frederick Ashton to work full-time at the Vic-Wells as its resident choreographer, providing him with a consistent salary and what historian Beth Genné describes as a rare 'laboratory' of dancers on whom he could 'work out his ideas'.¹⁰¹ After beginning his ballet training in the early 1920s, Ashton studied with and choreographed for Marie Rambert. In 1928–9 he worked with Nijinska while performing for a Paris-based ballet company directed by Ida Rubinstein, a Russian dancer of enormous wealth. Back in London from 1929, he choreographed chic, witty ballets for the Ballet Club and the Camargo Society that invoked the fashionable world of the 'Bright Young People'. Like many dancers of the period, Ashton worked across genres to make ends meet, choreographing for and dancing in musical comedies, revues and operas.

Quickly becoming the most celebrated British choreographer of his generation, Ashton staged his first work for the Vic-Wells Ballet in 1932. After his 1935 appointment, he created numerous ballets for de Valois, many of which revealed a romantic, lyrical and classical sensibility. Dancers remarked on the differences between de Valois's and Ashton's choreographic methods: while de Valois was 'cold and reserved' in rehearsal, communicating her excruciatingly detailed, pre-planned choreography with a 'voice as sharp

⁹⁸ E. Battersby, "'Madwoman's' legacy', *Observer*, 15 Nov. 1987, p. 53.

⁹⁹ B. Boone, 'Triumphantly-British ballet comes of age', *Evening News*, 8 May 1950.

¹⁰⁰ Genné, 'Ninette de Valois'.

¹⁰¹ Genné, 'Ninette de Valois'.

as the snip of scissors', Ashton was playful, intuitive, 'exposed and tender'.¹⁰² With the self-effacement typical of her writings about her company, in 1942 de Valois claimed that Ashton's arrival at the Vic-Wells Ballet marked the moment when its 'independent development, choreographically ... really began'.¹⁰³ In *Invitation to the Ballet*, she implied that her decision to hire Ashton was guided by a desire for stylistic diversity and the need to detach the company's artistic identity from the work of a single choreographer (herself).¹⁰⁴ Here, again, she followed Diaghilev's model. De Valois continued to choreograph, but Ashton's appointment alleviated her workload. In bringing him in, she consciously passed over her female peers and the male presence in the Vic-Wells Ballet continued to grow.

By the end of the decade, de Valois's company was winning critical praise and inching closer to Britain's cultural establishment and the state. It began touring regionally, expanding its national presence. In 1936 Keynes arranged for the company to perform at the opening of his new Arts Theatre in Cambridge: the company subsequently enjoyed an ongoing relationship with this theatre. That same year, the Vic-Wells Ballet became the second British dance company to perform for the BBC's new television service. Until the service shut down in 1939 for the duration of the war, the company presented numerous ballets on BBC TV, many choreographed by Ashton.¹⁰⁵ In 1937, subsidized by the British Council, the Vic-Wells Ballet travelled to Paris to perform de Valois's *Checkmate* at the International Exposition. In 1939, it presented Sergeyev's staging of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Royal Opera House, a performance given in honour of French President Albert Lebrun's visit to London.

As men rose within de Valois's company, the director continued to enhance her stature as a singular figure in the British ballet world. Giving public lectures and publishing a growing list of books and articles, she established herself as an expert in the field. Her first book (*Invitation to the Ballet*) appeared in 1937: the text included reflections on her time with the Ballets Russes as well as incisive commentary on the economic position of ballet in Britain, its audiences and critics, dancers, training and history. It also precisely outlined the ideal structure of a repertory ballet company (copying the Vic-Wells model) and offered sharp assessments of international dancers and dance critics. In 1938, de Valois charted the history of her company in an extended introduction to a new, celebratory book, *The Vic-Wells Ballet:*

¹⁰² Farjeon, 'Choreographers', pp. 195, 198.

¹⁰³ De Valois, *Step by Step*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁴ De Valois, *Invitation to the Ballet*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁵ J. R. Davis, 'Ballet on British television, 1933–1939', *Dance Chronicle*, v (1981), 245–304.

Camera Studies. By 1939, Haskell had dubbed her ‘the outstanding figure in the world of ballet’.¹⁰⁶

De Valois’s career path and the trajectory of the Vic-Wells Ballet reveals how, by 1939, the status, nature and gendered make-up of ballet in Britain had shifted far from its late-Victorian iteration. With male artistic leaders and a strong classical repertoire, the Vic-Wells Ballet reached a near-national status, endorsed by British elites. The artistic experimentalism, hardship and open possibilities for female leadership that characterized de Valois’s experiences and the wider British ballet landscape between the First and Second World Wars gradually contracted as the Vic-Wells Ballet became a pre-eminent company, accumulating men, resources and prestige. With this transition from nascent institution to establishment came an apparent obligation to appeal to entrenched structures and tastes.

De Valois may have appeared to recede from centre stage as her company’s status rose.¹⁰⁷ Speaking about her choreography in 1939, Haskell maintained that ‘the success of her own works is not her main preoccupation’; other writers and colleagues noted that she gave herself ‘little credit’ when it came to her artistic achievements and enterprise.¹⁰⁸ The Vic-Wells dancer Margaret Dale, for instance, felt that de Valois ‘didn’t always safeguard her own reputation’: when selecting dancers for their new ballets, she always let Ashton take ‘the best’.¹⁰⁹ Fonteyn likewise commented that de Valois appeared ‘unable to comprehend ... her own greatness’.¹¹⁰ Certainly, after the Second World War, de Valois vocally championed women as ballet’s ‘housekeepers’ and ‘pioneer workers’, invoking a regressive argument which positioned men as the inevitable rightful directors, choreographers and teachers of the art, taking ownership of the form after women performed the early grunt work.¹¹¹ Celebrating this passing of the torch, de Valois downplayed the fact

¹⁰⁶ Haskell, ‘The birth of the English ballet’, p. 798. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ S. Crow and J. Jackson, ‘Crafting a collaboration of “talents”’, in *Ninette de Valois: Adventurous Traditionalist*, pp. 173–82.

¹⁰⁸ Haskell, ‘The birth of the English ballet’, p. 798; Neatby, *Ninette de Valois and the Vic-Wells Ballet*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ M. Dale, interview by D. Vaughan, 15 and 19 Jan. 1975, transcript, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, NY, *MGZMT 5-4II.

¹¹⁰ Fonteyn, *Margot Fonteyn*, p. 264.

¹¹¹ De Valois, *Step by Step*, p. 188; N. de Valois, ‘The English ballet’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, cv (1957), 962–73, at p. 963; N. de Valois, ‘Introduction’, in P. Brinson, *The Ballet in Britain: Eight Oxford Lectures* (London, 1962), p. 2.; N. de Valois, ‘English male dancing’, *Ballet Annual*, xi (1957), 95–7.

that her own professional success and that of her company rested heavily on the support of her mother, Lopokova, Nijinska, Baylis and numerous women dancers.

Other cultural organizations which emerged in interwar Britain and were heavily staffed by women seem to have followed a similar trajectory. For instance, in the case of the feminist magazine *Time and Tide*, an influx of male contributors to the publication by the late 1930s was part of a concerted strategy by its female leaders to boost their magazine's circulation and cultural reach.¹¹² As suggested by her celebration of men gaining control of British ballet, de Valois actively promoted male artists to validate and achieve her greater goals for her company and the art in Britain.

Still, de Valois's apparent self-sacrifice was highly strategic. Norman Marshall recalled how, 'devoid of any desire for personal glory', de Valois would occasionally appear in front of the curtain at Sadler's Wells to take a bow after one of her ballet premieres: 'no speech, no showmanship'. She seemed, 'superficially, just an ordinary young woman in a very plain evening dress, obviously tired and over-worked'. But, Marshall noted, all this was 'according to plan – Ninette de Valois's plan', devised like 'the advance of a good general'.¹¹³ Indeed, the Vic-Wells dancer Annabel Farjeon posited that de Valois's inscrutable, 'secretive nature' was actually a concerted part of her mission to 'separat[e] directors from [the] work force'. According to Farjeon, de Valois 'needed solitary power, for her own satisfaction and for the management of the company'.¹¹⁴

After the Second World War, when her company became a state-subsidized organization and relocated to the Royal Opera House, de Valois virtually ceased to choreograph.¹¹⁵ Finally, in 1963 she gave up her post as artistic director of the Royal Ballet (as her company was renamed in 1956) in favour of Ashton. Yet she remained supreme. From 1945, numerous budding British dance companies and arts institutions solicited her advice. She continued managing her ballet school, moulding dancers and choreographers who fed into the Royal Ballet and dispersed to work elsewhere in Britain and abroad. She presided over the ousting of Ashton in 1970 and the anointing and eventual resignation of his successor, the choreographer Kenneth

¹¹² C. Clay, *Time and Tide: the Feminist and Cultural Politics of a Modern Magazine* (Edinburgh, 2018).

¹¹³ Marshall, *The Other Theatre*, pp. 143, 156.

¹¹⁴ Farjeon, 'Choreographers', p. 196.

¹¹⁵ On historic exclusions of women choreographers from elite ballet institutions see L. Garafola, 'Where are ballet's women choreographers?' in Garafola, *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance*, pp. 215–28.

MacMillan, as the Royal Ballet's director.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, she developed an army of female ballet teachers and administrators whom she dispatched to shape major ballet institutions abroad: they included Celia Franca at the National Ballet of Canada, Peggy van Praagh at the Australian Ballet and Joy Newton, Beatrice Appleyard and Ailne Phillips at the Turkish State Ballet.

Sometimes, de Valois's belief in her own personal influence betrayed itself. In 1963, for instance, she wrote: 'I wanted a tradition and I set out to establish one.'¹¹⁷ She succeeded in her goal: ballet had been transformed from a pleasure-seeking late-nineteenth-century entertainment into an elite, national and male-influenced high art in mid-twentieth-century Britain, and de Valois remained at the centre of it all.

¹¹⁶ See J. Kavanagh, *Secret Muses: the Life of Frederick Ashton* (New York, 1996), pp. 473–6; J. Parry, *Different Drummer: the Life of Kenneth MacMillan* (London, 2009), pp. 467–8, 470.

¹¹⁷ De Valois, *Step by Step*, p. 189.

9. Archives, autobiography and the professional woman: the personal papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton*

Heidi Egginton

Journalist, translator, novelist, biographer, editor, politician, broadcaster, lecturer, careers adviser, expert on public opinion and social reform: in Mary Agnes Hamilton's final analysis, her 'distressingly diversified' career had been that of a 'Jack of all trades and master of none, perfectly exemplified'.¹ 'She is a working brain worker', Virginia Woolf concluded after one of their first meetings, a summer weekend spent in the company of other pacifist intellectuals at Garsington Manor, Oxfordshire, in the final months of the First World War: 'Hasn't a penny of her own; & has the anxious hard working brain of a professional, earning her living all the time.'² Born in 1882 to Scottish parents, Mary Agnes, known as 'Molly', and her five siblings grew up amid the academic surroundings of the universities of Manchester, Aberdeen and Glasgow, where her father, Robert Adamson, was a distinguished philosopher. Her mother, Margaret, a botanist and teacher, had been among the earliest women to study at Cambridge, and Molly followed her to Newnham College in 1901 to read classics, then economic history.³ A short and unhappy spell in university teaching after graduation resulted in a short and unhappy marriage to an economist colleague who later became a barrister, Charles Joseph Hamilton; she petitioned for divorce in 1914. She retained her married name for the rest of her life, during which she moved in and out of the professional worlds of journalism, politics, literature and the civil service.

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¹ M. A. Hamilton, *Up-hill All the Way: a Third Cheer for Democracy* (London, 1953), pp. 9–10.

² V. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: 1915–1919*, 3 vols (London, 1977), i, p. 174.

³ M. A. Hamilton, *Remembering My Good Friends* (London, 1944), p. 40.

H. Egginton, 'Archives, autobiography and the professional woman: the personal papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton' in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 233–262. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

The making of Molly Hamilton's career provides a useful optic on the complicated path through professional society taken by the daughters of 'New Women' Oxbridge graduates, for whom expertise and achievement were rarely rewarded by a linear series of progressive promotions in a clearly defined field or specialism, but were instead forged out of a sequence of adjustments and compromises between the demands of paid work and private life.⁴ The institutional roles for which Hamilton became best known during her lifetime – as Labour MP and as League of Nations delegate in Ramsay MacDonald's second minority government in 1929–31, and as BBC governor in 1932–6 – she would describe in retrospect as having been characterized by the 'precarious' atmosphere of the tumultuous years in domestic and international politics leading up to the Second World War.⁵ It was her precarious career as a writer that supported and defined her position as a public servant, providing her with the means to make a lasting personal contribution towards what she saw as the defining issue of her time: British democracy. In this endeavour, Hamilton was just one representative of a large and varied cohort of relatively privileged but rarely fully recognized women who found that alternative 'professional settings and audiences' outside of established professional organizations and networks enabled them to pursue theoretical work on the relationship between individuals, the state and civil society during the mid twentieth century.⁶ A more comprehensive biographical study would trace the threads of Hamilton's thought and influence across the pages of her novels, newspaper and journal articles, wireless broadcasts, and the reports and papers of the vast array of different government and voluntary committees on which she served. Outside of her salaried roles, her published work ranged widely across political journalism, fiction, literary criticism, history and biography. This chapter focuses on just one, but perhaps the central, component of Hamilton's intellectual contribution towards what she called 'the argument for democracy': her autobiographical writing, which reflected on the position and significance of the professional woman in modern British society and culture.⁷

In so doing, this chapter draws on a small archive of Hamilton's personal papers which her family donated to the Churchill Archives Centre in

⁴ G. Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 2015).

⁵ Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 287–8.

⁶ V. Huber, T. Pietsch and K. Rietzler, 'Women's international thought and the new professions, 1900–1940', *Modern Intellectual History*, xviii (2021), 121–45.

⁷ Hamilton, *Up-hill*, p. 7.

2018.⁸ After Hamilton left the House of Commons in 1931, she remained a perceptive political commentator and her two memoirs, which she devoted principally to a series of pen portraits of her colleagues, are often found among the footnotes to biographies and histories of the interwar period. Catherine Clay, meanwhile, has located Hamilton within a group of middle-class metropolitan women novelists who found their professional work ‘advanced and enlivened’ by the capacious forms of friendship (as well as rivalries and love affairs) generated by writing in this period.⁹ Hamilton’s personal papers contain a series of her wartime diaries, dating from the years when she was compiling her first memoir, *Remembering My Good Friends* (1944), which highlight in much greater relief than has hitherto been possible the professional collaborations, successes and disappointments of the last phase of her career as a writer and temporary civil servant in the Ministry of Information (MOI) and the Reconstruction Secretariat. Her diaries also demonstrate how the task of supporting women’s entry into professional employment and politics, to which Hamilton and many other middle-class organizers and intellectuals had turned their attention during the 1920s and 1930s, developed after the outbreak of the Second World War. Read together with her published works of autobiography (though this was a term Hamilton herself rejected, and her rejection of it became key to her sense of herself as a professional), her diaries show how the material practices of life-writing and record-keeping can evolve in later life.¹⁰ As unpublished documents, they illuminate questions about the gendered forms of cultural production available to women who devoted themselves to public service, and about the way the politics of collecting and cataloguing that evidence ultimately condition how women’s professional work is remembered.

This chapter looks firstly at Hamilton’s particular approach to composing her diaries and first memoir in the context of a blossoming culture of life-writing during the 1930s and early 1940s. It then goes on to consider how the practice of committing her personal ‘reminiscences’ to paper in wartime influenced how she navigated the male-dominated worlds of professional

⁸ Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge (hereafter CAC), papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton (hereafter HMTN). All dates refer to diary entries unless otherwise specified. On the appraisal and cataloguing of this collection see H. Egginton, ‘A collection of her own: the diaries of Mary Agnes Hamilton’, *Churchill Archives Centre News*, 13 Apr. 2018 <<https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/news/2018/apr/13/collection-her-own-diaries-mary-agnes-hamilton/>> [accessed 18 Nov. 2019].

⁹ C. Clay, *British Women Writers, 1914–1945: Professional Work and Friendship* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 2–3, 13–14.

¹⁰ On the relationship between growing old, memory and autobiography see C. Greenhalgh, *Aging in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oakland, Calif., 2018), pp. 133–55.

recruitment, parliamentary politics and post-war reconstruction, and in turn how her experiences of work conditioned the ways she thought about women's role in democratic society. As an enquiry into the relationship between archives and autobiography, this is a study of a thoroughly modern woman who – as the biographer Lisa Cohen has shown was the tendency of women who worked 'precariously at the edges' of their professions in this period – both 'memorialised herself and colluded in her own invisibility'.¹¹

'The rickety frame work of a war-time diary'

The earliest surviving personal diary in Hamilton's archive opens with entries written aboard an ocean liner in January 1938, at which point she was embarking on a lecture tour in the United States, and covers the period until the final entry, written on V-J Day in August 1945. There are hints that maintaining a descriptive journal as a means to organize her thoughts and record memories both of her personal experiences and of world events was not a new exercise, but she was evidently prompted to continue this set of diaries as a serious writing project by the rising international tensions in Europe and the outbreak of war. By 25 August 1939, the day on which she declared she had sent a completed manuscript of her latest novel to her publisher, Jonathan Cape (not before painting 'windows and lampshades'), she had '[d]etermined to keep [*sic*] proper diary'.¹² She thus began what she later came to call her 'war diary' in a cloth-covered notebook purchased in Rouen, which she had visited in the summer of 1939 with two of her sisters and one of her closest college friends and neighbours, Dorothy Shuckburgh.¹³ Hamilton continued to document her work, conversations and her daily life in her Chelsea flat and offices in central London in a series of ring-bound pocket notebooks, the first of which she labelled 'War (2)', indicating that she meant to continue until the conflict had reached its denouement (Figure 9.1). The diaries contained notes and ideas for her first memoir, but Hamilton also came to see the act of composing a diary as an important part of her contribution to the war effort in its own right.

In the growing body of scholarship on selfhood and subjectivities in twentieth-century Britain, the rituals of self-conscious diary-keeping during the Second World War have loomed large in historians' studies of the ways in which writers and other articulate individuals 'used available cultural

¹¹ L. Cohen, *All We Know: Three Lives* (New York, 2013), p. 5.

¹² HMTN 1/2, 25 Aug. 1939.

¹³ See stationer's sticker in inside front cover of HMTN 1/3.

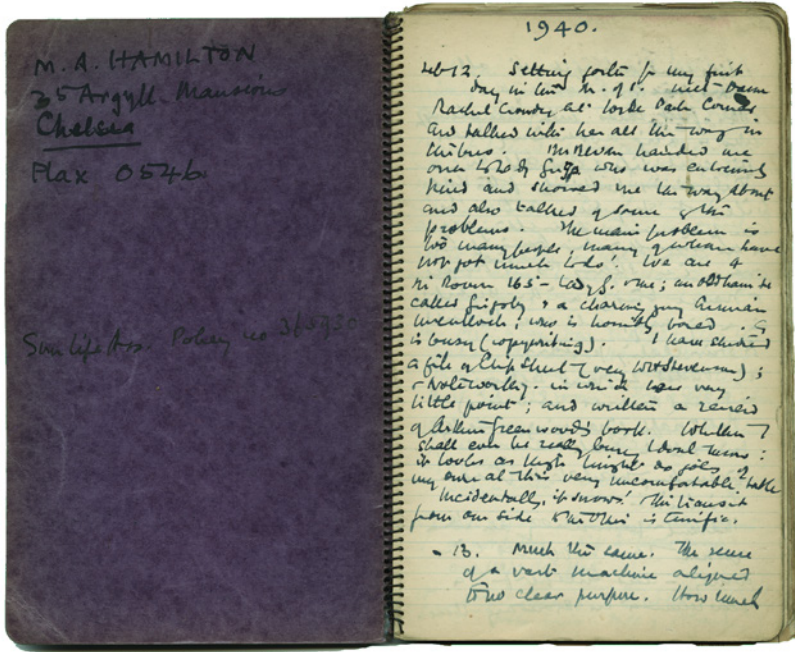


Figure 9.1. First page of Mary Agnes Hamilton's diary entitled 'War (2)', 12–13 Feb. 1940. Papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton, HMTN 1/4, Churchill Archives Centre.

resources to weave meaningful narratives of their personal identities'.¹⁴ Joe Moran has identified the mid twentieth century as a moment when the routine habit of maintaining a diary using inexpensive personal stationery as a receptacle for social engagements, reminiscences and other 'notes to self' gained a specific cultural purchase, including through the 'anthropology of ourselves' assembled from the testimonies of anonymous diarists by Mass Observation.¹⁵ From the 1930s, as Deborah Cohen, Matt Houlbrook and others have shown, the rise of popular cultures of confession together with

¹⁴ J. Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford, 2010), p. 4.

¹⁵ J. Moran, 'Private lives, public histories: the diary in twentieth-century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, liv (2015), 138–62. For the diaries of women writers and Mass Observers see D. Sheridan, 'Writing to the archive: Mass-Observation as autobiography', *Sociology*, xxvii (1993), 27–40; M. Jolly, 'Historical entries: Mass-Observation diarists 1937–2001', *New Formations*, xlv (2001), 110–25; A. Bell, *London was Ours: Diaries and Memories of the London Blitz* (London, 2011); N. Hubble, 'Documenting lives: Mass Observation, women's diaries, and everyday modernity', in *A History of English Autobiography*, ed. A. Smyth (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 345–58.

a new emphasis on privacy and the growing interest in measuring and responding to 'public opinion' had seen the private diary cross-pollinate with other works of 'life-writing' intended for popular consumption, so that interiorized reflections on public affairs often came to share stylistic elements with published works of middlebrow fiction, human interest journalism and biography.¹⁶ It was the combination of these trends with the unprecedented disruption to civilians' everyday lives during the war that enabled the 'intimate histories' contained in war diaries to be seen as significant 'repositories of collective memory'.¹⁷ Even if a war diary had been written for its author's eyes only, it still had the potential to become a space for both 'off-duty' rehearsal and the performance of one's public role during a heightened period of global peril.¹⁸

Scholars of the huge variety of life-writing generated in, and about, war have profitably studied texts such as the private diary through the lens of 'composure'.¹⁹ This has revealed, on the one hand, the traces of mainstream cultural narratives within personal testimonies of the Second World War and the way those traces interacted with the imprint of gender and other factors, including class, region and age, to produce individual subjectivities.²⁰ On the other, it has uncovered the ways in which war diarists' unconscious responses to large-scale historical forces as well as the mysteries of the human heart could be registered on a minute scale in the emotional texture of their writing.²¹ Hamilton's personal papers highlight how the social act of composing one's self can also usefully be explored in its creative and material senses, that is, as 'composition'. The practice of putting her everyday life, reading and conversations down on paper in the diaries she carried with her

¹⁶ D. Cohen, *Family Secrets: Living with Shame from the Victorians to the Present Day* (London, 2013), pp. 181–211; M. Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: the Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Chicago, 2016), pp. 123–6; V. Stewart, 'Writing and reading diaries in mid-twentieth-century Britain', *Literature & History*, xxvii (2018), 46–61.

¹⁷ J. Moran, 'Private lives, public histories', pp. 138–9.

¹⁸ Jolly, 'Historical entries', pp. 114–15; Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, pp. 5–6; Bell, *London was Ours*, p. 8.

¹⁹ G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Abingdon, 1994), pp. 22–3.

²⁰ P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998); 'Culture and composure: creating narratives of the gendered self in oral history interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, i (2004), 65–93.

²¹ M. Francis, 'Wounded pride and petty jealousies: private lives and public diplomacy in Second World War Cairo', in *Total War: an Emotional History*, ed. C. Langhamer, L. Noakes and C. Siebrecht (Oxford, 2020), pp. 98–115.

as she moved between home and work in a city at war – ‘it is actually one of the few things one can do in an air raid’, she reminded herself in October 1940, as a spur to begin writing in a new notebook – would exert its own influence on the direction of her career.²² Faced with war work in which the full range of her talents went underused, her diaries became a space in which she not only recorded the extraordinary events and the mundanities of civilian life in wartime and reckoned with the emotional trauma of the conflict, but also decided which of her memories she would weave into her memoirs. The history of her surviving personal papers after her death in 1966, moreover, would continue to shape the way she is remembered as a professional in connection with her friends and colleagues. Historians tend to ‘look through’ material practices of composure like writing and archival collecting, but these practices underpin the creation of personal testimonies and their relationship to subjectivity.²³

If the discipline of daily diary-writing had become widespread during the early twentieth century, it was a material form of expression particularly suited to Hamilton’s life as a temporary civil servant. Living mostly in her own flat on her own means, her home, books and papers would not be destroyed in the bombing, as her fellow author Rose Macaulay’s were in 1941.²⁴ Her diaries record in detail the physical and emotional toll of ‘total war’, but they also suggest that she was able to indulge in some luxuries and hobbies – staying with friends outside London, building furniture, shopping for clothes or making an evening dress out of black-out fabric – as a coping mechanism and a creative interlude from her writing.²⁵ Nor did Hamilton’s wartime service, which combined work on propaganda and reconstruction with voluntary roles for several women’s and social welfare organizations, preclude her from spending time on her own intellectual pursuits. This was despite the fact that diary-keeping and other forms of

²² HMTN 1/5, ‘October 1940’, written c.4–18 Oct. 1940.

²³ The awareness, or lack thereof, of writing as material practice has its own history: see B. Jardine, ‘State of the field: paper tools’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, lxiv (2017), 53–63, at p. 57. On archivists’ approach to personal papers see C. Hobbs, ‘The character of personal archives: reflections on the value of records of individuals’, *Archivaria*, lii (2001), 126–35; G. Yeo, ‘Custodial history, provenance, and the description of personal records’, *Libraries & the Cultural Record*, xlv (2009), 50–64; *The Intimate Archive: Journeys through Private Papers*, ed. M. Dever, A. Vickery and S. Newman (Canberra, 2009).

²⁴ Hamilton felt the loss of her friend’s unpublished manuscript material particularly keenly; see HMTN 1/7, diary entry for 29 July 1941.

²⁵ She also connected shopping for small luxuries with her writing life; one diary entry for the summer of 1940 simply reads: ‘Lacking inspiration – haircut!’ HMTN 1/4, 20 Aug. 1940.

private communication became a security concern in the later years of the war; indeed, Hamilton's own diary covering the period between November 1942 and March 1943 was confiscated for 'careful reading by Censor' at customs upon her return from the US, where she had been sent as a speaker to promote the Beveridge Report.²⁶ A public figure whose frequent travels abroad during the 1930s had often combined the professional with the personal, attending to the physical matter of her diary, memoirs and 'papers', along with her clothing and furnishing, was a crucial part of the way she adjusted to the shock of having to prepare for what seemed certain to be an unwelcome form of displacement at the end of August 1939:

Meantime I move almost restlessly: packing up fur coat and sending it off: removing carpet, tearing up papers and generally putting things in order as if for a long journey. Eliz. [Hamilton's housekeeper] is magnificently calm, and goes on with her work as if nothing were happening. That is the general note; it is noticeable that no one in a shop or bus says anything about the crisis and looks at you with mild surprise if you do, as if it were bad form. ~~Talked to~~ [illegible] Finally began my 'Remembering My Good Friends' since one must do something.²⁷

Two days later, she was moved to continue working on her personal papers by a similar sense of unease at the speed with which events were progressing, noting 'we are being told little while efforts go on. Nasty rumour that R[ussian] troops are massing on Polish frontier ... Sandbags assembling in great masses everywhere ... The very busy are enviable at the moment.' In the midst of this unsettling atmosphere, she declared again: 'I am trying to write reminiscences, not, if I can help it, of myself, but of my friends.'²⁸

The memoirs that resulted from Hamilton's aversion to writing 'of herself' during the war used her own educational milieu, campaigning work, writing career and institutional roles as windows on to the working lives of what she called the 'contacts' and 'associations' she had made in different professional settings. This form owed much to the encounters with people recorded in her personal papers. Reviewing *Remembering My Good Friends* for the *Spectator*, her former BBC colleague Janet Adam Smith noticed the imprint of Hamilton's 'diary' in her 'verbless telegraphese' and 'sprawling'

²⁶ J. Fox, 'Careless talk: tensions within British domestic propaganda during the Second World War', *Journal of British Studies*, li (2012), 936–66, at p. 963. See HMTN 1/10, 28 Mar. 1943. On Hamilton's role in promoting the Beveridge Report and fostering Anglo-American relations during the war see R. Calder, *Beware the British Serpent: the Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the United States* (Montreal, 2004), pp. 86–7.

²⁷ HMTN 1/3, 29 Aug. 1939.

²⁸ HMTN 1/3, 31 Aug. 1939.

sentences.²⁹ Hamilton admitted the book was ‘disjointed and imperfect’, stressing that “‘national service’ has taken most of the hours of the day and filled most of its thoughts’. Although she omitted much of her war service from this memoir, it was inevitably marked by her own paid work on propaganda and morale for the MOI. Hamilton could draw on familiar cultural tropes of resilience when she declared that no one single ‘personal life’ mattered more than ‘human courage, endurance and faith’, than ‘what we have gone through together in our minds’.³⁰ Yet her diary shows that she chose to pursue life-writing partly as an antidote to war work, which by the autumn of 1940 she found she was already becoming resigned to finding ‘dull, monotonous’ and devoid of ‘creativity’. ‘Perhaps through this process of accommodation one may reach a stage when something rather more constructive becomes possible’, she reasoned, ‘even if it goes no further than the fitting in of back reminiscences into the rickety frame work of a war-time diary.’³¹ Though the diary may have been an inelegant technology of the self, it was the form that gave her the chance not to dwell on ‘the shrinkage of life’ under the Blitz but on ‘some of the good elements that can’t be taken’, including art, literature and her social connections.³²

As an early woman parliamentarian and professional, Hamilton was by no means unusual in devoting an ostensibly personal account of her own career to what one reviewer deemed to be a mere ‘album of portraits’ of her predecessors and contemporaries.³³ Her second memoir and last book-length work of non-fiction, *Up-hill All the Way* (1953), would expand on her wartime approach to situate the life histories of members of her wide circle of ‘friends’ within the context of civil society as a whole, as her argument for democracy. Reviewing it for *Truth* in 1954, the young critic Bernard Levin surmised that Hamilton had eschewed ‘the fashionable, introspective autobiography’ and called the life that emerged from the book ‘shadowy’, ‘placid’, ‘homely’ and ‘meek’.³⁴ Krista Cowman has pointed out that the memoirs of the first women Labour MPs deliberately did not take on the form of conventionally masculine works of individualistic autobiography, but nor did they emulate the domestic narratives of struggle published by earlier socialist women campaigners; instead, as women who had assumed positions of power within a male-dominated field, they looked outwards

²⁹ J. Adam Smith, ‘Mrs Hamilton’s reminiscences’, *Spectator*, 22 Dec. 1944, p. 18.

³⁰ Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 306–8.

³¹ HMTN 1/5, 19 Nov. 1940.

³² HMTN 1/5, 26 Oct. 1940.

³³ ‘Portrait gallery’, *Scotsman*, 18 Jan. 1945, p. 7.

³⁴ B. Levin, ‘A democrat’s democrat’, *Truth*, 19 Mar. 1954, p. 374.

to focus on the complexities of their relationship to their peers and to the public.³⁵ When Hamilton put pen to paper to write her own memoirs in August 1939, she had already established a reputation as a biographer of women and men in the labour movement.³⁶ In the mid-1930s, she had also written an experimental ‘informal biography’ of Newnham and its notable personalities, beginning with a chapter listing her cohort’s professional achievements.³⁷ The ‘friendship album’ she would publish in 1944 was thus not a retreat from the traumas and trivialities of her everyday life to the feminine worlds of conversation and companionship.³⁸ It was a confrontation with her own past and an extension of her practice as an author.

In devoting her most autobiographical writing in her later life to a series of biographical portraits of her friends and colleagues, then, Hamilton was not erasing her own personal contributions to British public life or to the war effort but amplifying them. She envied her sister Margot’s collection of war poems, written while an Air Raid Precautions warden in Welwyn during the Blitz under the working title ‘Civilian Duty’, and evidently saw her reminiscences as part of the same national project: ‘a much worthier fulfilment of that title than my diary could possibly be’.³⁹ Although she seems not to have consciously emulated the long-form ethnographic and self-examining techniques of the Mass Observers, her own war diaries and memoirs (she reminded herself in her notebook after a month of ‘slow progress’ on her other writing in January 1942) were ‘planned as a contribution to democracy – to that faith in which is so wonky’.⁴⁰ In June

³⁵ K. Cowman, ‘The political autobiographies of early women MPs, c.1918–1964’, in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, ed. J. V. Gottlieb and R. Toye (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 203–23.

³⁶ M. A. Hamilton, *The Man of To-morrow: J. Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1923); *Margaret Bondfield* (London, 1924); *Mary Macarthur: a Biographical Sketch* (London, 1925); *Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1926); *Sidney and Beatrice Webb: a Study in Contemporary Biography* (London, 1933); *John Stuart Mill* (London, 1933); *Arthur Henderson: a Biography* (London, 1938). Hamilton initially published her biographies of Ramsay MacDonald and Margaret Bondfield under a pseudonym, ‘Iconoclast’, but had abandoned this identity as early as 1924. Her name was widely mentioned in connection with these two biographies in reviews thereafter; see ‘From shop counter to front bench: the life story of Margaret Bondfield’, *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*, 22 Nov. 1924, p. 3; ‘Portrait of a feminine British Labor leader’, *New York Times*, 18 Apr. 1926, p. 11.

³⁷ M. A. Hamilton, *Newnham: an Informal Biography* (London, 1936).

³⁸ Cf. J. Marcus, ‘Invincible mediocrity: the private selves of public women’, in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings*, ed. S. Benstock (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), pp. 114–46.

³⁹ HMTN 1/7, 24 May 1941.

⁴⁰ HMTN 1/8, 25 Jan. 1942.

1941, when the looming threat of invasion and what she described bitterly as a 'cigarette famine' had cast a long shadow over her work, this 'faith' had become central to her writing.

Meditating in bed I ask myself how it is that I 'realise' this war less than in 1914. Is it that age blunts one? I think not: I think it is that one dreads the overwhelming effect of the sense of cruelty and pain existing wherever G[ermany] is on top: that it is literally too bad to bear ... Last time one knew the end was certain ... Then, one could afford to take in and dwell on the horror: now, one must keep the mind fixed on the point of faith. The extraction of and dwelling on evil in the clever modern novel is doing the Nazi work.

The 'completely muddled' manuscript of a new novel she had sent off to her own publisher on the eve of the war no longer seemed to adequately counter this evil: the only 'scheme' that could, she concluded, would be 'the concealed autobiography'.⁴¹ Part of what would result from this project of writing her memoirs through the lives of her contemporaries was the confirmation of her belief in a generalized 'spirit of God' binding humans together, which provided the foundation for both her socialist politics and her conviction in the special part which artists had to play in society. But her first memoir was also to reaffirm her belief in the importance of her role as a woman who had, through 'luck', been able to occupy several different positions in the professional world: 'my dispersed form of work meant wide and various contacts' with those 'in whom the good is more significant and operative than the bad'.⁴²

Though it may have been unfashionable, Hamilton's distinctive approach to life-writing illustrates how the entwined cultures of privacy and confession expressed in the composition of personal testimonies before the war could inform the rising cultural purchase of 'ordinariness' in its aftermath.⁴³ The quietly radical contribution Hamilton made through her 'concealed autobiography' was to uphold the importance, and indeed the ordinariness, of the creative role of the professional woman in democratic society. By the time she published her second memoir, aged seventy-one, she could describe herself as 'a specimen of the ordinary' precisely because of her 'incoherent and "bitty"' career, and her share of 'illness', 'distress' and 'unemployment': 'This very scattered and miscellaneous experience does mean that I have known a very wide range of the people, and a large number

⁴¹ HMTN 1/7, 1 June 1941.

⁴² Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 309–11.

⁴³ C. Langhamer, "'Who the hell are ordinary people?'" Ordinariness as a category of historical analysis', *Transactions of the RHS*, xxviii (2018), 175–95.

of the institutions, on which democracy depends.’ Her ‘claim’ to expertise as a writer on democracy in touch with the ‘normal man’, she declared, was not that her career had been out of the ordinary, but that she wanted ‘for others what I want for myself’.⁴⁴ The complex task of negotiating her own path through professional society while attending to the issues of less fortunate women’s professional employment had occupied her throughout the 1930s, and was how she strove to participate in the war effort before obtaining an official position at the MOI in February 1940.

‘A little army of highly-paid women’

Women’s work was a central concern of Hamilton’s war diary: her most lyrical and descriptive passages are reserved for the weather, musings on the drama of war, personal relationships – and other people’s employment. Even before she assumed her role as a careers adviser, she appeared to have an instinctive interest in who was working where and who they were working with, what the conditions were like for women, how much autonomy or ‘scope’ they had in their work, what they wore and how much they earned. ‘Odd to me that life should require “professional women,” an irritated Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary soon after meeting Hamilton at an earlier point in both their publishing careers, when the two writers were in their mid-thirties.⁴⁵ By the spring of 1919, Woolf had identified Hamilton as the type of woman who already seemed to be at ease charting a course through the new professional society. At gatherings with mutual friends she noticed Hamilton’s tendency to catalogue the careers of those around her, and the way she defined her own ‘professional’ identity through her papers:

Mrs. Hamilton made me feel a little professional, for she had her table strewn with manuscripts, a book open on the desk, & she began by asking me about my novel; & then we talked about reviewing, & I was interested to hear who had reviewed *Martin Schüller*, & was a little ashamed of being interested.

In Woolf’s eyes, Hamilton had the persona of a Victorian lady journalist, with female friendships based only on an economy of sharing ‘bits of literary gossip’.⁴⁶ But Hamilton’s interest in the social reality which lay behind women’s professional opportunities would become central to her thinking on the progress of British democracy, and it is worth exploring the ways these conversations figured in the composition of her diary and her published writing during the war in more depth.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, *Up-hill*, pp. 9–12.

⁴⁵ V. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, vol. ii: 1920–1924* (London, 1980), p. 35.

⁴⁶ Woolf, *Diary, vol. i: 1915–1919*, (Harmondsworth, 1979), pp. 254–5.

The monitoring of women's progress in the professions was an important aspect of the movement towards economic equality after the extension of the franchise. During the 1930s, Hamilton had acted as an 'Expert Adviser' to the Cambridge University Women's Appointments Board (CUWAB) and the Women's Employment Federation (WEF), two of a number of mid-twentieth-century organizations dedicated to smoothing women's path into professional employment and winning the arguments for their access to higher grades and salaries. The WEF, Hamilton explained in her last and most fulsome pen portrait in *Remembering My Good Friends*, of its indomitable founder and her close friend, Ray Strachey, acted as an exclusive 'clearing-house of knowledge, experience and contacts'.⁴⁷ Both the WEF and the CUWAB (of which Strachey was chairman from its establishment in 1930) looked beyond conventional fields in which women had already gained stable footholds and instead interested themselves in a wide range of professions, including the civil service 'at home and abroad', law, journalism, industry and commerce, research, advertising and public relations, librarianship and architecture.⁴⁸ They focused on manoeuvring women into posts offering salaries above £300 a year with potential for 'progressive' promotion – deliberately helping them to avoid 'Casual and blind alley work'.⁴⁹ The WEF survived on grants from the Carnegie Trust, but after September 1939 it came into conflict over civilian employment with the Ministry of Labour, which also maintained a women's register.⁵⁰

Along with the novelty of the blackouts, and an all-pervading sense of fear providing an eerie contrast with a spell of 'glorious' weather in London, Hamilton experienced the first days of war in terms of the loss of paid work for women. She joined Ray Strachey at the WEF's sun-warmed premises at Bedford College in Regent's Park in early September 1939 to interview professionals seeking war work, partly as a way of avoiding the silent horror of 'solitary thought', and found herself confronted with a situation of a different magnitude to the caseload she would have had during the 1930s.

⁴⁷ Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 263–78. On the WEF see also B. Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury: a Biography of the Strachey Family* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 318–19; H. Smith, 'British feminism in the Second World War', in *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain*, ed. S. R. Grayzel and P. Levine (London, 2009), pp. 94–5; J. Holmes, *A Working Woman: the Remarkable Life of Ray Strachey* (Kibworth Beauchamp, 2019), pp. 294–6, 306–10.

⁴⁸ Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL), archives of the Cambridge University Women's Appointments Board, APTB A/4/1, draft CUWAB prospectus for 'Old Students', Feb. 1931.

⁴⁹ CUL, APTB A/4/1, CUWAB minutes, 31 Oct. 1936.

⁵⁰ HMTN 1/1, 27 Nov. and 5 Dec. 1938.

Already unemployment falls – masses of people. Businesses and shops closing – from Eliz. Arden type to ordinary commercial. We saw rows of highly effective women asking for £250 up who don't know what to do next. There is no early prospect of government employment. It is of course the same with men, and also of course is an 'early phase' phenomenon – but it is pretty grim at the moment.

She sensed the same urgent need for occupation among her interviewees, some of whom even longed for an 'ignoble peace'. By contrast, meeting women like Mary Glasgow, who had already been transferred from her work as a school inspector 'to Intelligence (Balkans)' and was 'too well pleased with herself', brought back difficult memories; a few days later, after hearing similar accounts from other women friends, Hamilton noted with regret that 'those happy war workers are with us again'. But her interviewing throughout the autumn of 1939 was cheering, giving her a 'remarkable picture of the work women were doing – and all over the world'.⁵¹

Ensuring that women could access the same professional opportunities as men played a central role in Hamilton's thinking on democracy, but she was clear-sighted about the prejudices which limited or expanded the vast majority of women's working lives.⁵² She and Strachey hoped that the WEF could be brought under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour in order to establish a 'new and hon. professional exchange for men and women', with Ray installed as head of the women's section.⁵³ This enterprise would have been the culmination of a long project for both women. After leaving Newnham with the equivalent of a first-class honours degree, Hamilton had her professional ambitions checked by the old-fashioned Central Bureau for the Employment of Women; Strachey would later clash with the bureau in setting up the WEF during the 1930s. Hamilton's only options, she had been told in 1904, were secretarial work or teaching, and she duly took the latter.⁵⁴ This left her convinced, she admitted in her first memoir, that 'typing, for the university-trained woman, is an accomplishment to be concealed; once admit to it, and you are graded in a class from which it is hard to escape'.⁵⁵ Hamilton's pragmatic, equal-rights-based feminism was rooted in her socialism: she claimed to identify with all those who were 'in the common boat' with no 'unearned resources'.⁵⁶ Her autobiographical writings also highlighted the significance of women's *unemployment*, a difficult subject

⁵¹ HMTN 1/3, 7, 8, 9, 14 Sept. and 4 Oct. 1939.

⁵² Hamilton, *Up-hill*, pp. 82–3.

⁵³ HMTN 1/3, 8 Dec. 1939.

⁵⁴ Hamilton, *Up-hill*, pp. 25–6.

⁵⁵ Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 274–5.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 144.

during the 1930s, when raising the goal of securing women's right to employment at all grades was often interpreted as a threat to men's work and wages.⁵⁷ Hamilton herself had already established a public reputation as a high earner, being one of only three women to enter the BBC at over £500 a year before 1939.⁵⁸ Press reports to which Strachey contributed comments on her work for the WEF had characterized Hamilton as a member of a 'little army of highly-paid women' who were earning *four-figure* salaries.⁵⁹ But this is likely to have been an exaggerated figure, masking the periods when she relied on income from publishing and speaking fees to fill in the gaps between her salaried employment; Hamilton's first salary cheque from the MOI in 1940, where she joined at £600 a year, was 'an agreeable thing since it is a long time since any have come in'.⁶⁰

Despite, or perhaps *because* of, the professional comradeship she could draw on as a Newnham graduate and her own periods of success, Hamilton was attuned to younger women's under-remunerated and unacknowledged service. She used her diaries to record the way their relations with male colleagues could serve to restrict women's access to outlets for their distinctive forms of expertise. The experience of her neighbour Dorothy Shuckburgh's niece at the War Office illustrated 'the eternal trouble of women kept down in junior posts, badly paid, yet doing resp[onsible] work'.⁶¹ Hamilton also noted reports of the Ministry of Labour 'treating women' badly, 'especially the highly qualified ones – if they get them in'.⁶² She was wryly amused to hear her friend Ruth Dalton had been 'accused of "taking too much upon herself" in her work'; Dalton, during a period of separation from her husband, was occupied as a liaison officer with women armaments factory workers in Manchester for the Ministry of Supply. 'She is inclined to be bossy', Hamilton admitted, 'but

⁵⁷ S. Alexander, 'Memory, generation, and history: two women's lives in the interwar years', in *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (London, 1995), pp. 231–42; K. Laybourn, "'Waking up to the fact that there are any unemployed": women, unemployment and the domestic solution in Britain, 1918–1939', *History*, lxxxviii (2003), 606–23.

⁵⁸ K. Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: a History of Early Women at the BBC* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 142–3. See, e.g., W. Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilization* (London, 1934), pp. 83–4.

⁵⁹ 'Britain's highly paid women', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 19 Nov. 1937, p. 4; 'Women who are envied by their friends', *Sunderland Echo*, 20 Nov. 1937, p. 2.

⁶⁰ HMTN 1/4, 1 Mar. 1940.

⁶¹ HMTN 1/6, 2 Apr. 1941.

⁶² HMTN 1/8, 12 Jan. 1942.

this sounds like the resentment of the inefficient against the efficient.⁶³ Underlying her dismay at women getting swept up in ‘intrigues’ at the BBC and inside the wartime ministries throughout the conflict was a conviction that women had as much right as men to autonomy and freedom of expression as professionals *outside* their institutional roles – especially as women’s paid positions tended to be unfulfilling. During the months when Hamilton was most deeply engaged with the WEF, she had helped place her friend Ilse Hellman, an Austrian Jewish refugee whom she had supported in obtaining exemption from internment in the autumn of 1939, as an assistant to the Strachey family. Hamilton soon came to regret this, since in looking after Ray’s grandchild the talented child psychoanalyst had ‘no time for her own work’.⁶⁴

If Hamilton was the consummate ‘professional woman’, as a professional writer she was aware that she occupied what Alison Light has called ‘that vast and ill-defined middle ground between the dedicated artist and the full-time journalist’.⁶⁵ This is in evidence in Woolf’s interwar diaries, where Hamilton is depicted as one of the ‘strugglers’, more concerned with money than with art.⁶⁶ For her part Hamilton tended to depict her own status as a ‘second-line’ artist as a strength, maintaining it could never dim her ‘determination to go on writing’.⁶⁷ Although she may have had a room of her own (during her years as a journalist and MP, Hamilton lived in a ‘tiny flat’ at the Adelphi, near Westminster), Woolf guessed that much of her writing was *not* carried out in reflective solitude: she ‘dashes it off, I imagine, on blocks of paper, on her knee, at the House of Commons perhaps; or in the Tube’.⁶⁸ After joining the *Review of Reviews* on £570 a year in December

⁶³ HMTN 1/9, 8 Mar. 1942. On Ruth Dalton’s war work see B. Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton* (London, 1995), pp. 380–82.

⁶⁴ HMTN 1/3, 2 Nov., 23 Nov. and 1 Dec. 1939. On Ilse Hellman see M. Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 68.

⁶⁵ A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991), pp. 132–3.

⁶⁶ Woolf, *Diary: 1920–1924*, ii, p. 167. See also E. T. Y. Chan, *Virginia Woolf and the Professions* (Cambridge, 2014). For a fuller excavation of Woolf and Hamilton’s relationship as novelists and the roles of art, money, and politics in their work, see C. Clay, “The novelist ... must write about politics”: Mary Agnes Hamilton and the politics of modern fiction’, *Women: a Cultural Review*, xxxi (2020), 366–83.

⁶⁷ M. A. Hamilton, ‘The will to write’, in *What is a Book: Thoughts about Writing* (London, 1936), pp. 79–93.

⁶⁸ V. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, vol. iii: 1925–1930* (London, 1981), p. 296. On Hamilton’s flat at the Adelphi see Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 92.

1920, Hamilton met Woolf, who wrote sardonically of her announcement: 'And her mother can live in London; & she's launched; poor Molly can do all this by chaining herself to the desk. There the desk was & books laid out as you see them in shops.'⁶⁹ Two years later, Woolf imagined this type of writing life merely gave Hamilton stale, solitary evenings of work and 'impersonal' relationships with her male editors and superiors.⁷⁰ Hamilton gave her 'friendship' with the Woolfs prominent positions in both her memoirs, but admitted she knew Virginia thought little of her work. If Woolf had felt she was always being studied by Hamilton for inclusion in one of her 'second-rate' novels, Hamilton wrote that her abiding memory of a weekend with Woolf in 1923 was of being 'on the dissecting table', and concluded: 'I was, for her, a specimen of that, to her, queer object – the normal human being.'⁷¹

It quickly became obvious after war had broken out that the professional dreams Hamilton had fulfilled in the 1920s and 1930s and wanted for her younger contemporaries would be dashed amid confused and contradictory propaganda messaging and the anxieties that continued to swirl around women's skilled employment.⁷² One of the last conversations with Strachey that Hamilton recorded in her diary took place on the eve of Ray's unsuccessful deputation with a group of women MPs to present the case for women professionals to the Treasury in February 1940. The two women, Hamilton wrote in her diary, had spoken of their hopes for the creation of a national minimum wage and family endowments, backed by the trade unions.⁷³ Strachey passed away suddenly after an operation a few months later and, in the absence of her friend's 'grand vitality', Hamilton, by then employed at the MOI, redirected her efforts as a writer towards the problem of women's work and the relationship between women's different social roles.⁷⁴ In December 1939 she had begun research and interviews with women trade union secretaries and organizers for a study published as *Women at Work* (1941), a 'tangled' mixture of history and polemic on the issue of trade unionism for 'women who work, whether in their homes or

⁶⁹ Woolf, *Diary: 1920–1924*, ii, p. 79.

⁷⁰ Woolf, *Diary: 1920–1924*, ii, p. 167.

⁷¹ Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 142–3.

⁷² S. Carruthers, "Manning the factories": propaganda and policy on the employment of women, 1939–1947', *History*, lxxv (1990), pp. 232–56; S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 107–50.

⁷³ HMTN 1/3, 9 Feb. 1940.

⁷⁴ HMTN 1/4, 16 July 1940.

outside them'.⁷⁵ It identified women's 'transience' in the formal workplace, as they moved between being single, being married and raising children, as the main obstacle to effective union organizing and the reason women were 'often not taken seriously as workers (least of all when promotion is in question)'. In an elegant response to the signs of the resurgence of traditional ideas about women's roles, Hamilton argued that women's increasing status and pay within professions such as entertainment and politics would help set the standards for greater freedom, respect and mutuality in other areas of life, including the home.⁷⁶ She continued to puzzle over the question of equality in these fields in her life-writing as the prospect of re-entering parliamentary politics came into view in the final years of the war.

Things that matter

'I am at a bad loose end,' Hamilton confided to her diary in January 1944: 'no work at office, none of my own on the stocks.' It was the act of '[l]ooking over [*sic*] old diary' which had given her 'intense dissatisfaction; and a recognition that I am quite considerably to blame'.⁷⁷ On the previous day she had read in a newspaper – 'no word from T[ransport] House', she added in brackets – that Labour had selected a local councillor for the Kirkcaldy Burghs by-election, a position which she had been asked to put herself forward for as a prospective parliamentary candidate a few months earlier.⁷⁸ Hamilton's efforts to grapple with her memories of her complex relationship with Labour politics and politicians in her life-writing played an important role in shaping her thinking on the impact that women's entry into the professions had on social life and democracy in Britain. In the 1930s she had been a sharp critic of the double standards under which woman politicians suffered, particularly regarding their looks and their treatment in the press.⁷⁹ Of all the institutions she had known as a professional she ultimately decided it was the London County Council, in which she had served as a Labour alderman in the late 1930s, that had shown her what it was like for women to be 'treated on a footing of perfect equality', able to 'pull their weight without fuss or self-assertion'.⁸⁰ In this, her experiences broadly confirm the findings of historians of women in the interwar Labour

⁷⁵ HMTN 1/3, 7 and 28 Dec. 1939; M. A. Hamilton, *Women at Work: a Brief Introduction to Trade Unionism for Women* (London, 1941), p. vii.

⁷⁶ Hamilton, *Women at Work*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ HMTN 1/II, 23 Jan. 1944.

⁷⁸ HMTN 1/10, 25 Nov. 1944; HMTN 1/II, 22 Jan. 1943.

⁷⁹ M. A. Hamilton, 'Women in politics', *Political Quarterly*, iii (1932), 226–44.

⁸⁰ Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 169.

Party, who note that these women were able to make the most significant progress in larger numbers in local and municipal politics.⁸¹ Later in her life, however, the House of Commons was where Hamilton remembered having encountered the most ‘kindness’, ‘fraternity’ and ‘comradeship’, and it continued to form the backdrop to her professional imaginary long after she left. The decade of hard campaigning work she had undertaken for Labour in the 1920s before being elected resurfaced in her thoughts as London came under sustained aerial attack in the autumn of 1940 and the prospect of making peace with those with whom she had ‘quarrel[led]’ in the event she did not survive the war gradually came into sharper focus. Writing ‘an hour every evening at autobiography’ was the best way to ‘make terms with this strange life we live’, she thought, but

[t]he difficulty there remains – can I ever tell the truth about JRM [J. Ramsay MacDonald], and, if I don’t what a gap covers 1919 to 1929. If written faithfully, there is a cautionary story there – more against me I’m afraid: but perhaps that fact is the justification for attempting it. One cannot go on just dodging the bombs.⁸²

Having returned to this period of her life in her diaries and memoirs, she chose not to elaborate further on her relationship with MacDonald, with whom it has been speculated she had been in ‘political love’ during the 1920s, before becoming disillusioned with his approach.⁸³ Instead, Parliament became the place where she decided her professionalism had first been taken for granted by her male colleagues, despite being one of only nine Labour women MPs elected in 1929. ‘In the House’, she declared in her final book, ‘you are an M.P. – *tout court*.’⁸⁴

Although Hamilton published a murder mystery set in the Palace of Westminster (*Murder in the House of Commons*, 1931), shortly after declining to join the National Government and losing her seat, it was only on the publication of her second memoir that she revealed she had used an earlier novel, *Folly’s Handbook* (1927), to ‘transpose’ the setting and characters of Parliament to the world of grand opera.⁸⁵ The plot focused

⁸¹ P. Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918–1939* (Cambridge, 1994); J. Hannam, ‘Women and Labour politics’, in *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900–39*, ed. M. Worley (Abingdon, 2009), pp. 171–92.

⁸² HMTN 1/4, 22 Sept. 1940.

⁸³ A. Morgan, *J. Ramsay MacDonald* (Manchester, 1987), p. 75.

⁸⁴ Hamilton, *Up-hill*, p. 46.

⁸⁵ M. A. Hamilton, *Folly’s Handbook* (London, 1927). On *Murder in the House of Commons* see L. Beers, ‘Feminism and sexuality in Ellen Wilkinson’s fiction’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, lxiv

on the glittering rise of a celebrity opera singer, Rachel Chandos, and the women and men in her orbit. The blurb proclaimed Rachel to be ‘a new thing in fiction – a woman and artist, with a career and a will behind it strong as any man’s’. But it is her lover, the Scottish barrister and writer Mark Ireton, who acts as an advocate for Hamilton’s socialist politics and her emerging views on work, friendship and professionalism; a violinist, until a war wound prevented him from playing, it is Ireton who Hamilton suggests has the more genuine appreciation for music and art.⁸⁶ The novel is composed of a number of interweaving narratives of unrequited love, each of which serves to expose different facets of what it meant to succeed as a professional in the early 1920s. Mark’s affair with Rachel can only continue in secret asides and stolen moments, often literally behind closed doors, as the singer is shown to struggle to craft her own identity when surrounded by impresarios: Chandos was a member of a profession which had ‘its own laws, its own atmosphere, its own personnel, which touched that of other worlds at the smallest number of points’.⁸⁷ It is Rachel’s world that ultimately wins out, as she forces Mark to betray an old musician friend for the sake of her own financial support, with tragic consequences.

Read as a study of professional achievement and unfulfilled potential, *Folly’s Handbook* shows how women’s creative and political work had begun to disrupt contemporary gender dynamics. It would be too reductive to see Chandos as a cipher for MacDonald, whom Hamilton remembered as one of the most mercurial male ‘personalities’ she had worked closely with in the Labour Party, but she may have drawn on elements of his leadership and the disappointments of their professional friendship in her portrayal of the opera singer.⁸⁸ If Mark and Rachel’s doomed romance highlighted the impossibility of combining love, art and celebrity, however, it also depicted women’s ambition and competence as a powerful force shaping their relationships with less exceptional but more senior men. The character in the novel whose experiences may have most closely resembled some of Hamilton’s own was that of Mark’s sister, Sophy Ireton, an aspiring parliamentary candidate. Though she too is absorbed in an affair, with an older and unsuitably mediocre MP, Sophy is shown to be completely committed to her profession, her romantic devotion evidently another aspect of her love for her work. She lives in a down-at-heel flat ‘near King’s Cross’ with a single female friend who ‘was

(2011), 248–62, at p. 257.

⁸⁶ Hamilton, *Folly’s Handbook*, pp. 199–200.

⁸⁷ Hamilton, *Folly’s Handbook*, p. 128.

⁸⁸ On MacDonald’s political charisma see Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 123.

always either just coming from a meeting or just going to one'. Mark is able to see that she disturbs their mother with her 'tendency to devote her earnings to subscriptions instead of to clothes' and her 'proud and self-contained' determination to 'manage her own life and, if necessary, make a mess of it in her own way'.⁸⁹

Hamilton's entry in *Who's Who* begins with her election as an MP in 1929, but the unconventional and costly work of unofficial political organizing as a woman had been a thread running through her earlier, unofficial career. As she later told it, she had been able to cultivate her talents for public speaking and political argument at Newnham, where she was a member of a debating club called Things That Matter and was elected Liberal prime minister in the college's political society.⁹⁰ In both her memoirs she connected her early training in economics at Cambridge directly to her introduction to socialist and pacifist politics through the Independent Labour Party and the Union of Democratic Control during the First World War.⁹¹ Yet, when still living with her husband and mother-in-law, she was recorded in the 1911 census as a 'Secretary to Philanthropic Society', a practical, if not necessarily political, form of employment she might have combined with writing the historical textbooks for children and translations she published around the same time.⁹² Hamilton's description of her work as 'the chores of a rank and filer' in the period following her divorce in 1914, before she was able to stand officially as a Labour candidate for the first time, in Chatham, aged forty-one, in 1923, also belie assumptions about the relatively smooth path into parliamentary politics she appeared to enjoy as a trusted friend of MacDonald and a middle-class intellectual.⁹³ Her first memoir hinted at the physical exertion the work had demanded even before her selection:

canvassing, addressing envelopes in dark and often dank committee rooms, distributing leaflets, speaking at meetings, generally small, in other people's constituencies, 'filling in' until the candidate arrived; attending branch meetings, going to conferences; getting to know what, in the Labour Party, we call 'the movement'.

⁸⁹ Hamilton, *Folly's Handbook*, pp. 225–7.

⁹⁰ Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 47–8.

⁹¹ Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 64; *Up-hill*, p. 28.

⁹² Census of England and Wales, 1911.

⁹³ See, e.g., the assumptions about Hamilton made in D. Howell, *MacDonald's Party: Labour Identities and Crisis, 1922–1931* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 337–8, and M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2011), pp. 205–6.

From 1924 until her election for Blackburn in 1929, Hamilton had divided her time between small lodgings in London and Lancashire, campaigning and making herself known among local women until she became ‘a citizen of the town’ (Figure 9.2).⁹⁴ Like that of many of the women professionals in *Precarious Professionals*, Hamilton’s dedication now reads almost as exploitation, especially her delight, when an MP, in serving as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Clement Attlee, for which she received a desk in his ‘dank little room in the basement’ and the chance to have ‘great talks with Clem, notably when we had to sit up all night’.⁹⁵ Yet in her appraisal, after she returned to her time in Parliament in her second memoir, a ‘queer but real unspoken shared idealism makes electioneering fascinating, and redeems its fatigues and disappointments’.⁹⁶

The composition of this narrative took place while Hamilton weighed up the possibility of re-entering the House of Commons. She recorded the option of standing for election as an MP again in her war diary as early as November 1939. After a day spent interviewing women for the WEF, she had supper with the MP and author George Ridley, formerly a union official under the second Labour MP in Hamilton’s old double-member constituency, and a close friend. He told her that if she wanted a new seat: ‘I must do meetings and get them reported, write letters to News and Herald and generally project myself against having been out so long.’ This left Hamilton with ‘that stuffy view of the H. of C. I often feel: the complete absorption in their own atmosphere’.⁹⁷ Her diary shows that she kept a watchful eye on her former colleagues at Labour women’s conferences and in the press throughout the war, remaining as sceptical of the ‘over-driven’ women MPs’ methods as she had been of the idea of forming a cross-party women’s group while in Parliament; her allegiance had always been to her party first and foremost.⁹⁸ Ridley died suddenly of a stroke in January 1944 as Hamilton waited for the results of the Kirkcaldy selection, and the loss of her most significant remaining party confidante at the point at which her political ambitions had reawakened came as a shattering blow.⁹⁹ She briefly considered putting her name forward for another Lancashire constituency

⁹⁴ Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 165–79.

⁹⁵ On the disadvantages Hamilton and other interwar women MPs faced in this unpaid role see P. Brookes, *Women at Westminster* (Plymouth, 1967), p. 126; K. Cowman, *Women in British Politics, c.1689–1979* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 121.

⁹⁶ Hamilton, *Up-hill*, p. 47.

⁹⁷ HMTN 1/3, 29 Nov. 1939.

⁹⁸ HMTN 1/3, 1 Feb. 1940.

⁹⁹ HMTN 1/11, 4 Jan. 1944.



Figure 9.2. Mary Agnes Hamilton electioneering in Blackburn, c.1929. Unknown photographer. Papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton, HMTN 2/1, p. 7, Churchill Archives Centre.

in September 1944, before deciding ‘nothing will come of it’, then stood, unsuccessfully, for selection in Kensington North in the spring of 1945, knowing the seat looked likely to be captured by Labour for the first time since 1929. ‘I fancy work could win it’, she pondered in her diary after meeting the other, male candidates, ‘but who is going to do the work?’¹⁰⁰

‘One remained an inferior animal’

In her second memoir Hamilton described her decision not to stand for Parliament in 1945 as a simple ‘refusal’, based on her ‘feeling of being too ancient to be confident of standing the strain’; this verdict was later supported by the overwork and untimely death of her Labour colleague Ellen Wilkinson. But she inserted a memory of hearing rumours that her section of the MOI was about to be transferred to the Foreign Office as her main justification, since it gave her the best opportunity she had yet had in

¹⁰⁰ HMTN 1/12, 12 Sept. 1944 and 10 Apr. 1945; ‘The man behind your M.P.’, *John Bull*, 23 June 1945, p. 13.



Figure 9.3. Mary Agnes Hamilton at her desk in Carlton House Terrace, c.1948. Unknown photographer. Papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton, HMTN 2/1, p. 17, Churchill Archives Centre.

her career to dedicate herself to public service (Figure 9.3). ‘I was already fascinated by the kind of work that gives an insight into the machine and what makes it go; in a “real” Government Department one could learn about this, even if, as a Temp. one remained an inferior animal.’¹⁰¹ Her diaries suggest that this feeling of being part of the ‘machine’ was what both motivated her and made her privately despair of her work as a public servant, shining new light on the meanings of professional success for a woman who had known several different bureaucratic institutions intimately before the war.

Hamilton was one of a large number of writers and intellectuals drawn into the MOI. Her notes from her first days at work in the General Production division in February 1940 confirm the classic picture of the ministry as a refuge for amateurs – ‘a vast machine aligned to no clear purpose’, as she put it – so much so that she began to find it hard to write.¹⁰²

This diary is going to pieces ... But 10–7 in this place where the sense of frustration is heavier than lead, makes it very hard. Long hours are more tiring when nothing comes of them than they would be if we were getting on with the job. The head of our Dept. has no notion of organising or of using his staff; result, everyone is annoyed and no-one knows what they’re doing.

¹⁰¹ Hamilton, *Up-hill*, p. 115.

¹⁰² H. Irving, ‘The Ministry of Information on the British home front’, in *Allied Communication to the Public during the Second World War: National and Transnational Networks*, ed. S. Eliot and M. Wiggam (London, 2019), pp. 21–38.

During her first period at the MOI in 1940–41, Hamilton's energies were mostly directed towards propaganda literature aimed at boosting domestic morale – though by the end of her first day at the ministry she was already busying herself with her diary in her new office ('Whether I shall ever be really busy I don't know: it looks as though I might do jobs of my own at this very uncomfortable table').¹⁰³ She appreciated Frank Pick's bracing if chaotic reorganization of the MOI in the summer of 1940 and found Kenneth Clark, the new head of her department, to be a congenial superior and committee man, even if she was briefly moved into a new section ominously known as 'Other Activities'.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, she came to dread constant plotting between the Publications and General Production divisions, and criticism of the pamphlets to which she contributed, while the work of her section was made no less complicated by the paper shortage. And she soon found her ability to continue her memoir in her spare moments dwindling in the Blitz. 'My head is perfectly muzzy', she wrote in the ministry's shelter on 31 August 1940, an air-raid warning having deprived her and her colleagues of their lunch, 'and it is more than time it stopped for a bit: no idea has visited me for a long time.'¹⁰⁵ Hamilton was interested in the schemes of her colleague and fellow writer Graham Greene, who, she confided to her diary, had been using 'his peculiar novelist's eye' to turn the other members of the ministry into fictional characters, but suspected that he, too, believed himself merely a part in a dramatic performance.¹⁰⁶

Increasing Hamilton's scepticism about the work of the MOI in the winter of 1940–41 was the prospect of another, weightier role in planning for post-war reconstruction. In late November she was summoned to lunch with Attlee at the House of Commons to discuss a transfer to the secretariat of the Cabinet's committee on 'Reconstruction and Peace Aims'. Over the next few weeks she recorded agonized conversations on the transfer in her diary. Ridley advised her to stay at the MOI, while her director felt their division 'now ha[d] a chance to be something' and attempted to convince her that 'the doom of frustration' would also hang over the task of planning for peace. Clark, however, agreed with Hamilton: 'there is nothing doing here'. Though, as she also reminded herself, the offer 'may of course not materialise'. By the middle of January 1941, her former Labour colleagues were conspiring to help her make up her mind, and she was offered a side role as a 'working' vice-chairman of the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS)

¹⁰³ HMTN 1/4, 12, 13 and 19 Feb. 1940.

¹⁰⁴ HMTN 1/4, 21 Aug. 1940.

¹⁰⁵ HMTN 1/4, 31 Aug. 1940.

¹⁰⁶ HMTN 1/5, 17 Jan. 1941.

– ‘Herbert M[orrison] it seems has suggested that I could take time off from job to do this’ – which she decided would ‘fit in very well: one would have an outside set of contacts of great use in the other work’.¹⁰⁷

A week later, as she prepared to leave the MOI, Hamilton was writing that she had finally started to ‘feel an affection for some aspects’ of the place. An effusive diary entry followed on the supper conversations she had shared with her colleagues about ‘books and the future of schools ... films ... Rumour and Hospitals’, and on the Senate House basement, where (after working on her trade unions book ‘after dinner’) she often slept in a bunkbed in ‘the “Headmistress quarters”’. A little over a week after that, she had ‘collapsed’ with bronchitis and influenza and was confined to the MOI rest room. Hamilton was well enough to present herself for her first scheduled day as a member of the Reconstruction Secretariat, but within hours she was writing in her diary in her new ‘real old fashioned dignified government office room’ that, again, ‘it is not very clear to me what I am going to be doing’. While she had started a new, blank notebook on her first day at the MOI (poignantly adding her life insurance number to the inside front cover), she took the volume of her diary beginning in October 1940 with her to the War Cabinet offices and continued to write until she filled it. Carrying the diary allowed her earlier memories of feeling ‘baffled and pointless’ as a ‘temp.’ to intrude on her thoughts. ‘I shall have to write my reminiscences here’, she decided on the first anniversary of her appointment, reminding herself ‘that a sense of frustration is likely to go on and the change over from a responsible admin. job to an “intelligence” one is not likely to be pleasant’.¹⁰⁸

Over the next three years, Hamilton’s diary entries become more fleeting as she immersed herself in her work and her memoirs, recording the names of colleagues with whom she had had intense conversations; fact-finding missions to colleges and hospitals; and the progress of a range of committees on the problems of the post-war settlement. She was appointed to serve officially on bodies including the Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, and when she wrote about her war service in her second memoir she emphasized the opportunities she had had there to work as part of a collective, even, or especially, if this meant her work becoming subsumed into a larger whole. She would later write that she had particularly admired the ‘higher civil servants’ working on the Beveridge Report for their ‘entire objectivity and selfless readiness to put all they had into a common pool of a range of extremely able individuals’.¹⁰⁹ As the only member of

¹⁰⁷ HMTN 1/5, 27 and 28 Nov., 2 and 12 Dec. 1940, 7 and 15 Jan. 1941.

¹⁰⁸ HMTN 1/6, 22 Jan., 6 and 12 Feb. 1941.

¹⁰⁹ Hamilton, *Up-hill*, p. 81.

the social insurance committee with a public reputation, Hamilton may have underestimated how much William Beveridge valued her opinions and expertise, especially on women's issues, as his biographer suggests.¹¹⁰ Her diaries also reveal that she retained a tight-knit web of social and professional connections with favoured colleagues at the MOI throughout the war, continuing to hear details about their office intrigues and acting as a sounding board for their ideas. On a hot evening in the summer of 1941, for example, she had taken a taxi through the City with Kenneth and Jane Clark and Henry Moore to see 'the tremendous, really awe-inspiring ruins', ending up on the balcony of a pub in Wapping discussing painting.¹¹¹

In the final months of revising her memoir for publication in 1944, Hamilton continued to 're-read' her diary, reflecting on her struggle to move the focus away from herself and her faith in the importance of writing her 'friends' into her life.¹¹² 'It is probably part of the whole natural process that the centre of interest should move on to others', she mused, 'but that movement can only be satisfactory and unharmed to the others if they, like oneself, have value in relation to something more lasting and fundamental than any of us.' It was her long-term companion, fellow Newnhamite and Chelsea neighbour Dorothy Shuckburgh, who, Hamilton decided in her diary, best embodied this value.¹¹³ Dorothy had lived with Molly at the Adelphi and had stayed close to her throughout the war, working as second librarian to the Board of Education in its central London premises.¹¹⁴ Once, the two women had drunk sherry with each other in the street during an air raid as they watched 'the fire brigade at work amid the roar overhead'.¹¹⁵ This was the professional friendship, Hamilton declared in her memoir, that had 'counted most and most constantly and who is so enwound in my life at all its stages that there is something almost unnatural in the attempt to detach and put her down at one particular point'.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Perhaps fittingly for a professional biographer who devoted several years of her writing career to the work of connecting her 'concealed autobiography' to the lives of her friends and colleagues, the first set of Mary Agnes

¹¹⁰ J. Harris, *William Beveridge: a Biography*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1997), pp. 371–2.

¹¹¹ HMTN 1/7, 2 July 1941.

¹¹² HMTN 1/10, 21 June 1943.

¹¹³ HMTN 1/12, 31 Aug. and 18 Sept. 1944.

¹¹⁴ Electoral Register, City of Westminster, Charing Cross Ward (A), 1929.

¹¹⁵ HMTN 1/4, 8 Sept. 1940. On Dorothy Shuckburgh see 'The library of the Ministry of Education', *Librarian and Book World*, xlviii (1959), pp. 122–3.

¹¹⁶ Hamilton, *Remembering*, pp. 53–7.

Hamilton's personal papers arrived at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC) in a collection of materials assembled by the biographer of one of her contemporaries. As an author, politician, civil servant and political theorist, Lord Arthur Salter (1881–1975) had assembled an extensive private political archive but, in a cruel twist of fate, his papers were inadvertently destroyed while in storage after his death. His biographer undertook to record the personal recollections of those who had worked with him and acquire surviving documents relating to his life, and Hamilton's war diaries were initially preserved and transcribed as part of this initiative before the archive was transferred to CAC.¹¹⁷ As an author, politician, civil servant and political theorist, Molly Hamilton was one of a great many early professional women who appeared never to have considered that their papers might constitute a private political archive. Her family kindly formalized the donation of her diaries in 2018, adding copies of her obituaries and a scrapbook containing personal materials Hamilton had collected during her lifetime. These include press cuttings, notes and memoranda, her titular degree certificates, printed copies of her speeches and photographs, all meticulously arranged by her niece and nephew to show the different aspects of her work and interests. The significance of this collection, beyond its value as a source on Salter's life, was immediately recognized, and the papers have now been conserved and catalogued in their own right.¹¹⁸ This means that the archive now has its own reference code and a dedicated hierarchical catalogue record containing a biographical description of Hamilton, its 'creator', in the style of a broadsheet obituary or *Who's Who* entry. She became only the third woman MP, after Florence Horsbrugh (1889–1969) and Margaret Thatcher (1929–2013), to receive a collection of her own, alongside over 600 male politicians, diplomats, military leaders and journalists whose personal papers reside at CAC.

This chapter has examined the intricacies of the relationship between archival creation and autobiography in the writings of a professional woman who found in later life that 'the interest of work and the pleasure of companionship' went hand in hand.¹¹⁹ It has suggested that we can incorporate studies of work, friendship and professional identity into histories of ageing and memory in modern Britain. It also suggests that

¹¹⁷ S. Aster, *Power, Policy and Personality: the Life and Times of Lord Salter, 1881–1975* (self-published, 2015); CAC, SALT 7, 'Contributors of recollections and deposits of primary documents, including MS letters': files of correspondence detailing Aster's collecting.

¹¹⁸ E. D'Alessandro, 'From one scrapbook to another', *Churchill Archives Centre News*, 16 Mar. 2020 <<https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/news/2020/mar/16/one-scrapbook-another/>> [accessed 12 Sept. 2020].

¹¹⁹ Hamilton, *Newnham*, p. 20.

we need more sophisticated ways of conceptualizing women's professional careers, ways which can situate the evidence of their individual struggles and achievements not just within singular collection records and narratives of 'composure' but within wider networks of influence and association.¹²⁰ We also need to take into account multiple moments of cultural production and their materialities, from the point the ink of a fountain pen dries on the page of a pocket diary or the arrangement of treasured family newspaper cuttings in a scrapbook to their virtual afterlives in online finding aids, as 'social and collaborative' documents.¹²¹ Hamilton's unpublished diaries give us a glimpse of how a 'distressingly diversified' and often precarious career in public service could be defined through conversations, committee meetings and chance encounters which eluded conventional forms of archival preservation. Her personal papers survived in the form of an 'archive' almost by accident, collected as a mere source on the life of a more powerful male civil servant and their mutual acquaintances.¹²²

'Professional woman' may no longer be a contradiction in terms, as it was for much of Hamilton's career, but we have historically lacked the vocabulary to describe women who interested themselves in different fields of expertise, or those who worked at the intersections of different fields and acted as important conduits for the passage of ideas and social connections between them. Professional detours are highly gendered, often being seen to diminish rather than enhance a woman's career; Hamilton would publish her last memoir, in which she described herself as a 'Jack of all trades', a decade before the term 'Renaissance woman' came into popular usage in Britain.¹²³ The gaps in the vocabulary used to talk about professionals of Hamilton's generation are not simply linguistic, however. They have been influenced by complex histories of record-keeping, biographical research and collection development which often mean that a woman's public status during her lifetime does not guarantee her papers will be turned into the prestigious form of a private archive. When studying how interior lives

¹²⁰ For an example, focused on a woman who exerted greater control over the 'destiny' of an archive, see K. Israel, 'Esther Barbara Chalmers's Scottish international lives', *International Review of Scottish Studies*, xliii (2018), 75–122, at p. 106.

¹²¹ J. Douglas and H. MacNeil, 'Arranging the self: literary and archival perspectives on writers' archives', *Archivaria*, lxvii (2009), 25–39, at p. 39.

¹²² Until the summer of 2020, CAC's collecting policy defined archival significance in Churchillian terms of 'top ranked' professionals, nation-wide 'impact' and 'access to or influence on key individuals or events': high bars for many professional women to have cleared.

¹²³ "Renaissance Woman, n.", *OED* online <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/152052>> [accessed 16 Oct. 2020].

interacted with world affairs in this period it is crucial, therefore, to attend to the wider archival politics which shape the very nature of the 'personal' and its paper afterlives in different contexts.¹²⁴ In the search for the making of the modern self, historians have largely tended not to dwell on the multitude of different hands through which unpublished testimonies can pass before they reach the reading room desk, nor upon the structures of power and feeling which compose institutions and their collections over time. But the gendered histories of record-keeping practices and mentalities can alter the nature of the relationship between public and private lives, ultimately determining who we see as professional and how their contributions are remembered.

¹²⁴ For a starting point see A. H. Chen, 'Possessing an "inner history": curators, donors, and affective stewardship', *Collections*, xii (2016), 243–67.

10. Women historians in the twentieth century*

Laura Carter

In spring 1939 the Welsh food historian and journalist Dorothy Hartley (1893–1985) wrote to a production assistant at the BBC in an attempt to secure some broadcasting work in collaboration with Arthur Dodd, a professor of history at the University College of North Wales (Bangor). She appealed to the BBC as follows: ‘I could find friends at Cambridge, and elsewhere, who would assure Proff [*sic*] Dodd that I can be a very serious quiet historian, even though I do use popular Guide Books to earn myself a much-needed holiday.’¹ Hartley was not serious or quiet, but she knew that doing history in mid-twentieth-century Britain, even on the airwaves, meant negotiating the co-dependent hierarchies of gender and professional status.² The juxtaposition raised between Cambridge learning and her popular, commercial writing signalled that she understood that, from her position as a non-professional historian and as a woman, any claims to historical knowledge must be both verified and qualified.

The first aim of this chapter is to offer an overview of how a diverse range of women, including odd-jobbing populists like Hartley, practised history in the twentieth century. These women understood and used the term ‘professional’ in relation to the production of histories well beyond the confines of universities and academia, often seeing themselves instead as professionals in the fields of education, public service or activism. The second aim is to assess how gender has shaped the production of history in relation to the professional identity

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¹ BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC), Dorothy Hartley talks file I: 1937–62, D. Hartley to Miss Quigley, 10 May 1939.

² On Hartley see the introduction to D. Hartley, *Lost World: England, 1933–1936*, sel. and intro. A. Bailey (Totnes, 2012).

L. Carter, ‘Women historians in the twentieth century’ in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 263–285. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

of ‘historian’. The chapter argues that focusing only on professional women historians in universities, especially around the eras of first- and second-wave feminism, blinkers our understanding of the gendered production of history in twentieth-century Britain. By thinking beyond the institutional barriers that made women historians precarious, this chapter investigates the changing texture of their liminal position, especially in the mid twentieth century. Was being a precarious professional ever productive and creative, as well as marginalizing and impoverishing, and what were the consequences for the politics, geography and reception of history in the twentieth century?

The Weberian category of ‘professional’ cannot fully accommodate how gender operates in nominally meritocratic social systems.³ This has been widely noted in relation to a range of creative industries.⁴ In the field of history, the existing literature on (mostly) English women historians is much more satisfactory for periods prior to the twentieth century, before the discipline professionalized.⁵ Early modern scholars locate the standardization of historical method among men in the sixteenth century, but work on gender in relation to this change reveals that the persistence of a relative generic freedom allowed elite women to excel in the writing of history in other forms.⁶ Megan Matchinske finds in the diaries of seventeenth-century noblewoman Lady Anne Clifford (1590–1676), for example, a personal and future-oriented form of history writing ‘peculiarly suited to female needs’.⁷ Daniel Woolf has argued that women’s consumption of history in the early modern period had long-lasting consequences for how historical knowledge was organized thereafter, from eighteenth-century girls who were socialized on history’s entertaining qualities to women readers of history who were

³ H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989).

⁴ J. Seddon, ‘Mentioned, but denied significance: women designers and the “professionalisation” of design in Britain c.1920–1951’, *Gender & History*, xii (2000), 426–47; A. Logan, ‘Professionalism and the impact of England’s first women Justices, 1920–1950’, *Historical Journal*, xlix (2006), 833–50; D. Kennerley, ‘Debating female musical professionalism and artistry in the British press, c.1820–1850’, *Historical Journal*, lviii (2015), 987–1008.

⁵ For Ireland, see N. C. Smith, *A ‘Manly Study’?: Irish Women Historians, 1868–1949* (Basingstoke, 2006).

⁶ N. Z. Davis, ‘Gender and genre: women historical writers, 1400–1820’, in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. P. H. Labalme (New York, 1980), pp. 153–82.

⁷ M. Matchinske, *Women Writing History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 75–6. See pp. 4–5.

engrossed by familial and domestic aspects of the past.⁸ More recent work by Benjamin Dabby on Hannah Lawrance (1795–1875) has shown how, in the nineteenth century, history written by women retained a strong moral edge.⁹ This point is further reinforced by Martha Vandrei's tracing of the fate of Queen Boudica across the centuries; her story assumed a cautiously didactic character for women readers into the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Rosemary Mitchell has highlighted that the 'picturesque' united non-fiction and fiction in nineteenth-century popular historical cultures driven by women historians writing for a commercial market.¹¹ Bonnie G. Smith's portrait of similar late-Victorian women historians underpins a powerful feminist argument contending that male professionalism was originally wrought in opposition to female amateurism, leaving all Western historical practice gendered by default.¹²

The literature on women historians in the twentieth century is not as sensitive to the interplay of gender and genre because it is confined to the world of professionalized history. By the interwar period, history was an established professional discipline in British universities, with its own professorial chairs, learned societies and journals.¹³ Meanwhile, the steady growth of women's participation in higher education since the 1880s meant that some women could realistically aspire to careers as professional historians. In Britain in 1928 there were forty women academic historians, only 16.5 per cent of the total community, but a figure still far higher than in other European nations.¹⁴

Within the University of London, a more recent calculation shows that the proportion of women historians peaked at 30 per cent between 1930 and 1931 and reached its lowest ebb between 1976 and 1986, at 17 per

⁸ Daniel Woolf, 'A feminine past? Gender, genre, and historical knowledge in England, 1500–1800', *American Historical Review*, cii (1997), 645–79.

⁹ B. Dabby, 'Hannah Lawrance and the claims of women's history in nineteenth-century England', *Historical Journal*, liii (2010), 699–722.

¹⁰ M. Vandrei, *Queen Boudica and Historical Culture in Britain: an Image of Truth* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 124–34.

¹¹ R. Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, 1830–1870* (Oxford, 2000).

¹² B. G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

¹³ P. Mandler, *History and National Life* (London, 2002), pp. 47–60.

¹⁴ M. O'Dowd, 'Popular writers: women historians, the academic community and national history writing', in *Setting the Standards: Institutions, Networks and Communities of National Historiography Comparative Approaches*, ed. I. Porciani and J. Tollebeek (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 351–71, at p. 352.

cent, returning to the 30 per cent benchmark only in the early 2000s.¹⁵ Most of these London women academics were naturally concentrated at Bedford, Royal Holloway and Westfield Colleges, which remained single-sex institutions for teaching women students until the 1960s.¹⁶ The obvious mid-century lacuna of academic women historians can be partly explained by the wider stagnation of female participation in higher education between the 1920s and the 1970s, the fall in the age of marriage after the Second World War and the tremendous diversion of female scholarly and educational talent into the profession of school teaching across the mid-century.¹⁷ From the end of the 1960s a fresh crop of women historians emerged. These scholars were often united by political feminism and committed to women's history. Inspired by socialist principles, they adopted a collective and interdisciplinary approach, and Women's Liberation women's history especially was nourished by literary, sociological and social policy research.¹⁸

A conversation within the Economic History Society during the 1980s about the declining presence of women within their subdiscipline generated the first thorough investigation of these twentieth-century trends.¹⁹ This work offered a much-needed corrective to a tired androcentric tradition that chronicled the development of British historiography via the biographies of 'great men'.²⁰ This body of literature uncovered the stories of the first professional women historians and is embodied by Maxine Berg's 1996 biography of Eileen Power (1889–1940), which emphasized the role

¹⁵ These figures were calculated by Caroline Barron using the University of London's 'White Pamphlets', historical history syllabi, which listed all of the history teachers and lecturers working at the federal University, for her paper 'Women historians at London University', presented at 'London's Women Historians: a Celebration and a Conversation', Institute of Historical Research, London, 13 Mar. 2017. I am grateful to her for giving me permission to reproduce these figures in this chapter.

¹⁶ C. Dyhouse, *Students: a Gendered History* (London, 2006), pp. 158–61. Royal Holloway made the decision to admit men undergraduates in 1960, Westfield in 1963 and Bedford in 1963. In London degrees were already conferred upon women in the 1870s, but in Cambridge women were not officially allowed to receive degrees until 1923 and did not become full members of the university until 1948.

¹⁷ Dyhouse, *Students*.

¹⁸ S. Alexander and A. Davin, 'Feminist history', *History Workshop Journal*, i (1976), 4–6.

¹⁹ For a history of this movement from the EHS point of view see H. Paul, 'Editorial: Women in economic and social history: twenty-fifth anniversary of the Women's Committee of the Economic History Society', *Economic History Review*, lxxviii (2015), E1–E17.

²⁰ Examples include J. Kenyon, *History Men: the Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London, 1983), and D. Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: a Life in History* (London, 1992). A similar feminist response has recently occurred in the history of archaeology: see L. Carr, *Tessa Verney Wheeler: Women and Archaeology before World War Two* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 5–8.

of networks, patrons and institutions in the careers of female historians.²¹ Understanding how women negotiated the male academy demonstrated a distinctive female contribution to the discipline: a broad and comparative social-economic history that could speak to a wide range of publics.²² Eileen Power's significance as a public historian continues to be reassessed, always on the assumption that her professional status as a fellow of Girton College, Cambridge, and later professor at the London School of Economics (LSE) make her the archetypal woman historian.²³

These networks of women in social and economic history had petered out by the 1970s, partly as a consequence of the triumph of quantitative, data-driven economics in universities over the kind of historical economics favoured in Power's day.²⁴ This 'golden age to decline' narrative has strongly shaped the overall picture of women historians in twentieth-century Britain, but it is largely peculiar to economic history. Meanwhile, work on the history of women's history, notably Zoë Thomas's recent study of interwar women's groups' historical pageants, is beginning to forge new paths, but women's history is still only one part of the work of twentieth-century women historians.²⁵ Without dismissing the importance of pioneering women economic historians and historians of women's history, we still need an overarching narrative that applies across the board, outside of economic history and outside of the academy.

A recent collection edited by Hilda L. Smith and Melinda S. Zook, *Generations of Women Historians*, has significantly broadened the story. The book contains biographical essays on thirteen women historians in Britain, France and the United States. It shows how even women with professional jobs were on the fringes of academic life, and helpfully explores a series of women writing history in other genres and 'beyond the academy'. But the

²¹ M. Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power, 1889–1940* (Cambridge, 1996). See J. Thirsk, 'The history women', in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, ed. M. O'Dowd and S. Wichert (Belfast, 1995), pp. 1–11.

²² Berg, *Woman in History*, pp. 5, 131.

²³ For a recent, misguided assessment see S. Collini, 'Historian-intellectuals? Eileen Power, Herbert Butterfield, Hugh Trevor-Roper', in *Common Writing: Essays on Literary Culture and Public Debate* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 241–65.

²⁴ P. Hudson, 'Women in economic history, past, present and future with special reference to the early Westfield connection', presented at the Economic History Society Women's Committee annual workshop, Institute of Historical Research, London, 22 Nov. 2014.

²⁵ Z. Thomas, 'Historical pageants, citizenship, and the performance of women's history before second-wave feminism', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxviii (2017), 319–43. See L. E. N. Mayhall, 'Creating the "suffragette spirit": British feminism and the historical imagination', *Women's History Review*, iv (1995), 319–44.

introduction to this collection frames the overall narrative in an American educational context that is different to that of Britain in important ways.²⁶ While both countries had a strong first generation of professional women historians that saw a decline between the 1930s and the 1960s, higher-education participation rates, overall and for women, were much lower in Britain than in the US for most of the twentieth century. Even middle-class young women far more frequently went on to the teacher-training colleges in Britain. University did not become a mass school-leaving choice for young women in Britain until the 1980s, when the arrival of the GCSE as a standardized route into A-levels and the conversion of polytechnics into universities helped to close the gender gap.²⁷ This chapter is thus more attuned to British educational norms, introducing the idea of cohorts of women historians.

Three cohorts of women historians

For this chapter I have surveyed the lives of over 200 women historians using the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, obituaries, autobiographical sources and women's own history writing.²⁸ All of these women historians were active in Britain across the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and almost all were deceased at the time of writing this chapter. The list is not exhaustive and the definition of 'doing history' has been deliberately broadened beyond academics to include popularizers, activists and educators at all levels. If we look at these lives en masse, three clear cohorts emerge which closely mirror women's changing educational trajectories across each period.

The first cohort comprises those, like Eileen Power, who were born in the late nineteenth century and whose careers straddled the professionalization of history. Some of them worked as professional historians during the

²⁶ H. L. Smith, 'Introduction: Women's scholarship within and outside the academy, 1870–1960', in *Generations of Women Historians: Within and Beyond the Academy*, ed. H. L. Smith and M. Zook (London, 2018), pp. 1–21.

²⁷ In 1987, as the gap was beginning to close, still only 8.3% of boys and 6.6% of girls in England left school for a degree course. See Department of Education and Science, *Statistics of Education School Leavers CSE and GCE 1987* (London, 1988), p. 1.

²⁸ This research grew out of an exhibition and event at the IHR in March 2017, 'London's Women Historians: a Celebration and a Conversation'; many of the suggestions for and details of women historians discussed at that event and in this chapter were generously supplied through Twitter, email lists and other collective and crowd-sourced approaches in the true spirit of women's history. Much further in-depth biographical research on these women was undertaken during the summer of 2017 by Ishvinder Sohal as part of a King's College undergraduate research fellowship. This research has subsequently resulted in a partnership with the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* to diversify its current representation of women historians.

interwar period. The second consists of those born during the Edwardian and interwar periods who were adults in the mid twentieth century and had more diverse and precarious professional historical lives. The third cohort is made up of those born from the 1940s onwards, some (but not all) of whom benefitted from more equal professional opportunities for women as the century drew on. This chapter will have most to say about the mid-century cohort; as the historiography attests, they are the missing link in our existing narrative of women historians. Their working conditions were unique because of the low age of marriage, the persistence of de facto marriage bars and a higher-education system largely closed off and hostile to women, regardless of social class. This chapter is thus inspired by historians such as Claire Langhamer and Cairríona Beaumont, who have suggested more creative ways of understanding women's work and political agencies 'between the waves'.²⁹

The biographical research undertaken for this chapter shows that women's historical expertise was spread thinly and widely across academic research, the university and college teaching professions, popular writing, archives, libraries and museums in the twentieth century. This spread grew as history in universities professionalized in the late nineteenth century, and then fragmented into the mid twentieth century. As more academic history jobs were created, women were squeezed out of the more secure or prestigious posts and pigeon-holed into particular fields and teaching roles.³⁰

From the late nineteenth century talented women historians had found themselves appended to the historical pursuits of their male supervisors (or husbands, or fathers), as researchers, footnoters and indexers. The prominent University of Manchester medievalist T. F. Tout was good at publicly acknowledging the otherwise hidden labour of his female assistants in the early years of the twentieth century, who included Dorothy Broome and Mabel Mills.³¹ More corrosive was the attitude of Edward A. Freeman, Regius Professor of History at the University of Oxford from 1884, who sought out female academic assistants for what he perceived to be their innate deference and thus suitability for the role.³² The practice of women

²⁹ C. Langhamer, 'Feelings, women and work in the long 1950s', *Women's History Review*, xxvi (2017), 77–92; C. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928–64* (Manchester, 2013).

³⁰ See Thirsk, 'The history women'.

³¹ See T. F. Tout, Preface, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England*, 6 vols (Manchester, 1933), vol. i.

³² E. Garritzen, 'Pasha and his historic harem: Edward A. Freeman, Edith Thompson and the gendered personae of late-Victorian historians', in *How to be a Historian: Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800–2000*, ed. H. Paul (Manchester, 2019), pp. 89–106.

historians working behind the scenes was, in general, widespread and was institutionalized at the Victoria County History project (VCH), founded in 1899. John Beckett found that between 1905 and 1911 women wrote 78 per cent of the social and economic histories in this series, and they also did the majority of the research, often working remotely as contractors. Some were graduates from the Oxbridge and London women's colleges and the LSE, while others had no qualifications but proved industrious and speedy workers, which suited the VCH's stringent publication targets.³³ Similarly, the History of Parliament project (established in 1928) employed women as research assistants whose individual contributions were absorbed into the large, multivolume project, as Linda Clark's study has revealed.³⁴

After 1918 and into the interwar years, history quietly flourished in pockets of cultural life in England that were just emerging, often locally and linked to citizenship projects, including in museums and libraries, at the BBC and through popular educational writing. The First World War and its aftermath created these new sites of history. Wartime necessity forced museums to open up their doors as public spaces and to develop partnerships with local education authorities.³⁵ The post-war expansion of the Historical Association (HA), a professional organization for history teachers founded in 1906, enabled the army of woman schoolteachers to more successfully participate in intellectual exchange, through HA publications, committee work and conferences.³⁶ And the publication of autobiographical histories by suffrage campaigners between the

³³ J. Beckett, 'Women economic and social historians and the Victoria County History, 1899–1915', presented at the Economic History Society Women's Committee annual workshop, Institute of Historical Research, London, 22 Nov. 2014.

³⁴ L. Clark, 'The contribution of women to the History of Parliament', presented at 'London's Women Historians: a Celebration and a Conversation', Institute of Historical Research, London, 13 Mar. 2017.

³⁵ Board of Education, *Memorandum on Increased Co-operation between Public Museums and Public Educational Institutions* (London, 1931). See G. Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: a Social History* (London, 2014).

³⁶ Historical Association, *The First 50 Years: Historical Association Jubilee Pamphlet 1906–1956* (London, 1956). The HA was initially the brainchild of two female teacher trainers, although it quickly became dominated by men at the top and Erickson notes that, although Ellen McArthur was a founding member of the HA, she is missing from the official history. See J. Keating, D. Cannadine and N. Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 31–2; A. L. Erickson, 'Ellen Annette McArthur: establishing a presence in the academy', in *Generations of Women Historians*, pp. 45–6.

wars primed the commercial book market for new genres of women's 'self' history.³⁷

This altered landscape promoted new opportunities for women to engage with history, often precariously, as both professionals and volunteers. For example, in 1947 Enid Porter (1908–1984) switched from school teaching to curating and collecting local histories at the Cambridge Folk Museum (founded in 1936), where she stayed until her retirement in 1976.³⁸ Doris Langley Moore (1902–1989) collected historical costume and went on to open a museum of costume in 1955, which eventually found its home in Bath. She wrote and researched on the history of fashion throughout her life.³⁹ As a volunteer starting in the mid-1970s, Ann Heeley (1941–2017) gathered recordings of ordinary life in rural Somerset over forty years and contributed to the publications and educational resources of the Somerset Rural Life Museum, where her oral history archive was housed.⁴⁰ From different vantage points and through circumstances prescribed by their gender, these women contributed significantly to a history of everyday life that would not be recognized as legitimate in academic history until the end of the twentieth century.⁴¹ As Kate Hill's work has shown, women's work opportunities in the mixed volunteer-professional economy of museums were fluid and the gender dynamics were complex before curatorship fully professionalized in the 1970s.⁴²

Age is a particularly important category of analysis in understanding women's contributions to history. In the mid twentieth century most

³⁷ H. Kean, 'Public history and popular memory: issues in the commemoration of the British militant suffrage campaign', *Women's History Review*, xiv (2005), 581–602.

³⁸ C. Blacker, 'Enid Porter 1909–1984', in *Women and Tradition: a Neglected Group of Folklorists*, ed. C. Blacker and H. R. Ellis Davidson (Durham, NC, 2000), pp. 233–44. Blacker has Porter's date of birth incorrect.

³⁹ 'Moore, Doris Elizabeth Langley (1902–1989)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*), 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40180>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See D. Langley Moore, *The Woman in Fashion* (London, 1949) and *The Child in Fashion* (London, 1955). Moore's museum first opened in Kent but was permanently housed in Bath from 1963 and is today the Fashion Museum.

⁴⁰ M. Brown, 'Obituary: Ann Heeley', *Guardian*, 15 June 2017; See 'Somerset Voices: Oral History Archive, about the archive' <<http://www.somersetvoices.org.uk/about-the-archive/>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2018]. On museums and the prehistory of oral history see L. Carter, 'Rethinking folk culture in twentieth-century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxviii (2017), 543–69.

⁴¹ L. Carter, 'The Quennells and the "History of Everyday Life" in England, c.1918–69', *History Workshop Journal*, lxxxi (2016), 106–34.

⁴² Kate Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester, 2016).

women's work had to be balanced with the demands of home and family. These factors often shaped more unconventional paths of history-making. Monica Baly (1914–1998) worked as a nurse and, later, as a campaigner for nurses' pay and conditions. These experiences led her to write histories of nursing later in life and to write a book on Florence Nightingale, an ever-popular women's history figure.⁴³ Likewise, Mavis Batey (1921–2013), a Bletchley codebreaker, became a conservation activist in her senior years, combining it with her passion for gardening to write popular books on garden and environmental history.⁴⁴

Like so many women possessing further education qualifications in this period, Sheila Fletcher (1924–2001) worked in education and teaching; she went on to complete a PhD and write on the history of education, when her children had grown up.⁴⁵ Mary Prior (1923–2012) began her PhD project, supervised by Joan Thirsk, when her husband died in 1969, on the economic lives of a community of early modern women.⁴⁶ For those born before the mid-1930s, the proliferation of adult education and return-to-study opportunities (through extramural departments which women were also heavily involved in) from the 1960s and into the 1970s was crucial. These examples of women historians' lives demonstrate that women's pathways towards historical expertise were shaped by the gendered life cycle; they found time to do history later in life, once the demands of home and family had subsided. They also highlight how women's experiential working lives flavoured the histories they were compelled to tell.

⁴³ T. Bullamore, 'Obituary: Monica Baly', *Independent*, 18 Nov. 1998 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-monica-baly-1185620.html>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See M. Baly, *Florence Nightingale and the Nursing Legacy* (London, 1997) and *A History of Nursing at the Middlesex Hospital, 1745–1990* (London, 2000).

⁴⁴ D. Lambert, 'Batey [née Lever], Mavis Lilian (1921–2013)', *ODNB*, 1 Jan. 2017 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/108264>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. Batey was heavily involved in the Garden History Society (established 1965), from the early 1970s. See M. Batey, *Oxford Gardens: the University's Influence on Garden History* (London, 1982) and *Regency Gardens* (London, 1995).

⁴⁵ M. Sheppard, 'Obituary: Sheila Fletcher', *Independent*, 24 Aug. 2001 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/sheila-fletcher-9220552.html>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See S. Fletcher, *Feminists and Bureaucrats: a Study in the Development of Girls' Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1980) and *Women First: the Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880–1984* (London, 1989).

⁴⁶ M. Dodsworth, 'Obituary: Mary Prior', *Guardian*, 30 Jan. 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2012/jan/30/mary-prior-obituary>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See M. Prior, *Fisher Row* (Oxford, 1982) and *Women in English Society, 1500–1800* (London, 1986).

Across all three cohorts there was a strong preponderance of women doing economic, social and local history, working on women and gender and on medieval and early modern history. The interwar ‘golden age’ of women medieval economic historians and their wider institutional networks explains some of these trends as legacies of the first cohort. Amy Erickson’s essay on Ellen McArthur (1862–1927) convincingly argues that McArthur was the foundational historian of that first cohort, through her tireless teaching and poorly acknowledged mentoring; ‘her legacy was her students’.⁴⁷

Into the mid-century, local and family history projects were popular among women historians because women were more likely to have a role in public life at a local level and therefore to have access to records. One of the most prominent academic women historians of the mid-century and an inheritor of McArthur’s tradition, Joan Thirsk (1922–2013) was a champion of local and family history (at a time when there was little appetite for these topics in the academy) and of women historians more generally.⁴⁸ Dorothy Thompson (1923–2011), another mid-century historian, of Chartism and local activism, helped to ensure that local history did become more rooted in universities via the Workers’ Educational Association and extramural departments.⁴⁹ For the third cohort of women historians, which for the first time included women of working-class origins, local history could blossom in works such as Jill Liddington’s (b. 1946) study of Halifax suffragists.⁵⁰

Unlike the academic women historians of the cohorts before and after them, the mid-century women were more likely to be conservative, or at least to be less committed to progressive political causes in their work. It was women activists outside of the universities, working in the tradition of the Fabian Women’s Group, that most often used history to address key social policy concerns.⁵¹ As the social sciences established themselves academically from the 1950s, it is unsurprising that some of these departments in the new ‘redbrick’ universities nurtured scholars whom we would now recognize

⁴⁷ Erickson, ‘Ellen Annette McArthur’, p. 41.

⁴⁸ P. Sharpe, ‘The history woman: Joan Thirsk (1922–2013)’, *History Workshop Journal*, lxxx (2015), 335–41.

⁴⁹ S. Rowbotham, ‘Thompson [née Towers], Dorothy Katharine Gane (1923–2011)’, *ODNB*, 8 Jan. 2015 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/103564>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See Z. Munby, ‘Women’s involvement in the WEA and women’s education’, in *A Ministry of Enthusiasm: Centenary Essays on the Workers’ Educational Association*, ed. S. Roberts (London, 2003), pp. 215–37.

⁵⁰ J. Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (London, 2006).

⁵¹ See S. Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London, 2010).

as women historians.⁵² A foundational figure in this milieu was Leonore Davidoff (1932–2014), a mid-century woman historian whose vocation, after breaks to raise children and facilitate her husband's academic career, flowered in the sociology department of the University of Essex. The sociological lens through which she viewed history came to redefine how historians thought about family life in the past.⁵³

The themes and chronologies chosen by twentieth-century women historians must have been influenced by the vibrant inheritance of nineteenth-century traditions of women's popular history writing, which did not die out when the subject professionalized but remained firmly rooted in amateur and commercial spaces. Historical biography was an enduringly popular mode of history-making for women, straddling the popular and professional divide, covering different topics and time periods.⁵⁴ This point is highlighted by recent essays on C. V. Wedgwood (1910–1997) and Nancy Mitford (1904–1973), two dazzlingly successful mid-century writers of history and biography for the popular market.⁵⁵ The dominance of male historians over the modern period in political and diplomatic history, which developed as fields in the late nineteenth century when history was first deemed appropriate training for a career in the civil service, reflected male hegemony over those aspects of national politics deemed to be of strategic importance.⁵⁶

That is not to say there were not examples of women working in these fields, but it was often those atypical women who secured academic posts through traditional routes who went on to work on political and diplomatic history. Agatha Ramm (1914–2003), historian of nineteenth-century diplomacy, studied history at Bedford College and then worked at

⁵² Among living historians, these include Pat Hudson (economics), Beverley Skeggs (sociology) and Pat Thane (social policy).

⁵³ Most famously in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, 1987), co-written with Catherine Hall, but the sociological foundations were laid in her MA dissertation at the LSE in the 1950s on married women's employment; see A. V. John, 'Obituary: Leonore Davidoff', *Guardian*, 6 Nov. 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/06/leonore-davidoff>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁵⁴ R. Maitzen, "'This feminine preserve': historical biographies by Victorian women", *Victorian Studies*, xxxviii (1995), 371–93; A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991).

⁵⁵ M. S. Zook, 'C. V. Wedgwood: the historian and the world', in *Generations of Women Historians*, pp. 115–35; J. P. Zinsser, 'Nancy Mitford: lessons for historians from a best-selling author', in *Generations of Women Historians*, pp. 273–95.

⁵⁶ J. O. McLachlan, 'The origin and early development of the Cambridge historical tripos', *Historical Journal*, ix (1947), 78–105.

Somerville College, Oxford.⁵⁷ With the injection of feminist politics into the work of women historians in the 1970s there was a clear propulsion forward into more modern topics among the third cohort. Writing in 1980, Anna Davin (b. 1940) reflected that the London Feminist History Group mostly discussed eighteenth- to twentieth-century topics and that more work on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would be welcomed by her colleagues.⁵⁸

Conceptualizing women historians in twentieth-century Britain through these three cohorts usefully takes us out of the professionalization paradigm and highlights the broader forces of social change at work, especially for the mid-century cohort of mainly middle-class women whose working lives were so uneven. This chapter will now zoom in on three elements of doing history – politics, place and audience – aided by some more detailed biographical cameos, in order to analyse the circumstances and experiences of being a woman historian in each instance.

Politics

Many women historians, like many men historians, have considered history a formidable tool for political thinking and activism. The women's history of the Women's Liberation Movement is the most obvious example of this. At the same time as uncovering the hidden histories of women's lives, prominent feminist activist-historians campaigned for improved working conditions, and for sexual and legal rights for women in the present.⁵⁹ Women historians of earlier cohorts had sought to combine historical and political pursuits to achieve goals that were not primarily articulated as feminist. Often this could be achieved only in limited ways by women, using the established channels of domestic British political life. For example, the Marxist historian Dona Torr (1883–1957) wrote history, including a biography of the early labour activist Tom Mann, from within the Communist Party of Great Britain, where she tutored and supported a number of male Marxist historians of the twentieth century, many of whom have subsequently become much more famous and lauded

⁵⁷ 'Obituary: Agatha Ramm', *The Times*, 16 July 2004 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/agatha-ramm-m37pdf9tjkf>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁵⁸ A. Davin, 'Historian's notebook: the London Feminist History Group', *History Workshop Journal*, ix (1980), 192–4.

⁵⁹ S. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against It* (London, 1974). See S. Bruley, 'Women's liberation at the grass roots: a view from some English towns, c.1968–1990', *Women's History Review*, xxv (2016), 723–40.

than her.⁶⁰ Ellen Wilkinson (1891–1947) forged a pathway into the heart of government via a scholarship to study history at the University of Manchester in 1910, before going on to become a trade union organizer and prominent Labour MP.⁶¹

As much new work on transnational feminism is demonstrating, some women did exercise their political agency, however, through global rather than domestic networks.⁶² These networks shaped the work of women historians and could direct them towards historical topics with a global, political urgency. This was particularly true of women historians of colour working across colonial networks, who are often absent in accounts of women's history-making in white, domestic contexts.⁶³ Yet women historians of colour working in the metropole in the middle decades of the twentieth century produced some of the most important and innovative early histories of Caribbean slavery. Elsa Goveia (1925–1980) arrived in London in 1945 from British Guiana to study history at University College London.⁶⁴ She completed her PhD at the Institute of Historical Research (IHR) with a thesis on slave society in the eighteenth century that adopted an anthropological reading of culture in the British Caribbean.⁶⁵ Goveia experienced racial discrimination in the British university system and felt that there was some resistance from English

⁶⁰ V. Kiernan, 'Torr, Dona Ruth Anne (1883–1957)', *ODNB*, 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/59174>> [accessed 7 June 2021]; D. Torr, *Tom Mann* (London, 1936).

⁶¹ L. Beers, *Red Ellen: the Life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016), pp. 27–8. Beers notes that Wilkinson was awarded the Jones Open History Scholarship at the University of Manchester to study history in 1910, and that at the time more women than men read history there.

⁶² K. Gleadle and Z. Thomas, 'Global feminisms, c.1870–1930: vocabularies and concepts – a comparative approach', *Women's History Review*, xxvii (2018), 1209–24.

⁶³ In Smith and Zook's edited collection, *Generations of Women Historians*, all of the women discussed are white, although for two of them, Ruth Benedict and Eleanor Flexner, race was a central topic of intellectual enquiry in their work. At the time of writing in July 2019 there was only one black female professor of history in the United Kingdom, Professor Olivette Otele at Bath Spa University, appointed in October 2018.

⁶⁴ M. Chamberlain, 'Elsa Goveia: history and nation', *History Workshop Journal*, lviii (2004), 167–90.

⁶⁵ Goveia's trajectory indicates the continuation of the 'golden age' of women economic historians into the new field of imperial history. Her thesis was supervised by Eveline Martin (1894–1960), who taught history and became an assistant lecturer at Westfield College in 1923 after covering a period of leave for her supervisor, Caroline Skeel (1872–1951). Skeel was an important node in the interwar networks of women historians. Martin became University Reader of African and Imperial History in 1932, and later taught at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. I would like to thank Pat Hudson for this information.

academics to colonial postgraduate students wanting to work on their own national histories.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, she sought to understand slavery as a form of social organization in which all actors were complicit, an approach that yielded explanations for the challenges of Caribbean society in the present and stretched the boundaries of the place of activist politics in the subdiscipline of imperial history. Goveia's historical formulations were an essential contribution to London's mid-century, predominantly male, Caribbean and African intellectual community, and were vital in critiquing and reworking empire from within in the era of decolonization.⁶⁷ This work was continued by one of Goveia's doctoral students at the University of the West Indies (where Goveia became the first woman professor in 1961), Lucille Mathurin Mair (1924–2009), whose work in the 1970s on the intersections of gender, race and class in slave societies is widely regarded as pioneering.⁶⁸

Goveia and Mair were explicit about their politics and its relationship to their history writing, and both established elite professional careers against the odds of gender and racial discrimination. A more hidden contribution to the anticolonial discourse in London was made slightly earlier by an African American woman named Ruth Anna Fisher (1886–1975). Fisher was from Ohio, and first came to London in 1920 to study political science at the LSE. She went on to work for the Library of Congress in Washington, where she was charged with locating, identifying and copying archival material relating to American history in British archives.⁶⁹ She settled in London in the 1930s, registering at the British Museum Reading Room in 1920 with a Bloomsbury address. She went on to occupy an office at the British Museum for five years.⁷⁰ She worked mainly on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century papers of the British Foreign, Colonial, War and Navy Offices and the private papers of William Gladstone and Edmund Burke.

⁶⁶ M. Matera, 'Colonial subjects: black intellectuals and the development of colonial studies in Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, xlix (2010), 388–418, at p. 408.

⁶⁷ M. Matera, *Black London: the Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland, Calif., 2015), pp. 266–8; Chamberlain, 'Elsa Goveia'.

⁶⁸ B. Bush, 'Lucille Mathurin-Mair (née Waldron), 1924–2009: pioneer of Caribbean women's history', 21 Mar. 2011 <<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-month-lucille-mathurin-mair-nee-waldron-1924-2009-pioneer-of-caribbean-womens-history/#more-719>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2018]; L. Mathurin-Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655–1844* (Kingston, 2006).

⁶⁹ S. L. Render, 'African-American women: the outstanding and the obscure', *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, xxxii (1975), 306–21, at pp. 315–19.

⁷⁰ G. Romain, *Race, Sexuality and Identity in Britain and Jamaica: the Biography of Patrick Nelson, 1916–1963* (London, 2017), p. 77.

During this time Fisher became a quiet and subversive vessel of transatlantic knowledge exchange between the 'official' spaces of British and American national history. In the interwar period she joined the British Labour Party and wrote on European affairs for the African American magazine the *Messenger*, advancing internationalist arguments against British imperialism for a black audience.⁷¹ She shared in the optimistic, pro-democracy Anglo-American wartime discourse of the 1940s, publishing stalwart letters sent to her in Washington by English friends (she had to leave London in 1940 when her flat was bombed).⁷² Most importantly, although Fisher never published a history book herself, she did write a series of articles in the *Journal of Negro History* based on her archival findings.⁷³ Despite the fact that she was not vocal in the era of civil rights politics, in her historical research she was committed to uncovering black experiences both in Africa and in the New World through reading between the lines of the British colonial records that she was sending back to her bosses in Washington.⁷⁴ Her affectionate tone towards the virtues of British national identity and 'Blitz spirit' was always laced with a strong critique of the legacies of British slavery, suggesting a subtle articulation of black Britishness in her writings, although Fisher was herself African-American. Referring to the Englishman, she wrote, 'the very system which he now wished to abolish had bred up a class of his own race which regarded these liberal principles as a menace to its existence and which to this day remains one of the chief obstacles to putting them into full practice'.⁷⁵

Goveia and Fisher do not fit neatly into a traditional, white picture of women historians. They were engaged in a transatlantic political discourse more concerned with race and nation than with class or gender. As women of colour, they worked on the precarious margins of professional history and of 'Black London'. But these circumstances also allowed them to reconfigure their histories from within, with unmistakable consequences for both the content and methodologies of colonial and imperial history writing in the future.

⁷¹ R. A. Fisher, 'Lessons from Egypt', *Messenger*, June 1925, p. 235.

⁷² R. A. Fisher, 'England today', *Phylon*, ii (1941), 155–61.

⁷³ R. A. Fisher, 'Materials bearing on the negro in British archives', *Journal of Negro History*, xxvii (1942), 83–93; 'A note on Jamaica', *Journal of Negro History*, xxviii (1943), 200–203; 'Granville Sharp and Lord Mansfield', *Journal of Negro History*, xxviii (1943), 381–9; and 'A note on "divide and conquer"', *Journal of Negro History*, xxx (1945), 437–8.

⁷⁴ Towards the end of her life, Fisher attended the march on Washington in 1963. She first met W. E. B. Du Bois at the Third Pan African Congress held in London in 1923; see Render, 'African-American women', p. 319.

⁷⁵ Fisher, 'Materials bearing on the negro', p. 93.

Place

Place and spaces of work shape the output of all historians. In the mid twentieth century, when two world wars prompted vast movement within Europe through forced displacement and voluntary migration, women historians worked between and across national and imperial spaces. London, the metropolitan capital of a decolonizing empire, with its only quasi-institutional libraries at the IHR and the British Museum, was naturally a city of diasporic historians. One of the first historians of early modern women's lives in England, Patricia Crawford (1941–2009), found networks and collaborators in London during the twelve years of temporary contracts that marked her early academic career in Australia.⁷⁶ The federal University of London's mid-century structure included constituent bodies dedicated to European language and culture, including the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. This naturally attracted women historians who left their home countries in the 1930s and 1940s. Olga Crisp (1921–2010) fled Poland for England in 1946 after having worked for the Polish resistance. Crisp did graduate work in London throughout the 1950s on Russian economic history and went on to become a professor of Russian history at the IHR in 1979.⁷⁷ Other examples include the Spanish historian of Russia Isabel de Madariaga (1919–2014) and the Norwegian-born scholar of European diplomacy Ragnhild Hatton (1913–1995).⁷⁸

The women cited above marshalled their extraordinary talents and diasporic experiences to establish elusive academic careers in the mid twentieth century. But for other women historians, the gender implications of place had different consequences, because women were always much more likely to be producing history in liminal spaces such as libraries and archives. Archives and information management were burgeoning historical enterprises in mid-twentieth-century British culture and society. As Margaret Procter has argued in her study of the gendered networks of Public Record Office (PRO) archivist Hubert Hall, large swathes of women with historical training ploughed their energies into the semi-professionalized field of archives from the early twentieth century.⁷⁹ Local government and

⁷⁶ Private information supplied by Laura Gowing.

⁷⁷ G. Hosking, 'Obituary: Olga Crisp', *Independent*, 8 Mar. 2011 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-olga-crisp-resistance-worker-who-became-an-authority-on-russian-economic-history-2235748.html>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁷⁸ On de Madariaga see W. Sunderland, 'The historian and the empress: Isabel de Madariaga's Catherine the Great', in *Generations of Women Historians*, pp. 181–94.

⁷⁹ M. Procter, 'Hubert Hall (1957–1939): archival endeavour and the promotion of historical enterprise' (unpublished University of Liverpool PhD thesis, 2012). Hall worked as a civil servant at the PRO, reaching the post of assistant keeper in 1912.

its bureaucracies expanded in Britain from the 1880s, resulting in more opportunities for women to follow professional paths involving historical work without facing the marriage bar. This was certainly the trajectory of Joyce Godber (1906–1999), a history graduate who, after working at the IHR and a short stint in publishing, rose up the ranks of the archives profession to become county archivist of Bedfordshire between 1946 and 1968.⁸⁰ She wrote an important regional study, *History of Bedfordshire, 1066–1888* (1969), from that position and maintained horizontal links with the demographers at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure in its early days.⁸¹ In a less professionalized but all too familiar set-up, Rachael Lane Poole (1860–1937), whose husband was the Oxford University archivist, spent her married life cataloguing important artworks across the colleges, university and city of Oxford.⁸²

The central civil service, especially during and after the Second World War, was also a significant site of historical activity. Wartime service in high-level intelligence and administrative roles closely informed the work of a whole generation of post-war historians in Britain, women as well as men. They went on to see their historical research as closely related to government policy in the present. This was true of Ragnhild Hatton, the historian of Spain Jean Lindsay (1910–1996) and the historian of science and technology Margaret Gowing (1921–1998), all of whom undertook wartime government service.⁸³ Gowing continued working in the Cabinet Office from 1945 to 1959 on the official histories of the Second World War. Afterwards she was appointed as the official historian and archivist to the UK Atomic Energy Authority, which led to the publication of her *Britain and Atomic Energy, 1939–1945* (1964).⁸⁴

Before policy-makers shifted to a wholesale reliance on the social sciences in the 1960s, the Foreign Office also supported significant historical research in the post-war period. Luke Gibbon has recently forensically

⁸⁰ ‘Joyce Godber’, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society <<http://www.bedfordshirehrs.org.uk/content/publication-author/godber-joyce>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2018].

⁸¹ Private information supplied by Deborah Thom.

⁸² R. Williams, ‘“By herself”: rediscovering the history of women at St John’s College, Oxford’, St John’s College Library Oxford Special Collections, 7 Feb. 2018 <<https://stjohnscollegelibrary.wordpress.com/2018/02/07/by-herself-rediscovering-the-history-of-women-at-st-johns-college-oxford/>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2018].

⁸³ M. Bryant, ‘Lindsay [née McLachlan], Jean Olivia (1910–1996)’, *ODNB*, 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/65734>> [accessed 7 June 2021]; R. Fox, ‘Gowing [née Elliott], Margaret Mary (1921–1998)’, *ODNB*, 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/71257>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁸⁴ M. Gowing, *Britain and Atomic Energy, 1939–1945* (London, 1964).



Figure 10.1. Dame Lillian Penson running her seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, London, June 1957. Image reproduced by permission of the Institute of Historical Research and Walter L. Arnstein.

pieced together the scale and nature of Lillian Penson's (1896–1963, see Figure 10.1) hitherto unacknowledged contributions to editing the famed *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914* series while she was working for the civil service as a research assistant to two male historians.⁸⁵ Penson eventually gained acclaim in her own right as an academic historian and as the first female vice-chancellor of the University of London, in 1948. Both Gowing and Penson were mid-century women historians who researched, worked and taught in traditionally masculine fields of history. Their pathways to these topics through wartime service and policy concerns suggest that women had to prove themselves through applied historical labour in order to excel in these fields. At the same time, this practical experience yielded histories that were alert to public policy needs in a way that later history writing from within the professionalized academy was not.

⁸⁵ L. Gibbon, 'The unknown editor: Lillian Penson and *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*', presented at the 14th International Conference of Editors of Diplomatic Documents, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, London, 29 Apr. 2017. See Z. Steiner, 'On writing international history: chaps, maps and much more', *International Affairs*, lxxiii (1997), 531–46, at p. 533.

Audience

Women historians in the twentieth century frequently faced set expectations about who their histories were supposed to be for. As work on the nineteenth century has shown, there was a strong assumption that women were suited to writing history for children and commercially for non-elite audiences.⁸⁶ Twentieth-century publics were better educated and thus more demanding of their histories, as history itself fragmented under the weight of professionalization and the proliferation of new media and technologies. Gendered assumptions about audience did not subside, however; rather they evolved in line with changing ideas about gender and social class. Histories produced by women continued to be regarded as most appropriate for non-academic consumers, be they post-war housewives or working-class pupils in secondary schools.

Some women historians, including Eileen Power, used their professional platforms to advance social reform agendas relating to peace and women's rights. Parallel to this endeavor, women continued to produce popular histories specifically aimed at 'ordinary' people throughout the interwar years, leaving highbrow historical writing (mostly) to male historians, professional or otherwise.⁸⁷ The gender division in history writing for different audiences was in part imposed by gatekeepers (especially publishers) but also by a bottom-up demand for women's writing that recounted cosy, intimate and humanistic versions of the past. This mode of history writing was finessed by middle-class writers such as Margaret Jourdain (1876–1951), Elizabeth Pakenham (1906–2002) and Cecil Woodham-Smith (1896–1977) throughout the mid twentieth century.⁸⁸ The expansion of secondary and then higher education after the Second World War diversified tastes, expanded horizons and enabled working-class women who decisively challenged these genres to become historians and writers.

The case of Dorothy Hartley, with whom this chapter began, demonstrates how audience demands for certain types of history could facilitate careers for women historians outside of the academy. Hartley was an eccentric who made a living through a combination of journalism, travel writing and broadcasting on historical themes relating to everyday life in England. Like many academics, she carried out her research in the British Museum

⁸⁶ Mitchell, *Picturing the Past*.

⁸⁷ See V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* [1929] (London, 2000), pp. 55–7.

⁸⁸ See, e.g., M. Jourdain, *English Interiors in Smaller Houses from the Restoration to the Regency, 1660–1830* (London, 1933); C. Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale* (London, 1950); E. Pakenham, *Victoria R. I.* (London, 1964).

Reading Room when she visited London.⁸⁹ She was politically conservative and her commitment to recovering the practical elements of a bygone past clearly reflected her preference for an ‘organic’ social order.⁹⁰ In the 1930s Hartley wrote a series of lively and informal columns on the history of food for the *Daily Sketch*, covering topics as diverse as seaweed, toffee apples and clotted cream.⁹¹ These were the product of her extended travels around Britain by bicycle and by car, a less high-profile, conservative version of J. B. Priestley’s famed *English Journey* (1934).⁹² An essay on the history of tea opened with light-hearted portraits of daily life in 1930s England, with the wife leaving a tea caddy scoop out for her husband showing him how much to use and the apprentice boys in a factory fetching their cans at ‘mashing time’, their tea break.⁹³ Hartley eventually covered similar topics in some one-off radio broadcasts on the BBC Empire Service.⁹⁴

In 1954 she published *Food in England* with the non-academic press Macdonald, and in doing so invented a new genre of history book, using historical recipes to illuminate past practices of cooking and eating with one eye on the present.⁹⁵ This model, grounded in mid-century domesticity, captured female audiences with no apparent interest in history in its ‘official’ guise. Women historians were well placed to explore this fluidity between genres and to write for women audiences in the mid twentieth century. Although a later cohort of socialist women historians would credibly denounce these domestic discourses as oppressive and restrictive, they resonated with a public raised on banal austerity and wartime patriotism.

Situated awkwardly between these two positions sits another mid-century popularizer, Jacquetta Hawkes (1910–1996). Hawkes publicly voiced her disdain for the Women’s Liberation Movement in 1980, but she spent most of her public and personal life defying established expectations

⁸⁹ BBC WAC, Dorothy Hartley talks file I: 1937–1962, D. Hartley to R. Power, 17 May 1938.

⁹⁰ Introduction to Hartley, *Lost World*; M. Wondrausch, ‘Hartley, Dorothy Rosaman (1893–1985)’, *ODNB*, 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50449>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁹¹ Reproduced in Worsley, Bailey and Hartley, *Lost World*, pp. 35–301.

⁹² J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London, 1934).

⁹³ Hartley, *Lost World*, p. 243.

⁹⁴ BBC WAC, Dorothy Hartley talks file I: 1937–1962, D. Hartley to Miss Quigley, 12 May 1939. Hartley’s first broadcast, which explained the medieval tradition of ‘Ox-Roasting’, aired on the Empire Service on 21 June 1937.

⁹⁵ D. Hartley, *Food in England* (London, 1954).

of how female academics should behave.⁹⁶ She trained and began her career as an archaeologist but during the Second World War transitioned into journalism and worked for the Ministry of Education and UNESCO on a special ‘visual education’ unit, making popular films about the Iron Age, while moonlighting as a poet.⁹⁷ Consulting for the BBC in the late 1940s, Hawkes prepared scripts and guidance notes for teachers on recent domestic excavations in Britain.⁹⁸ Within BBC schools broadcasting, female historical expertise was particularly ubiquitous. In fact, the most prolific schools history writer and broadcaster of the mid-century was Rhoda Power (1890–1957), a historian and the younger sister of Eileen Power.⁹⁹ Rhoda Power collaborated closely with Hawkes on ‘illustrated’ history talks for the radio with music, sound effects and dramatic interludes, a form of history she herself invented.¹⁰⁰ Both women displayed technological mastery and a keen pedagogical understanding of how to prepare suitable history resources for a school-age audience.

Hawkes courted middlebrow, adult publics with her published books; in them her easy spirituality and frank sexuality breathed life into mid-century history writing. *A Land* (1951) combined lyricism, history and geography to tell the entire natural history of Britain.¹⁰¹ It was a book about the growth of consciousness in the introspective, post-war moment: ‘consciousness has now reached a stage in its growth at which it is impelled to turn back to recollect happenings in its own past, which it has, as it were, forgotten’.¹⁰² A later work, *A Quest of Love* (1980), reimagined seven historical periods through the mind of a partially autobiographical universal woman.¹⁰³ Hawkes said that she tended to ‘write books that fall between all the shelves’.¹⁰⁴ Particularly difficult for the disciplinized professionals to swallow was the commingling of psychology and New

⁹⁶ ‘Jacquetta Hawkes’, *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4, 21 Nov. 1980 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p009mvpr>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁹⁷ ‘Jacquetta Hawkes’, *Desert Island Discs*.

⁹⁸ BBC WAC, S68/6/1, J. Hawkes to R. Power, 12 Oct. 1947.

⁹⁹ See L. Carter, ‘Rhoda Power, BBC Radio, and Mass Education, 1922–1957’, *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, xxvi (2021), 1–16; K. Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: a History of Early Women at the BBC* (London, 2016), pp. 135–7.

¹⁰⁰ This is usually mistakenly reported as Eileen Power’s innovation. See: BBC WAC, S68/9, R. Power, ‘Broadcasting history lessons’, 25 Feb. 1933.

¹⁰¹ J. Hawkes, *A Land* (Boston, Mass., 2001).

¹⁰² Hawkes, *A Land*, p. 11.

¹⁰³ J. Hawkes, *A Quest of Love* (London, 1980).

¹⁰⁴ ‘Jacquetta Hawkes’, *Desert Island Discs*.

Ageism with the 'hard' sciences of archaeology and geology in *A Land*, and Hawkes was largely disregarded by the academic community once she began to write these popular works. But she was embraced by the literary and educational establishments alike in the mid twentieth century for her creative and personal renderings of prehistoric Britain and its environmental and sensory links to the post-war, Cold War present. Considered collectively, Hartley, Power and Hawkes demonstrate how women historians in the mid-century carved their own idiosyncratic paths, with commercial and popular success, to wider audiences for history.

This chapter has displayed the diversity of women's historical work in the twentieth century, showing that a focus on professional women historians and the traditional pathways of the university are only one part of a broader story. The history of women doing history in Britain was not just about the conservative politics of universities, or the socialist politics of women's history. It was about the politics of everyday life. Women's age, race, nationality, locality and past work experience all placed parameters on their claims to the identity of historian, and were always set in relation to a male, professional academic norm.

In particular, the experiences of women historians in the mid-century cohort deepens our understanding of the gendered conditions of doing history outside of the academic profession. The first and third cohorts of women historians in Britain, working in the interwar and the post-1960s periods respectively, worked during a time of more buoyant (although still highly unequal) female employment in higher education and in the political context of two women's movements. Between the 1930s and 1960s women did also contribute to the production of historical knowledge, but they did it for different causes and audiences and in alternative spaces to those women who came before and after them. Very often those women who took long career breaks to raise a family, the professional identities of women historians in the mid-twentieth century were frequently not as 'historians' at all. Their identities and enterprises spanned the precarious professions, from archivists and curators to educators and writers. But their methodological, pedagogical and practical legacies have been essential to both the professional lives of later women historians and to how history has been consumed beyond the academy into the twenty-first century.

II. Feminism, selfhood and social research: professional women's organizations in 1960s Britain

Helen McCarthy

In the early to mid-1960s, professional women's organizations in Britain were gripped by a peculiar kind of survey fever. During these years, bodies including the British Federation of University Women (BFUW), the Medical Women's Federation (MWF), the Association of Headmistresses and Association of Assistant Mistresses, and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Great Britain and Northern Ireland conducted substantial pieces of social research. In most cases, this took the form of a postal questionnaire designed to elicit factual information about educational achievements, employment histories, income and domestic circumstances with a view to building an authoritative picture of how the graduate or 'trained' woman was positioned within the post-war labour market. In addition, the surveys explored the role of attitudes, ambitions and orientations in shaping career choices and outcomes, paying particular attention to how women felt about engaging in paid work after marriage and maternity. These surveys were published and disseminated in various ways – through books, pamphlets, policy briefings, conferences and seminars – and to audiences stretching from gatherings of professional women to employers, university careers advisers and government policy-makers. The data they contained helped professional women's organizations formulate demands for wider employment and training opportunities, better career development and more favourable tax policies for their members, including married women looking to return to the workplace after having children.

This chapter anatomizes this social survey 'moment' among graduate and professional women by exploring the contexts which produced it and by evaluating its social, cultural and political consequences. The flurry of surveys in the 1960s reflected longer-term demographic and socio-economic trends which transformed the typical female life cycle in the post-war decades and made regular paid work after marriage an increasingly common experience and aspiration across social classes. Yet, as this chapter demonstrates, this survey fever was also the product of

H. McCarthy, 'Feminism, selfhood and social research: professional women's organizations in 1960s Britain' in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 287–304. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

an encounter with social science, or, more precisely, with an emerging sociology of women which placed the problem of understanding women's subjective feelings about paid work, family and identity centre stage. Pioneered by individual researchers such as Viola Klein, Judith Hubback and Pearl Jephcott, the pursuit of sociological knowledge about paid work and feminine selfhood was embraced by professional women's organizations and stood at the heart of the public advocacy which they carried out on behalf of their members.

Social research thus became the intellectual ally of a particular kind of liberal, middle-class feminist politics centred on notions of professional commitment, personal achievement and emotional self-management. This process had two key elements which were to prove consequential in the longer term. First, social surveys produced new forms of evidence which these organizations could deploy when lobbying government and employers or appealing to a wider public. 'Research' gained a far greater prominence in public debates about women's professional careers in the later twentieth century than it had in earlier decades. Second, social research established a dynamic of reflexivity within the construction of women's professional identities which would endure. These surveys purported to describe the realities of women's work and family lives, but the image they reflected prized personal characteristics such as determination, courage and ambition, alongside the capacity to organize, delegate and manage and discipline the feminine self. While some women found this celebration of individual agency empowering, it stemmed from and prioritized the particular interests of a group of relatively privileged middle-class women. This had the effect of downplaying issues of wider significance for working women, notably childcare, and created ideological distance between long-established professional women's organizations and the radical strategies advocated by second-wave feminists in the 1970s. Despite the political challenge presented by Women's Liberation, the feminized professional identities established in the post-war decades remained culturally pervasive into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

I

The landscape of bodies organizing and representing the interests of professional women was broad and varied in 1960s Britain. There were organizations dating back to the Victorian and Edwardian women's movement, such as the Association of Headmistresses (1874) and the British Federation of University Women (1907), both founded when access to higher education, training and professional employment was an object of sustained feminist agitation. Others, like the Medical Women's Federation

(1917), the Women's Engineering Society (1919), the British Federation of Business and Professional Women (1933) and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (1938), were founded during or after the First World War, reflecting women's small but growing presence across a widening range of occupational fields.¹ These advances were enabled in part by the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, which eradicated formal barriers preventing women's entry to occupations including law, architecture, accountancy and the administrative grades of the home civil service.² Professional women's organizations established a track record in mobilizing women and campaigning for their rights, often joining wider coalitions led by feminist societies such as the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship and the Six Point Group around causes including equal pay and abolition of the marriage bar.³ Such associations provided a collective voice for their members but also a sense of professional community and a forum for sociability through annual conferences, monthly journals and local branch meetings.⁴ This mix of activities continued to characterize the post-war work of these and newer bodies, whose memberships grew as more women entered higher-level white-collar occupations, particularly

¹ The British Federation of Business and Professional Women was separate from, and founded five years earlier than, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. For their different histories, see L. Perriton, 'Forgotten feminists: the Federation of British Professional and Business Women, 1933–1969', *Women's History Review*, xvi (2007), 79–97; and D. Hall, *Making Things Happen: History of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* (London, 1963).

² M. Takayanagi, 'Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, 1919', in *Women's Legal Landmarks: Celebrating the History of Women and Law in the UK and Ireland*, ed. E. Rackley and R. Auchmuty (London, 2018), pp. 133–8.

³ For women's organized activism on these issues between the wars see P. Thane, 'What difference did the vote make?' in *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present*, ed. A. Vickery (Stanford, Calif., 2001), pp. 253–88; Perriton, 'Forgotten feminists'; 'The education of women for citizenship: the National Federation of Women's Institutes and the British Federation of Business and Professional Women 1930–1959', *Gender and Education*, xxi (2009), 81–95; H. Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation: Women's Work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900–1955* (Manchester, 2016); S. Worden, 'Powerful women: electricity in the home, 1919–40', in *A View from the Interior: Women and Design*, ed. J. Attfield and P. Kirkham (London, 1989), pp. 131–50; C. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928–1964* (Manchester, 2013).

⁴ H. McCarthy, 'Service clubs, citizenship and equality: gender relations and middle-class associations in Britain between the wars', *Historical Research*, lxxxi (2008), 531–52. For professional women's community in the pre-1914 period see M. Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (London, 1985).

those ‘caring’ professions associated with the expanding welfare state, most notably teaching, medicine and social work.⁵

Alongside swelling demand for female labour in these sectors, demographic changes were reshaping the context for professional women’s organizations by the 1960s. Much public debate and sociological comment fixed upon a set of interlinked trends which appeared to be transforming the typical female life cycle. Earlier marriage and smaller, more compressed families, greater longevity and improved health presented new possibilities for the ‘middle years’ of a woman’s life. As the social policy expert Richard Titmuss wrote in 1952:

With an expectation of another thirty-five to forty years of life at the age of forty, with the responsibilities of child upbringing nearly fulfilled, with so many more alternative ways of spending money, with new opportunities and outlets in the field of leisure, the question of the rights of women to an emotionally satisfying and independent life appears in a new guise.⁶

These developments framed new understandings of the meaning of paid work for women and were brought to further prominence by widely read sociological studies such as Viola Klein and Alva Myrdal’s *Women’s Two Roles* (1956), Judith Hubback’s *Wives Who Went to College* (1957) and Pearl Jephcott’s *Married Women Working* (1962). These social researchers helped to solidify in the public mind the idea that women’s needs and aspirations, both material and psychic, were undergoing a process of profound change rooted in irreversible social, economic and cultural transformations evident in all ‘modern’ societies. Central to their analysis was the ‘dual role’, an emerging pattern of paid and unpaid work phased over the life course. Women now typically worked beyond marriage and up to the birth of their first child, returning to employment in their late thirties or forties, often on a part-time basis and following a prolonged period of full-time childrearing.⁷

This pattern was evident among working-class wives seeking part-time jobs in the 1950s, such as those interviewed by Ferdynand Zweig or by Pearl Jephcott in her ground-breaking study of the Peek Freans biscuit factory in Bermondsey.⁸ The idea of the dual role was, however, taken up with greatest

⁵ Interestingly, nurses’ associations do not appear to have been part of this survey moment, despite much discussion within government on labour shortages in nursing and the need to attract trained nurses back into the profession after marriage.

⁶ R. M. Titmuss, *Essays on ‘the Welfare State’* (London, 1958), p. 102.

⁷ H. McCarthy, ‘Social science and married women’s employment in post-war Britain’, *Past & Present*, ccxxxiii (2016), 269–305.

⁸ F. Zweig, *Women’s Life and Labour* (London, 1952); P. Jephcott, with N. Seear and J. H. Smith, *Married Women Working* (London, 1962).

enthusiasm by professional women's organizations because of the solution it appeared to offer to the 'dilemma' of continuing a career after marriage and motherhood. It had not proven wholly impossible for married women to practise certain professions in earlier decades, especially if self-employed or freelance, as in the case of GPs, journalists and small business-owners, and especially when helped by live-in servants and boarding schools.⁹ Yet the imposition of marriage bars across the public and private sectors forced most women to choose between career and family before the Second World War. The prospect of women being enabled to return to paid work as an 'ordinary' feature of the female life course was therefore a new and exciting development for bodies such as the Medical Women's Federation or the British Federation of University Women. The dual role provided an answer to critics who decried the 'wasted' investment of training women in medicine, architecture or social work and who supported the use of formal or informal quotas to limit women's presence on university or vocational courses.¹⁰ It promised, furthermore, to expunge once and for all the still-resonant stereotype of the spinster bluestocking who sacrificed the pleasures of 'normal' family life to pursue intellectually satisfying work. As Myrdal and Klein argued, their favoured two-stage model demonstrated 'that it is possible for women to envisage the idea of work outside the home as a career for life without any feeling of self-denial or resignation, and to plan for it as a positive gain'.¹¹

This was the context in which professional women's organizations turned to research to inform and invigorate their campaigning work. Earlier advocates of women's professional employment had made use of empirical data, such as the economist and factory inspector Clara Collet, who published a series of pioneering essays on this subject in *Educated*

⁹ Some particularly prominent examples of mothers who achieved professional success between the wars include the writer Vera Brittain, the crystallographer and future Nobel laureate Dorothy Hodgkin, the landscape architect Marjory Allen, the economist Joan Robinson and the medic and later principal of Somerville College Janet Vaughan, all discussed in H. McCarthy, *Double Lives: a History of Working Motherhood in Modern Britain* (London, 2020), ch. 5.

¹⁰ Most medical schools enforced an unofficial quota on female applicants into the 1960s, ranging from 15% in London to a more generous 30% at some provincial universities (see M. A. Elston, 'Women doctors in the British health services: a sociological study of their careers and opportunities' (unpublished University of Leeds PhD thesis, 1986)), while female entrants to the senior branch of the Foreign Office were not permitted to exceed 10% of the total intake (see H. McCarthy, *Women of the World: the Rise of the Female Diplomat* (London, 2014)).

¹¹ A. Myrdal and V. Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, 2nd edn (London, 1968), p. 8.

Working Women: Essays on the Economic Position of Women Workers in the Middle Classes in 1902. The Fabian Women's Group compiled a volume of informative chapters by leading professional women in *Women Workers in Seven Professions* (1914), while numerous guides and surveys appeared between the wars tracking progress and noting ongoing obstacles to women's career mobility.¹² In addition, women's societies produced briefings and memoranda for parliamentary inquiries and royal commissions which touched on questions related to women in the professions. In 1929–30, for example, the Association of Headmistresses, the Council of Women Civil Servants, and the London and National Society for Women's Service (among others) provided expert evidence to the Royal Commission on the Civil Service, pressing for wider opportunities for women in government employment.¹³ These submissions tended to draw upon the knowledge of individual officers who collated 'exemplary' cases of pioneering career women rather than producing statistically rigorous analysis rooted in large bodies of data. Interestingly, this latter approach was far more common among observers of women's *manual* labour, which was extensively investigated from the 1880s by social investigators, factory inspectors and such bodies as the Women's Industrial Council and the Fabian Women's Group.¹⁴

By the time professional women became of comparable interest, new methods and perspectives had transformed what Mike Savage has eloquently described as a pre-war tradition of 'gentlemanly' social science into a professionalized and 'de-moralized' sociology.¹⁵ This was reflected in

¹² For example, V. Brittain, *Women's Work in Modern England* (London, 1928); R. Strachey, *Careers and Openings for Women: a Survey of Women's Employment and a Guide for those Seeking Work* (London, 1935); *The Road to Success: Twenty Essays on the Choice of a Career for Women*, ed. M. I. Cole (London, 1936).

¹³ The minutes of evidence can be found at the National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), T169/18, T169/20.

¹⁴ The published literature on women's industrial labour is too vast to include here, but for a sense of its empirical ambition see, e.g., Royal Commission on Labour, *The Employment of Women: Reports by Miss Eliza Orme, Miss Clara Collet, Miss May Abraham and Miss Margaret Irwin (Lady Assistant Commissioners) on the Conditions of Work in Various Industries in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland* (Parl. Papers 1893 [C. 6894], xxiii); A. Harrison, *Women's Industries in Liverpool: an Enquiry into the Economic Effects of Legislation Regulating the Labour of Women* (London, 1904); E. Cadbury et al., *Women's Work and Wages: a Phase of Life in an Industrial City* (London, 1907); *The Occupations of Women according to the Census of England and Wales, 1911: Summary Tables Arranged and Compiled by L. Wyatt Papworth and D. M. Zimmern* (London, 1914); B. L. Hutchins, *Women in Modern Industry* (London, 1915); C. Black, *Married Women's Work* (London, 1915).

¹⁵ M. Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: the Politics of Method* (Oxford, 2010), p. 21.

the MWF's use of the questionnaire in the mid-1940s, when it launched its first major survey of women doctors amid mounting fears that women's medical training was being neglected under plans for the new National Health Service.¹⁶ The federation carried out another survey in 1954, partly prompted by the publication of Hubback's 'Graduate Wives' report (the forerunner to her *Wives Who Went to College*, which was also based on questionnaires), and planned a further piece of work in 1962, although this was postponed after it was learned that a national survey of women medics was already underway at the Medical Practitioners' Union, led by Patricia Elliott.¹⁷ In the end, both surveys were published in 1966, with respective sample sizes of 9,075 and 8,209, representing nearly three quarters of all practising female doctors in Britain.¹⁸ These were followed by numerous smaller surveys dealing with women's careers in particular specialties, medical schools or regions, some of which were published in the profession's leading journals, the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*.¹⁹ The BFUW launched its Graduate Women at Work project around the same time, collecting questionnaire replies from around 1,500 women and a sample of diaries kept by 91 graduate mothers working full- or part-time in a range of occupations over a period of two weeks.

Numerous other investigations were conducted by professional women's organizations across the decade, in most cases, as above, collecting data through postal questionnaires. They included a survey of married women in teaching carried out by the Association of Headmistresses and the

¹⁶ See circular letter from Gwendoline Smith, dated 4. Apr. 1944, in Wellcome Library, London (hereafter Wellcome Lib.), records of the Medical Women's Federation, MWF/J.3/1.

¹⁷ Wellcome Lib., MWF/J.3/1, 'Survey of the completed questionnaires relating to medical women who qualified in 1933 and 1948' – copy of final report, dated Aug. 1955.

¹⁸ J. Lawrie, M. Newhouse and P. Elliott, 'Working capacity of women doctors', *British Medical Journal*, 12 Feb. 1966, pp. 409–12; M. Jefferys and P. Elliott, *Women in Medicine: the Results of an Inquiry Conducted by the Medical Practitioners' Union in 1962–63* (London, 1966).

¹⁹ See, e.g., J. Kahan and N. Mac Faul, 'Middlesex women graduates 1947–1961: a survey of their careers', *Middlesex Hospital Journal*, lxii (Oct. 1962), 192–4; A. H. T. Robb-Smith, 'The fate of Oxford medical women', *Lancet*, 1 Dec. 1962, pp. 1158–61; A. G. W. Whitfield, 'Current work of Birmingham medical graduates', *Lancet*, 15 Feb. 1964, pp. 374–5; Audrey W. M. Ward, 'Women doctors graduating at Sheffield, 1933–1957', *Medical Officer*, 28 Nov. 1969; M. Timbury and M. Ratzer, 'Glasgow medical women, 1951–4: their contribution and attitude to medical work', *British Medical Journal*, 10 May 1969, pp. 372–4; K. Ulyatt and F. M. Ulyatt, 'Some attitudes of a group of women doctors related to their field performance', *British Journal of Medical Education*, v (1971), 242–5; L. A. Aird and P. H. S. Silver, 'Women doctors from the Middlesex Hospital Medical School (University of London) 1947–67', *British Journal of Medical Education*, v (1971), 232–41; F. Eskin, 'A survey of medical women in Lincolnshire, 1971', *British Journal of Medical Education*, vi (1972), 196–200.

Association of Assistant Mistresses; the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs' study of the employment and training needs of older women; and smaller-scale enquiries into women in social work, architecture and veterinary medicine.²⁰ The Women's Information and Study Centre (WISC), a body founded in 1962 to help married women resume careers after bringing up their families, published *Working Wonders: the Success Story of Wives Engaged in Professional Work Part-Time* (1969), based on questionnaire responses from 250 women across a range of fields. Meanwhile, in 1965, an Inter-Professional Working Party (IPWP), set up by the MWF with representatives from multiple occupations, distributed a survey through its affiliated organizations asking respondents about their employment patterns, domestic arrangements and expenditure on childcare, housekeeping, personal grooming and work-related travel.²¹ Set alongside the studies produced by Hubback, Klein and others, the wealth of information generated by and about professional women in the 1960s was extraordinarily rich. Never before had the professional working woman been so closely probed or thoroughly documented, a phenomenon which was not limited to Britain.²² So overwhelming, in fact, was the proliferation of surveys on medics that one university dean wrote to the MWF in 1974 calling for better coordination of effort, noting that 'people do get rather irritated by receiving a lot of questionnaires'.²³

As well as the sheer quantity and scale of these post-war enquiries, professional women's organizations departed from earlier modes of evidence-

²⁰ Association of Headmistresses, *Enquiry into the Recruitment of Married Women Graduates to Teaching: the Problems and Possibilities* (London, 1961); National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (hereafter NFBPWCGBNI), *The Changing Pattern: Report on the Training of the Older Woman* (London, 1966); P. Willmott, 'The Part-Time Social Worker', 1963, University of Reading Special Collections, Papers of Viola Klein, MS.1215 17/1. For architects see M. Green, 'They laughed when she went back to work', *Sunday Telegraph*, 23 Feb. 1964, p. 16.

²¹ Wellcome Lib., SA/MWF/L.10.

²² As the correspondence in Viola Klein's papers reveal, there was considerable interest in this subject in the United States, as well as in parts of Europe and Australia. The founders of the WISC were inspired in part by the Radcliffe Institute of Independent Study at Harvard University, which aimed 'to seek new ways of helping women to realize their best intellectual and creative potential' and was 'especially designed for those talented women who want to pursue their research or creative projects in addition to their domestic and community responsibilities' (copy of brochure dated Nov. 1960 in University of Reading Special Collections, MS.1215 4/2). Representatives of six US women's college alumni clubs, as well as Helen Cam, the first tenured female professor at Harvard, were present at the WISC's founding meeting on 16 May 1962 (see minutes in MS.1215 4/2).

²³ Wellcome Lib., MWF/J.10, Miss F. Gardner, dean of the Royal Free School of Medicine, to Jean Lawrie, 6 Mar. 1974.

gathering in their embrace of formal social-scientific expertise. The BFUW appointed Viola Klein as an expert adviser on their Graduate Women at Work project, signaling how seriously the federation regarded the academic integrity of the research. What was needed, as a circular of 1963 put it, was 'actual facts collected from as wide an area as possible and presented clearly and authoritatively'. The questionnaire, members were informed, had been compiled 'with the advice of psychologists and statisticians' and was piloted in a north-eastern town before being rolled out nationwide.²⁴ Klein was given the task of analysing the ninety-one diaries collected from successful working mothers and contributed a chapter to the final publication. In the mid-1960s, Klein advised the Inter-Professional Working Party whose members subsequently decided 'to write to all social science and sociology departments of Universities to see if they would or could co-operate' with its planned investigations.²⁵ The MWF was similarly anxious to ensure the robustness of its research, hesitating before agreeing to collaborate on the survey underway at the Medical Practitioners' Union, due to doubts about Elliot's qualifications and the fact that the questionnaire had been 'designed without consulting a sociologist or indeed the MWF itself'.²⁶ They devised their own questionnaire with help from John Brotherston, then head of the Department of Public Health at Edinburgh University, and sent it to the statistician Roy Allen at the London School of Economics for scrutiny, noting the need for 'proper statistical recording' of the data it aimed to produce.²⁷

II

These studies of professional women are absent from the major histories of post-war British social science, despite offering compelling evidence of what Mike Savage has called 'the creeping rise of the social science apparatus', together with its power to frame and interpret social change.²⁸ The efforts of professional women's organizations to collect authoritative data about a well-defined social group – in this case graduate and professional women – lend support but also add a new inflection to Savage's account. Whereas earlier generations of social investigators drew their conclusions through

²⁴ University of Reading Special Collections, MS.1215 7/2, Circular No. 2 to local associations, 11 Sept. 1963.

²⁵ Wellcome Lib., MWF/L.1/1, minutes of MWF IPWP for 17 and 30 Nov. 1965.

²⁶ Wellcome Lib., SA/MWF/J.7, 'Medical Women's Federation: memorandum on the MPU survey', undated.

²⁷ Wellcome Lib., SA/MWF/J.8/7, 'Memorandum re: regional surveys of medical women', undated.

²⁸ Savage, *Identities and Social Change*, pp. 10, 21.



Figure 11.1. Viola Klein, 1965. Photograph by W. M. Mills. Papers of Viola Klein, MS.1215 14/5, University of Reading Special Collections.

processes of visual inspection and moral evaluation, post-war sociologists became increasingly interested in how their subjects understood the world and their place in it. This shift towards capturing subjectivity was especially marked in studies of women's relationship to family and work, as evidenced by the work of Hubback, Jephcott and Klein, who placed as much emphasis on women's feelings and orientations as they did on demographic shifts and changing labour market structures. This interest in subjective experience also characterized the approach adopted by professional women's organizations. In exploring the situation of graduate and professional women, their surveys not only collected rich data on education, family size and employment status but also probed women's preferences and desires, their attitudes and ambitions, and their hopes and fears concerning paid work.²⁹

²⁹ I examine this reflexivity in depth using the archived questionnaires from Klein's 1963 survey of graduate women in 'Career, Family and Emotional Work: Graduate Mothers in 1960s Britain', *Past & Present*, ccxvii, Issue Supplement 15 (Dec. 2020), 295–317.

This becomes apparent in the shared themes which emerge from the surveys, foremost among which was the importance of professional commitment and an ethic of service in sustaining women's careers over the full female life course. The MWF repeatedly stressed this point in the conclusions they drew from survey data across the decades. Getting married women back to work, the MWF wrote in 1955, 'depends on the women themselves; they alone can build up the reputation for devotion to medical duty and reliability which it demands'.³⁰ Elliott and Jefferys made a similar point at the end of the 1966 MPU survey, noting that, while government and employers could smooth their path, 'ultimate responsibility rests with the women themselves. In accepting one of the limited opportunities for training for a profession whose skills are greatly in demand, they incur an obligation to the community which they must do their utmost to discharge.'³¹ A strong sense of vocation was found to be equally prominent among the BFUW's survey participants. Of the ninety-one diarists, Klein found that most were 'keenly interested in their job, were convinced that it is important not only for themselves but also for the community, and were on the whole rather proud of themselves'.³²

Related to this theme of commitment was the capacity to manage one's 'double life' (as Klein put it), both in terms of the practical logistics of running a job and a home and as regards the emotional labour required to maintain domestic harmony and achieve mental equilibrium. Klein admired the schoolteacher and mother of three who oversaw a 'team-spirit effort' in her household, which involved the supervision of a daily domestic worker and the delegation of specific tasks to husband, children and mother-in-law. Of a forty-three-year-old lawyer who moved her stepmother in so she could help with the care of her teenage daughter, Klein wrote: 'The whole of her record gives an impression of quiet, unfussing competence.'³³ Pat Williams struck a similar chord in her survey of professional part-timers: these women, she noted, 'want a multifaceted life ... the picture built up in the questionnaires is of extremely busy, often humorous, adaptable women, fast on their feet, somehow dovetailing the many different demands on them, and happy with their way of life'.³⁴ The authors of the MWF's 1966 survey argued that young

³⁰ Wellcome Lib., MWF/J.3/1, 'Survey of the completed questionnaires relating to medical women who qualified in 1933 and 1948', p. 1.

³¹ Jefferys and Elliott, *Women in Medicine*, p. 42.

³² *Graduate Women at Work: a Study by a Working Party of the British Federation of University Graduates*, ed. C. E. Arregger (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1966), p. 59.

³³ *Graduate Women at Work*, p. 66.

³⁴ P. Williams, *Working Wonders: the Success Story of Wives Engaged in Professional Work Part-Time* (London, 1969), p. 18.

women considering medicine as a career should be encouraged to seek this kind of contentment and balance. Aspiring female medics, they advised, must ‘take a sensible look at their circumstances and plan to make these compatible with their professional ambitions’.³⁵ This echoed the position adopted by Judith Hubback, who suggested in *Wives Who Went to College* that it was for each woman ‘to face the difficulties involved in combining marriage, motherhood and individualism and to work out her own solution in terms of her own circumstances, character and endowment’.³⁶

This assumption, that it was ultimately for women to work out their own strategies for a balanced and fulfilling life, stood at the heart of the model of professional identity constructed in these texts. All drew on survey data to call for measures to support women’s careers, but the success of such reforms relied in the final analysis on the courage and determination of women themselves. The National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs captured this spirit in the preface to its report on the older married returner, advising that ‘the various ways of entry into a fuller, vital life are here for the reading, here for action, which, if taken, will lead to a rewarding enjoyment’.³⁷ Later in the report it argued that ‘refresher’ courses aimed at married women were important not so much for imparting skills as for supplying ‘a moral booster’ to restore the confidence of the professionally trained housewife who feels she has ‘become a cabbage’.³⁸

In summary, these surveys articulated a feminist politics rooted in the values of personal achievement, commitment and self-knowledge. This was reflected in the kinds of issues that their authors championed publicly. Professional women’s organizations were highly vocal on the need for part-time training and flexible hours, a demand voiced repeatedly by their married members, but were strikingly silent on nursery or after-school provision, both areas of historic underinvestment by governments and employers. The problem of childcare, these organizations assumed, would be resolved privately by their mostly middle-class members. Elliott and Jefferys reported that respondents to the MPU survey ‘tended to agree that the most satisfactory form of care was that which could be provided in the home itself’, meaning that ‘the solution lies in the personal arrangements which the individual mother makes’. While noting that a minority had in fact expressed a preference for hospital-based crèches or nursery schools, the authors argued nonetheless for measures to tackle ‘the continuing shortage

³⁵ Lawrie et al., ‘Working Capacity’, p. 10.

³⁶ Judith Hubback, *Wives Who Went to College* (London, 1957), p. 87.

³⁷ NFBPWCGBNI, *Changing Pattern*, p. 3.

³⁸ NFBPWCGBNI, *Changing Pattern*, p. 21.

of people willing to undertake child-minding and domestic work in other people's homes'.³⁹ The survey of professional 'woman power' which Viola Klein carried out in 1963 with the assistance of the BFUW similarly found that few graduate mothers made use of nurseries or stated a preference for collective forms of day-care. Most of those with pre-schoolers who were working outside the home used nannies, au pairs, housekeepers or co-resident grandmothers.⁴⁰ This undoubtedly reflected the social stigma that local authority nurseries carried in this period, being widely regarded as a residual welfare service for unmarried mothers or other 'problem' families.⁴¹ But it also indicated the ideological dominance of the dual-role model in these decades. This contained two presuppositions: first, that most mothers would return to careers once their children were at school and therefore had little need of day-care; and, second, that the small minority pursuing continuous careers would have sufficient income to employ help at home. This goes some way towards explaining why maternity rights, including paid maternity leave, did not feature among the demands made by professional women's organizations before the 1970s.⁴²

One issue which these organizations *did* care about was tax, an issue of concern more broadly for the professional middle classes in the era of post-war social democracy. Bodies such as the Middle Class Alliance began lobbying Conservative governments for tax cuts from the mid-1950s, but professional women brought a distinctly feminist perspective to the debate a decade later.⁴³ The Inter-Professional Working Party set up by the MWF campaigned against joint taxation of married couples and lobbied for tax relief for those employing domestic help, arguing that such reforms were necessary to encourage highly qualified women back into the workplace.⁴⁴ Through the course of 1965–6, its members wrote to the Chancellor, met with Treasury officials and rallied supportive MPs, later setting up a dedicated pressure group, the Women's Taxation Action Group (WOTAG), to carry the campaign forward. Advocates of

³⁹ Jefferys and Elliott, *Women in Medicine*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ McCarthy, 'Career, family and emotional work'.

⁴¹ A. Davis, *Pre-School Childcare in England, 1939–2010: Theory, Practice and Experience* (Manchester, 2015), ch. 3.

⁴² McCarthy, *Double Lives*, ch. II. See also V. Randall, *The Politics of Child Daycare in Britain* (Oxford, 2000).

⁴³ For middle-class discontent over taxation see E. H. H. Green, 'The Conservative Party, the state and the electorate', in *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820*, ed. J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 176–200; M. Daunton, *Just Taxes: the Politics of Taxation in Britain, 1914–1979* (Cambridge, 2002), ch. 8.

⁴⁴ Wellcome Lib., MWF/L.1/2, minutes of the MWF IPWP for 28 Nov. 1967.

reform stressed the demoralizing effect of seeing a large proportion of one's salary absorbed by income tax and the cost of employing nannies or housekeepers, which was increased by the Selective Employment Tax (SET) introduced by the Labour government in 1966. However committed a woman might be to her profession, the IPWP wrote, 'if she cannot earn a sum which, after taxation and the payment of her domestic bills, brings some appreciable financial benefit to the family unit, she will, in all probability, remain at home'.⁴⁵ WOTAG's cause attracted some positive press commentary, including a piece in the *Guardian* by Jill Tweedie, who gave an example of a barrister so incensed by the prevailing tax laws that she was considering divorcing her husband and living with him unmarried so as to avoid paying what she regarded as a penalty for marriage.⁴⁶ The *Economist* also provided WOTAG with some welcome publicity for its campaign in December 1969.⁴⁷

WOTAG's demands, however, received less sympathy in government. The chief financial secretary to the Treasury told an IPWP deputation that he was unpersuaded by their claims about financial disincentives. 'He wondered for how many women taxation rather than their dedication to their families, etc. was the determining factor', and suggested that the situation for high-earning dual-career couples was not as bad as the IPWP implied.⁴⁸ This position was echoed by the Labour chancellor Roy Jenkins when the issue reached his desk in 1969, prompted by a communication from the Association of Anaesthetists urging support for WOTAG's proposals as a means of tackling labour shortages in medicine. In his reply, Jenkins defended the principle of progressive taxation and observed that only the tiny minority of couples with an income in excess of £5,000 paid significantly more under joint assessment.⁴⁹ This latter point was correct. As Viola Klein observed in her earlier reflections on this subject, the raising of the 'surtax' threshold from £2,000 to £5,000, together with personal allowances, meant that married women who earned were not in fact dramatically worse off than single

⁴⁵ Wellcome Lib., SA/MWF/L.10, 'Memorandum for submission to the Chancellor of the Exchequer', June 1965, p. 3.

⁴⁶ J. Tweedie, 'A taxing problem for working wives', *Guardian*, 16 Mar. 1970, p. 9.

⁴⁷ 'The wages of virtue', *Economist*, 20 Dec. 1969, p. 72.

⁴⁸ Wellcome Lib., SA/MWF/L.10, 'Note of meeting between the financial secretary to the Treasury and a deputation from the inter-professional working party held at the Treasury on the 16th December 1965'.

⁴⁹ For the government position see TNA, MH 149/323, Miss D. E. Chapman, private secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to R. P. W. Shackleton, President of the Association of Anaesthetists, Aug. 1969.

women.⁵⁰ Klein did, however, note that the rules around housekeeper and child-minder allowances penalized working wives: a husband with a disabled wife could claim £75 in tax relief if he employed a housekeeper to replace her, as could divorced or widowed wives in employment, but dual-income married couples could not. Klein also pointed out that the added costs of personal grooming, work clothes and running a second car were serious considerations for professionally qualified mothers contemplating a return to work.⁵¹ These details apart, WOTAG's broader target was the injustice of treating a woman's earnings as an extension of her husband's income, an issue that was only partly rectified by the introduction of optional separate assessment in 1971.⁵² As Tweedie wrote:

At the heart of WOTAG the principle of equality lies more deeply than finance. Professional women, they feel, have a right to deal with their own financial affairs yet, as things stand, all details of their finances and any investments must be channelled through their husbands; thus he is always aware of his wife's finances though he need not account to her for his.⁵³

III

The strength of feeling among professional women's organizations on taxation and their corresponding lack of interest in childcare policy was symptomatic of the class privilege enjoyed by their members. Bodies such as the BFUW and the MWF spoke of 'graduate', 'educated' or 'professional' women as a group defined by their intellectual training and expertise rather than by their social status. Yet in the 1950s and 1960s it was mostly middle-class girls who stayed on to take A-levels and secured places at university or teacher training colleges. If they married, as most did in those decades, their husbands were usually employed in professional or executive-level occupations and earned comfortable salaries. Professional women's organizations thus assumed that their members inhabited a middle-class

⁵⁰ V. Klein, 'Working Wives: the Money', *New Society*, 4 July 1963, p. 16.

⁵¹ It was a basic assumption, unquestioned either by WOTAG or its critics, that domestic labour and childcare were something to be paid for out of the wife's earnings, rather than a joint expense which enabled *both* spouses to follow fulfilling careers.

⁵² After that date, a married woman could choose to have her earned income assessed as though she were a single person if her husband agreed, although the Inland Revenue continued to correspond solely with husbands in relation to their wives' tax affairs until 1978. The couple lost their married person's allowance as a result, making this option attractive only to those on fairly high incomes. See House of Commons Library, *Tax and Marriage* (Research Paper 95/87, July 1995).

⁵³ Tweedie, 'A taxing problem'.

world and would apply its culturally specific calculus of decision-making when it came to paid work, factoring in private school fees, the cost of housekeepers, nannies, gardeners and au pairs, and the household's overall tax liability. The politics of personal achievement and commitment promoted by these organizations can in this sense be understood as an 'ideology of class', situated within and produced by the material circumstances and cultural norms of the post-war professional middle classes.⁵⁴

This position would begin to change in the 1970s, when the expansion of polytechnics and growing opportunities in public sector employment enabled more women from working-class or less secure lower-middle-class backgrounds to enter professional work.⁵⁵ The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) also issued a challenge to the liberal feminist politics practised by bodies such as the BFUW or the MWF. These organizations found common ground in calling for equal pay and equal opportunities in the workplace, but there were significant cultural, intellectual and generational differences between them. The president of the British Federation of Business and Professional Women told their annual conference in 1970 that their association could 'show that women can have confidence without emotionalism, realism without revolution and femininity without feminism', a comment evidently aimed at the more radical political methods favoured by second-wave activists.⁵⁶ Issues such as sexual autonomy, reproductive rights, domestic violence and pornography featured prominently within the WLM but were at odds with the career-focused agenda of professional women's organizations, as were the socialist and trade-unionist commitments held by many feminist activists in Britain.⁵⁷ There were differences, too, in how the WLM used research, viewing it as a means of challenging patriarchal power directly and largely eschewing the postal questionnaire for more innovative ethnographic fieldwork on the shop floor or in women's homes.⁵⁸ While the post-war social surveys made the

⁵⁴ I apply here the framework developed by R. McKibbin in *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880–1950* (Oxford, 1990) and *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1998).

⁵⁵ E. Worth, 'Women, education and social mobility in Britain during the long 1970s', *Cultural and Social History*, xvi (2019), 67–83.

⁵⁶ *Business and Professional Woman*, summer 1970, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Like professional women's organizations, the WLM was dominated by middle-class women, but not exclusively so, as recently argued by G. Stevenson in *The Women's Liberation Movement and the Politics of Class in Britain* (London, 2019).

⁵⁸ See, e.g., A. Pollert, *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* (Basingstoke, 1981); R. Cavendish, *Women on the Line* (London, 1982); S. Westwood, *All Day, Every Day: Factory and Family in the Making of Women's Lives* (London, 1984); S. Allen and C. Wolkowitz, 'Homeworking and the control of women's work', in *Waged Work: A Reader* (London, 1986), pp. 238–64; V. Beechey and

crucial first move towards recovering women's subjectivity, it was only from the 1970s that feminist researchers explicitly connected the articulation of women's experience to the development of collective strategies of resistance.⁵⁹

And yet the burgeoning feminist academy of the 1970s and 1980s did not displace the older traditions of research into women's lives pioneered by professional women's organizations. More work is needed to explore the legacy of the 1960s surveys in full, but their brand of empirical investigation into professional women's lives was replicated in a wider range of settings over the years, including business schools, think-tanks, employer organizations and research units within government.⁶⁰ It might be possible to see the 1960s surveys as anticipating the field of women in management research, which took shape in the 1980s and placed questions relating to women's professional ambition and career mobility centre stage.⁶¹ One could push the argument even further and suggest that these 1960s texts help us to trace the genealogy of popular discourses around women and professional work that have become dominant in the early twenty-first century. The high-achieving career-woman who successfully juggles family and job through sheer willpower and force of character is a familiar stereotype in contemporary popular culture, best exemplified in texts like Sheryl Sandberg's 2013 self-help book, *Lean In*.⁶² Yet Viola Klein was writing about this figure in the *Guardian* as early as 1964:

'How on earth does she manage?' we ask ourselves each time we hear of yet another woman whose achievements in her profession are matched by a full and happy family life ... Apart from the essential prerequisites of good health

T. Perkins, *A Matter of Hours: Women, Part-Time Work and the Labour Market* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁵⁹ H. Roberts, 'Some of the boys won't play any more: the impact of feminism on sociology', in *Men's Studies Modified: the Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines*, ed. D. Spender (Oxford, 1981), pp. 73–81; A. Oakley, 'Women's Studies in British sociology: to end at our beginning?', *British Journal of Sociology*, xl (1989), 442–70; S. Tarrant, *When Sex became Gender* (London, 2006).

⁶⁰ See, e.g., M. Fogarty, I. Allen and P. Walters, *Women in Top Jobs, 1968–1979* (London, 1981); *Careers of Professional Women*, ed. R. Silverstone and A. Ward (London, 1980); C. L. Cooper and M. Davidson, *High Pressure: Working Lives of Women Managers* (London, 1982).

⁶¹ The journal *Women in Management Review* was founded in 1985 but, unlike other branches of feminist social science, this field appears to lack a strong sense of its history.

⁶² As I discuss elsewhere, some feminist cultural studies scholars, unaware of this genealogy, have seen these discourses as the unique product of our 'neoliberal' moment. See H. McCarthy, "I don't know how she does it!" Feminism, family and work in neoliberal Britain', in *The Neoliberal Age? Britain since the 1970s*, ed. A. Davies, B. Jackson and F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (UCL Press, forthcoming).

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and ample energy, the secret of their success seems to be largely a matter of organization ... It would appear that what makes these women 'tick' is, first of all, their determination to make a success of their dual role. Where they are prompted by a sense of vocation, by a feeling of duty to fill a vacancy in one of the shortage occupations, or by a psychological need to get out of their homes for part of the day – whatever their motives, they are equally attached to their job and resolved to make it work.⁶³

⁶³ V. Klein, 'A double life', *Guardian*, 30 Oct. 1964, p. 10.

12. The ‘spotting a homosexual checklist’: masculinity, homosexuality and the British Foreign Office, 1965–70*

James Southern

In July 1991, Paul, a mid-ranking diplomat at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), told his employers he was gay. It was, of course, a critical moment in his personal life, but it was even more profound, considering the fact that, since the partial decriminalization of same-sex acts between men in 1967, it had been against the rules of the British diplomatic service to be openly gay. Days earlier, the then Prime Minister, John Major, had announced that the bar on homosexuality would be lifted, and Paul claims to have been the first diplomat subsequently to come out. In an interview in 2015, he described the day the FCO allowed him to keep his job:

I got a phone call from the Head of Security’s PA ... and it was quite simply ‘[He] will see you at 9.30 tomorrow morning’. And then, forgive the language, ‘Oh fuck, what’s going to happen?’ So I duly went ... and he was very pleasant and said ‘We’ve looked through your file and thank you for being open and we are able to grant your DV certificate’ ... So I went home for the evening and I stopped off at a gay bar that I’d been to a few times and I was in my suit and tie ... and I said ‘Can I have a pint, please?’ and the guy said ‘Excuse me, but do you know that this is a gay bar?’ and I said ‘Yes, I’m gay’ and do you know those first words [were] quite astonishing and amazing, liberating and wonderful that I no longer had to hide the fact that I was gay. It was only a small step, but a really significant step for me.¹

* A note on sources. This chapter makes use of material from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office archives at Hanslope Park (hereafter HP) which has at the time of writing not yet been released to The National Archives. It therefore references a filing system known as ‘X-Reference’, instances of which will be obvious to the reader. For this reason, catalogue references from this archive are not cited. These files are due to be released to the public in the near future.

¹ Paul, interview with the author, 24 Aug. 2015. ‘DV certificate’ refers to ‘Developed Vetting certificate’, the device used by UK government departments to define which individuals were permitted to access secret information. Hereafter, the equivalent term for the 1960s, ‘Positive Vetting’ (PV), is used.

J. Southern, ‘The “spotting a homosexual checklist”: masculinity, homosexuality and the British Foreign Office, 1965–70’ in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (London, 2021), pp. 305–324. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Paul's 'coming out' was, in a sense, a microcosm of a phenomenon widely experienced by gay men and lesbians in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century.² Yet it was also, on another level, a historically unique personal experience. Throughout his career, before and after the bar had been lifted, Paul had to reconcile his sexuality with his professional identity as a diplomat, and his autobiographical trajectory is inextricably linked with the history of the British diplomatic service. Well aware of the emotional labour he had expended in coexisting as a gay man and a diplomat, he admitted in retrospect that 'it was probably quite damaging to me as an individual to have to hide a fundamental part of my being'.³ Nonetheless, he considered the benefits of his Foreign Office career as having 'outweighed the inconvenience ... of having to hide my sexuality'.⁴ In other words, his desire to be a diplomat clashed with, overrode and shaped his identity as a gay man. What enabled Paul to frame his professional identity and sexuality in this way?

This chapter sets out to analyse the relationship that Paul negotiated: between the professional identity of British diplomats and the sexual identity of gay men and lesbians. It returns to the origins of the FCO bar on homosexuality, when the 1967 Sexual Offences Act forced British diplomats to decide whether or not homosexuality was, despite its partial decriminalization, inherently incompatible with what Iver Neumann has termed diplomatic 'scripts' – the basic performative requirements of 'being' a British diplomat.⁵ Using documentary material from the FCO archive in Hanslope Park, it conducts a discursive analysis of the process by which British diplomats defined, identified and developed a policy on homosexuality in the 1960s. It argues that the construction of 'homosexuality' at the Foreign Office was a creative process, the aim of which was the maintenance of strict codes for group identity and the foundations of which reveal that the definitions applied were culturally, historically – and institutionally – specific.

In doing so, this chapter seeks to intervene in debates about the construction of sexual identities in early post-war Britain. Historians have shown that

² On the uses of 'coming out' stories in oral history see R. W. Connell, 'A very straight gay: masculinity, homosexual experience, and the dynamics of gender', *American Sociological Review*, lvii (1992), 735–51.

³ Paul, interview with the author, 24 Aug. 2015. On the emotional labour required to 'perform' professional identities in conflict with personal identities see D. Mendelson, 'Transformations of working identities: labour and the self', in *Routledge Handbook of Identity Studies* (London, 2011), esp. pp. 163–4.

⁴ Paul, interview with the author, 24 Aug. 2015.

⁵ I. Neumann, 'To be a diplomat', *International Studies Perspectives*, vi (2005), 72–93.

the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were an era in which new sexual identities were cultivated and established within both hetero- and homosexual paradigms.⁶ Such interpretations, however, while insightful, can tend to obscure the particular mechanisms by which the acutely individualized process of sexual identification was experienced and performed in different social and cultural environments. Harry Cocks has argued convincingly that sexual identities are forged in individual "'sites" of modernity' as 'localized phenomena dependent on specific practices of class and the structure of life in a particular place'.⁷ Building on Cocks's claims, this chapter argues that British diplomats had to envisage and create a specifically Foreign Office version of homosexuality in order to keep gay men and lesbians out of the diplomatic service, and thus one of its key contentions is that the construction of sexual identity may be understood only through careful analysis of the sites and chronological contexts in which it was constructed.

Following Timothy Mitchell's injunction that there is no boundary between the 'state' and that which lies outside of it but rather an imaginary *internal* boundary drawn 'within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained', this chapter is an exploration of the methods by which 'deviant' forms of sexuality were identified, isolated and carefully partitioned off from the realm of government employment.⁸ It builds on insight from Harold Perkin's classic text, *The Rise of Professional Society* (1989), in which he argued that the twentieth-century British economy was defined by a rise in 'professions':

Where pre-industrial society was based on passive property in land and industrial society on actively managed capital, professional society is based on human capital created by education and enhanced by strategies of closure, that is, the exclusion of the unqualified.⁹

⁶ See, e.g., C. Waters, 'The homosexual as social being in Britain, 1945–1968', *Journal of British Studies*, li (2012), 685–710; B. Lewis, *Wolfenden's Witnesses: Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (Basingstoke, 2016); P. Schwarz, 'The social construction of heterosexuality', in *The Sexual Self: the Construction of Sexual Scripts*, ed. M. Kimmel (Nashville, Tenn., 2007), pp. 80–92.

⁷ H. Cocks, 'Modernity and the self in the history of sexuality', *Historical Journal*, xlix (2006), 1235–53. For illustrative examples of such work see M. Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago, 2005), 195–218; M. Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago, 2004); V. Harris, 'Sex on the margins: new directions in the historiography of sexuality and gender', *Historical Journal*, liiii (2010), 1085–104.

⁸ T. Mitchell, 'The limits of the state: beyond statist approaches and their critics', *American Political Science Review*, lxxviii (1991), 78.

⁹ H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989), p. 2.

Perkin's argument about the changing operations of social class in a society defined as much by unequal access to 'merit' as by hereditary status is a compelling one – so compelling, in fact, that its echoes continue to be clearly discernible in analyses as masterly and comprehensive as Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014).¹⁰ What this chapter argues is that the Weberian techniques of social closure to which Perkin and Piketty allude were much more versatile than their critiques of class may suggest: British diplomats used those same techniques to exclude homosexuality from their institution.¹¹ At a time when Britain's international status was unstable, increasingly fluid definitions of sexuality became a currency of legitimacy through which diplomats attempted to shore up, as they perceived it, the integrity of their profession. Paul's story is one in which one part of his identity – the 'diplomat' – was sanctioned and encouraged by the organization for which he worked, while another part – his sexuality – was excluded. This was social closure of a profession in which the boundaries were within, rather than between, individuals.

Sexual identity does not present itself at a strictly somatic level (like, say, gender or race) and thus always carries with it the potential for concealment. Any boundaries drawn by Foreign Office recruiters to keep gay men and lesbians out of the diplomatic service could not, therefore, be drawn on the perimeter of the organization; rather, they had to be drawn within the conceptual parameters of diplomatic identity itself. The urgent historical questions to be asked, then, are not concerned with the morality, legality or practice of sexualities in 1960s Britain. Instead, how did homosexuality come to be bound up with ideas considered relevant – indeed essential – to diplomatic identity, such as trustworthiness and stability? How was homosexuality deployed as a legal and moral concept within an institution that straddled functions as representatives of the British state and as an actor in the international political community during the Cold War? What did it mean to be *gay and* a British diplomat after the legislative revolution of 1967? It is these questions that this chapter seeks to address, beginning with an analysis of the origins of the bar on homosexuality, followed by a close reading of the discursive process by which it was constructed.

¹⁰ T. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, 2014), esp. pp. 407–17.

¹¹ On Weberian 'social closure' see M. Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Abingdon, 2009), pp. 187–90; K. Allen, *Max Weber: a Critical Introduction* (London, 2004), pp. 81–7; F. Parkin, 'Strategies of social closure in class formation', in *The Social Analysis of Class Structure*, ed. F. Parkin (London, 2001), pp. 1–5.

The history of the diplomatic service bar on homosexuality is inseparable from the cultural development of the Foreign Office in the political milieu of early Cold War Britain. Positive Vetting (PV), the practice of identifying characteristics or information believed to put individuals at risk of blackmail or make them unsuitable for access to secret information, was introduced in Britain in 1951 amid concerns about possible communist infiltration of the Foreign Office and security services.¹² The British government, however, conducted no anti-communist purges reasonably comparable to those in the US; its effort was so lacklustre contemporary campaigners dubbed it 'silent McCarthyism'.¹³

The formal templates generated by the introduction of PV, however, were to prove versatile instruments for the policing of government employees on other criteria. Concomitant with the development of PV, a number of high-profile scandals involving Foreign Office personnel began to suggest – to the public mind at least – that there were links between sexuality, diplomacy and treason.¹⁴ In the summer of 1951, homosexual Guy Burgess and (alleged) bisexual Donald Maclean defected to the Soviet Union – a scandal that damaged heavily the reputation of the Foreign Office. The revelations instigated a long-running narrative in the popular press about the 'Cambridge Five' spies (of whom Burgess and Maclean were two), who passed on state secrets to the Soviet Union during the 1940s and were closely associated with the Foreign Office. Far less attention was paid – both in government and in the popular press – to the ideological sympathies of the Five than to their personal lives. The tabloid press sensationalized every disclosure: Burgess's promiscuity; claims that Maclean had 'put it about that he was homosexual'; Kim Philby's notorious womanizing; John Cairncross's passion for polygamy.¹⁵

¹² P. Hennessy and G. Brownfield, 'Britain's Cold War security purge: the origins of Positive Vetting', *Historical Journal*, xxv (1982), 965–74; for a recent exploration see D. Lomas, *Intelligence, Security and the Attlee Governments, 1945–51: an Uneasy Relationship?* (Manchester, 2016).

¹³ On the lacklustre manifestations of what campaigners called 'silent McCarthyism' see K. Potter, 'British McCarthyism', in *North American Spies: New Revisionist Essays*, ed. R. Jeffreys-Jones and A. Lownie (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 143–5; S. Parsons, 'British McCarthyism and the intellectuals', in *Labour's Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain, 1945–51*, ed. J. Fyrrh (London, 1995), pp. 224–46.

¹⁴ A useful exploration of such associations may be found in C. Moran and S. Willmetts, 'Filming treachery: British cinema and television's fascination with the Cambridge Five', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, x (2013), 49–70.

¹⁵ R. Whittaker, 'Cold War alchemy: how America, Britain and Canada transformed espionage into subversion', in *American-British-Canadian Intelligence Relations, 1939–2000*, ed. R. Jeffreys-Jones and D. Stafford (London, 2000), 193–4. See J. Cairncross, *After Polygamy was Made a Sin: the Social History of Christian Polygamy* (London, 1974).

By the early 1960s, the mysterious disappearance of Lionel ‘Buster’ Crabb had been linked to sexual ‘perversion’ and gay junior diplomat John Vassall had been photographed having group sex with other men by Soviet operatives and blackmailed.¹⁶ The panic received official endorsement in 1963, when Lord Denning declared in his report into the Profumo affair that he ‘would normally regard homosexual behaviour ... as creating a security risk’.¹⁷

The Foreign Office incorporated criteria relating to sexuality into its vetting procedure in 1955, but tabloid sensationalism about upper-class sexual deviancy and susceptibility to treason had ignited a cultural problem that would require more than administrative reform if its consequences were to be contained.¹⁸ Henry Fairlie’s 1955 article for the *Spectator* magazine, in which he popularized the metaphor ‘the establishment’ in Britain, was an excoriation of the failure at the Foreign Office to deal with Burgess and Maclean.¹⁹ Two years later, journalist and Burgess’s friend Goronwy Rees wrote a scandalous series of articles in the *People* in which he seemed to capture eloquently the Foreign Office’s problem. As Frank Mort summarized:

[Rees] went on to claim that Burgess’s thirst for sexual adventure had even compromised the inner sanctum of the Foreign Office itself. Taken by Burgess into the Victorian splendour of the Foreign Secretary’s suite, Rees was amazed to find that Burgess kept his personal copy of Kinsey’s *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* in Ernest Bevin’s safe!²⁰

Rees described a ‘secret society’ of homosexuality and treason, where ‘[m]en like Burgess’ maintained social networks by practising ‘the same terrible

¹⁶ On Vassall see D. Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good* (London, 2005), pp. 596–8; for his own account see J. Vassall, *Vassall: the Autobiography of a Spy* (London, 1975); for Crabb see C. Moran, ‘Intelligence and the media: the press, government secrecy and the “Buster” Crabb Affair’, *Intelligence and National Security*, xxvi (2011), 676–700, at p. 691.

¹⁷ Lord Denning, *Lord Denning’s Report*, Cmnd 2152 (London, 1963), p. 190. For the context and motive behind Denning’s remarks see F. Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven, Conn., 2010), pp. 281–348.

¹⁸ R. Aldrich, *Espionage, Security and Intelligence in Britain 1945–1970* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 137–40, 148; P. Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (London, 2002), p. 97. Burgess’s homosexuality is well known, and for a specific exploration see F. Sommer, ‘Anthony Blunt and Guy Burgess, gay spies’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, xxix (1995), 273–94; for a fuller background see the recent biography by A. Lownie, *Stalin’s Englishman: the Lives of Guy Burgess* (London, 2015). For Maclean’s sexuality see C. Andrew, *Defence of the Realm* (London, 2009), pp. 172–3; Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, pp. 561–3.

¹⁹ H. Fairlie, ‘Political commentary’, *Spectator*, 22 Sept. 1955, p. 5.

²⁰ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 190.

vices'.²¹ His unmasking as the author of the articles precipitated not only the end of his academic career but also his resignation from the Wolfenden Committee, which had recommended decriminalization of homosexuality between consenting individuals in private in 1957. Rees became personally emblematic of the growing cultural problem the Foreign Office now faced: each revelation in the 1950s and 1960s strengthened in the public mind the assumed interconnections between the state, sexuality, espionage and British elites.

However, the damage to the Foreign Office's reputation in Britain was arguably less of a concern to officials than the damage to its reputation in the international diplomatic milieu in which it operated. The close political relationship between Britain and the US, developed during the Second World War and carefully cultivated by Labour and Conservative Foreign Secretaries in the late 1940s and 1950s, was jeopardized almost immediately.²² An FBI report disparagingly linked the treachery of Burgess and Maclean to their being 'a pair of pansies' in an official report produced in the aftermath of the revelations, and the then secretary of state, Dean Rusk, exploded at the thought that Maclean 'knew everything' about the atomic, economic and intelligence secrets shared between London and Washington. Indeed, both Burgess and Maclean had previously been posted to the US capital, and the former, who had been sent to Washington partly to help restore bilateral trust following the nuclear spy scandals involving Klaus Fuchs and Alan Nunn May, had exacerbated the situation by giving full expression to his voracious appetite for alcohol and sexual orgies, compounded by his flamboyant disregard for diplomatic niceties.²³ At a crucial alliance-building stage of the early Cold

²¹ Quoted in Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 189.

²² See N. Ashton, 'Anglo-American relations from World War to Cold War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxxix (2004), 117–25; M. Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office, Anglo-American relations and the Korean War, June 1950–June 1951', *International Affairs*, lxii (1986), 459–76; J. Ellison and K. Ruane, 'Managing the Americans: Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, and the pursuit of "power-by proxy" in the 1950s', *Contemporary British History*, xviii (2004), 147–67; R. Frazier, 'Did Britain start the Cold War? Bevin and the Truman Doctrine', *Historical Journal*, xxvii (1984), 715–27; S. Greenwood, 'Frank Roberts and the "other" long telegram: the view from the British embassy in Moscow, March 1946', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxv (1990), 103–22, and "'A war we don't want": another look at the British Labour government's commitment in Korea, 1950–51', *Contemporary British History*, xvii (2003), 1–24.

²³ Whittaker, 'Cold War alchemy', p. 193; for American reaction to the defection of Burgess and Maclean see Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 426–8; see also Whittaker, 'Cold War alchemy', pp. 177–8. For a good summary of Burgess and Maclean in Washington see N. Verne, *The Cambridge Spies: the Untold Story of Maclean, Philby and Burgess in America*

War, British institutions looked like places in which treachery and enemy espionage could flourish.

However, what concerned the US more was the apparent antipathy – or inability – on the part of their allies to deal with what seemed like inherent problems with the Foreign Office and the security services.²⁴ The main tangible outcome of the Burgess and Maclean revelations was the formation of the Cadogan Committee in 1951, which, although recommending a tightening of PV rules, failed to consider the recruitment practices that Fairlie and others were to critique to such devastating effect.²⁵ Senator Joseph McCarthy's 'Red Scare' across the Atlantic highlighted the scale of British inaction: between 1948 and 1982, over 24,000 American civil servants suspected of communist sympathies were either moved or dismissed altogether. In the same period, the total for the British civil service was just 133.²⁶

Indeed, the fact that the Foreign Office appeared to have a problem with homosexuality was particularly concerning in the US, where, alongside his 'Red Scare', McCarthy was orchestrating the so-called 'Lavender Scare': a radical attempt in the 1950s and 1960s to purge the US Foreign Service of anyone suspected of homosexuality. Republicans and conservatives were concerned that, as they perceived it, years of New Deal administration had established a large army of bureaucrats in the US civil service who were broadly sympathetic to the politics of the Democratic Party.²⁷ Seeking to regain political influence in an environment in which anti-communist witch hunts were flourishing, conservatives took steps to frame the political uncertainty surrounding the early Cold War in ways that could be exploited in their interests. As Robert Dean put it: 'Driven by a sense of their own political impotence, conservatives depicted the foreign service as a bureaucracy staffed by effete "cookie-pushing" Ivy League internationalist homosexuals and "pinks".'²⁸ At a time when biologist Alfred Kinsey controversially claimed in print that as many as

(New York, 1991); Dean Acheson quoted in Lownie, *Stalin's Englishman*, p. 264.

²⁴ H. Nehring, "'Westernization': a new paradigm for interpreting West European history in a Cold War context', *Cold War History*, iv (2006), 175–91.

²⁵ Lownie, *Stalin's Englishman*, pp. 261–2.

²⁶ R. Davenport-Hines, *Enemies Within: Communists, the Cambridge Spies and the Making of Modern Britain* (London, 2018), pp. 370–71.

²⁷ D. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: the Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (London, 2004), p. 97.

²⁸ R. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst, Mass., 2001), p. 65.

one in ten American men might be gay, the narrative that the effeminacy and ungoverned emotions associated with homosexuality posed an internal, destabilizing threat to Western civilization mirrored perfectly the perceived external threat from the communism of the Soviet Union.²⁹

Like its anti-communist counterpart, the so-called 'purge of the perverts' was mercilessly prolific. During the two-term Eisenhower presidency, over 400 US diplomats were forced out of their jobs for 'real or imagined' homosexuality, and efforts were intensified in 1950 when the State Department hired two 'full-time "expert" homosexual-hunters' who sent detailed memoranda to each US mission to help officials to spot a homosexual.³⁰ An eruption of innuendo in popular print media fed on the sheer scale of the operation. By the time Britain changed its laws in 1967, and at a time when only one US state (Illinois) had decriminalized same-sex relations, it is estimated that as many as 1,000 people had been dismissed from the State Department for 'alleged homosexuality'.³¹ So comprehensive was its reach that the Lavender Scare ironically contrived to smear Joe McCarthy himself, ending his career.³²

When Leo Abse's Sexual Offences Bill became law in 1967, its effect at the Foreign Office was to illuminate the relationship between British diplomats, the politics of the country they represented and the diplomatic community in which they operated. At home, diplomats had to decide whether partial decriminalization removed the threat of blackmail for gay men; if they could be open with the law, on what basis could they be threatened by hostile intelligence agencies? Overseas, diplomats had to prove to their new close allies, in the context of an increasingly bipolar international order, that they could be trusted to contain Soviet influence.

When it became clear that Abse's bill was on its way to eventual royal assent, it was this unique institutional quandary that shaped the actions of British diplomats. In December 1965, the head of the British diplomatic service security department travelled to Washington to conduct a full inquiry into policy on homosexuality in the US Foreign Service. Although he did not include a list of his interlocutors or engagements in his final

²⁹ A. Kinsey, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* [1948] (Bloomington, Ind., 1998); N. Shibusawa, 'The Lavender Scare and empire: rethinking Cold War antigay politics', *Diplomatic History*, xxxvi (2012), 723–52.

³⁰ Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*, pp. 66, 96.

³¹ Johnson, *Lavender Scare*, pp. 67–9, 75–6; Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*, p. 85.

³² A. Friedman, 'The smearing of Joe McCarthy: the Lavender Scare, gossip, and Cold War politics', *American Quarterly*, lvii (2005), 1105–29.

report, it is clear from his findings that this was not an attempt to assess the trustworthiness or capabilities of openly gay diplomats: this was tactical reconnaissance on behalf of a Foreign Office that had decided *what* to do about openly gay diplomats but had yet to decide how to do it. Aping the methods of the superpower the British government urgently needed to impress seemed, evidently, a wise strategy.

The officer returned to London with high praise for the State Department diplomats with whom he had spoken. He described a 'very high rate of detection' at the application stage and added that for those allegedly gay officers already working for the Foreign Service 'the figures of 43 detected cases last year and about 60 the year before speak for themselves'.³³ Significantly, he noted that the structure of the US system was designed so that the Foreign Service itself, rather than a centralized body like the Civil Service Commission, controlled recruitment. In Britain, because a member of the department to whom a candidate had applied always sat on the so-called Final Selection Board, the last stage in the Whitehall recruitment process, it was quite conceivable that Foreign Office representatives might do more to weed out suspected homosexuals.

The head of security went on to describe American policy in more detail, writing that they 'have no magic formula' but instead focused on conducting extensive research into individuals' backgrounds, using in-house psychiatrists to help interpret their findings. He explained the process:

Great stress is laid upon the building up of detailed background information by neighbourhood inquiry ... particular attention is paid not only to any clear signs of sexual aberration ... but also to more general indicators – effeminacy, solitariness, psychological quirks of any sort.³⁴

Were British diplomats to establish a clear case that homosexuality constituted a security risk despite its changed legal status, they would have to argue that the risk persisted regardless of whether an individual had 'come out' to their family and social network. The above passage indicates that British officials were beginning to develop the notion that homosexuality and diplomatic identity were inherently incompatible.

The official elaborated further, explaining that American methods involved building up

the most complete and detailed picture possible of friends, contacts of all sorts, recreational and drinking habits, bars frequented ... This information is kept in a central homosexual intelligence bank and has proved of great assistance in

³³ HP, Anon., 'Policy towards homosexuals', 13 Dec. 1965.

³⁴ HP, Anon., 'Policy towards homosexuals', 13 Dec. 1965.

The 'spotting a homosexual checklist'

cross-checking on other homosexuals and in developing material on which to conduct an interview.³⁵

Again, the idea of a 'central homosexual intelligence bank' from which individuals' profiles could be cross-checked against set criteria is suggestive of a belief that homosexuality could be essentialized with reference not to sexual intercourse but to character traits relevant to the professional identity of a diplomat.

Indeed, the growing body of research about the Lavender Scare in the US illustrates the extent to which the meanings attributed to an imagined 'homosexuality' allowed it to be manipulated so as to exclude gay men and lesbians from government professions. At a time when 'scientific and popular awareness of the pervert exploded on the American continent', policy-makers in American institutions quickly equated homosexuality with deficient masculinity in men or excessive masculinity in women.³⁶ Communist sympathies entailed a deliberate choice to switch Cold War allegiance and were presumed to be predicated on at least some intellectual basis, but homosexuality represented a defect of character which made individuals susceptible to lapses in security in the same way alcoholism or loquaciousness might do.³⁷ The relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality was conceptualized by American civil servants as binary, and an insufficient display of masculinity meant switching from the former to the latter category. As Margot Canaday put it:

The homosexual was ... a perverted type whose perversion was defined primarily by gender inversion (mannishness in women and effeminacy in men) rather than by sexual behaviour per se.³⁸

The head of security at the Foreign Office returned from Washington convinced that 'general indicators' such as 'effeminacy', 'solitariness' and 'psychological quirks' helped to manage the exclusion of gay men from the US Foreign Service. He had, evidently, internalized a way of defining homosexuality, predicated on an idea of inadequate masculinity, that in his own view was commendably efficient in dealing with a problem he and his colleagues now faced directly. The question, of course, was whether such an approach could be transferred to an international organization representing a different nation

³⁵ HP, Anon., 'Policy towards homosexuals', 13 Dec. 1965.

³⁶ M. Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford, 2009), p. 2.

³⁷ Johnson, *Lavender Scare*, pp. 7–9.

³⁸ Canaday, *Straight State*, p. 11.

state. British diplomats would not only have to define homosexuality in such a way as to link it inherently to security risks; they would have to do so in the political and social context of a nation state which was slowly coming to terms with – and indeed had (partially) legalized – homosexuality.

The report from the head of security met with the initial approval of his diplomatic colleagues, who within months began to devise ways of importing the American methods to Britain. The chief medical officer at the Foreign Office (who also served the civil service more generally) was given a document used by US investigators and asked, with the help of advice from State Department doctors and contemporary psychiatric research, to produce what one official termed a ‘spotting a homosexual checklist’.³⁹ The American list on which he based his counterpart version had been written in 1950, and the British result bore hallmarks of the scale of the panic in the State Department at the height of the Lavender Scare:⁴⁰

Sleep (good, bad. Vivid dreamer).
Appetite (good, bad, indifferent. Interested in food; gourmet).
Eating habits
Smoking habits
Interest in Arts (Theatre, Music, Painting, Literature, Crafts, others)
Practice of arts (as above)
Interest and practice of sport (attainments)

History of:
Temper (judged by candidate himself, and by others)
Depression
Anxiety due to excessive worry
Loss of memory or Amnesia
Bed wetting
Nervous disorder of any sort
Long term use of medicines, tablets, tranquillisers
and sleeping drugs.

Drinking habits
Detailed amount of drink, type of drink consumed.

Emotional attachment to:

³⁹ HP, Anon. to Anon., 4 Oct. 1966.

⁴⁰ HP, ‘Report of medical history’, United States Bureau of the Budget Circular A-32, Standard Form 89 (1950).

The 'spotting a homosexual checklist'

Mother
Father
Sister(s)
Brother(s)
Schoolfriends
Schoolmasters
Tutors
Men friend(s)
Girl friend(s)
Fiance(e)(s)
Wife (wives)

Describe briefly (maximum 200 words each):

My three greatest emotional experiences

Summary: A happy-go-lucky; meditating; slightly depressed temperament; Independent – dependent.⁴¹

The most significant feature of the 'spotting a homosexual checklist' is that it encompasses individuals' private lives in their totality. Every aspect of daily life is accounted for: sleeping, eating, personal relationships, emotional experiences, interest in sport or theatre. Lacking is any concrete guidance on particular characteristics that may indicate homosexual tendencies; instead, the checklist served as a psychological search warrant, giving officials the freedom to explore the emotional and personal make-up of individuals and to interpret their findings as they thought appropriate. The function of the policy on homosexuality, at least according to this checklist, was to expand the licence of investigating officers to identify supposed character defects which left applicants, as one diplomat put it, 'subject to other pressures which render them no less susceptible to approaches from a hostile intelligence agency'.⁴² Clearly, individuals' personalities and lives in their totality were considered relevant to their ability to perform work on behalf of the state, but what diplomats at the Foreign Office required was a framework through which to ascertain who of their (prospective) colleagues betrayed an untrustworthy character via suspected homosexuality or deficient masculinity.

⁴¹ HP, Anon. to Anon., 28 Mar. 1966.

⁴² HP, Anon., First Secretary, diplomatic service administration office, Foreign Office minute, 18 Oct. 1967.

Just as the State Department had in 1950, the Foreign Office appointed its own 'homosexual hunter': a military colonel who had retired as director of personnel at the War Office in the early 1960s. The colonel, who had a 'security service background', joined the team of PV investigators, with a special jurisdiction over cases of suspected homosexuality. He would operate as an ordinary investigator but be called upon 'when a special case is under investigation'.⁴³ The Foreign Office planned to send him to the US to learn about the detection of homosexuality in an environment of 'much greater professionalism' in the State Department, after which he would be given the resources to facilitate 'the formation of a small elite division within the P.V. Section for handling difficult cases' in London.⁴⁴ The fact that the Foreign Office appointed a military colonel who had worked in intelligence to oversee its bar on gay men and lesbians working for the diplomatic service, combined with the fact that more than one conspicuous research trip had been taken to the State Department, revealed much about the logic and motives behind the policy.

Attitudes to the relationship between the individual and the state across the Atlantic were fundamentally different, however, and the Lavender Scare grew out of a political context which contrasted with that in Britain. As Robert Dean explained:

Though sharpened in the context of the Cold War, both the Red and Lavender Scares were outgrowths of a broader campaign led by members of Congress to halt the expansion of a bureaucracy they had neither the expertise nor the power to control.⁴⁵

The 'purge of the perverts' in the US was part of a broader political project to gender federal bureaucracy (and the welfare state it underpinned) so that it could be manipulated and attacked. Conservatives were attempting to redefine political debate along identity lines, where masculinity was equated with moral superiority, and where intellectual 'cookie-pushing' liberals were jeopardizing the masculinity required to fight the coming Cold War through an elitist obsession with welfare and bureaucracy.⁴⁶ In Britain, no such political project existed and almost immediately the attempt to construct a system for the identification and eradication of homosexuality ran into difficulties as it was hastily transferred to an immensely dissimilar environment.

⁴³ HP, Anon., 'Investigation into homosexual cases', Foreign Office minute, 8 Mar. 1966.

⁴⁴ HP, Anon., 'Policy towards homosexuals', Foreign Office minute, 13 Dec. 1965.

⁴⁵ Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*, p. 97.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Lavender Scare*; Shibusawa, 'The Lavender Scare and empire'.

The head of the diplomatic service security department, whose praise for the methods of the American Foreign Service had inspired the 'spotting a homosexual checklist' and the proposed appointment of the specialist vetting team, was also the first to raise concerns about the viability of the policies he observed in Washington. His report contained serious warnings about the 'after-care of homosexual cases' at the State Department, because of the ruthlessness with which careers were ended – often on the basis of minimal evidence. Indeed, his report even suggested the possibility that the American approach was 'so black-and-white ... as to be of little help to us'.⁴⁷ His initial doubts were echoed increasingly by his colleagues, and a year later another official complained that 'to question in considerable depth a suspect's sex life' was unacceptable in Britain, and that in general the proposed 'methods would not be tolerated in this country to the extent they are in America'.⁴⁸ Two years after his trip to Washington, the head of security was even less convinced of the approach:

[T]he American approach to this business is radically different from our own and the extraordinary degree of probing into people's private affairs which they evidently undertake as an established routine would be repugnant in this country and would certainly not be tolerated by either candidates for the Diplomatic Service or established members of it ...

He would, he added, 'prefer to avoid unnecessary formality in our arrangements in this peculiarly sensitive sphere'.⁴⁹ Initial enthusiasm for the American approach, then, quickly became a negotiation over the levels of scrutiny necessary to enforce the bar on homosexuality. Diplomats' reservations did not provoke a change in policy but rather a series of open questions about which aspects of an individual's life and character could be considered relevant to the PV process. The Foreign Office was now engaged in devising its own nationally, chronologically and institutionally specific archetype of the homosexual it wanted to debar.

Having attempted to build a policy on the basis of making a statement to American allies about an attitudinal shift, after which tighter controls on recruitment would be imposed, British diplomats were now engaged in a conversation among themselves about the *type* of statement they, as representatives of the Foreign Office and of the British government, were willing, and indeed able, to make. In February 1967, less than six months before the passage of the Sexual Offences Act, the head of personnel wrote

⁴⁷ HP, Anon., 'Policy towards homosexuals', Foreign Office minute, 13 Dec. 1965.

⁴⁸ HP, Anon., 'Vetting: detection of homosexuals', Foreign Office minute, 25 July 1967.

⁴⁹ HP, Anon., 'The detection of homosexuals', Foreign Office minute, 22 Apr. 1968.

to complain about the 'degree of subjectivity which I have noticed in one or two Field Investigators' reports'. He acknowledged his colleagues' 'strong views on this', but argued that 'we are not concerned with the moral angle, only the security one ... Assessment of homosexual tendencies is a skilled matter'.⁵⁰ Writing on the eve of the passage of the Sexual Offences Act, his caution around morality illustrates the peculiar sensitivities associated with homosexuality as it took on new social and cultural meanings at the end of the 1960s.

The head of personnel's arguments in favour of impartial formality were quickly contested. One official replied that it 'is often very difficult to decide where a moral issue in a case becomes a security problem',⁵¹ while another stated flatly that 'I do not agree ... that in homosexual cases we are concerned purely with the security and not with the moral aspects of the case'. He went on:

In security terms there is a considerable difference between the homosexual who admits his perversion and is prepared to discuss it as a moral issue and the man who will not admit that he is a homosexual even when confronted with evidence showing that he is.⁵²

In this passage, the diplomat in question began to adjust to a uniquely Foreign Office perspective on homosexuality: distancing himself from the type of judgement that would require evidence about an individual's private life, he instead focused on the morality of the act of disclosure itself, equating it with the moral character required of trustworthy, loyal British diplomats. The challenge, as another official put it, was to ascertain 'whether homosexuality in itself should raise a presumption of unfitness ... or whether it was only the vulnerability of a homosexual to blackmail or pressure' that mattered.⁵³

What now concerned diplomats was striking a balance: the admission to the service of individuals liable to duplicity had to be stopped, but at the same time the homosocial bonds of trust – which were easily frayed by excessive intrusion into private sexual habits – had to be maintained. It is tempting to draw parallels between the compromise to which British diplomats tentatively agreed and the bargain struck by soldiers in the US army in the 1990s about the acknowledgement of homosexuality in their

⁵⁰ HP, Anon. to Anon. and Anon., 16 Feb. 1967.

⁵¹ HP, Anon. to Anon., 22 Feb. 1967.

⁵² HP, Anon. to Anon., 23 Feb. 1967.

⁵³ HP, 'Security implications of the Sexual Offences Act, 1967', minutes from SM(O)(PS) (67), 4th meeting, 8 Nov. 1967.

institution. Bill Clinton's administration introduced a policy in 1994 known as 'Don't ask, don't tell!' by which gay men and lesbians could technically serve in the military (a key campaign promise of Clinton's) under the tacit agreement that their sexuality was never discussed, acted upon or revealed. Slavoj Žižek offers a reading of the dynamics of this policy that is particularly pertinent here:

One should ask a naïve, but nevertheless crucial question here: why does the Army community so strongly resist publicly accepting gays into its ranks? There is only one possible consistent answer: not because homosexuality poses a threat to the alleged 'phallic and patriarchal' libidinal economy of the Army community, but, on the contrary, because the libidinal economy of the Army community itself relies on a thwarted/disavowed homosexuality as the key component of the soldiers' male bonding.⁵⁴

British diplomats' unwillingness to adopt intrusive American methods, and their further inability to separate sexual behaviour and its implications from the moral character of individuals, reveals that the bar on homosexuality was at root an exercise in the construction of group identity. Male bonding at the Foreign Office was much more nuanced and elusive than the latent homosexuality described by Žižek in the US army: in Britain, homosocial bonding was predicated on the presumed links between trustworthiness and membership of the diplomatic community, and much less about a specific intolerance of same-sex intercourse itself.⁵⁵

Nowhere is the real crux of the Foreign Office bar on homosexuality better exposed than in diplomats' discussions about lesbianism. The legislation of 1967 applied only to same-sex relations between *men*, but while there has never been legislation in Britain explicitly criminalizing relations between women, lesbianism has periodically been invoked as a tool with which to shape legislation concerning sexuality.⁵⁶ The diplomatic service was an overwhelmingly male-dominated hierarchy still coming to terms with its

⁵⁴ S. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London, 1997), p. 24.

⁵⁵ The concept of 'homosociality' to which I allude here and which offers a more nuanced analytical framework than does Žižek, is best stated in E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [1985] (New York, 2015). For discussion see S. Bird, 'Welcome to the men's club: homosociality and the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity', *Gender and Society*, x (1996), 120–32; for an effective application see M. Flood, 'Men, sex, and homosociality: how bonds between men shape their sexual relations with women', *Men and Masculinities*, x (2008), 339–59.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., C. Derry, 'Lesbianism and feminist legislation in 1921: the age of consent and "gross indecency" between women', *History Workshop Journal*, lxxxvi (2018), 245–67.

official acceptance of women applicants in 1946, and the construction of female same-sex relations was evidently considered peripheral and is barely mentioned in the archives.⁵⁷ Where it was discussed, however, it served as a foil against which male homosexuality was defined; it served, in fact, as the clearest framework officials were able to construct to guide recruiters and vetters on what was problematic, and therefore unacceptable, about male homosexuality.

Having done no research (at least of which there is surviving evidence) on lesbian identities or lifestyles, diplomats projected imagined characteristics on to imaginary women in order to help make sense of the moral implications, as they saw them, of non-normative sexuality. The first mention came in mid-1967:

I have not specifically mentioned lesbians in this report, but I include them in the term 'homosexual' and take it that appropriate action would apply to them equally whenever they come to notice. There is, of course, less likelihood of lesbians coming to notice in the course of P.V. enquiries.⁵⁸

Formally, then, the same bar that applied to men would apply to women. Already, however, the official writing this minute had made a crucial distinction, asserting that lesbianism was more easily concealed than male homosexuality and, although forbidden, was therefore less likely to present itself as a problem in the PV process.

What was it, then, that allowed such a distinction to be made? Put simply, while diplomats were unable to countenance intrusion into their colleagues' private lives, they were more than comfortable with the idea that only when it manifested itself as personality and lifestyle was homosexuality unacceptable. In this way, moral judgements about sex lives were unnecessary; attention was focused instead on the compatibility of an individual with the basic requirements of diplomatic professional identity. For British diplomats, there were important differences in the ability of gay men and lesbians to comply with such requirements.⁵⁹

Twelve months after the security department had proclaimed lesbianism less of a risk to the integrity of the PV system than male homosexuality, officials were beginning to elaborate on exactly what was meant by this

⁵⁷ See H. McCarthy, *Women of the World: the Rise of the Female Diplomat* (London, 2014), pp. 160–87; 'Women, marriage and work in the British diplomatic service', *Women's History Review*, xxiii (2014), 853–73.

⁵⁸ HP, Anon., 'Vetting: detection of homosexuals', Foreign Office minute, 25 July 1967.

⁵⁹ On the cultural construction of lesbianism in the workplace see R. Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls: a Lesbian History of Postwar Britain, 1945–71* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 57–65.

claim. One senior diplomat wrote that while the possibility of blackmail could not be discounted, lesbians 'tended to be less promiscuous than male homosexuals, more stable in their relationships, and therefore on the whole less vulnerable to pressure'.⁶⁰ In 1974, a First Secretary in the security department wrote to ask for clarification on what policy had been agreed upon in previous discussions: 'How seriously, in a security context, do we regard practising Lesbianism as opposed to male homosexuality?'⁶¹ A colleague assured him that in the case of lesbians, 'in general her vulnerability is probably less than that of the male homosexual', because lesbians were 'less promiscuous', 'more emotionally stable', and 'less likely to give rise to gossip' than gay men.⁶² The key admission, however, read as follows:

if, for example, the individual has a stable relationship about which she is perfectly open, both at work and among her friends and family, it may be possible, all other things being equal, to consider her employment on classified work in the UK.⁶³

Here was a plain concession that neither same-sex relations, nor the supposed social stigma they entailed, were the core driver of Foreign Office policy on homosexuality. Rather, the stability of an individual's relationships and the openness with which they were conducted *both at work and among friends* was the issue. Their assumptions about lesbianism, then, allowed diplomats to convince themselves that while *all* private life was the business of the state, only some manifestations of it – and here lesbianism was the boundary – were relevant to whether an individual could successfully conform with diplomatic identity.

The passage of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967 forced British diplomats to confront a number of questions about their collective professional identity. Was it compatible with homosexuality? If not, what was it specifically about same-sex relations that made gay men unsuitable for work at the Foreign Office? To what extent could the state be permitted to go in policing the types of people it employed? And how could any of these questions be answered effectively within an institutional context shaped and limited by the society it represented and recruited from, and the dynamics of the Cold War geopolitics in which it operated? The solutions to these questions

⁶⁰ HP, Anon., 'Positive vetting: security significance of lesbianism', SM(O)(68), 3rd meeting, 23 Oct. 1968.

⁶¹ HP, Anon. (Security Department) to Anon., 24 Dec. 1974.

⁶² HP, Anon. to Anon., 7 Feb. 1975.

⁶³ HP, Anon. to Anon., 7 Feb. 1975.

came in two phases: first, an attempt to demonstrate competence to wary American allies by aping State Department techniques of associating homosexuality with weakness of character and deficient masculinity; second, an assertion that character, not sexuality, was the relevant factor in PV assessments and that diplomats themselves would have to negotiate which aspects of character could, and should, be measured.

The creative process in which diplomats had to engage to organize a set of meanings around the idea of homosexuality so that it could plausibly be debarred demonstrated something of the nature of the social and political transitions that Britain faced at the end of the 1960s. Yet more than this it demonstrated in microcosm the construction of an idea of sexuality: a diplomatic 'moral panic' inculcated an urgent need to define homosexuality, and those definitions were then shaped by cultural and moral assumptions thought essential to British diplomatic identity. As this chapter has shown, those assumptions were unique to the institutional history of the Foreign Office.

There can be no general history of sexuality without first building, from the 'bottom-up', a genealogy of its associated terms and concepts. The geographical, social, cultural and historical contexts in which meanings are attached to sexualities are neither incidental nor tangential, they are fundamental to the development of the politics and culture of sex in post-war Britain. Homosexuality, as a concept, was qualitatively different in the US State Department and the British Foreign Office. Ideas about sexualities therefore exist as a vast kaleidoscope of subtly different assumptions and meanings, and only through a critical examination of the particular can historians understand better the general picture.

Thus, this chapter prompts a number of questions for future research. How should historians write the history of institutions, like the Foreign Office, the BBC or private companies, if they are to pay due attention to the role they play in the cultural construction of sexuality and other similar concepts? What would a general history of, say, lesbianism look like, were a range of varied institutional histories considered? What is the relationship between such institutional histories, and how should historians approach the subtle parallels and discontinuities between them? Or a history of the Foreign Office itself, as an elite institution, and the role it plays in shaping histories of class, gender and race? The bar on homosexuality in the British diplomatic service lasted just twenty-four years, from 1967 to 1991, but its impact and legacy are as yet far from understood.

Afterword

Christina de Bellaigue

Since the early nineteenth century, the idea of ‘the profession’ has been constantly defined and redefined. The question of which occupations might be accorded the status of profession, who might or might not join a given profession, and what having a profession might signify was a subject of serious preoccupation to contemporary observers and to professional workers themselves. Professional status was understood to confer a certain standing, authority and respectability. By the twentieth century, Harold Perkin argues, British society as a whole might itself best have been understood as a professional society in a dual sense: as a society in which the number of occupations defining themselves as professions with vertical career hierarchies cutting across the structures of class had substantially increased; and as a society in which an ideal of professional service and merit was culturally dominant.¹ In the second half of the twentieth century, Mike Savage demonstrates that the permeation of professional aspiration and structures extended further and professionalism was redefined to incorporate technical and applied expertise, moving away from the gentlemanly model of the by then ‘traditional’ professions.² By the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Eve Worth argues, many occupations, particularly those associated with the welfare state and hitherto dominated by women, have experienced a process of ‘de-professionalization’.³ Today, the term ‘professional’ still signifies status and carries some of the weighty connotations of the nineteenth century, as implied by the hierarchies implicit in the official categories used to analyse social structure, which rest on those devised in 1911.⁴ Alongside this,

¹ H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 2002), p. 2.

² M. Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: the Politics of Method* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 67–92.

³ E. Worth, ‘A tale of female liberation? The long shadow of de-professionalization on the lives of post-war women’, *Revue française de civilisation britannique*, xxiii (2018).

⁴ Information provided by the Office for National Statistics about the NSSEC classification system <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatistics socioeconomicclassificationnssecbasedonsoc2010>>

however, the idea of the professional has been emptied of meaning to the extent that it has become letting-agency code for a desirable tenant.

Since the 1820s, then, the category of ‘profession’ has fluctuated and has embraced and excluded a range of occupations. At the same time, there has been some continuity throughout the period in the way ‘profession’ has connoted security of status and income, respectability, reliability, the prospect of an enduring career and upward social mobility. Yet by setting out to think critically about the idea of professional status, the chapters gathered in this wide-ranging and important collection pose two significant challenges to any tendency to accept such connotations on their own terms. First, they demonstrate that professional security and stability was often fragile. It rested on processes of exclusion and certification developed as a bulwark against precarity, and on the strenuous performance of a particular style of life. Both these processes and performances were often gendered. Second, by taking those who articulated or embodied professional selfhood and aspiration on their own terms, rather than adjudicating professional standing on the basis of traditional sociological models, these chapters uncover the elasticity of the idea of the profession. This reveals the breadth of claims to professional selfhood across a much wider range of occupations than has been considered in the existing scholarship.

A further challenge to some of the presumptions of existing scholarship on professionalization emerges from the volume when it is considered as a whole. The effect of the critical perspective and its emphasis on elasticity and precarity, combined with the form of the collection – gathering together as it does multiple and variegated accounts of the professional career – raises new questions about how meaningful professional solidarities were, about the extent to which ‘the professions’ were a collective project, and about the relationship between class and professional standing. In these three ways, then, *Precarious Professionals* challenges the teleological and self-congratulatory stories often told by the professions of themselves.

By thinking critically about what might be termed the classical definition of the profession (which emphasizes meritocratic recruitment; coherent, self-governing associations; autonomy; an ethic of service; and social closure), the chapters in this collection draw our attention to the extent to which these features might often arise defensively. As is clear from the history of the medical profession, which became a model for many occupations, the introduction of registration in 1858, the management of medical training and

#history-and-origins> [accessed 1 Mar. 2020]. For the origins of this scheme see S. Szreter, ‘Classes in Britain, the United States and France: the professional model and “les cadres”’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxxv (1993), 285–317.

the guarding of expertise, were intended to secure the status of medical men who faced competition from ‘medical entrepreneurs’ and sought to distance themselves from lower-status practitioners such as apothecaries and barber-surgeons.⁵ Several chapters demonstrate how similar mechanisms operated to exclude all but those from particular privileged social groups from full access to other occupations. These defences were designed to protect the stability and standing of the profession. Claire Jones highlights how scientific ideas asserting women’s unsuitability for inclusion operated to limit access to scientific societies and resources, with such exclusions intensifying as scientific disciplines became more sharply defined and institutionalized. Ellen Ross demonstrates how formal mechanisms of exclusion, intended to protect men’s work from female competition after the Great War, narrowed the range of professional occupations available to women. Marriage bars, controlling access to training and limiting membership of professional associations were defensive mechanisms that sought to shore up against precarity the standing of those whose social position was not underwritten by wealth or heredity.

Yet *Precarious Professionals* reveals that just as important as these formal defensive mechanisms were more informal and less tangible bulwarks which determined access to professional standing on the basis of the production and performance of a certain kind of self and style of life. Ren Pepitone demonstrates how access to the bar was dependent on participation in a particular form of white gentlemanly professional sociability and bodily performance, staged in the self-referentially historical architecture of the Inns of Court. Zoe Thomas uncovers the way Nelson Dawson articulated his claims to professional standing by associating himself with particular signs of masculine authority in his photographs, particularly crucial at a time when his situation was financially precarious. James Southern reveals how entry to the British Foreign Office might depend on the performance of heterosexual masculinity, while Claire Jones highlights how, in contrast, Hertha Ayrton’s embodiment as a married woman rendered her invisible and inconceivable as a professional scientist. Their chapters highlight the theoretical maleness and whiteness of the professional norm. At the same time, they point to the precarity of that masculinity, evident in the way it constantly needed to be shored up.

The collection also demonstrates that despite the establishment of formal mechanisms of professionalization, because they accorded status on the basis of the relatively intangible qualities of education, expertise, character and an ethic of service – qualities which might be acquired and claimed

⁵ M. J. Peterson, *The Medical Profession in Mid-Victorian London* (Berkeley, Calif., 1978).

across gender, class and race boundaries – the professions might have porous boundaries. This porosity provided openings for women and others who did not conform to the norm. From this vantage point, marginalized as they might have been in some ways, women such as Anna Jameson, whose work is examined by Benjamin Dabby, or the historians studied by Laura Carter, or the social scientists who are examined by Helen McCarthy, were fundamental to the development of their professions. Dabby shows how central Jameson was to the evolution of art history as a discipline, precisely because her distance from elite male critical circles positioned her as an educator and popularizer who used her professional expertise to construct a new approach to criticism. Carter shows how, partly because of their partial or full exclusion from academic history, the generation of women historians writing in the mid twentieth century elaborated new approaches to historical research that uncovered the history of everyday life, pioneered medieval economic history, developed what would now be understood as the Atlantic history of slavery and empire and addressed new audiences. McCarthy highlights how women's professional organizations in the post-war period developed extensive innovative social survey research on women's working lives in order to support their members. In these examples, women were able to extend the reach of their respective professions in part as a result of their peripheral status and precarity.

While acknowledging this precarity and its consequences, however, we must also recognize its limits. For Perkin, the professions were 'the forgotten middle class', and it is clear that the precarious professionals of this collection might all be understood as middle class, and even – perhaps especially in the case of the 'ladies' of the League of Nations examined by Susan Pedersen – upper class. Jones's chapter on women in science demonstrates clearly how class might inflect the experience of professional life: Eleanor Ormerod was able to pursue the entomological activities which eventually led to her holding fellowships at a number of scientific societies in part because, having inherited a substantial sum, she was able to finance her own research and publications. Others whose professional lives are examined, like Francesca Wilson, studied by Ellen Ross, might have a more pressing need to find work and to make their professional occupations pay. However, for the most part, the precarity these professionals faced was relative and did not threaten outright destitution. They had access to material and social resources which both protected them from fundamental want and facilitated the kinds of relationships needed to build up a professional career. Such resources also made it possible for them to persist with precarious occupations rather than having to find more prosaic and reliable sources of income, echoing the findings of studies examining the situation of those in creative and cultural

occupations today.⁶ Day to day, having such resources meant that they could devote time to their professional and artistic work. As Zoë Thomas demonstrates, the Dawsons' pursuit of their profession depended on being at least partially protected from the demands of domestic life by the hidden labour of working-class men and women.

By accepting the self-declared claims to professional standing of contemporaries, *Precarious Professionals* also calls into question the classification of occupations according to distinctions between professions, semi-professions and proto-professions. Such classifications have often enshrined a pyramidal hierarchy descending from the male archetype to female-dominated occupations whose standing as professions is permanently in question. The move away from rigid classifications enables the recognition of a much wider range of professional occupations and reveals the role of women in extending and expanding these areas of activity. In so doing, *Precarious Professionals* builds on Perkin's original analysis of the cultural dominance of professional ideals to explore how these ideals were aspired to and experienced across many different occupations, from art to ballet, to humanitarian work, to conveyancing. In the process, it uncovers different understandings of what professional life might look like.

Thomas's chapter on the Dawsons highlights how it is possible to read an artistic career as professional but also prompts us to think about how the professional project might be collective, at least on the small scale of the couple or family. Jones's work on the Ormerods also uncovers the possibility of professional partnership, noting the significant contribution made by Eleanor Ormerod's sister Georgiana to Ormerod's career through her illustrations; the author referred to her sister as her 'assistant' or 'collaborator'. Other partnerships, like that of the Ayrtons, were more asymmetric. Quinton's chapter on Ninette de Valois explores the construction of ballet as a profession, again pointing out how important partnerships and collaborations might be to the development of a professional career. The same themes emerge from Leslie Howsam's chapter on Eliza Orme's career on the edges of the legal profession. At the core of her work stood her partnerships with Mary Richardson and Reina Lawrence, but that work also underpinned the careers of the many male barristers with whom she collaborated. These studies demonstrate that the boundaries of professional society might be more fluid and elastic than the traditional analyses suggest,

⁶ S. Friedman, D. O'Brien and D. Laurison, "Like skydiving without a parachute": how class origin shapes occupational trajectories in British acting', *Sociology*, li (2017), 992–1001, at pp. 1000–1001.

both in terms of the range of occupations included and the number of people and relationships underpinning a professional career.

Like other contributions to the collection, Howsam's chapter underlines how the historical and archival process has shaped understanding of the professions. The tangential and auxiliary character of Orme's legal conveyancing partnership has meant that her career cannot be tracked through a coherent archive repository in the way the papers of a prominent barrister might be. The reconstruction of Orme's career rests on the magpie collection and piecing together of fragments from a range of sources. This theme of archival serendipity in retracing the history of the precarious professions also emerges from Thomas's chapter, which reveals that the asymmetric process of preserving their papers had concealed the extent of the professional partnership between Edith and Nelson Dawson. Heidi Egginton's chapter on Mary Agnes Hamilton pursues the theme from the other end of the spectrum. It explores how Hamilton's private and public writing and her effort to record events were at the core of her attempt to constitute a coherent professional self in the context of her 'distressingly diversified career'. In her diary and other writing Hamilton both articulated her professional self and generated a putative, scattered archive of a particular kind of professional career. This aspiration to document a professional itinerary resembles the efforts of Professor Merze Tate, the first African American woman to attend Oxford, a pioneer of diplomatic history and international relations, who self-consciously curated her own archive to affirm her professional identity and to create a trail for the black women professionals she hoped would come after her.⁷ Tate recognized that practices of record-keeping shaped what would be understood as professional. Through her archival practice, she was quietly but radically destabilizing the white male norm.

Part of Hamilton's difficulty in constructing a professional identity was the diversity of her working life. Like Merze Tate, she sought to construct a linear narrative of career that belied the often precarious and interrupted trajectories of her working life. These variegated patterns emerge from several of the chapters in the collection and draw attention to another theme of the precarious professional experience presented in this volume. Rather than the orderly linear career progression implied by the sociological model of the profession, the chapters gathered here indicate the non-linearity both of individual careers and of processes of professionalization and development. In doing so, they suggest that Andrew Miles's argument that over the

⁷ B. Savage, 'Professor Merze Tate', in *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women*, ed. M. Bay et al. (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015), pp. 252–72.

course of the nineteenth century the ‘bureaucratic career’ structure became a dominant feature of white-collar work needs to be nuanced with respect to gender and across occupations.⁸ The itineraries of the women examined here resemble more the ‘fractured trajectories’ and ‘shapeless careers’ Miles identifies as having become less common since the mid nineteenth century. They also prefigure the late-twentieth-century phenomenon identified by Magne Flemmen and Mike Savage whereby socially mobile subjects experienced careers that followed ‘a series of jagged lines’ rather than running along smooth tracks, a pattern that had a marked gendered dimension, with women’s itineraries being particularly interrupted.⁹ Yet, as Egginton’s chapter reveals, along with Ellen Ross’s on Francesca Wilson, these interruptions and fragmentations might not have been experienced as such. The cultivation of a professional self could provide a logic that wove such ‘jagged lines’ into a coherent and personally satisfying narrative. *Precarious Professionals* underlines the limitations of an understanding of professional careers that is insufficiently attentive to the ways individuals drew on ideas of profession and adapted them to their own purposes and circumstances.

Recognizing the diversity and breadth of professional careers and the way the construction of a professional self might give meaning to variegated careers also raises the question of how far professionalization was a collective project. As noted above, the chapters on Eliza Orme and the Dawsons uncover how a professional career might rest on significant collaborations or on the hidden labour of family members and servants. They reveal that it is important to look beyond the individual to understand how professional lives were made possible. Yet this does not necessarily mean that the collectivity was central to professional experience, despite the fact that associations have been seen as a key element of professionalization. The precarious professionals discussed here seem for the most part to have encountered such associations as mechanisms of exclusion, rather than of collective solidarity.

Instead, *Precarious Professionals* reveals a central preoccupation with ideas of professional selfhood as the common feature of the lives examined in the volume. This is not to say that women professionals such as Eliza Orme, who made significant contributions to the women’s movement, or Eleanor

⁸ A. Miles, *Social Mobility in Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century England* (London, 1999), pp. 112–14.

⁹ M. Savage and M. Flemmen, ‘Life narratives and personal identity: the end of linear social mobility?’, *Cultural and Social History*, xvi (2019), 85–103; E. Worth, ‘Women, education and social mobility in Britain during the long 1970s’, *Cultural and Social History*, xvi (2019), 67–84.

Ormerod, who sought to improve opportunities for women's scientific training, did not seek to work on behalf of others or understand the need for collective action. But their campaigning activities, while facilitated by their standing as professional women, were incidental to their working lives and professional identities, rather than central to them. At the same time, when associations did seek to draw on the strength of professional solidarities, rather than seeking wider social change or collective advance, as Helen McCarthy shows, their feminist politics were 'rooted in the values of personal achievement, commitment and self-knowledge'. From a different perspective, Ellen Ross qualifies the emphasis placed on a professional ethic of service by revealing Francesca Wilson's frank commitment to pursuing work for her own fulfilment, rather than for the sake of those she supported through her humanitarian work. What seems to be emerging here is the notion of 'profession' as centred on the self, the personal, and on individualized patterns of progression. When this is combined with the recognition of the elasticity of the concept of 'profession' that this collection underlines, it seems that perhaps the central and defining characteristic of the notion in the British context was less a self-professed commitment to education, training, certification, professional association and social closure and more a focus on the production, performance and cultivation of a satisfying professional selfhood. If this hypothesis is sustained by further research, it might provide new ways to understand the apparent weakness of horizontal class solidarities in professional society. Taking precarity as a lens through which to examine the professions in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain thus challenges us to see through the mythologies of the professional ideal; it offers us a less heroic but a much richer and more nuanced history of the professions.

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