

Women in Public Life in Liverpool Between the Wars

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore women's involvement in various aspects of public life in Liverpool between 1918 and 1939. It hopes to cast more light on the history of the women's movement at this time, and to contribute to recent debates about how women's participation in the public sphere evolved during and after the later stages of the era of the suffrage campaign. Among the subjects examined is the promotion by individual women and by some women's organisations of the concept of citizenship, as it applied to women and their involvement in society, and of the idea that women had a valuable role to play in promoting the 'common good', especially through their emphasis upon feminine skills. These themes are explored via close study of the lives of a number of active women, partly through group-biography. They are further examined by studying the activities, aims, goals, membership, and links between several non-political women's organisations, including some involved in social welfare work, and some which participated in policing. The thesis explores the links between the women patrols and the vigorous campaign organised in Liverpool to demand the appointment of women police. This campaign is examined in terms of what it reveals about women's ability to mobilise support, the ideas they used to support their arguments, the nature of the opposition they faced, and the debates it provoked about women's appropriate role. The thesis also looks at women's involvement in politics, as parliamentary and municipal candidates, and as members of local political associations. It reveals something about the motivation of women who engaged in politics, the links between this and new ideas about women's citizenship, the obstacles which confronted women who sought to be active, and their level of success. It explores the participation of women within the public/political arena, the ways in which women presented themselves, and unresolved issues concerning the appropriate role of women and the responses that their political activity provoked.

This study shows that during the inter-war years Liverpool had a rich, varied, and vibrant women's movement, some parts of which were extending the boundaries of women's involvement in public life, both practically and through the promotion of new notions of women's extended citizenship status. These notions held that women had an important contribution to make to society on their own terms, using skills and qualities which were distinctively feminine, in a way that was appropriate to them. The thesis argues that these women and the organisations they participated in must be assessed within the context and by the standards of their own time, and that when this is done it calls into question the view of some historians that, compared to the suffrage era, the inter-war period was a dull, uninteresting time when the women's movement lost its way. It maintains, so far as Liverpool is concerned, that it would be better to regard the inter-war years as a time when the energy of the movement was rechannelled into new and important areas.

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List of Abbreviations of the Names of the Main Organisations Referred to in the Text

COS	Charity Organisation Society
CRS	Central Relief Society
CSS	Council of Social Service (former CVA)
CSSB	Catholic Social Service Bureau
CVA	Council of Voluntary Aid (becomes CSS)
CWA	Child Welfare Association
GFS	Girls' Friendly Society
ICA	Invalid Children's Association
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LCWC	Liverpool Council of Women Citizens
LDWWAC	Liverpool and District Working Women's Advisory Council
LLWCC	Liverpool Labour Women's Central Council
LPC	Liverpool Patrol Committee
LRSHH	Liverpool Rescue Society and House of Help
LTCLP	Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party
LWPPC	Liverpool Women Police Propaganda Committee
LWSS	Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society
LWUF	Liverpool Women's Unionist Federation
NCEC	National Council for Equal Citizenship
NCW	National Council of Women (formerly NUWW)
NUSEC	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
NUT	National Union of Teachers

NUTG	National Union of Townswomen's Guilds
NUWI	National Union of Women's Institutes
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
NUWW	National Union of Women Workers (becomes NCW)
NVA	National Vigilance Association
PACA	Police Aided Clothing Association
PSC	Personal Service Committee
PSS	Personal Service Society (created as the PSC)
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SAC	Spanish Aid Committee
SSFA	Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association
WCA	Women Citizens' Association
WCG	Women's Co-operative Guild
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WLA	Women's Liberal Association
WLF	Women's Liberal Federation
WLL	Women's Labour League
WLS	Women's Labour Section
WMCA	Working Men's Conservative Association
WNLF	Women's National Liberal Federation
WPV	Women Police Volunteers
WUF	Women's Unionist Federation
WWHS	Working Women's Holiday Service
WWSB	Working Women's Service Bureau
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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Introduction

In the history of women and the women's movement the period between 1918 and 1939 has often been overshadowed by the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Historians have attached great importance to the activities of the Victorian and Edwardian women who sought an active public role through work in philanthropic, welfare, and political organisations, and in local government. They have rightly given even greater emphasis to the campaign for women's suffrage. By comparison, the inter-war period is sometimes seen as something of a hiatus in the history of the women's movement, a time when not much happened, and when what did happen was not nearly so important as what had gone before. Indeed, Sandra Stanley Holton has suggested that the period 1918-1928 may have been 'neglected, perhaps because of its very drabness'.¹ In recent years, however, research has begun to rectify this neglect for the inter-war period, though much work remains to be done.² Among the themes which require exploration are the determination of women to secure empowerment and equal citizenship, often by means which acknowledged their difference, and the distinctive contribution which they could make to society. These themes may appear to some more drab than the high passion of militant suffragism, but they are, arguably, no less important. The campaign for, and acquisition of, the vote was fundamental to women's emancipation, but it may be suggested that the suffrage campaign, with its poignant images of ladies in picture hats being carried kicking and screaming by burly policemen which have captured the popular imagination, has overshadowed in a detrimental way the later activity of women who made just as significant an impact on other women's lives.³

The formal steps on the route to women's emergence into public life are usually traced from 1870, when the first women were elected to the new School Boards. The election in 1875 of the first woman who 'quietly stood' for a Poor Law Board in London is seen as the next significant stride.⁴ After 1894 women were participating on the new rural and parish councils, though they had to wait until 1907 before they could seek election to the borough

¹ Sandra Stanley Holton, *Review of Cheryl Law, Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement, 1918-1928* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1997), in *Women's History Review*, 9 (1) (2000), 173-74 (p.174).

² Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace 1914-1928* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Helen Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914-1950: Gender, Power and Social Policy* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); Law, *Suffrage and Power*; Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

³ For example, see Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp.201-07.

⁴ The later absorption of education committees by local councils under the 1902 act deprived the majority of women of this role until 1907: Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local*

councils. It was only in 1918, almost fifty years after gaining the municipal vote, that the government granted women over thirty (who fulfilled the qualifications) the right to vote in general elections.⁵ Subsequent developments that year meant that women fortunate enough to gain the support of their party would be able to stand for election to Parliament. Other reforms, at the local level, included the right for women to be appointed to a jury or the magistrate's bench. In addition, the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act relaxed entry to the professions for women. The importance of these changes cannot be denied, but for many women struggling through the realities of their daily existence possession of the right to vote or to be appointed to Parliament may well have seemed to offer little promise. There were more practical issues which needed to be addressed, not least those of an economic nature; as Virginia Woolf noted, her 'career profited more from her legacy than the vote'.⁶ For other women who were in a position to make use of such reforms, the struggle to do so was only just beginning. How far they managed to take advantage of their newly acquired position has been an important focus of debate.

Alongside this formal route into public life women were gaining experience in other areas, probably the most significant of which was philanthropy and welfare. Historians have shown how women transformed what was effectively perceived as a private activity into a public role.⁷ As Prochaska argues, 'if we are to isolate one profession that did more than any other to enlarge the horizon of women in nineteenth-century England, it would have to be the profession of charity'.⁸ Maria Luddy has shown how this process worked in Ireland, where philanthropy was not simply a means of relieving poverty 'but also of immense importance in developing a public role for women as active and effective social workers in Irish society'.⁹ Such philanthropic activity varied, as did the goals it enabled women to attain. For some it provided an important route into local government; for others it led to participation in more organised ventures such as the Settlement Movement which, as Martha Vicinus has shown, provided many single women with both a sense of community and the experience needed for careers in professional social work.¹⁰

Women may have been denied access to the centre of the political stage until 1919

Government 1865-1914 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.7-8, 392.

⁵ Under the terms of the Representation of the People Act passed in February, all men over twenty-one were also enfranchised.

⁶ Harrison, Prudent Revolutionaries, p.314.

⁷ Anne Summers, 'A Home from Home - Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century', in Fit Work for Women, ed. by Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp.33-63.

⁸ Frank Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p.222.

⁹ Maria Luddy, 'Women and Charitable Organisations in Ireland', Women's Studies International Forum, 4 (11) (1988), 301-05 (p.301).

¹⁰ Hollis, Ladies Elect; Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

but they had already served their time out of the limelight. Political campaigns of the mid-nineteenth century, such as those concerned with slavery, the Corn Laws, and the Chartist movement, had their share of female participants, usually in a supportive capacity.¹¹ Women had also been crucial actors in the informal networking undertaken by wealthy and influential families before the 1880s. A political structure dominated by the aristocracy meant that many upper-class women acted as political confidants of their male relatives. As Pat Jalland has shown in her study of the female members of leading political families during the late nineteenth century, many of these women played a key role in their husband's political strategies.¹² G. E. Maguire has emphasised how seriously many Tory women took their role; though not all as seriously as Mary Ann Disraeli, who was once so concerned not to trouble her husband before an important speech that she stoically bore the pain of her hand being trapped in a carriage door.¹³ For some women a sense of political awareness may often have been inspired by family interest in developing working-class movements. Anna Davin has suggested that as a young girl, trade unionist, and suffragist Ada Nield Chew may have been encouraged by her father's interest in Owenite and Chartist ideas.¹⁴ Some years later, the yearning of a young Jennie Lee to become involved in her father's late night fireside debates with his Independent Labour Party comrades, does not appear to have been discouraged.¹⁵

Historians have shown how membership of organisations of a political, reforming, and social nature was beginning to provide women with greater access to the public world during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Primrose League, created by the Conservative Party in 1883, and the Women's Liberal Federation, established in 1887, encouraged the formal participation of women in politics; albeit often in a supplementary role.¹⁶ Before 1918 women were also contributing to the various organisations which formed the Labour movement.¹⁷ In addition, Labour women were beginning to enjoy membership of women-centred organisations, like the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Women's Labour

¹¹ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.53.

¹² Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880-1935* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp.43-45.

¹³ G. E. Maguire, *Conservative Women: A History of Women and the Conservative Party, 1874-1997* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p.6. and see pp.5-48.

¹⁴ Anna Davin, foreword to *Ada Nield Chew: The Life and Writings of a Working Woman*, [sic] presented by Doris Nield Chew (London: Virago, 1982), p.xi.

¹⁵ Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.2.

¹⁶ For the WLF, see Linda Walker, 'Party Political Women: A Comparative Study of Liberal Women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914', in *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, ed. by Jane Rendall (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp.165-91. For the Primrose League, see also Janet H. Robb, *The Primrose League 1883-1906* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942); Pugh, *The Tories and the People*, Chap.3.

¹⁷ Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); June Hannam, "'In the Comradeship of the Sexes Lies the Hope of Progress and Social Regeneration": Women in the West Riding ILP', in *Equal or Different*, pp.214-38.

League, and the Railway Women's Guild.¹⁸ The development of a variety of social, religious, or reforming organisations, like the Mothers' Union, the Girls' Friendly Society, and the National Union of Women Workers, offered further opportunities for women's activity beyond the home.¹⁹ These organisations varied in membership, aim, and approach but shared a commitment to increasing women's role in public life and to promoting reform for women; and many of them supported or played an active role in the suffrage campaign, which provided them with a focus and unifying theme.²⁰

In the inter-war period, however, the differences between the various elements of 'the women's movement', particularly those between the so-called 'new' and 'equal rights' feminists, became much more apparent. It has been argued that such divisions contributed, along with a backlash against feminism, the 'post-war economic situation and the threat of fascism', to the 'demise of feminism as a mass movement'.²¹ Research has explored the attempt to re-affirm traditional gender roles after four long years of war had divided men and women physically whilst eroding the previously well demarcated lines between their roles.²² Some historians have seen the 1930s as a decade dominated by a revival of domesticity, characterised by increased emphasis upon the home and motherhood, the growing popularity of women's organisations like the Women's Institute Movement and the new Townswomen's Guilds, and the flourishing of women magazines.²³ Developments such as these in the period after the excitement of the suffrage campaign and the unbalancing effects of war, have led some historians to question the nature, and even the existence, of a women's movement after 1918. Even where historians have noted the continuity of the pre- and post-war women's movement, some of them have only pursued this theme as far as 1928 (when women acquired equal franchise), which reflects how far the history of the inter-war women's movement has been dominated by the suffrage campaign and national politics.²⁴ This national political emphasis is also evident in the work which has focussed on the nature and activities of the first

¹⁸ For the WCG, see Gillian Scott, Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-operative Guild 1880s to the Second World War (London: University College of London Press, 1998). For the WLL, see Christine Collette, For Labour and For Women: The Women's Labour League 1906-1918 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Caroline Rowan, 'Women in the Labour Party 1906-1920', Feminist Review, 12 (1982), 74-91.

¹⁹ See Brian Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920', Past and Present, 61 (1973), 107-38.

²⁰ For an invaluable guide to the suffrage movement, see Elizabeth Crawford, The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928 (London: University College of London Press, 1999).

²¹ Susan Kingsley Kent, Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.222.

²² Susan Kingsley Kent examines this question in detail in 'The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the Demise of British Feminism', Journal of British Studies, 27 (1988), 232-53.

²³ Martin Pugh, 'Domesticity and the Decline of Feminism, 1930-1950', in British Feminism in the Twentieth Century, ed. by Harold L. Smith (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), pp.144-64. For the NUTG, see Mary Stott, Organisation Woman: The Story of the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds (London: Heinemann, 1978).

generation of women who entered, or tried to enter, the House of Commons.²⁵ In recent years, however, historians of the inter-war women's movement have begun to explore new areas, such as the participation of women as policy-makers in the field of social welfare.²⁶ New interpretations of the significance of women's inter-war activity have emerged. Margaret Andrews has argued that the significance of the Women's Institute movement, which played a fundamental role in mobilising large numbers of women between the wars, in the history of the women's movement and feminism as a whole has been underestimated.²⁷ In addition, in a study of the interpretation of the concepts of citizenship and feminism by six major voluntary women's organisations, Caitriona Beaumont contends that 'the concept of citizenship for women, as opposed to feminism, was a more effective way to secure social and economic rights for the majority of women during the inter-war period'.²⁸

It is the purpose of this thesis to contribute to some of these new areas of investigation and debate by exploring the nature and significance of women's membership of various organisations, political and non-political, in Liverpool during the inter-war period, and their participation in various other forms of public activity. One of its main arguments is that the concept of citizenship informed and inspired the work of some of these organisations and many of the leading women who were publicly active within and beyond them. Another is that this public activity was also influenced and shaped by the idea that women could make a significant contribution to public life through their particular feminine and domestic skills and qualities. These skills and qualities were not regarded by many of the publicly active inter-war women as obstacles to empowerment.

I

This study investigates the nature, range, and extent of women's interests in public life in Liverpool during the first age of joint citizenship. Before introducing these broad themes in more detail, however, it is pertinent to reflect on the choice of Liverpool for such a study.

The city provides a significant, rich, and varied context in which to study the involvement of women in public life, and to address some of the historical debates about the women's movement in the inter-war period. Though its heyday had passed, Liverpool was still

²⁴ Law, *Suffrage and Power*; Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*.

²⁵ Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House: The Women M.P.s, 1919-45', *Historical Journal*, 29 (3) (1986), 623-54; idem, *Prudent Revolutionaries*; Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, Chap. 6.

²⁶ Jones, *Women in British Public Life*.

²⁷ Margaret Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997).

²⁸ Caitriona Beaumont, 'Citizens Not Feminists: The Boundary Negotiated Between Citizenship and Feminism by Mainstream Women's Organisations in England, 1928-1939', *Women's History Review*, 9 (2) (2000), 411-29 (p. 411).

a major city at this time. By 1931 its growing population stood at 855,688.²⁹ Tony Lane argues that from the 1770s onwards 'Liverpool's people became accustomed to thinking of themselves as belonging to a city with a place in the world'.³⁰ Indeed, in 1918 Liverpool could still claim to be the second city of the Empire and 'the gateway to the Western world'.³¹ Its history as a major port was reflected in its cosmopolitan population, with its communities of Chinese, Irish, Jewish, Somalian, Welsh, West African, and West Indian people (to name just some of them).³² It was also reflected in the wealth and extreme poverty which existed within the city. Jack Robinson, who grew up in the Everton district after the First World War, recalled that 'Liverpool was one of the nicest cities in the world' though 'nobody had a job'.³³ There were certainly thousands of people who had no jobs and lived in poverty. Their plight was due in part to the economic decline of the city. Following the diminishment of Liverpool's role in the trade in products like cotton, wool, tobacco, and beef, on which it had relied, the city's prosperity declined; a situation not helped by limited industrial (mainly saw-milling and soap-boiling) and manufacturing (brewing and sugar refining) sectors. This had serious repercussions for its workforce, which suffered all the effects of casual employment.³⁴ The poor families who still inhabited the inner-city courts must have felt a world away from the families who lived in the grand homes around Sefton Park. The housing situation, however, was in the process of transformation after 1918. The landscape of the city changed as slums were cleared and new homes were built for families on the periphery of the city at Norris Green and Clubmoor. New middle-class housing was developing on the southern outskirts of the city around Childwall and Mossley Hill. Many of the grand homes around the south end of Liverpool were divided into flats, or sold off to the University as their occupants relocated to the suburbs or left town. But though Liverpool 'society' may have begun to 'disintegrate' towards the end of the nineteenth century and during the early twentieth, many of the names associated with its so-called 'aristocracy' (Booth, Holt, Melly, Muspratt, Rathbone) still appear in the records of the social and political life of the city between the wars.³⁵ Another characteristic feature of Liverpool which continued beyond 1918 was the strong tradition of sectarianism between Catholics and Protestants, despite falling church attendance.³⁶

²⁹ Census of England and Wales: County of Lancashire, Population Tables (1931).

³⁰ Tony Lane, Liverpool: City of the Sea (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), p.2. For an introduction to Liverpool, see Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790-1940, ed. by John Belchem (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992).

³¹ Lane, Liverpool, p.1.

³² Ibid., p.87.

³³ Jack Robinson, Teardrops on My Drum (London: GMP, 1986), p.102.

³⁴ P. J. Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1939 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1981), pp.1-4; Lane, Liverpool, p.31.

³⁵ Lane, Liverpool, pp.29, 54.

³⁶ Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism, p.xvii. See John Bohstedt, 'More than One Working-Class: Protestant and Catholic Riots in Edwardian Liverpool', in Popular Politics, Riot and Labour, pp.173-

Liverpool's history, decline, and divisions meant that it had more than its fair share of social problems, which adds to its importance as a focus for study. This is because since the Victorian period the struggle to combat these problems had provided women with an important route into public life. This was so in Liverpool, where at least one Victorian woman, Josephine Butler, achieved national prominence for her work. From the late 1880s a small number of women had made their way on to the Liverpool Poor Law Boards as well as the School Boards.³⁷ By 1918 Liverpool women had formed or ran numerous organisations which dealt with all manner of need. These included the Liverpool Rescue Society and House of Help, the Girls' Friendly Society, Margaret Beavan's Child Welfare Association, and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association which was organised during the First World War by Eleanor Rathbone and her suffrage colleagues. Rathbone not only played a key role in the Liverpool suffrage struggle, but in 1913 pioneered (with other members of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society) the Women Citizens' Association (WCA) in order to educate women for their coming enfranchisement. For some women, however, the WCA offered little in political terms, for they were already active within numerous political organisations, such as the Women's Liberal Federation and the Primrose League. Other women, like the celebrated Mary Bamber, championed the rights of working women.³⁸

Between the wars this busy and complex landscape of organisations in which women were involved became even richer and more varied. A brief glance at the pages of the *Liverpool Red Book* for any year in the period 1918-1939 would bear testimony to the plethora of organisations which characterised the social, political, and civic life of the city.³⁹ Many of these organisations were concerned with welfare issues and social problems, some sought to promote the needs and rights of women, and others had more specialised objectives (such as the extension and exploration of women's citizenship). For some women party political activity was compatible with membership of women's non-party organisations. Many of the outstanding women who can be located within this field of endeavour were making a contribution to the more formal structures of Liverpool's political and civic life. The City Council welcomed its first woman councillor, Eleanor Rathbone, in 1909; and between the wars she was joined by women from all the main parties. In 1927 the city appointed Margaret Beavan as its first woman Mayor. By 1939 there were two women on the aldermanic bench, and the magistrates' bench had long since welcomed its first women members.⁴⁰ In addition, three attempts were made in Liverpool to return a woman to Parliament between the wars,

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³⁷ Krista Cowman, "Engendering Citizenship": The Political Involvement of Women on Merseyside 1890-1920' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1994).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Liverpool Red Book* (1919-1939).

⁴⁰ Women accounted for only 15% of JPs: Ibid.

and though all of them were unsuccessful Eleanor Rathbone was returned in 1929 (albeit for the Combined English Universities) after a campaign actively supported by women and men from her home town.⁴¹ Rathbone was the most prominent Liverpool woman active in public life, but she had many contemporaries who contributed to the widening of women's public role between the wars, some of whom were recognised nationally for their work at the time, some of whom worked quietly at the local level, and all of whom deserve to be studied.⁴² Such a study is valuable for many reasons, but not least for the light it sheds on the motivations, interests, and activities of a range of women, some of whom were prominent, some of whom became prominent, and some of whom remained in the background.

There is a further reason why Liverpool provides a useful context for a study of this nature. In March 1919 a report on reconstruction drawn up by the Social Improvement Committee, a committee of men and women, of the Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid stated that:

While to the leading citizens Liverpool is a unit in which they take their appropriate places, and form their own council, intellectual and other institutions and societies, to the great bulk of residents citizenship is an empty phrase robbed of its meaning, its privileges and its responsibilities. They live in some street or other from their youth upward, unknown, unwelcomed and unused.⁴³

After 1919 women's leaders became increasingly aware that citizenship was not necessarily just about politics or gender, and (as a result) their programmes and activities were influenced not only by a desire to promote women's role in public life as citizens but to make citizenship a concept relevant to all members of the community.

II

Before introducing the areas of public life with which this study is concerned, it is necessary to consider what is understood by the 'public'. The distinction between public and private has long been used as a tool to make sense of women's history.⁴⁴ Men have always enjoyed a

⁴¹ Liverpool University Special Collections, RP/XIV.3.3: Rathbone Papers, Election Addresses.

⁴² See Chapter Two.

⁴³ Liverpool Council of Social Service, 14 Castle Street, Liverpool: Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid Collection, Report on Social Reconstruction in Liverpool, 1 March 1919, p.7. I am grateful to the LCSS for allowing me access to their material.

⁴⁴ In a discussion of the possible problems attached to the use of such terms, Amanda Vickery has noted that Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) 'offers the most complex use of separate spheres to date': 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36 (2) (1993), 383-414 (p.393). Jane Rendall has expressed concern about

much closer and more natural relationship with the public than women. As Eileen Yeo points out, '[i]n nineteenth-century Britain, while a public man was a citizen, a "public woman" meant a prostitute'.⁴⁵ Modern industrialised society accorded masculinity the highest status, a point which Eleanor Rathbone emphasised when she argued that 'some aspects of our whole social fabric [are] man-made through generations to suit masculine interests and glorify masculine standards'.⁴⁶ Women's entry to and behaviour within the public sphere has been controlled by the interaction between understandings of the public sphere, changes within it, and prevailing perceptions of masculinity, femininity and their appropriate channels. For example, during the late nineteenth century women gained access to the public sphere as actors within local government because femininity was perceived to be appropriate to that sphere, but they were denied access to national government because this was perceived to be inappropriate. By 1919 women had gained the right of access to national government, but the extent to which they were able to make use it, and the experience of those women who finally made it onto the coveted benches of the House of Commons, indicated that it remained the 'men's house' and that public life in general continued to be dominated by masculine values.⁴⁷ Even after 120 women were swept into Parliament in 1997, some women MPs felt that the working conditions of the Commons continued to reflect male domination of the public arena.⁴⁸

When using the word 'public' in a study of this nature, it may be useful to bear in mind Amanda Vickery's comments that:

current interpretations of 'the public' vary enormously. In a historian's hands, a public role can mean access to anything from politics, public office, formal employment, opinion, print, clubs, assembly, company, the neighbourhood, the streets, or simply the world outside the front door.⁴⁹

The sheer variety of female experience suggests that the later, literally interaction beyond the home is the most useful definition of the public. The women examined in this study shared an interest in pursuing activity beyond their home but their experience of the public varied

the adequacy of 'a single version of the public': 'Women and the Public Sphere', *Gender and History* 11 (3) (1999), 477-85.

⁴⁵ *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere*, ed. by Eileen Yeo (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.1. For a discussion of the category of woman in history, see Denise Riley, 'Am I that Name?: Feminism and the Categorisation of 'Women' in History' (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

⁴⁶ Eleanor Rathbone, quoted by Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1984), p.104.

⁴⁷ Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House'; Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, pp. 190-201.

⁴⁸ See the comments of retiring Speaker Betty Boothroyd in her statement to the House: *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard) (26 July 2000), c.1114.

enormously. They participated in various areas of the public domain, including working for local welfare schemes (either as volunteers or paid employees), joining local women's organisations like the Women's Co-operative Guild, involving themselves in municipal politics, and serving on committees. Many women enjoyed experiences, or used skills, popularly associated with the home or private life within the public arena; others adopted official public roles while continuing to embrace their domestic responsibilities. Their experiences support the view that the public/private division often bears little resemblance to women's real lives.

III

In 1982 the journalist and former flapper voter Mary Stott told Dale Spender: 'I am an organisation woman because I think that the only way women are going to get anywhere is by organising'.⁵⁰ Organisations provided an important vehicle for women's activity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and continued to do so between the wars. With this in mind, Chapter One of this thesis investigates how women's leaders displayed and fulfilled their commitment to exploring and expanding women's role in political, civic, and social life through the medium of several organisations, like the Women Citizens' Association (WCA) which operated under the umbrella of the Liverpool Council of Women Citizens (LCWC) (an important non-party and non-sectarian forum for women's activity between the wars). It challenges the view that the women's movement lost energy between the wars, arguing that in different ways women's organisations promoted women's role by encouraging women to use their new extended citizenship status to pursue reforms beneficial not only to themselves but to society as a whole, that is to the 'common good'. An important theme of this chapter, and one which features elsewhere in the study, is the part these organisations played in widening the scope of the women's movement. It is argued that they played a positive role by encouraging many different women to make a contribution to public life and enabling them to do so in a way and at a level which felt natural to them. This discussion makes a further contribution to recent work which has offered alternative readings of inter-war women's organisations based upon a re-evaluation of definitions of 'feminist'.⁵¹

The history of the women's movement has tended to concentrate on the lives and careers of a few prominent women. This can be seen in the case of two Liverpool women, Eleanor Rathbone and Maude Royden, who have captured the attention of historians largely

⁴⁹ Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?', p.412.

⁵⁰ Dale Spender, *There's Always Been a Women's Movement this Century* (London: Routledge, 1983), p.144.

⁵¹ Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*.

because they can be placed within the context of the national women's movement.⁵² Rathbone was, according to Brian Harrison, 'by far the most distinguished feminist of the period' and although her role as President of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) placed her at the forefront of the inter-war women's movement, and after 1929 she was busy with her new role as Independent MP, she never formally cut her ties with the women's movement which she had helped to foster in her home city.⁵³ Rathbone appears to have been acutely aware that she was at the forefront of a network of equally hardworking women. As she wrote to a Liverpool WCA colleague, Sarah Everton, in 1929:

It is, I suppose, more or less inevitable that the credit for joint movements for reform is almost invariably given in far too great a measure to those who have occupied positions as officers and leaders; whereas it is usually the less conspicuous workers who have the least of the fun and most of the toil . . . I do indeed thank you with all my heart and with the hope that you and I may have further opportunity of working together for the causes we care for.⁵⁴

Recently, however, there has been a growing emphasis in women's history on the need to look beyond exceptional women to discover the stories of 'ordinary' women, that is less prominent women who contributed to, and benefited from, changes in women's lives.⁵⁵ For example, the development of labour history helped to rescue forgotten subjects and to realise the role of women like Hannah Mitchell, Ada Chew, and Selina Cooper in the history of women's struggle.⁵⁶ In view of this, the second chapter of this thesis attempts to widen the boundaries of the historical spotlight which has been shone so brightly on Eleanor Rathbone, in order to explore the lives of some of her less prominent contemporaries in inter-war Liverpool. In doing so, it utilises the technique of group-biography which has been effectively employed in some recent studies. Historians have long acknowledged the importance of women's networks for the women's movement, and on this basis group-biography offers a

⁵² Both women have been the subject of individual and group biography. See Mary Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949); Johanna Alberti, Beyond Suffrage; idem, Eleanor Rathbone (London: Sage, 1996); Sheila Fletcher, Maude Royden: A Life (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

⁵³ Harrison, Prudent Revolutionaries, p.9. It should be noted that in 1935 her other commitments led to her decision not to stand for re-election to Liverpool City Council.

⁵⁴ Liverpool Record Office (hereafter LRO)/ACC/3538: Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Collection (three boxes of unlisted material) Box 1: Letter of Eleanor Rathbone to Sarah Everton, 21 November 1929.

⁵⁵ See Sandra Stanley Holton, 'The Suffragist and the "Average Woman"', Women's History Review, 1 (1) (1992), 9-24; Barbara Caine, 'Feminist Biography and Feminist History', Women's History Review, 3 (2) (1994), 247-61.

⁵⁶ Hannah Mitchell, The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell: Suffragette and Rebel, ed. by Geoffrey Mitchell (London: Virago, 1977); Chew, Ada Nield Chew; Jill Liddington, The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper 1864-1946 (London: Virago, 1984).

particularly appropriate tool with which to investigate women's stories. Thus, Chapter Two uses the narratives of sixteen women's lives to contribute to debates about women's role in the inter-war period. The discussion develops one of the most important themes of the study as a whole: the need to understand active women within the context of their own lives. These sixteen women, and the other women identified as active during the period, were attempting to balance their public lives with their private lives. They shared a commitment to pursuing activity in the public sphere, though their inspiration and motivation, the choices they made, and the amount of time they were able to devote to activity varied considerably. By exploring the variations and similarities which existed among these sixteen women, the discussion presents an opportunity to develop our understanding of how far and in what ways education, marriage, lifestyle, religion, politics, and class influenced women's opportunities and decisions.

Much public activity undertaken by women during the nineteenth century was of a voluntary nature. Chapters Three and Four focus on welfare activity and the police force, two areas in which women were beginning to demand appropriate recognition for their skills and contribution. Welfare had provided many women's first taste of public life during the nineteenth century, and it continued to do so after 1918. Perceptions of the female nature as loving and compassionate had long made for an easy connection between women and care-giving. Chapter Three traces some of the factors which helped women to attain a position of considerable strength in local welfare initiatives by 1939. It explores the way in which women's work was organised and expanded within a field which was undergoing significant organisational transformation. By focusing upon women's activity in four specific welfare organisations, the discussion considers the repercussions of the professionalisation of social work for women's participation and looks at how the development of community approaches to welfare ensured that women were able to maintain their important role as welfare givers. The discussion explores the role of women in attempts to implement new attitudes towards the plight of the poor, which were influenced not only by changing perceptions of the 'poor' but by debates regarding the relationship between the working and middle classes in post-war society.

The way in which understandings of, and responses to, femininity were used by those who supported and those who opposed women's progress in public life is developed in Chapter Four. This theme is explored through an examination of the campaign for women police in Liverpool, one of the major demands of the inter-war women's movement. The chapter looks at the origins of the campaign, which were linked to the establishment of the women patrols during the First World War, an experiment that served to underline the haphazard nature of provision for women's policing. It explores the organisation and development of the campaign by the Liverpool Women Police Propaganda Committee,

organised by the WCA and the Women Patrols, and the support it attracted from leading local citizens. Between 1920 and 1929 the appointment of women police was recommended by two government committees and a Royal Commission, and in January 1930 was supported by a majority of the Liverpool City Council. But the Liverpool Watch Committee refused to appoint them, which makes the Liverpool campaign unique. The discussion explores the arguments presented by both sides in a debate which centred around questions of women's right to equal employment, women's skills, and notions of propriety concerning female bodies as police and policed. Attention is paid to the way in which the campaign heightened tensions in the public sphere regarding women's role. Issues surrounding the protection of the female body in the public arena is a theme returned to in Chapter Six.

The last two chapters explore women's activity in the political sphere. Chapter Five investigates the opportunities available for women to participate in national and local politics. The emphasis is placed upon local politics, the first arena in which women made their political contribution and the one in which they continued to be concentrated between the wars. Close exploration is made of women's contribution to Liverpool municipal elections and the reasons for their varied performances. Political parties in Liverpool spoke the language of equality; how far they practised it in electoral politics is examined here in a discussion which considers possible reasons for women's levels of participation and success across the parties. As in other cities, electoral politics was only available to a limited number of men and women, so the chapter moves on to look closely at the other important focus of women's inter-war political activity, the local political association. Limitations of space dictate that the study examines women's contribution only to the associations linked to the three main parties: Conservative, Labour and Liberal. Its most important argument is that in a period when non-party women's organisations were keen to educate women for citizenship, local party associations also played a key role in this process.

The final chapter investigates representations of, and responses to, women as actors within the public sphere. Bearing in mind the fact that women's entry to the public sphere had been controlled by expectations of, and responses to, appropriate female conduct and understandings of femininity, this chapter considers the impact of women's new role as equal citizens on issues of appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour, which at that time were clearly still unresolved. The discussion looks at how expectations of femininity not only continued to play a significant part in the allocation of public roles to women, but influenced reactions to women as public actors. These themes are explored in more depth in two case studies. The first examines Margaret Beavan's disastrous Conservative campaign at Everton in the 1929 General Election, and the second reviews the activities of outspoken Labour councillor and future MP Bessie Braddock.

IV

The primary sources available for the study of women in public life in Liverpool between the wars are varied. Large collections of material survive for only a limited number of organisations. As is often the case, the material is much fuller in some areas than in others. Sources concerned with activities in which men and women were engaged together tend to be more plentiful than for those where women acted alone. For example, the sizeable collection relating to the Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party in Liverpool Record Office does not include any material relating to the Women's Labour Sections. Some original material survives for Liverpool Conservative women, but it forms only a tiny portion of the limited material relating to the Conservative party as a whole within the city. Some records of women's organisations have been held informally by members, while others have been deposited in record offices. For example, the papers relating to Liverpool WCA were deposited in Liverpool Record Office by the son of a member, who found them after her death. This material includes selected annual reports, minutes, leaflets, programmes and some personal correspondence, and these have been invaluable for shedding light on the activities and membership of other local women's organisations discussed, the majority of which are not well served by original sources. Where possible, as in the case of the Women's International League, national collections have been consulted in order to gain some impression of branch activity. Organisational journals, such as the *Townswoman* and *Labour Woman*, are useful in providing evidence of branch location and activity.

Scarcity of evidence has dictated selectivity as regards the women's organisations that have been discussed. It meant that little could be said about several organisations, including The Union of Catholic Mothers, the records of which were destroyed by fire during the Second World War.⁵⁷ Although this fate also befell some of the records of the Mothers' Union, certain aspects of the history of this organisation in Liverpool can be reconstructed from materials in other collections, such as those in the Mothers' Union headquarters at Mary Sumner House, London. This lack of symmetry may appear problematic, but it should be noted that the major concern of the chapter in which the Mothers' Union is discussed is with organisations which played an important role in mobilising large numbers of women on the basis of citizenship. Limitations of space also meant that the role of women in other religious organisations, such as those of the Methodists and Baptists, and of the Jewish faith, could not be studied. These valuable and potentially fertile areas of enquiry, which deserve

⁵⁷ Letters to the author from Mrs Brenda Greenwood, Assistant Diocesan Secretary of the Mothers' Union, Liverpool Diocese (10 October 1996), and Mrs Angela Batey, Archdiocesan President of The Union of Catholic Mothers, Liverpool Archdiocesan Branch (1 November 1996).

investigation, must sadly be left to future enquiry.

Minute books and annual reports, from several organisations and societies, most notably the WCA, the Personal Service Society and the Liverpool Police Propaganda Committee, have formed an important source of evidence, though one not without its problems. The formal nature of minutes, especially those relating to Liverpool City Council, mean that personalities and discussions are hidden by the economy of the structure. Annual reports, on the other hand, are public documents designed to present organisations in the most favourable light (especially so in the case of welfare organisations, which were seeking to attract donors). One way of limiting these problems is to employ a variety of sources relating to the same organisation. Differing and valuable perspectives can be provided by other contemporary sources, including the local and national press, local journals, organisational journals, and pamphlets.

Historians agree that the availability of source material can often pose a problem in tracing some women's lives.⁵⁸ It is a pity that the private papers of women, which might appear to offer the greatest potential for casting light on their lives and careers, are often lacking. When searching for the papers of the female relatives of politicians Pat Jalland noted that, 'women's records tended to be kept by accident or default, revealing fragments of the lives of obscure sisters and nieces as well as the more famous wives'.⁵⁹ Historians who seek to study more diverse women often find their options limited by a lack of sources, a problem Brian Harrison faced when choosing who he was going to study in *Prudent Revolutionaries*. Lady Rhondda and Grace Harlow were two examples of women, active between the wars, who 'had to go' as material was too limited for the task.⁶⁰ For those for whom private papers no longer exist, information may be gathered from a variety of other sources; and, while scarcity of material renders some women's lives irretrievable, others may be waiting to be discovered. The chance discovery of the Hampstead electoral roll for 1933, which indicated that following Flora Mayor's death her friend Mary Sheepshanks moved into her home, led Sybil Oldfield to begin to trace the life of a previously neglected woman.⁶¹

The private papers of only a small minority of the Liverpool women who feature in this thesis have survived, which meant that Chapter Two, with its biographical studies, posed the greatest problem to write. But the lack of this important form of evidence was compensated for to some extent by other sources, such as autobiographies and biographies, the oral testimony of relatives and friends, diaries, obituaries and funeral tributes, newspapers,

⁵⁸ Lori Williamson, 'Women's History and Biography', *Gender and History*, 11 (2) (1999), 379-84 (p.380).

⁵⁹ Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics*, p.3.

⁶⁰ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, pp.12-13.

⁶¹ Sybil Oldfield, *Spinsters of this Parish: The Life and Times of F. M. Mayor and Mary Sheepshanks* (London: Virago, 1984).

journals and, in one case, unpublished writings.⁶² In using these sources certain problems in writing biographies must be borne in mind. Liz Stanley has investigated the problems inherent in auto/biography; she argues that 'all biography consists of *post hoc* highly selective ideological accounts of particular selves'.⁶³ Mary Stocks' preface to her biography of Eleanor Rathbone suggests that ultimately some elements of the finished product were slightly at odds with what Rathbone and her companion, Elizabeth Macadam, might have chosen.⁶⁴ Similarly, Dorothy Keeling's recollections of social work in Liverpool were not quite the autobiography which her friends had encouraged her to write.⁶⁵

Like auto/biography, oral testimony, another potentially important source material, presents its own difficulties. Dependence on memory may be a problem, and there is also the possibility that some oral testimony may represent interpretations rather than recollections of the past, influenced by hindsight. Personal perspective may also distort recollections of the past; as Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson have commented, '[a]ny life story, written or oral, more or less dramatically, is in one sense a personal mythology, a self-justification'.⁶⁶ With this in mind, oral testimony has been used as a source in conjunction with other material. In some cases it illuminates issues or routes of enquiry which may have remained in the shadows, and often provides factual evidence which may otherwise have been unobtainable.

Many secondary sources have proved helpful for this thesis. Krista Cowman's study, referred to above, offers an invaluable introduction to women's early political activity in Liverpool.⁶⁷ The general political landscape has been covered by P. J. Waller in his richly detailed study of the period 1868-1939.⁶⁸ Liverpool's Labour Party has received relatively more attention from historians. Sam Davies, for example, has traced the social and economic influences on it in his valuable study.⁶⁹ Contemporary sources also offer useful insights into

⁶² Four of the women were the subjects of biography: Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone; Alberti, Eleanor Rathbone; C. F. Mott, Lilian Mary Mott: A Memoir By Her Husband (Privately published, 1956); Millie Toole, Mrs Bessie Braddock MP: A Biography (London: Robert Hale, 1957); Ivy B. Ireland, Margaret Beavan of Liverpool: Her Character and Work (Liverpool: Henry Young and Sons Ltd, 1938). Two wrote their autobiographies: Jack and Bessie Braddock, The Braddocks (London: MacDonald, 1963); Dorothy C. Keeling, The Crowded Stairs: Recollections of Social Work in Liverpool 1919-1940 (London: National Council of Social Service, 1961).

⁶³ Liz Stanley, The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp.181-213.

⁶⁴ Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone, pp.7-8.

⁶⁵ Interview with Mrs Margaret Simey, Liverpool, 25 November 1997.

⁶⁶ The Myths We Live By, ed. by Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1990), p.10.

⁶⁷ Cowman, "Engendering Citizenship".

⁶⁸ Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism.

⁶⁹ Sam Davies, Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool, 1900-1939 (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996); Joan Smith, 'Labour Tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool', History Workshop Journal, 17 (1984), 32-56. For a personal perspective, see Jack Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', History Workshop Journal, 18 (1984), 92-101.

local parties.⁷⁰ The Merseyside Socialist Research Group's study of unemployment on Merseyside offers a useful introduction to the problems of the 1930s.⁷¹ Auto/biography has also been helpful. In addition to those already discussed, Helen Forrester's account of her poverty stricken years in 1930s Liverpool, and George Melly's account of his childhood in one of Liverpool's oldest families, both provide important insights.⁷² Particular aspects of women's role in public life in the inter-war period, both within and beyond Liverpool, have been examined in books and articles (too numerous to mention individually), which feature in the footnotes and bibliography of this thesis, and to the writers of which, the author of this thesis owes a great deal.

⁷⁰ Will Hamling, A Short History of the Liverpool Trades Council 1848-1948 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1948); Barbara Whittingham-Jones, Down with the Orange Caucus (Liverpool: n.p., 1936); idem, The Pedigree of Liverpool Politics: White, Orange and Green (Liverpool: n.p., 1936).

⁷¹ Sam Davies *et al.*, Genuinely Seeking Work: Mass Unemployment on Merseyside in the 1930s (Birkenhead: Liver Press, 1992).

⁷² George Melly, Scouse Mouse or I Never Got Over It: An Autobiography (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984); Helen Forrester, Twopence to Cross the Mersey (London: Fontana, 1983).

Chapter One

Citizenship and The Common Good: Women's Non-Political Organisations in Inter-War Liverpool

The association of some women's organisational activity with opposition and violence, most notably that which accompanied the suffrage campaign, has contributed to the view that after the war women's groups became far less consequential. For example, Susan Kingsley Kent has argued that '[b]y the end of the 1920s, feminism as a distinct political and social movement had become insignificant'.¹ However, an examination of the aims, interests, and methods of women's organisations in Liverpool after the war suggests that the momentum of organised feminism was not lost but redirected into different initiatives. The rechanneling of women's energy into old and new organisations resulted not in its dispersal but in its diversification, though important elements of continuity were retained. The aims of women who sought to transform the role and position of women in society were much more varied, both before and after the suffrage campaign, than might be suggested by the prominence historians have often given to that campaign. After the partial enfranchisement of women in 1918, women's leaders throughout Britain sought to consolidate previous gains by continuing their campaign for equality and also by examining ways in which they could encourage and promote women's continued involvement in public life. Women set themselves goals which focused on the development of their new role in areas which they perceived to be appropriate.

Organisational activity was an important method by which these goals were pursued. It provided a forum for discussion, education, collective action, and companionship for many different women. As Mary Agnes Hamilton, an inter-war writer and commentator, noted, women's organisations developed to concentrate on areas where inequality remained; but, in addition to this, the women who joined these organisations were interested in improving society, both nationally and internationally.² Consequently after 1918 the agenda for reform widened. While equality remained an important goal, many women began to work for causes that were essentially non-gender-specific. Their objective was often articulated as the 'common good', which referred to general changes within post-war society, as well as equality for all citizens. This drew inspiration from women's pre-war agenda but was adapted to the

¹ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-War Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.4.

² Mary Agnes Hamilton, 'Changes in Social Life', in *Our Freedom and its Results*, ed. by Ray Strachey

new era. The emphasis on the 'common good' was partly a result of women's extended citizenship status, which resulted from their (limited) enfranchisement. The anticipation of this enfranchisement presented women's leaders with new questions about what citizenship meant to women and the means by which women could fulfil, and be seen to fulfil, their citizenship duties.³ These questions were especially pertinent because the traditional concept of citizenship, which was closely associated with masculinity and male activity within the state, had been subject to revision since the late nineteenth century.⁴ By virtue of their increased social, economic, and political action women began to conform to the criteria for citizenship for the first time. But these criteria remained to a large extent male-orientated; as Kathleen B. Jones has argued, the 'implications of the Liberal understanding of citizenship was that, if women were to become full citizens, then women would have to be more like men'.⁵ But rather than accept citizenship as a male concept to which they had to adapt, some women's leaders sought in the early twentieth century to challenge its boundaries.⁶ They acted on the basis of their individual right to citizenship as women, not as imitators of men. Some of them sought to achieve equality through difference, and saw femininity as a basis for empowerment.⁷ Central to this concept was the idea that, in their own way and making use of skills and attributes which were peculiarly feminine, women could make a unique and positive contribution to society.⁸

This chapter will argue that ideas such as these strongly influenced and were implemented by some of the women who were active in public life in Liverpool in the inter-war period. It will do so through an examination of five women's organisations active in Liverpool then: the Women Citizens' Association (WCA), the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds (NUTG), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

(London: Hogarth Press, 1936), pp.231-85 (p.262).

³ Pedersen refers to Marshall and Titmuss' definition of the citizen as a person who 'not only participates in the political life of the community and holds political rights but also contributes to the social and economic well-being' of the community: 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 983-1006 (p.983).

⁴ Carole Pateman, 'Women, Nature and the Suffrage', *Ethics*, 90 (4) (1980), 564-75 (p.570); Kathleen B. Jones, 'Citizenship: A Woman-Friendly Polity', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 15 (1990), 781-812 (pp.790-91).

⁵ Jones, 'Citizenship', p.792.

⁶ See note 4 above.

⁷ Kingsley Kent views this as resulting from the circumstances of the war forcing women to re-evaluate their role: Kent, *Making Peace*, p.6. But many women appear to have done so before 1914. As Millicent Fawcett stated, 'We do not want to be bad imitators of men; we neither deny nor minimize the differences between men and women . . . the claim of women to representation depends to a large extent on these differences': quoted by Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.13.

⁸ Like Naomi Black's social feminists, these women believed that their 'policy priorities [would] be successful in human terms'; women were arguing for the same 'compatibility between the sexes' on which the philosophy of 'social feminism relies': *Social Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.348.

(WILPF), the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG), and the Mothers' Union. Owing to the incomplete, fragmentary, and uneven nature of the surviving evidence, neither the selection of organisations nor the discussion of them is comprehensive. The evidence does not permit us to determine precisely how far the ordinary members of these organisations consciously subscribed to, and were changed by, their broader goals.⁹ The choice of organisations has been determined partly by the nature of the surviving evidence, and partly by their importance, appeal, and illustration of the diversity of women's action at the local level. The discussion of them will examine the formation, aims, policies, and activities of each organisation, before turning to consider the nature of their membership. It will study the degree to which membership was shared between the organisations, how far it transcended class boundaries, and the range of interests, influences, and motivations which led women from different social and economic backgrounds to become members. The discussion will help to reveal the extent, the varied concerns and interests, the goals, and the vibrancy of women's involvement in public life in inter-war Liverpool. It will show that the women's movement not only remained active in Liverpool, but widened its scope in terms of both participation and agenda.

I

The Women Citizens' Association

The WCA was one of the most important women's organisations in Liverpool in the inter-war period. Originally formed in May 1913 out of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society, its affiliation to the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) in 1919 meant that it provided a link between local and national activity.¹⁰ The immediate concern of those who organised the WCA was to educate women for citizenship and to contribute peacefully to the campaign for the franchise.¹¹ They originally intended that there would be a branch in every part of the city, and the first eighteen months of the WCA's life was a period of rapid expansion. WCA branches were developed in fifteen Liverpool wards. During the war years WCA members sought ways to contribute to dealing with the national emergency and 'officers made a determined effort to keep the organisation going'.¹² The records indicate that almost

⁹ See the limitations on the sources discussed in the Introduction. It is difficult to determine attendance rates at meetings, one way of assessing the level of interest in different concerns.

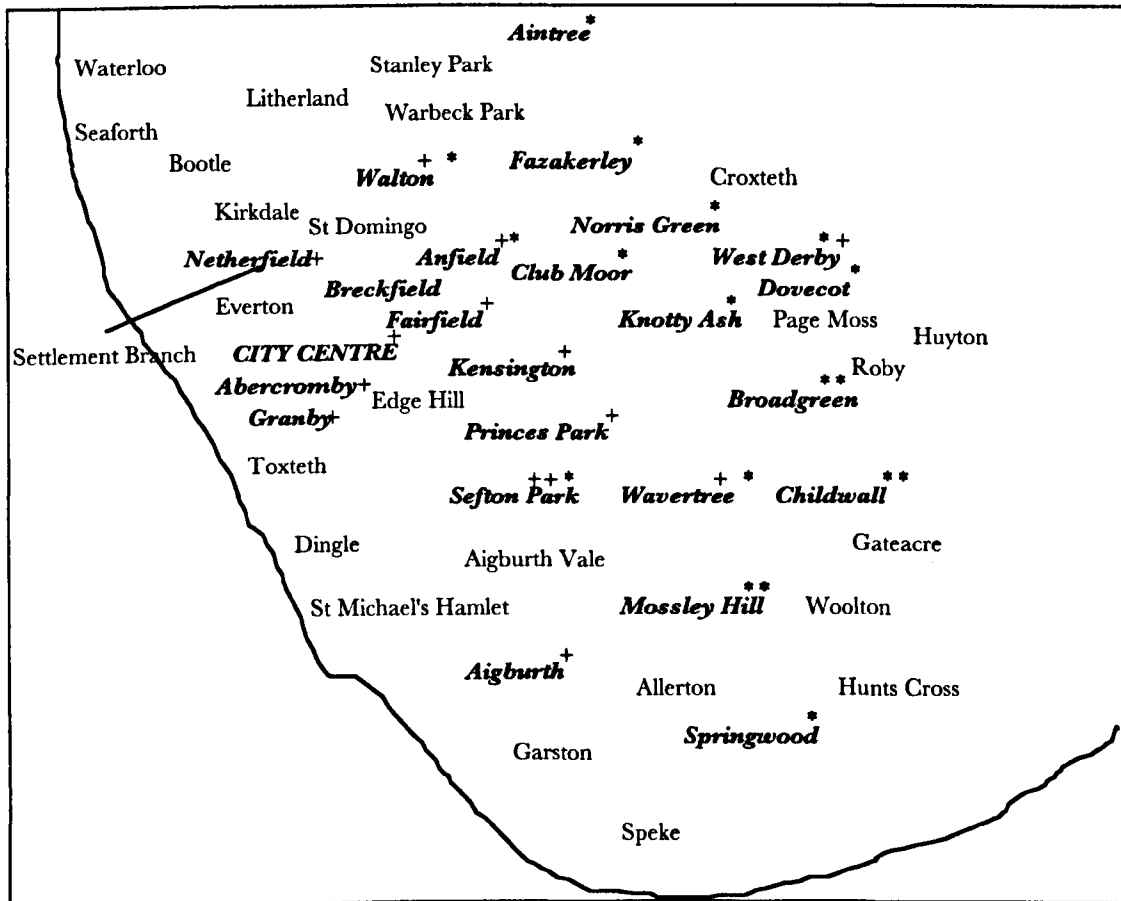
¹⁰ Not all WCAs chose to affiliate to NUSEC.

¹¹ Liverpool Record Office (hereafter LRO)/ACC/3538: Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Collection (three boxes of unlisted material; cited hereafter as LRO/WCA/B1/2/3), Box 2, Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Annual Report (hereafter LWCA Annual Report) (1919-1921), p.3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.4.

all of the original fifteen branches survived, or maintained branch officers, into the post-war period (see Map 1.i).¹³

Map 1.i. Location of Branches of the Women Citizens' Association and the Townswomen's Guild Formed in Liverpool Between 1913 and 1939



Source: LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Reports; The Townswoman; NUTG Annual Reports.*

Notes

+ WCA branches (in bold). * Townswomen's Guild branches (in bold).

Shortly after the war the WCA became involved in the 'second stage' of the national women's movement, which involved the demand for the acquisition of rights which befitted extended citizenship. This demand was made through the main campaigning women's organisations. The National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) adapted itself to the new era in March 1919, when the NUSEC took over 'to obtain all such reforms as are necessary to secure a real equality of liberty, status and opportunities as between men and

¹³LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1922-1923), pp.10-11.

women'.¹⁴ In the same year the Liverpool Women Suffrage Society (LWSS) amalgamated with the WCA under the name Liverpool WCA, and this organisation became the linchpin of the Liverpool Council of Women Citizens (LCWC) which was established in the same year as an umbrella organisation to represent women's organisations in the city.¹⁵ Among the LCWC's objectives was an intention to 're-organise and strengthen the existing WCA' by supporting branches and helping to create new ones and by assisting the WCA 'to carry out on a larger scale and more systematically its declared objects'. However, the LCWC's programme only concerned some of these objects, since it was formed 'to give expression to the opinion of the [women's] organisations represented on the Council upon questions affecting the interests of women and children', interests which had always been central to the concerns of the women's movement.¹⁶ It would appear from this that the LCWC was unconcerned with some of the wider objectives of the WCA, which affected the welfare of men as well as women and children; which probably reflects a desire on the part of the LCWC to concentrate on interests which were common to most women's organisations in the city, so as to increase the chances of making as many of these organisations as possible its satellites.

By this time, with the voting rights of women partially secured, the WCA's objectives began to widen. It sought to promote more general improvements in the condition of the nation by educating women for citizenship. It viewed the 'ready response' of women to its call for action as evidence that there were 'many women glad of the opportunity offered to fit themselves to exercise the rights they possessed and to prepare themselves for the fuller citizenship they were claiming.'¹⁷ In 1919 its stated objectives were:

- (i) To foster the sense of citizenship in women.
- (ii) To encourage the education of its members in social, political and economic questions.
- (iii) To secure the election of suitable women to Parliament, Local Governing Bodies and other bodies where their assistance and experience would be beneficial.
- (iv) To work for equality of status and opportunity between men and women.
- (v) To work for improvements in the social and economic conditions of the nation.¹⁸

These objectives reveal that although the equal franchise remained an important

¹⁴ Ibid. (1919-1921), p.4.

¹⁵ Like the WCA, the Liverpool Council of Women (LCWC) was non-party and non-sectarian. In 1919 there were twenty-six organisations affiliated to it, including the five organisations discussed here. See LRO/ACC/977: Josephine Legge Collection (file containing unlisted material) (hereafter LRO/JLC): LCWC Leaflet (1919).

¹⁶ Ibid. See also LRO/JLC: 'Constitution of LCWC' Leaflet (9 February 1920).

¹⁷ LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Leaflet (n.d., c.1920).

¹⁸ Ibid. (n.d.).

consideration for the WCA it was seen as part of a wider package of demands. They also show that the WCA's concept of citizenship embraced social and economic as well as political circumstances. This was partly a result of the fact that in the late nineteenth century the growing challenge to the public and private division of society meant that the concept of the citizen had been subject to debate, but it also sprang from the increasing involvement of women in those political, social, and economic roles which were regarded as important criteria in the definition of male citizenship. However, as clause iii of the 1919 WCA objectives may well imply, the WCA was not content to conform to these criteria. It believed that women could make their own particular contribution to society, and sought to redefine the boundaries of citizenship accordingly. It did not believe that women should be like men in order to fulfil their citizenship duties, but felt that by participating within society on equal terms women could use their own unique skills and experiences to transform society for the benefit of all.

In 1920 the WCA saw itself as 'ready to take its share in any development of the women's movement'.¹⁹ Its leaflets in the 1920s invited the membership of all women 'who wish to unite on the common ground of citizenship'.²⁰ The WCA's objectives were, and continued to be, couched in the language of universal reform. By 1928, with the women's vote fully secured, the WCA was seeking to 'enable women as citizens to make their best contribution to the common good', a concept dominated by utilitarian and humanitarian principles.²¹ The same thinking was expressed in the organisation's Annual Report for 1934, which stated that,

If women would but unite and use their power, they could accelerate to any degree the progress of all those reforms in which they are vitally concerned. International and national morality, public service, education, housing – all suffer from a lack of women's activity: her point of view is not expressed and such as is taken is necessarily incomplete.²²

This was also the language of action and duty. There is a sense here of the frustration felt towards women who ignored or failed to realise the need to build upon the progress already made. The WCA was attempting to rally women to take action. It maintained the position that women had to work to produce general improvements to benefit everyone, not just women. If the women who led the WCA were feminists, they regarded themselves first

¹⁹ Ethel Warhurst, Liverpool Women Citizens' Association (Liverpool: n.p., 1944), p.3.

²⁰ LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Leaflet (n.d., c.1920).

²¹ 'The Women Citizens' Association', The Liverpool Review, January 1932-December 1932, pp.95-97. It is interesting that this was similar in some respects to Plato's vision of citizenship, the Edwardian interest in which has been explored in José Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy', Past and Present, 135 (1992), 116-41 (p.128).

and foremost as humanists. They argued for the extension of their role, on the basis that it was useful or functional for society.

One of the WCA's pioneers, Eleanor Rathbone, was concerned that ordinary women should be educated for their anticipated enfranchisement, and showed, according to Martin Pugh, 'a shrewd appreciation of the political process'.²³ The idea of educating people for citizenship duties was not new, similar debates had surrounded the extension of male suffrage in 1867.²⁴ But whereas these debates were stimulated by political parties with the aim of training voters and potential politicians for party advantage, the WCA was a non-party organisation whose purpose was the general empowerment of women within society by promoting their awareness of and involvement in politics and the social needs of the community.²⁵ It promoted education via meetings, lectures, outings, and summer schools, and in doing so responded to national developments affecting the citizenship of women.²⁶ In 1919 WCA and other LCWC members had the opportunity to attend a series of ten lectures organised by Liverpool University School of Social Science on 'Local Government and the Life of the Citizen'.²⁷ In 1928 when the franchise was extended to women under thirty, the WCA, which had already formed a sub-group for the purposes of planning education for new voters, responded to an urgent appeal from NUSEC by convening special meetings (organised by the Sefton Park West, Wavertree, Granby, and Aigburth branches) to inform younger women of the usefulness of the vote in home and international affairs. Miss Nancy Stewart Parnell spoke to one such meeting on 'the usefulness of the vote in home affairs', while Mrs A. G. Edwards spoke from 'the international angle'.²⁸ Topics discussed by the WCA were often those selected by NUSEC.²⁹ The organisation provided the opportunity for women to study and learn together in a comfortable environment. The 'curriculum' focused attention upon welfare and social issues, often as a means to promote further welfare work. Members were

²² LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Annual Report (1934) (no page numbers).

²³ Martin Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.236.

²⁴ John A. Garrard, 'Parties, Members and Voters After 1867: A Local Study', Historical Journal, 20 (1) (1977), 145-63 (pp.155, 163).

²⁵ The non-party policy of the Liverpool WCA was demonstrated in 1928 when the Central Branch held three consecutive meetings at which three prospective parliamentary candidates from different political parties (Margaret Bondfield, Margery Corbett-Ashby, and Mary Pickford) discussed their parties' principles: LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Annual Report (1928), p.6.

²⁶ In 1937 Eva Hubback, an executive member of the NUSEC stated that the term 'education for citizenship' had 'almost as many meanings as there are people using it': LRO/WCA/B1: Eva Hubback, 'Education for Citizenship in the School', The Citizen, 4 (July 1937), 24-27 (p.24).

²⁷ LRO/JLC: LCWC Leaflet (1919).

²⁸ LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Annual Report (1928), p.5.

²⁹ Topics covered included 'Some reforms which women have helped to bring about', the endowment of motherhood, the equal moral standard, the growth of education and the day nursery, the Poor Law, humane slaughter, the 1923 General Election, housing, insurance, events in Europe, the colonisation of Europe, Mussolini, an interesting holiday, Louis Pasteur, and wild flowers picked on the annual day out: LRO/WCA/B3: Anfield WCA Minutes (September 1921-December 1928).

encouraged to become acquainted with contemporary events and changes, sometimes through the medium of visiting speakers. For example, in October 1921 Edith Eskrigge talked to Anfield WCA about the coming municipal elections, and the following January Eleanor Rathbone addressed them on the subject of 'Some Parliamentary Bills of Special Interest to Women'.³⁰

The various lectures and discussions were intended to mould the members into rounded citizens who were aware of their own local environment and national issues, but also of other interesting and informative topics. If the acquisition of citizenship is defined in a Platonic sense, namely as the development of the mind and character of the individual in a manner beneficial to the service of the larger community, the experience of women attending the WCA in the inter-war years can be interpreted as assisting the emergence of female citizenship in Liverpool in this period.³¹ For this reason topics discussed by the WCA were wide-ranging. In the 1930s the Liverpool organisation as a whole discussed issues ranging from juvenile delinquency and diet to health services and world peace. The programme of Anfield WCA at this time included presentations on the work of a prison welfare worker at Walton, 'Paths and Humour of Slum Life', and on conditions in mining districts. This branch also continued to be informed about current political and social issues and developments, including the plight of widows, old age pensions, the slum clearance bill, social purity in Liverpool, Maternity Services and Child Welfare, the Merseyside Youth Hostels Association, local history, travel, the traditions of Lancashire and West Derby, and life in Denmark. The WCA was also concerned with community-based issues. In 1928 the Aigburth branch was concerned with road maintenance and obtaining 'more drinking fountains and public lavatories'.³² Using campaigns for road safety and public loos as examples, Martin Pugh has argued that the pattern of activity of WCAs shows a 'tendency' to replicate the characteristics of Women's Institute (NUWI) programmes.³³

One of the most obvious aspects of the desire of the WCA to promote the 'common good' was charitable endeavour. In 1944 Ethel Warhurst wrote a booklet for the WCA in which she reflected on the previous twenty years. In it she neatly encapsulated what the WCA and other women's organisations had been trying to do:

much has been done by pioneer women, much remains to be done, surely every woman whose social conscience has been awakened and believes in the need for social and moral improvement will continue to work for a way of life that permits human personality to

³⁰ Ibid. (October 1921).

³¹ Harris, 'Political Thought', p.128.

³² LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Annual Report (1928), p.4.

³³ Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement, p.242.

develop in freedom, in a new and better post-war world.³⁴

One way in which the WCA had attempted to pursue these aims was via participation in charity and welfare work, a subject which will be explored more fully in Chapter Three below. Welfare was a natural element of women's organisational activity at a local level and an important aspect of citizenship. The WCA appears to have operated an extensive support network for the local community. This was at times very informal, functioning through *ad hoc* meetings of small groups of WCA members convened while they were shopping, during which information was exchanged concerning women in their local community who might benefit in some way (often through child care) from their assistance. Sarah Everton, the secretary of Anfield WCA, participated in one such network.³⁵ But the WCA also engaged in more formal welfare initiatives. Much of this work was conducted in liaison with the two most important social work organisations in Liverpool, the Council of Voluntary Aid (CVA) and the Personal Service Society (PSS).³⁶ The CVA acted to facilitate the organisation and work of charities and voluntary agencies in the city, while the PSS was a casework agency which aimed to be 'at the service of any citizen in difficulty'.³⁷ WCA pioneer Eleanor Rathbone and her companion Elizabeth Macadam both played a leading role in the creation of the CVA in 1909 and the PSS in 1919. In addition, Jessie Beavan, a leading member of the CVA from 1919 and a member of the Executive Committee in 1933 (by which time it had become the Council of Social Service (CSS)), was a key member of the leadership circle of the WCA.³⁸ At the CSS Beavan worked alongside T. S. Simey, Charles Booth, and J. R. Hobhouse, which gave substance to the emphasis placed by the WCA on social service as a means by which women could co-operate 'with citizens of the opposite sex'.³⁹ Further important links existed between the organisations: PSS Secretary Dorothy Keeling was a WCA member, and fellow member Lilian Mary Mott made an important contribution to the PSS after 1923 - eventually becoming Vice-Chairman in 1935.⁴⁰ The fact that names of WCA members can be picked out in the lists of volunteers mobilised by the PSS indicates that similar bonds existed at a lower level.⁴¹

Several important welfare schemes were initiated by WCA sub-groups during the

³⁴ Warhurst, Liverpool Women Citizens' Association, p.7.

³⁵ Interview with Mr John A. Everton, Liverpool, 15 August 1996.

³⁶ These organisations will be discussed in Chapter Three below.

³⁷ Dorothy C. Keeling, The Crowded Stairs: Recollections of Social Work in Liverpool 1919-1940 (London: National Council of Social Service, 1961), pp.19, 117; H. R. Poole, The Liverpool Council of Social Service 1909-1959 (Liverpool: Liverpool Council of Social Service, 1960), p.7.

³⁸ Poole, Liverpool Council of Social Service, pp.54, 89.

³⁹ 'The Liverpool Women Citizens' Association', p.97.

⁴⁰ C. F. Mott, Lilian Mary Mott: A Memoir By Her Husband (Privately published, 1956), p.110.

⁴¹ LRO/M364/PSS: Liverpool Personal Service Society Collection (hereafter LRO/PSS)/3/1-16: Liverpool Personal Service Society Annual Reports (hereafter LPSS Annual Reports) (1919-1938).

later 1920s, by which time the organisation was beginning to broaden its agenda. These included the Working Women's Holiday Service (WWHS) which was created in 1926 to provide holidays for women and old people, and which was absorbed by the Liverpool CSS ten years later.⁴² WCA member Cicely Leadley Brown headed the Child Adoption Council in 1926. In 1928 Anfield WCA created the Women Helpers' League to raise money for a bed in the Maternity Hospital, and a WCA-organised 'Women on Hospital Boards Group' planned a campaign to reform hospital diet.⁴³ The welfare of the young and the old was of special interest to the WCA. A sub-committee was created in 1926 to maintain a watch on the nature of, and the number of offences against, children.⁴⁴ Practical support for children was also provided. For example, during school holidays Anfield and Granby branches organised tents in Newsham Park and Princes Park to provide protection and support for children playing there (see Plate 1.i.).⁴⁵ WCA schemes to help the aged were not restricted to holidays; Aigburth and Granby branches organised afternoons for the elderly as part of a scheme initiated by the PSS.⁴⁶

The social issues which concerned the WCA included several which were highly controversial, including birth control. Initial discussions on this subject took place behind closed doors in the spring of 1923 when, as a result of a resolution adopted at the NUSEC annual council meeting, three meetings on birth control were planned. It was intended that these were to be followed by open discussion, but only after WCA leaders had attended special sessions run by Lilian Mary Mott, three doctors (Arthur Fitch, Frances Ivens and Margaret Joyce), Mrs Winifred Rathbone, and Mrs Shilston Watkins.⁴⁷ In November 1926 Anfield WCA was addressed by a Miss Symonds from the local Clarendon Street Clinic on the subject of the birth control work done there.⁴⁸ In December 1936, Liverpool WCA took part in a conference on another controversial issue, abortion, organised jointly by the North West Federation and the Abortion Law Reform Association.⁴⁹ In October 1930 the WCA also arranged for a speaker to address one of their supper meetings on the issue of eugenics, as it was considering the possibility of beginning a Eugenics Society. However, when the WCA was

⁴² LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Leaflet detailing WWHS (n.d. c.1930). See also LRO/WCA/B1: Correspondence dealing with WWHS. Margaret Beavan organised a similar scheme for tired mothers, which began under the PSS. The local WCG appear to have organised their own scheme: LRO/WCA/B2: Reply of Mrs Jackson, Aigburth Vale WCG, typed notes on local organisations approached (n.d.).

⁴³ LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Annual Report (1928), pp.5-7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: LWCA Leaflet (1926).

⁴⁵ The tent in Newsham Park was organised by Sarah Everton, the Secretary of Anfield WCA: Interview with Mr John A. Everton, 15 August 1996.

⁴⁶ LRO/PSS/3/1/9: LPSS Annual Report (1930), p.13. Walton WCG also took part.

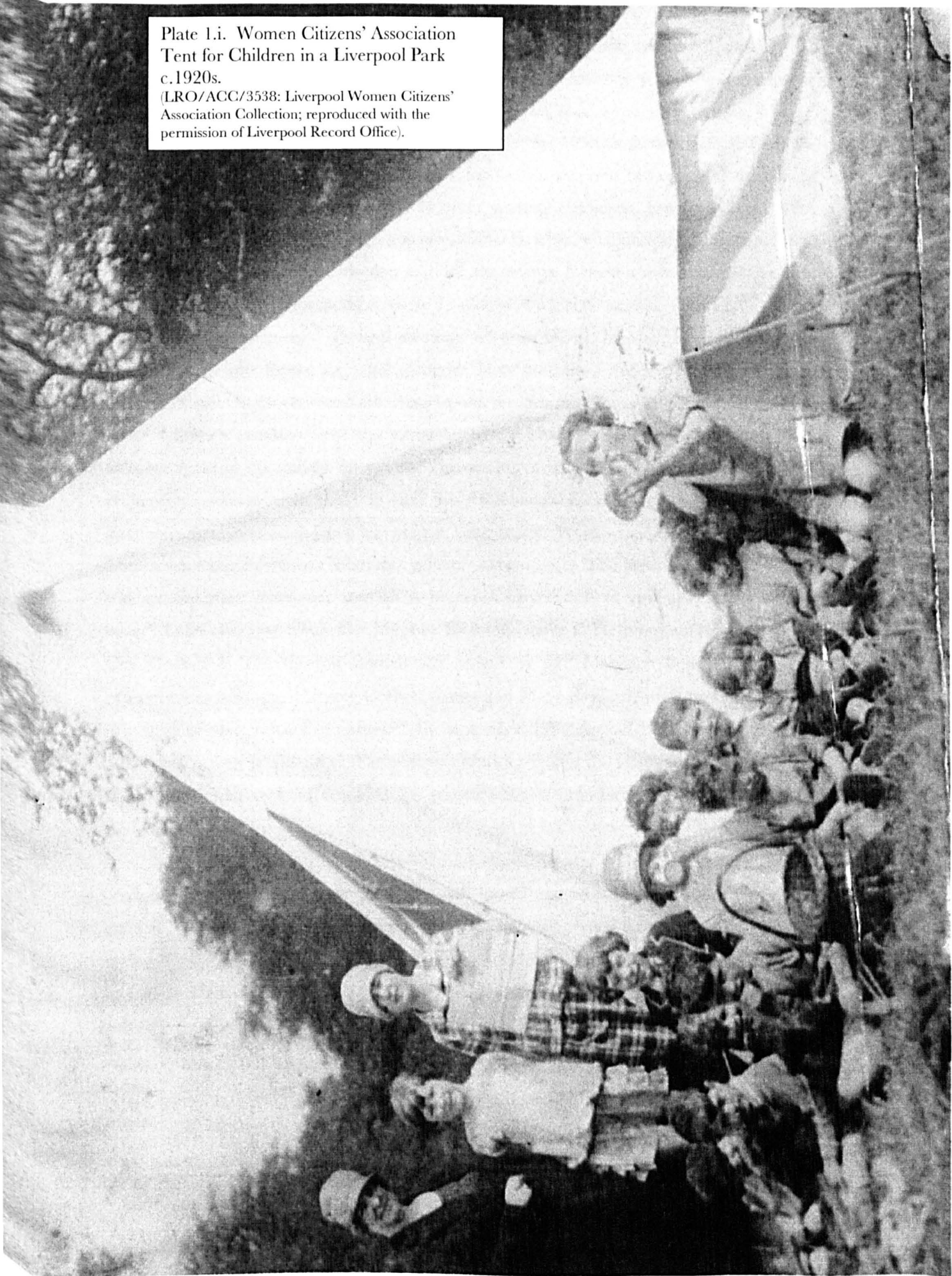
⁴⁷ *Ibid.*/B2: LWCA Annual Report (1922-1923), p.7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*/B3: LWCA Anfield Minutes (n.d. November 1926).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*/B1: LWCA Council Minutes (December 1936).

Plate I.i. Women Citizens' Association
Tent for Children in a Liverpool Park
c.1920s.

(LRO/ACC/3538: Liverpool Women Citizens'
Association Collection; reproduced with the
permission of Liverpool Record Office).



asked to support the creation of an Eugenics Alliance Society in 1936, it was undecided.⁵⁰

The Liverpool WCA also had political interests. In its early years it was anxious to support 'suitable' women of any party, either as local or national electoral candidates. When, in 1919, Nessie Stewart Brown won a by-election for the Liberals at Sefton Park East, the WCA proudly recorded that 'it had played a big part in securing her return as the second woman councillor in Liverpool'.⁵¹ Three other women candidates benefited from WCA support in these early years, though only one, Mabel Fletcher, was successful.⁵² In response to rumours of a possible general election in 1921, the women formed a special committee with the responsibility for propaganda work 'to familiarise the electorate with the idea of women candidates for Parliament'.⁵³ Several meetings were organised. In May, Eleanor Rathbone and Nessie Stewart Brown appeared alongside Lady Nott-Bower at the Royal Institute on Colquitt Street. In November Lady Astor spoke on 'Some reforms which women have at heart'.⁵⁴ Branch members were kept in touch with the issues at their normal meetings. Edith Eskrigge spoke to the Anfield Branch on 'The coming of the municipal elections with special reference to women candidates'.⁵⁵ In 1922 the WCA backed Eleanor Rathbone's unsuccessful election campaign as an Independent at East Toxteth. The WCA was also keen to ensure that women were kept informed about more general political issues. The 1928 Equal Franchise Bill was an important milestone, and WCA branches played host to visiting speakers on this issue.⁵⁶ Later that year Councillor Maurice Eschwege spoke to the group on 'Finance in the City Council'.⁵⁷ The Central Branch was visited by MP Margaret Bondfield and two prospective candidates, Margery Corbett Ashby and Mary Pickford, who 'expound[ed] the principles of their respective parties'.⁵⁸ In September 1931 Anfield branch members were addressed by their leader Ethel Warhurst on events leading to the General Election; and it is likely that similar lectures occupied the programmes of branches for which we have no evidence.⁵⁹

In their attempts to educate women for citizenship the WCA and the LCWC were engaging with an issue of wider concern, both locally and nationally. In 1933 the column entitled 'Woman's Word' in the *Liverpolitan* (a local journal) argued that enfranchisement was useless if some women, unsure of politics, came under their 'husband's influence' before they had made their own decision, and that 'a vote is only used when it is backed by personal

⁵⁰ Ibid. (3 November 1936).

⁵¹ LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1919-1921), p.11.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. (1919-1921), p.12.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ LRO/WCA/B3: Anfield WCA Minutes (20 October 1921).

⁵⁶ See note 28 above.

⁵⁷ LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1928), p.5.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

conviction otherwise it is like a ticket in a lottery - it may prove lucky or not'.⁶⁰ The suggestion was made that 'one sane method' of learning about politics was to study the questions from each point in a non-party organisation 'where party considerations are not allowed to distort the issue'.⁶¹ Nationally, the Conservative Party believed that sensible, patriotic women could help to educate other women to more partisan ends. David Jarvis has shown how the Party contributed to this discourse with their post-1928 propaganda campaign centred around Mrs Maggs, 'a middle-aged no-nonsense charlady' and her 'gullible, fickle' colleague, Betty, whom Maggs attempted to enlighten.⁶²

The WCA, like some of the other organisations to be considered, was also concerned to promote the 'common good' on an international scale, especially through the promotion of peace. This was a well established aspect of women's endeavour. As Naomi Black has commented, 'the connection between women and peace is an old one . . . peace is often symbolised by the figure of a woman'.⁶³ In April 1926 Mrs Shilston Watkins, a leading WCA and WILPF member, emphasised the need for arbitration in place of war when she visited Anfield WCA to explain proposals for the coming Peace Pilgrimage.⁶⁴ Later, in May, members of the WCA took part in the Peace Pilgrimage, during which a march to Exchange Flags was preceded by a service at the Cathedral.⁶⁵ In the face of growing international tensions in the early 1930s, peace and the consequences of war remained one of the Liverpool WCA's main concerns. In 1933 it arranged a public meeting on 'Disarmament and the Work of the League [of Nations]', and later that year Margery Corbett Ashby, in her role as substitute delegate to the Disarmament Conference of the League of Nations, was guest of honour at a lunch.⁶⁶ In 1935 the WCA discussed methods of airing objections to providing the public with gas masks.⁶⁷ It resolved to find out what the WILPF, the League of Nations Union and the Peace Society were planning to do about it. In return the WILPF invited the WCA to join in a meeting with a Mrs Zangwill on 'Disarmament in the Air'. This was well timed since the NCEC had suggested that all affiliated societies must 'do their utmost to arouse public opinion' on the subject.⁶⁸ In January 1936 Mrs Shilston Watkins, the Liverpool WCA

⁵⁹ LRO/WCA/B1: Anfield WCA Minutes (21 September 1931).

⁶⁰ *Liverpolitan*, April 1933, p.20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 5 (2) (1994), 129-52 (p.133).

⁶³ Naomi Black, 'The Mother's International: The Women's Co-operative Guild and Feminist Pacifism', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 7 (6) (1984), 467-76 (p.467).

⁶⁴ LRO/WCA/B3: Anfield WCA Minutes (16 April 1926).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* (29 May 1926).

⁶⁶ LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1934).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*/B1: LWCA Council Minutes (3 September 1935). The objections were based on the psychological damage that might be caused to women and children.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: LWCA Programme attached to Anfield WCA Minutes (3 September 1935).

Chairman, called for a conference of all women's organisations on peace.⁶⁹ Ethel Warhurst, chairman of the Anfield branch, was appointed as organiser of activities for a Peace Week planned for the end of September 1936. The event was repeated in 1937 when Miss Warhurst also attended a Peace Convention held in Manchester (at which Vera Brittain spoke) and there was a proposal for the creation of a new parliamentary party to be called the Peace Party.⁷⁰

By the early 1930s the WCA, in common with other women's organisations, was becoming increasingly disturbed by the spectre of fascism. It is interesting that its general concern about the threat posed to peace and democracy by fascism included a more specific concern about the threat it posed to the position of women.⁷¹ In 1933 the Annual Report noted that,

In our view the present is an extremely critical time. The causes of peace and democracy are endangered and with them the women's movement itself. Only in a democratic state and in one not dominated by military ideas, can women hope for true freedom and responsibility. We know how women have suffered in consequence of the reactionary forces which are sweeping over the Continent of Europe. It is for us to stand firm against any encroachment of our democratic freedom and to resist and denounce those dark powers which make for war.⁷²

The crusade against fascism in Spain quickly attracted the interest of women's organisations in Liverpool. The WCA offered support to the Spanish Aid Committee (SAC), established early in 1937, on which it was represented by Jane Raffle. The SAC, which collected food-stuffs and knitted garments for the Spanish people, was allowed to use the WCA rooms. It was decided that Ethel Warhurst would attend a conference on Spain on 5 February 1937 at which the Peace Movement would decide how to respond to the situation. Only a few months later the SAC was wound up because there were numerous other committees doing similar work.⁷³

The WCA was also concerned with a range of other international issues. In March 1924, for example, Cicely Leadley Brown talked to Anfield WCA about the diversity of the work of the League of Nations, focusing on the League's interest in a variety of topics

⁶⁹ Ibid.: Anfield WCA Minutes (7 January 1936).

⁷⁰ Ibid.: (5 May 1937).

⁷¹ For work showing that during the 1930s women became deeply concerned that feminism could not withstand the onslaught of fascism, see Johanna Alberti, 'British Feminists and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s', in *This Working Day World*, ed. by Sybil Oldfield (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), pp.111-22.

⁷² LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1934).

⁷³ Ibid./B1: *LWCA Council Minutes* (2 February, 2 June 1937).

including prisoners of war, women and children in Russia, attempts to deal with the traffic in opium, and white lead poisoning.⁷⁴ Eleanor Rathbone alerted the attention of the WCA and other women's organisations to the plight of Indian women and Anfield WCA members learned more about this issue in March 1928 when a Miss Fadek spoke about her own experience.⁷⁵

It is significant that along with its concern with education for citizenship the WCA appears to have sought to appeal to women as a social organisation which engaged in traditional 'feminine' activities and interests. For example, it organised fetes and days-out which were very popular, probably because they provided many women with a welcome break from family responsibilities. Minutes of the Anfield branch show that its members enjoyed a variety of visits, including trips to the Wirral to see the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight, Ness Gardens, and Willaston, and longer journeys to Alton Towers and Shrewsbury.⁷⁶ In July 1926 the women enjoyed a picnic in Mold, following which they were treated to a 'most delightful and interesting talk on the flowers gathered on the wayside' by their Chairman, Ethel Warhurst, who was incredibly versatile in the range of topics she selected for discussion.⁷⁷

The ethos and activities of the WCA show that it was interested in issues which extended far beyond the equality of women and concerned the whole community or the 'common good'. It presented its members with the opportunity to learn about a wide range of subjects, many of which must have given them a deeper knowledge and understanding of the community and world in which they lived and encouraged them to play a more informed, active, involved, and empowered political and social role within it. The WCA educated them for their role in a new kind of active citizenship which involved contributing on humanitarian grounds to the 'common good' rather than seeking only women-centred reforms.

II

The National Union of Townswomen's Guilds

The WCA's promotion of training in the responsibility of citizenship had an important impact on NUSEC. In 1928 NUSEC's leader Eva Hubback, inspired partly by the example of the NUWI, suggested to Margery Corbett-Ashby, a NUSEC council member, that a new

⁷⁴ LRO/WCA/B3: WCA Anfield Minutes (27 March 1924).

⁷⁵ Ibid. (26 March 1928).

⁷⁶ Ibid. (24 May 1925, 4 April 1926); LRO/WCA/B1: WCA Anfield Minutes (13 July 1931, 14 June 1934).

⁷⁷ LRO/WCA/B3: Anfield WCA Minutes (23 July 1926). Warhurst organised her own Botanical Society: Letter to the author from Mr. John A. Everton, 26 January 1997.

women's organisation might be formed which would offer a similar programme to that of the NUWI whilst incorporating the WCA's idea of training for citizenship. Looking back on this in 1976 Corbett Ashby told Mary Stott that, 'when younger women won the vote it was a real problem as to how they were to be trained for the new responsibility'.⁷⁸ Hubback's plan was the inception of the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds (NUTG), whose programme was to promote 'comradeship, arts, crafts and citizenship', while the NUSEC continued its political programme.⁷⁹ Financial support was also important, and it is significant that Eleanor Rathbone donated one hundred pounds to the new movement when it began.⁸⁰ As with the WCA, the organisation sought not just to promote the equality of women and men but to emphasise the distinctive contribution which women could make to society in ways which were regarded as traditionally within their sphere, as Margery Corbett Ashby's contribution to the *Woman's Leader* in March 1930 shows. She wrote that the Guilds should 'rationalise cookery and homecraft as men rationalise their businesses, without fear of losing their university education or equal entry into industry and profession'.⁸¹ Like the WCA, the NUTG was concerned to educate women for the benefit of the whole of society. In April 1933 Corbett Ashby wrote in the *Townswoman*, the journal of the NUTG, 'we cannot serve the common good unless we first educate ourselves. We must pull ourselves up to a new standard of intelligent knowledge and experience'.⁸² By 1932 the NUTG had grown too rapidly for NUSEC and so the National Council for Equal Citizenship (NCEC) was created to take over NUSEC's political programme.

The first branches of the NUTG were formed in Liverpool in 1932 (see Map 1.i.). They were located in the developing suburbs at Dovecot, Fazakerley, Knotty Ash, Norris Green, and Springwood. Other Guilds were created at West Derby and Larkhill (1933), Childwall and Wavertree (which was helped to form by Edith Wormald, first Chairman of the Liverpool Federation of NUTGs in 1934), Walton and Clubmoor, Childwall and Wavertree 'afternoon' (1936), Mossley Hill (1937), Aintree and Fazakerley, Broad Green, Mossley Hill 'afternoon', Childwall Park and Sefton Park (1938), and Broadgreen 'afternoon' (1939).⁸³

Martin Pugh has argued that although the presence of NUSEC 'stalwarts' within the NUTG suggested that feminism would remain a prominent feature, in practice 'Guilds

⁷⁸ Mary Stott, Organisation Woman: The Story of the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp.9-10.

⁷⁹ Ibid. See also Brian Harrison, Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.197.

⁸⁰ Stott, Organisation Woman, p.11.

⁸¹ Woman's Leader, 7 March 1930, p.35, quoted by Harrison, Prudent Revolutionaries, p.197

⁸² Stott, Organisation Woman, p.81.

⁸³ Fawcett Library, London (hereafter FL): National Union of Townswomen's Guilds Annual Reports (hereafter NUTG Annual Reports) (1932-1938); 'Ladies of Liverpool: Mrs Ethel Wormald', Liverpoolian, April 1951, p.3. Letter to the author from Miss Debbie Regan, Development Assistant, Townswomen's Guilds, 4 December 1996.

rapidly grew away from their origins'.⁸⁴ Gertrude Horton, the NUTG Secretary, explained that 'we didn't want the NUTG to be available for people with an axe to grind. We were trying to recruit people who had not got around to serious thinking'.⁸⁵ It was probably partly for this reason that the NUTG tended to hold discussions rather than debates which would end in resolutions or commitments to action.⁸⁶ It may also be that the NUTG feared losing support if they appeared as a radical, hard-hitting pressure group. Thus, although the NUTG maintained a close watch on the activities of local and central government, it was reluctant to court controversy; something also reflected in some of the objectives listed in one of its early leaflets.⁸⁷ The first of these was the encouragement of 'the science and practice of home-making and housecraft', and others related to promoting the 'preservation of the beauty of the town and countryside', and encouraging women to learn about art, science, voting responsibilities, peace, and international relations. The sixth objective listed, to encourage women 'to make their best contribution to the common good', mirrored one of the central aims of the WCA.⁸⁸

Activities undertaken by Liverpool Guilds suggest that there was a firm commitment to fulfil all the objectives of the NUTG. The evidence also indicates that Liverpool Guildswomen knew how to enjoy themselves. Activities such as folk dancing, keep-fit, rambling, needlework, and garden parties were enjoyed by all Guilds, and Childwall and Wavertree was not the only Guild which had a 'flourishing dramatic group'.⁸⁹ Like WCA members, Guildswomen also enjoyed trips to locations as varied as Speke Hall and the Gas Showrooms.⁹⁰ Even so, Liverpool Guild programmes addressed serious issues like the adulteration of food, prison reform, the women patrols, Liverpool hospitals, first aid in the home, and diet. Liverpool Guild meetings were not simply about craft, fun, or self-education, members also took an interest in community issues. For example, in 1933 Dovecot and Knotty Ash Guild alerted attention to a hazardous spot on the East Prescott road, which was rectified by the authority.⁹¹ Like the other organisations discussed here, Liverpool Guilds were interested in social service; for example, in 1937 Walton and Clubmoor Guild assisted in the Merseyside Hospital Collection, while Norris Green organised a party for local poor children.⁹² NUTG organisers were well aware that membership of their organisation presented women with the opportunity to embrace activity on a variety of levels. For some

⁸⁴ Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement, p.241.

⁸⁵ Stott, Organisation Woman, p.20.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁸⁷ One notable exception was on the issue of the appointment of official women police, where the NUTG urged Chief Constables to make provision where necessary: *ibid.*, p.153.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.23-24.

⁸⁹ The Townswoman, March 1937, p.301; July 1937, p.104; October 1937, p.169.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, January 1938, p.236; June 1938, p.79; October 1938, p.177; June 1939, p.79.

⁹¹ NUTG Annual Reports (1933), p.48.

women, the social aspect of Guild life would have been the most important factor in their membership, the value of which must not be underestimated. But membership also introduced many women from different backgrounds to collective activity, new ideas (of social, political, and economic relevance), and fresh opportunities. For some of these women this served to facilitate public activity on the basis of citizenship. As Ethel Wormald, a Liverpool Guild member, stated, 'It [that is, her public career as a city councillor and mayor] all started with the Townswomen's Guild movement when I found the stimulus to emerge from suburban seclusion into active citizenship.'⁹³

III

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

The WCA also had connections, through shared membership, with another smaller, more dynamic, organisation, active in Liverpool throughout the inter-war period, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.⁹⁴ International issues were an important area of concern and activity for women in this period. Looking back in 1936, Eleanor Rathbone suggested that they were 'not even second to' the questions involving women and children.⁹⁵ The British section of the WILPF began on 30 September 1915 'with an all-star committee', which included Kathleen Courtney and Helena Swanwick, only months after the creation of the parent branch at the Hague by women from thirteen countries.⁹⁶ It was agreed that branches of the WILPF were to be formed in consultation with the Executive Committee, were not to have less than 10 members, and were to fix their own subscription rates.⁹⁷

Two branches described as 'Liverpool' and 'East Liverpool' were formed in 1915; the former having 66 members and the latter 40 members. By 1916-1917, however, only one

⁹² *The Townswoman*, March 1937, p.301.

⁹³ Stott, *Organisation Woman*, p.159. See Chapter Two for a biography of Ethel Wormald.

⁹⁴ Members included Essie Ruth Conway, Nessie Stewart Brown, Margaret Fitch and Cicely Leadley Brown.

⁹⁵ Eleanor Rathbone, 'Changes in Public Life', in *Our Freedom and Its Results*, ed. by Ray Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1936), pp.13-76 (p.40).

⁹⁶ LRO/ACC/4451: Liverpool Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: *Annual Report* (1945), p.2. For work on the WILPF, see Gertrude Bussey and Margaret Tims, *Pioneers for Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1960* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965); Catherine Foster, *The Story of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Jo Vellacott, 'A Place for Pacifism and Transnationalism in Feminist Theory: The Early Work of the WILPF', *Women's History Review*, 2 (1) (1993), 23-56; idem, 'Feminist Consciousness and the First World War', *History Workshop*, 23 (1987), 81-101.

⁹⁷ London School of Economics, British Library of Political and Economic Science, WILPF/1-5: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Collection (hereafter BLPES/WILPF)/2/2: *WILPF Annual Report* (October 1918-1919), pp.23-24.

branch, ('Liverpool') which had 57 members is referred to. By 1919-1920 Liverpool membership is recorded as 36 having apparently fallen from 139 in 1918; suggesting that only one Liverpool branch continued to function after the war. This was significantly less than the membership of the branches in other northern cities like Manchester with 650, Leeds with 180, and York with 120 at about the same time. The membership of the Liverpool branch after 1920 is not recorded.⁹⁸

The main objective of the WILPF as a whole was the future management of conflict to avert war by examining social and economic questions. It sought to promote peace, disarmament, collective security, and to deal with wider welfare concerns. The 1918 Annual Council passed resolutions on the military occupation of Ireland, the bastardy laws, and venereal disease.⁹⁹ It also stated its aims as follows:

To establish the principles of right rather than might, and of co-operation rather than conflict, in national and international affairs, and for this purpose to work for . . . The strengthening of the democracies of the world by the inclusion of women in the ranks of equal citizenship. Emancipation of women and the protection of their interests:

[a] Extension to all adult women of the Parliamentary Franchise.

[b] Their admission to national and international councils.

[c] The establishment of their economic independence and legal freedom.¹⁰⁰

In 1919 the WILPF Executive Committee felt that the best work for feminism was 'to convert the middle-class'.¹⁰¹ The WILPF's activities then included urging its members to study the draft of the League of Nations, and organising a demonstration in Trafalgar Square and other measures to support the alleviation of starvation on the continent.¹⁰² In the same year the WILPF responded to requests to help the women and children of Vienna, which included promoting a campaign to transport Viennese children to countries willing to accommodate them.¹⁰³ In 1920, in addition to its other aims, the WILPF stated that it was concerned with '[t]he establishment of political, social and moral equality between men and women.'¹⁰⁴ Four years later it discussed the opium traffic, the nationality of married women, slavery, the position of women in native tribes, the appointment of women to the mandates commission, the traffic in women and children, the protection of animals, and disarmament.¹⁰⁵ In 1926 the

⁹⁸ BLPES/WILPF/2/1-2: WILPF Annual Reports (1915-1920). After 1920 branch membership figures were no longer detailed.

⁹⁹ BLPES/WILPF/2/2: WILPF Annual Report (1918-1919), pp.11-13.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.22-23.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*/1/1: WILPF Executive Committee Minutes (hereafter ECM) (2 January 1919).

¹⁰² BLPES/WILPF/2/2: WILPF Annual Report (1918-1919), pp.13, 20.

¹⁰³ BLPES/WILPF/1/2: WILPF ECM (6 October 1919).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* (1 July 1920).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.3.

league was concerned that the General Strike was bringing about the 'division of the British people into two opposing and hostile camps'.¹⁰⁶ Its varied interests are illustrated again in 1930, when it discussed opium, India, Chemical Warfare, Egypt, and minorities.¹⁰⁷ By 1933 the WILPF, like the WCA, was becoming increasingly concerned about the spread of fascism in Britain.¹⁰⁸ In 1935 it restated that it was 'strictly non-party' and worked in co-operation with women of all political parties or no political parties, and passed resolutions on Abyssinia, Nazi political crimes, India, and secret diplomacy.¹⁰⁹ Two years later the WILPF co-operated in a conference of the Women's Freedom League on 'Women and Political Action - More Women in Parliament or a Women's Party'.¹¹⁰ Its Executive Committee also expressed a desire to get women to take a greater interest in women candidates and to work through political parties to get women into Parliament.¹¹¹ In addition, Eleanor Rathbone appealed, on behalf of the WILPF, to both sides in the Spanish Civil War to show mercy in the hour of triumph.¹¹²

Through the WILPF women were arguing that their 'skills were needed in international affairs and conflict resolution. They were not abandoning the traditional role of caring and nurturing, but they were claiming the right to take this role into spheres which were the ultimate bastion of male supremacy'.¹¹³ In doing this the WILPF, like other women's organisations, used a variety of methods beyond convening meetings, including the formation of study circles and the distribution of literature.¹¹⁴

Unfortunately, the activities of the Liverpool branch of the WILPF remain somewhat shadowy due to the limitations of the surviving evidence, but those for which evidence survives clearly reflect the concerns of the organisation as a whole. Calls for disarmament and 'No More War' dominated the programme during the early 1920s, when the WILPF held meetings and led local demonstrations.¹¹⁵ In 1923, along with the branches in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester and Newcastle, it organised 'crowded and enthusiastic meetings' addressed by Herr Dabringhaus, the Chief Trades Union representative at the Krupp works, Essen, who was touring England speaking on 'What to do about the Ruhr'.¹¹⁶ In 1926 it is very likely that the WILPF was behind the application made by two of its

¹⁰⁶ BLPES/WILPF/2/2: WILPF Annual Report (January-December 1925), p.9

¹⁰⁷ BLPES/WILPF/1/6: WILPF ECM (14 January 1930).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. (13 June 1933).

¹⁰⁹ BLPES/WILPF/1/11: WILPF ECM (9 April 1935).

¹¹⁰ BLPES/WILPF/1/12: WILPF ECM (13 July 1937).

¹¹¹ Ibid. (14 September 1937).

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Vellacott, 'Feminist Consciousness', p. 94.

¹¹⁴ BLPES/WILPF/2/2: WILPF Annual Report (1918-1919), p.23.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. (October 1920-January 1922), p.15; Ibid. (7 January-December 1922), p.10; Ibid. (8 January-December 1923), p.5.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. (8 January-December 1923), p.11.

prominent members, Mrs Shilston Watkins and Margaret Fitch, to the Watch Committee for permission to use St George's Plateau for speeches by the Liverpool contingent of the Peace Makers' Pilgrimage to London.¹¹⁷ Liverpool members must have been particularly delighted when, in 1927, Edward Fitch, the son of Margaret Fitch, who was their Secretary, won an essay competition on the subject of peace organised for children by the WILPF.¹¹⁸

In January 1932 the Merseyside Disarmament Campaign organised a procession which was followed by a public meeting chaired by Nessie Stewart Brown, President of Liverpool WILPF.¹¹⁹ The WILPF continued its campaign for peace during the 1930s, holding a 'Peace Ballot' and organising a Peace Shop, but such work soon developed a greater resonance as fascism developed abroad and international conflict deepened.¹²⁰ Members lobbied the government with their concerns. For example, in 1937 along with branches in Leicester, Manchester and Worthing, Liverpool WILPF called for the non-recognition of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, and two years later they demanded that all maritime nations abolish the submarine.¹²¹ By August 1939 members' thoughts turned to more practical matters, namely the assistance they could offer refugees who were fleeing from Europe.¹²² Thus, the WILPF, the most focused of the organisations discussed here, helped women to develop a notion of international citizenship.

IV

The Women's Co-operative Guild

The three organisations discussed above were each the product of the reaction of middle-class feminist activists to social, political, and international issues. Although the remaining two organisations to be considered, the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG) and the Mothers' Union, were active (to some extent) within the same sphere between the wars, they had somewhat different origins. Both were formed during the late nineteenth century. The WCG is the only organisation discussed here which was born out of a larger, predominantly male organisation. By virtue of its association with the labour movement, the WCG also contrasts with the non-party nature of the other organisations. It was the only one of the five which

¹¹⁷ LRO/352/MIN/WAT: Liverpool Watch Committee Minutes (27 April 1926).

¹¹⁸ BLPES/WILPF/2/2: *WILPF Annual Report* (12 February 1927-February 1928), p.11.

¹¹⁹ LRO/WCA/B1: Merseyside Disarmament Campaign Leaflet (1932).

¹²⁰ BLPES/WILPF/1/8: WILPF ECM (13 December 1932). It is not clear who they balloted; BLPES/WILPF/2/3: *WILPF Annual Report* (1933), p.15.

¹²¹ BLPES/WILPF/1/12: WILPF ECM (14 September 1937); BLPES/WILPF/1/15: WILPF ECM (11 July 1939).

¹²² *Ibid.* (28 August 1939).

catered specifically for ordinary, usually married, women.¹²³

Originally created out of the Women's Corner of the Co-operative News as the League for the Spread of Co-operation in 1883, the WCG was the idea of Alice Acland, the wife of an Oxford Don, and Mary Lawrenson, a teacher.¹²⁴ The original objective of Acland and Lawrenson was to enable women to participate more confidently within the Co-operative Movement, and to encourage them to mobilise their power to fight for their needs both within and outside the developing labour movement. In this way the WCG 'became an articulate and influential protagonist for women's rights as well as a vehicle for personal and communal development'.¹²⁵ A comment made by Acland in 1883, when she realised the limited amount of support for her new organisation, shows her concern to utilise some of the traditional and distinctive skills and abilities of women for the benefit of society as a whole; a concern shared to some extent by all of the women's organisations under consideration. Acland assured women readers that 'we can move in a quiet womanly way to do true woman's work'.¹²⁶ She was clearly concerned that appearing too radical might be counter-productive. Indeed, she later wrote disdainfully about women 'imitating or competing with men, pushing themselves into positions which have hitherto been held by men, speaking on platforms or thrusting themselves on Management Committees, where they would be liable to be laughing stocks and stumbling blocks'.¹²⁷ Similar anxiety was felt much later in Liverpool by Jane Raffle, President of Lodge Lane Guild, who was conscious of the possible impact of her public activities upon her husband's position as a Church Officer at Sefton Park Presbyterian Church.¹²⁸ There is some evidence that the WCG remained somewhat conservative and traditional in outlook, especially when compared with some of the other organisations under discussion. In 1939 the prize essay in a competition in the *Guildswoman* (the journal of the WCG) listed several topics considered inappropriate for discussion at WCG meetings, some of which had already been discussed by the Liverpool WCA, including eugenics, cremation, birth control, mental hospitals, the Left Book Club, modern authors, and the problems of Indian workers.¹²⁹ But while avoidance of public discussion of birth control was WCG policy,

¹²³ Marriage was not a prerequisite for joining the WCG.

¹²⁴ For the history of the WCG, see Jean Gaffin and David Thoms, Caring and Sharing. The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild (Manchester: Co-operative Union Ltd, 1983); Catherine Webb, The Woman with the Basket: The History of the Women's Co-operative Guild 1883-1927 (London: WCG, 1927); Gillian Scott, 'The Working-Class Women's Most Active and Democratic Movement: The Women's Co-operative Guild from 1883 to 1950' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1988); idem, Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War (London: University College London Press, 1998); Black, Social Feminism.

¹²⁵ Gaffin and Thoms, Caring and Sharing, p. 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Black, Social Feminism, p. 116.

¹²⁸ Interview with Mrs Jane Saxby, Liverpool, 21 October 1996.

¹²⁹ Black, Social Feminism, p. 130.

the personal experiences detailed in letters collected from women (compiled in the 1915 WCG collection *Maternity*) made it very clear that they viewed it as an issue of some significance.¹³⁰

The first Liverpool WCG met in Toxteth in 1903, but the second, in the Aigburth-Dingle area, was not formed until 1911.¹³¹ Eventually, however, the WCGs became more widely spread in Liverpool than the WCA, with apparently over twenty branches operating during the inter-war period.¹³² The policy of building Co-operative Shops with rooms above for meetings was often one of the factors determining whether or not a Guild was formed in an area.¹³³ The WCG was relatively strong in Liverpool by 1915 because that year the city was the venue of the Annual WCG meeting. Unusually no papers were read at the meeting, but four principal resolutions on self-government, education, national care of maternity, and peace, were passed.¹³⁴ The Aigburth-Dingle branch had its own special service for each meeting. If a visiting speaker had not been arranged, a member would lead the meeting by talking about a recent event of interest or an important Parliamentary bill, or by reading from the organisation's journal. This branch appears to have encouraged its members to engage in public speaking by requesting individuals to read from the Co-operative News each week.¹³⁵ In a limited way this resembles procedures which Karen Blair has shown were adopted by some American Women's Clubs, in which members were encouraged to research, write, and present papers, and which resulted in the development of 'a strong sense of sisterhood . . . among [them] . . . along with confidence, and skills in speaking, researching and writing, which gave all a new sense of worth and enabled some members to move onto more political activity'.¹³⁶

Clearly at the centre of WCG activity in the north-west, Liverpool provided the venue for the Conference of Cheshire and West Lancashire District of the WCG in 1928. The fact that this was the year of Liverpool's first female Mayoralty provided a special moment when the district secretary, Annie Billinge, presented Margaret Beavan with a copy of the Guild's history on behalf of Toxteth branch.¹³⁷ Like the WCA and the WILPF, the WCG in Liverpool was also concerned to promote international peace. In 1935 it attempted to organise a

¹³⁰ Margaret Llewelyn Davies, *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* (London: Virago, 1978) [f.p. 1915]

¹³¹ LRO/ACC/4904: Liverpool Women's Co-operative Guild Collection (hereafter LRO/WCG); Aigburth-Dingle Minute Book (1911-1913).

¹³² This number is based on the testimony of Mrs Jane Saxby (daughter of member Jane Raffle, and personal member): Interview with Mrs Jane Saxby, 21 October 1996.

¹³³ Interview with Mrs Dorothy Ruddock, WCG Secretary for Liverpool, Liverpool, 23 October 1996.

¹³⁴ Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, p.204.

¹³⁵ LRO/WCG: Aigburth-Dingle WCG Minutes (1911-1913).

¹³⁶ Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), p.58. This practice was also important because there were often not enough speakers to visit clubs. Nervousness concerning the task of organising groups was not uncommon. See Olive Parker, *For the Family's Sake: The Story of the Mothers' Union 1876-1976* (London: Mowbrays, 1975), pp.12-13.

'Peaceway' in schools, and sought the co-operation of several other organisations in this. It held a meeting on the subject, to which organisations, including the WCA, were invited to send representatives.¹³⁸ Although WCG plans for a conference on the subject appear to have been aborted, its Executive chose a deputation (composed of four of its own members, Mrs Redfern from the Peace Society, and Mrs Shilston Watkins from the WILPF) to interview the Chairman of the Education Committee, C. F. Mott (husband of prominent WCA member Mary Mott) on 17 December 1935.¹³⁹ Like the NUTG, the WCG offered its members the opportunity for gentle exploration of their role as citizens, though it appears to have placed more emphasis upon their role at the centre of the family.

V

The Mothers' Union

The WCG's emphasis upon ordinary wives and mothers was shared by the Mothers' Union, an organisation which grew rapidly from its humble beginnings in a gathering of village women who met as guests of Mary Sumner at her Rectory home in Alresford, near Winchester, in 1876.¹⁴⁰ Though Sumner was then a grandmother, since the birth of her first child she had been pondering ways in which women could be offered support for their maternal role. She 'felt that mothers had one of the greatest and most important professions in the world, and yet there was no profession which had such poor training for its supreme duties'.¹⁴¹ The new organisation remained Winchester-based until 1885 when Mary Sumner expressed her conviction, to a meeting of the Church Congress in Portsmouth Town Hall, that there was need for an organisation 'wherein all classes could unite in faith and prayer'.¹⁴² The objectives which the Mothers' Union set for itself were articulated in a Charter in 1926:

- (i) To uphold the Sanctity of Marriage. (ii) To awaken in all Mothers a sense of their great responsibility in the training of their boys and girls - Fathers and Mothers of the Future,
- (iii) To organise in every place a band of Mothers who will unite in prayer, and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness of life.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 March 1928.

¹³⁸ LRO/WCA/B1: LWCA Council Minutes (5 November 1935).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* (5 December 1935).

¹⁴⁰ Parker, *For the Family's Sake*, p.8

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁴³ Elizabeth Birch, *As Wives and Mothers: The Mothers' Union from 1876* (London: The Mothers' Union, n.d.), p.8

This organisation, which placed the mother at the centre of the family, developed rapidly into 'the most important volunteer organisation within the Church of England in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods'.¹⁴⁴ By 1896 membership reached 100,000, and growth continued during the early twentieth century with membership increasing from 414,000 in 1913 to 600,000 in 1938.¹⁴⁵

The first Liverpool branch was organised in 1888 and by 1893 the membership of twelve had risen to 158. Bishop Ryle's daughter Isabella was the first President of the Liverpool Diocese, with Mrs Knowles of Lydiate Vicarage as Diocesan Secretary.¹⁴⁶ According to Miss Ryle, Edith Bright and Mrs Alfred Booth were responsible for the early development of the Mothers' Union in Liverpool.¹⁴⁷ Both women, the wives of prominent local shipowners, were active in the Liverpool suffrage struggle, and in their capacity as members of the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) they were responsible for organising the Women Patrols in Liverpool, which will be examined in Chapter Four below. By 1910 a total of 5,763 members were organised in 67 branches across Liverpool.¹⁴⁸ In 1921 the President, Edith Chavasse, the wife of the Bishop, led ninety-five branches organised in the deaneries of Bootle, Huyton, Liverpool North, Liverpool South, North Meols, Sefton, St Helens, Toxteth and Wavertree, Walton, Warrington, West Derby, Winwick and Wigan.¹⁴⁹ That year Edith Chavasse made an appeal for more members on the basis that,

At this time of distress and perplexity in the history of our country - in which women play so large and healing a part; with the foundations of our national morality seriously shaken and the sanctity of marriage widely attacked - it is proposed to make the aims of the Mothers' Union better known in this Diocese.¹⁵⁰

By 1935 Liverpool Diocesan Mothers' Union had mobilised 12,000 women, who formed 2 per cent of the national membership of 586,375.¹⁵¹

The Mothers' Union was decidedly non-political. While it encouraged discussion of contemporary issues, it rarely passed resolutions. It developed a reputation for a style of work epitomised by Isabella Ryle who was remembered for her 'quiet, unobtrusive life and

¹⁴⁴ Brian Heeney, The Women's Movement in the Church of England: 1850-1930 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.45.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.44.

¹⁴⁶ Mary Sumner House, London (hereafter MSH): The Mothers' Union Journal, 1893, p.18; Sarah Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', The Woman at Home IV, 21 (1895), p.7.

¹⁴⁷ Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', p.8

¹⁴⁸ MSH: The Mothers' Union Journal, 1894, p.93.

¹⁴⁹ LRO/JLC: Letter to members from Mothers' Union Diocesan President, Edith Chavasse, May 1921.

¹⁵⁰ LRO/JLC: Letter from Edith Chavasse to Mothers' Union Members, May 1921.

¹⁵¹ 'The Mothers' Union', Liverpool Diocesan Review, 10 (1935), p.625.

womanly influence'.¹⁵² However, it established a Social Concern department in 1913 called the Special Watch Committee. Subjects discussed at the first meeting included Divorce Law Reform, marriage before a Registrar, the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, and Moral Instruction.¹⁵³ Through this committee, the Mothers' Union maintained a close watch on all bills affecting women and children. This brief, concerned as it was with 'watching' rather than 'acting', and the obvious emphasis upon the home and motherhood might suggest that the Mothers' Union held little relevance for, or even held back, the women's movement. Indeed, Anne O'Brien has recently noted that 'there are many ways of seeing the Mothers' Union: as a countervailing force retarding women's fight for equality; as politically conservative, promoting links with empire and establishment through its hierarchical structure; as puritanical and repressive, taking a stand against what it defined as chinks in the moral fabric'.¹⁵⁴ Arguably however, the Mothers' Union was relevant to the women's movement because it offered another important and alternative site for women's organisational activity between the wars. Emphasis upon the home and motherhood was not incompatible with active citizenship for women. As Brian Heeney has pointed out, leaders of women's church organisations believed that 'it was possible to combine loyalty to the home and family with a new individuality for women'.¹⁵⁵

VI

Membership, Motivation, and Co-operation

The membership of the five organisations under consideration will be discussed together, as there was a measure of overlap in the leadership networks. Within all of these organisations a two-tier membership appears to have existed, composed of an upper group of 'leaders' and 'organisers' whose commitment was usually strong, and a lower group of 'rank-and-file' members whose level of interest and commitment to the organisation and immersion in its ideology is more difficult to determine. It is also hard to know how far the rift which has sometimes been discerned in the inter-war women's movement between older veterans of the suffrage campaign and younger women existed in these Liverpool organisations.¹⁵⁶ Generally, Martin Pugh has noted that '[a]lthough the division of the women's movement between

¹⁵² Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', p.8

¹⁵³ 'Looking Both Ways', *Social Concern* (Bulletin of The Mothers' Union), 50 (1) (1994), p.1.

¹⁵⁴ Anne O'Brien, 'Militant Mothers: Faith, Power and Identity in the Mothers' Union in Sydney, 1896-1950', *Women's History Review*, 9 (1) (2000), 35-53 (p.48).

¹⁵⁵ Heeney, *The Women's Movement*, p.85.

¹⁵⁶ Many veterans of the suffrage struggle seemed to resent what they saw as a lack of seriousness on the part of younger women who appeared unaware of the sacrifices which had been made on their part. See *Our Freedom and its Results*, p.10.

generations is more than simply a matter of age, it is significant that by the inter-war period the leadership was still dominated by women who had served their apprenticeship in the Victorian and Edwardian eras'.¹⁵⁷ This is true to some extent in Liverpool, where Eleanor Rathbone, Nessie Stewart Brown, and others who were prominent in organisations before the First World War continued to be so in the inter-war period.

The extent of overlap between the leadership of the WCA and the LCWC was particularly marked. In the early 1920s Eleanor Rathbone and Mabel Fletcher both occupied the role as Chairman and Vice-Chairman on the LCWC and the Central WCA. The first Honorary Secretary of the LCWC, Miss Mahler, was also a member of the Central WCA, even though her home was on the Wirral, a region whose flourishing women-based organisations active during the inter-war period were not represented on the LCWC. Jane Raffle, the President of Lodge Lane WCG, was co-opted to the Central WCA along with Ethel Wormald of the NUTG.¹⁵⁸ In addition Nessie Stewart Brown, Essie Ruth Conway, and Mrs Shilston Watkins were all prominent members of the WCA and the WILPF. Though it is not apparent whether leading WILPF members Margaret Fitch, Jane Style, and Nancy Stewart Parnell were active members of the WCA, their interests certainly meant they were in contact with its leading members. It is clear from this that some of the organisations under consideration shared, to some degree, a common leadership, and that this leadership transcended political and religious affiliations.¹⁵⁹

Martin Pugh has argued that the WCA attracted middle-class activists.¹⁶⁰ According to Pamela Graves NUSEC directed its propaganda at an educated middle-class constituency and made few attempts to recruit working-class women to the WCA. Graves argues that only a tiny minority of post-war Labour or WCG women joined WCAs.¹⁶¹ Despite the difficulty of categorising women by class, the arguments of Pugh and Graves are confirmed to some extent by the evidence from Liverpool as regards leading members. Eleanor Rathbone, President of Liverpool WCA between the wars, was a member of a prominent ship-owning and merchant family in Liverpool. The leadership circle of the WCA in the 1920s and 1930s also included several women whose husbands were prominent within the community. Among them were Nessie Stewart Brown, a veteran of the Liverpool suffrage struggle and a WILPF pioneer, whose husband, Egerton, was a local Liberal and barrister; Mrs Booth and Mrs Bright, who were the wives of prominent local shipowners; Lilian Mary Mott, whose husband was the

¹⁵⁷ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.260.

¹⁵⁸ LRO/WCA/B1: LWCA Council Minutes (June 1937, March 1938).

¹⁵⁹ Such connections are explored in more detail in Chapter Two. It is worth noting here that Mrs Yates, the Chairman of the Catholic Women's League, was a key member of the WCA.

¹⁶⁰ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.236.

¹⁶¹ Pamela M. Graves, *Labour Women: British Women in Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.122-24.

Director of Education; and Margaret Fitch, who returned to Liverpool in 1920 after spending time on the French Riviera with her family to be with her husband Arthur Fitch, a pioneering doctor who had his office on Rodney Street. Joining these women in their organisational ventures were members of the new generation of professional women which emerged after the war. They included Essie Ruth Conway and Ethel Warhurst, who were both headmistresses, and social worker Cicely Leadley Brown (who joined them at the WCA) who was called to the Bar in 1924 and worked in the chambers of Egerton Stewart Brown.¹⁶² But alongside these women worked others from less wealthy backgrounds. They included Jessie Beavan, the daughter of an Insurance worker who lived in suburban Hoylake on Wirral, and Sarah Everton, whose husband 'worked in the city' and whose first married home was a large three-storey terraced house in Anfield, both of whom were members of the WCA leadership circle. They also included Jane Raffle of the WCG, whose husband was a former cabinet- and shop-front- maker before a period of illness forced him to take a job as a Church officer.¹⁶³

There is evidence to suggest that the leaders of Liverpool WCA were committed to attracting a mixed class membership. As Essie Ruth Conway, President of the National Union of Teachers and a leading member of Liverpool WCA, told the inaugural meeting of the NWCA on 31 May 1918:

I feel sure that the women teachers will esteem it a privilege to join these WCAs, and thus come into close contact with women of all classes, particularly with working women . . . The war has done much to help unity among our men folk who are engaged in this terrible conflict, and one result of this will be a lessening of class distinction in the new era. Our women are also learning this lesson, and [WCAs] will be very helpful in this direction . . . [they] will give us a common ground of meeting and learning from each other.¹⁶⁴

Limited evidence makes it difficult to ascertain the extent to which the 'ordinary' membership of the WCA reflected this optimism between the wars. The WCA does not appear to have been active in the poorest quarters of Liverpool, and a number of WCA branches, such as those at Aigburth and Sefton Park, were located in the leafier, wealthier areas of Liverpool (see Map 1.i.). Aigburth branch met in the afternoons, suggesting that members had free time in the day and child care provision where necessary. Other WCA branches, such as those at Granby, Walton, and Wavertree, were in wards dominated by privately-owned terraced housing, occupied mainly by people of lower middle-class or 'respectable' working-class status.

¹⁶² *Liverpolitan*, November 1951, p.2.

¹⁶³ See Chapter Two for biographies.

¹⁶⁴ FL/ORG/NWC: National Women Citizens' Association Collection/I/3/6: 'The Citizenship of Women', NWCA Leaflet No. 6 (1933) (Reprint of meeting), pp.6-7.

In contrast, many members of the Settlement Branch appear not to have been well-off. When the price of the NUSEC's journal, the *Woman's Leader*, rose in 1928 the previously 'swelling' list of Settlement subscribers for this journal rapidly decreased.¹⁶⁵

Even with the evidence of location, we can not be entirely certain of the social status of rank-and-file members of the WCA and the other organisations under consideration. The time and money required to participate in these organisations undoubtedly restricted the involvement of poorer women, especially those with husbands, children, and other family members to care for. All of the organisations being examined charged a membership fee, though the impact of this on membership was probably negated to some extent by the decision of the Mothers' Union not to enforce payment on members who were genuinely unable to pay, and by the policy of the WILPF to allow individual branches to determine their own subscription rate.¹⁶⁶ It is likely that the membership of Mothers' Union and the WCG had a strong working-class element, as the needs and lives of married women (regardless of social background) were central to the concerns of both organisations. Most significant is the fact that the Mothers' Union was actually attempting to widen its appeal beyond working-class women in order to attract more middle-class women.¹⁶⁷ The WCG was geared towards attracting women who were involved in the Co-operative Movement, the majority of whom were working-class, and its local branches probably attracted members from nearby areas because membership was closely linked to the Co-operative Stores.

The WCA may have experienced more difficulty in attracting women to organise branches because the branches had to be self-governing. This placed greater demands on members who, for a variety of reasons (including a lack of time, confidence, or even apathy) may not have felt equal to the task. Professional and domestic commitments often compelled WCA members to resign.¹⁶⁸ When the WCA was reorganised in May 1926 professional women were encouraged to join the new Central Branch.¹⁶⁹ A WCA leaflet of the time stated that:

It is hoped that various expert workers in different spheres of social, educational and administrative work, in particular, will join this group and so bring their varied knowledge and experience to bear on the work of the Association.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1928), p.6. Membership of the Settlement Branch stood at about thirty.

¹⁶⁶ BLPES/WILPF/2/2: *WILPF Annual Report* (1918-1919), pp.23-24.

¹⁶⁷ Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', p.8

¹⁶⁸ Vice-Chairman Mrs Butler resigned due to pressure of work: LRO/WCA/B1: *LWCA Council Minutes* (8 March 1937); Mrs Moss was forced to give up her membership due to the needs of her family: LRO/WCA/B3: Letter from Mrs Moss to Mrs Everton, *LWCA Anfield Women Helper's League Minutes* (18 January 1932).

¹⁶⁹ LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Leaflet* (n.d. c.1926).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

By 1928, the new Central Branch, which met at the Bluecoat Chambers in central Liverpool, had about 300 members who attended evening supper-meetings.¹⁷¹ Although Liverpool WCA remained active throughout the 1930s, this branch failed to sustain itself and by 1934 its members who no longer met formally were classed as associates.

Cross-class and inter-denominational participation was also promoted by the NUTG which stated that, '[t]he successful Guild is the one which draws its members from all sections of the community, in which employers, employed and unemployed, and the holders of all creeds or political views meet to discuss their problems'.¹⁷² *Liverpool Echo* journalist Mary Ventriss, author of the column 'A Woman's Note', clearly felt that the Liverpool Guilds were attracting a varied membership. Commenting on the 21st anniversary of the formation of the Women's Institute, she noted that, 'What the WIs are doing for country women, the Townswomen's Guild is doing for those who reside in the cities, and though it is a much younger body, it is making excellent headway, and is greatly appreciated by its members, many of whom, despite the fact that they live in crowded streets and suburbs, were hitherto leading lonely, uneventful and sometimes drab lives . . . the committees are drawn from all classes - a very wise idea.'¹⁷³ Even so, although most of the Liverpool Guilds (apart from Sefton Park) shared what was a developing suburban location (as shown by Map 1.i.) some differences did exist between sites of council housing like Clubmoor and Norris Green, and sites of new middle-class housing like Mossley Hill and Childwall. However, Madeleine McKenna's conclusion that '[i]n the 1920s and 1930s bank managers, naval officers, clerks, artisans and shop assistants chose to live on the new council estates', should be borne in mind.¹⁷⁴

In contrast with the other organisations discussed here, the formation of a Mothers' Union was subject to male approval, in this case 'the wish of the Incumbent', which was probably always forthcoming because the Mothers' Union was renowned for being a 'most useful handmaid'.¹⁷⁵ Of all the organisations discussed here it embraced the greatest number while maintaining the strictest entrance policy, based on its Christian values and aims. Generally members had to be married and communicant with the Church of England, although Liverpool Diocese appears to have been willing to deviate from these rules. In 1921

¹⁷¹ Ethel Warhurst and Sarah Everton, Chair and Secretary of Anfield WCA respectively, both appear in the minutes of the WCA Council for the 1930s, as does Jane Raffle, President of Lodge Lane WCG: LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1928), p.6.

¹⁷² *NUTG Annual Reports* (1933), p.15.

¹⁷³ *Liverpool Echo*, 12 July 1937.

¹⁷⁴ Madeleine McKenna, 'The Suburbanization of the Working-Class Population of Liverpool Between the Wars', *Social History*, 16 (2) (1991), 173-189 (p.188).

¹⁷⁵ LRO/JLC: Letter to members from Mothers' Union Diocesan President, Edith Chavasse, May 1921.

Mrs Chavasse called for 'all women, married or unmarried' to join forces on the basis that 'almost every woman' contributed some 'bit of motherly work in the upbringing of the young or the guiding of a home' and the Union took 'its name from the nature of the work'.¹⁷⁶ Information on the social status of the members of each of the Mothers' Unions is hard to find, but it is more than likely that the membership of most, if not all, branches included middle-class and working-class women; though the ratio between them probably varied according to the nature of the parishes in which branches were located.

What motivated women to join these Liverpool organisations? Obviously adherence to their main principles and objectives was a prerequisite but commitment on this level probably varied considerably from individual to individual. In many cases concerns about matters such as equality, citizenship, the ills of society, and the 'common good' must have been mixed with or less important than other reasons for wishing to join. Many women were probably encouraged or influenced to join by friends or neighbours, political interests, church associations, a desire to follow an individual interest away from their domestic lives, or simply by loneliness. The latter influence owed something to the contraction of women's post-war employment and also, in the opinion of one prominent Liverpool woman, to changing housing patterns as families moved out to the suburbs. Ethel Wormald, Chairman of the Liverpool Federation of NUTGs, 'understood how lonely can be the lives of many women who live in the suburbs of a big city and the benefit they derive from Guild activities'.¹⁷⁷ Jane Raffle joined the Co-operative Guild, according to her daughter, because it provided her with an escape from her domestic life and her husband's religion. It also provided her with much needed companionship after her eldest daughter married and her sons went off to war in France in 1914 and Jane was left with only a small daughter and a son to look after at home.¹⁷⁸ As the following chapter will show, other women had different motives for becoming publicly active.

The desire for social interaction and companionship with like-minded women and for obtaining education in an informal way was undoubtedly an important reason for joining women's organisations.¹⁷⁹ When Conservative MP Nancy Astor suggested in 1932 that women's organisations had to go on existing in order to hasten the time when they 'need not exist' she was, to some extent, missing the point.¹⁸⁰ Her argument drew its inspiration from

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*. Liverpool Diocese's policy on divorced women is not clear.

¹⁷⁷ *Liverpolitan*, April 1951, p.3.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Mrs Jane Saxby, 21 October 1996.

¹⁷⁹ This is illustrated by an organisation which is not one of the main five under consideration here, the '1918 Club'. This was formed by Eleanor Rathbone and Elizabeth Macadam to offer women the opportunity to meet socially in an educational environment. It continued to operate after the war. In 1932 its organiser and secretary were Mrs Winifred Rathbone and Mrs Grace Booth (wife of Charles Booth) respectively: *Liverpolitan*, December 1932, p.8

¹⁸⁰ Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House: The Women M.P.s, 1919-45', *Historical Journal*, 29 (3)

equality feminist thinking which ignored the fact that the existence and vibrancy of some women's organisations owed much to their members' appreciation of their separateness from men. As Margaret Morgan has argued, women in the WI enjoyed the feeling of belonging to an organisation where they were not the 'other'.¹⁸¹ Within separate organisations women were able to realise their own potential via social activities with like-minded women, as well as having the opportunity to benefit others via welfare. The fact that some organisations encouraged their members to develop their potential in art and craft activities beyond everyday need was part of their essence and appeal. Even organisational leaders could be talented, learned, or simply interested in activities or subjects regarded as being traditionally feminine, such as Ethel Warhurst's knowledge of wild flowers and Margery Corbett Ashby's skill as a needlewoman.¹⁸² The social side of involvement is also reflected in the extension of the artistic activities of some organisations to include drama and entertainment. Individual WCA branches, for example, often organised entertainment for twice-yearly fetes. In this way, Mary Stott argues, organisations catered for the 'whole woman', a view supported by Margaret Morgan's work on the WIs in which 'the discerning membership (according to records) showed a definite inclination to chat, knit or snooze through any subject they felt was uninteresting and irrelevant'.¹⁸³ These points underline the fact that while distinctions can be drawn between the leaders and the general rank-and-file members of most (if not all) women's organisations, and between the major objectives of these organisations and their general associational activities, the interlocking of all of these things was crucial to organisational existence and operation.

Although there is some suggestion of tension at the national level between some of the organisations under consideration, co-operation between them at the local level in Liverpool was not unusual, especially as there was sometimes an overlap in membership. Nationally the WCG set itself apart from NUSEC on the issue of the post-war dismissal of married women and was also suspicious of organisations which attracted middle-class women, especially the NUTG which was appealing to uneducated newly enfranchised women.¹⁸⁴ In Liverpool, however, the WCG co-operated with the WCA on occasions, not least in allowing the Granby branch to hold its winter meetings in Lodge Lane Co-operative Guild Room during the late

(1986), 623-54 (p.635). Astor tried to organise women MPs across party: Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p. 80.

¹⁸¹ Margaret Morgan (Andrews), 'The Women's Institute Movement – The Acceptable Face of Feminism?', in *This Working-Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945*, ed. by Sybil Oldfield (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), pp.24-40 (p.32).

¹⁸² The information on Warhurst was provided by a letter to the author from Mr J. A. Everton, 26 January 1997. For Corbett-Ashby, see Stott, *Organisation Woman*, p.76.

¹⁸³ Stott, *Organisation Woman*, p.76 ; Morgan, 'The Women's Institute Movement', p.31.

¹⁸⁴ Black, *Social Feminism*, pp.129-130.

1920s.¹⁸⁵ The WCA minutes give a clear impression of co-operation between the WCA, the WCG, WILPF, and the NUTG, in the form of shared invitations to conferences and meetings such as WCG 'Peaceway' meeting to which the WCA was invited in 1935.¹⁸⁶ In 1938 the WCA joined forces with other local women's organisations, including the WCG and the NUTG, and with prominent political women, including Bessie Braddock, to create a Local Government Committee to further promote women's participation.¹⁸⁷ The WCA also co-operated closely with the WILPF, with which it shared some common interests. In October 1918 the Executive Committee of the WILPF began its meeting with a discussion of the relationship of the WILPF to the WCA, and co-operation between these two organisations continued well into the 1930s.¹⁸⁸ In this the WCA can be seen to have fulfilled one of its aims, that of getting 'in close touch with Associations and Committees engaged in work in which it is interested'.¹⁸⁹ Nationally, the WILPF was also concerned to develop links with organisations apart from the WCA. On 19 December 1918 its Executive Committee encouraged local secretaries to get in touch with local branches of the Mothers' Union in order to arrange to show lantern slides on international subjects to the members.¹⁹⁰ In February 1923 the WILPF changed its constitution to make it possible for branches of other organisations - including the WCG and the Labour Party - to affiliate. It was reported in 1924 that this was 'most useful' because it enabled the carrying of the message to a large body of women, and that speakers were welcomed at their meetings and found the audiences 'appreciative and sympathetic'.¹⁹¹ The Toxteth Labour Party (Women's Section), Moreton Labour Party (Wirral), and the Railway Women's Guild no. 2 affiliated to Liverpool WILPF.¹⁹²

There could, however, occasionally be tensions between organisations. When the WCG organised a deputation to interview the Chairman of the Education Committee, C. F. Mott, in December 1935 as part of its 'Peaceway' initiative, the WCA was annoyed at not being invited to participate directly in what had been understood to be a joint initiative. In response the WCA resolved to withdraw and act independently on the matter.¹⁹³ But incidents such as this were the exception rather than the norm. Co-operation rather than controversy characterised relations between the various organisations being considered and was probably due in part to shared membership or at least close association between members. For

¹⁸⁵ LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1928), p.5.

¹⁸⁶ LRO/WCA/B1: LWCA Council Minutes (3 December 1935).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* (5 April 1938).

¹⁸⁸ BLPES/WILPF/1/1: WILPF ECM (3 October 1918).

¹⁸⁹ LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Leaflet (1934).

¹⁹⁰ BLPES/WILPF/1/1: WILPF ECM (19 December 1918).

¹⁹¹ BLPES/WILPF/2/2: *WILPF Annual Report* (January-December 1924), p.18.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p.20.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* (5 December 1935). The WCG Executive may have felt that its invitation to Mrs Shilston Watkins, who was a member of both the WILPF and the WCA, to participate in the deputation covered the WCA.

example, the NUTG's invitation to the WCA in 1935 to attend a meeting at which Margery Corbett Ashby discussed 'Women of the Near East Today' probably owed something to the fact that the speaker was both a council member of the NUSEC and one of the leading figures involved in the formation of the NUTG.¹⁹⁴

VII

Conclusion

By 1937 *Time and Tide* (originally created as the journal of equality feminists) was advocating that feminists 'familiarise the general public with the idea of men and women working side by side regardless of sex and on equal terms for the general good'. The editor suggested this route in favour of 'perpetuat[ing] in the mind of the younger generation a picture of woman as a class apart and inferior, always knocking outside the door, never doing, but always claiming the right to do'.¹⁹⁵ This, it is possible to suggest, was similar to the thinking which inspired the activities of some of the women who led the organisations considered in this chapter after 1918. These organisations show the diversity and vibrancy of the women's movement in Liverpool during the inter-war period. Although they did not have exactly the same objectives they shared a number of important concerns which focused on the well-being of the community as a whole. One of the major threads which bound them together was their concern to address new issues outside the realm of purely women-based campaigning which were related to the 'common good'. Inevitably there were differences in terms of action and approach. The WCA, the WCG, and the WILPF were all pressure groups which lobbied politicians and government on issues of reform, which was not the case with either the NUTG or the Mothers' Union; and there were further differences regarding the discussion of issues, such as abortion, birth control, and divorce, perceived as controversial.¹⁹⁶ Despite these differences, however, organisational activity provided women with the vehicle to take their agendas forward, and to challenge dominant discourses on femininity and citizenship. Some of the leading women in these organisations spoke a common language not of conflict but of improvement and progress for society as a whole.

In addition to the leaders, a large number of 'ordinary' members were mobilised because the diversity of these organisations, and what they had to offer, made it possible for many different women to participate in public activity at a level which they felt was

¹⁹⁴ LRO/WCA/B1: LWCA Council Minutes (3 December 1935).

¹⁹⁵ The question was addressed to the editor by Monica Whateley, secretary to the Six Point Group on 23 October 1937: Alberti, 'British Feminists', p.118.

¹⁹⁶ The WCG lost its subsidy from the Co-operative Movement due to its position on Divorce Law

appropriate to their own lifestyle and needs. As Johanna Alberti has suggested, the enjoyment and pleasure which many women found in domesticity and maternity prompted them to join organisations such as the WI, the WCG, and the NUTG.¹⁹⁷ In this sense, women's acceptance of 'traditional' roles was not a backward step. The celebration of femininity was liberating rather than constraining for some women. This was an important consideration for a women's movement which needed to increase its relevance for all women's lives. But it was not the only consideration. The women's organisations in Liverpool show that the basis of their appeal was wider than this. They were attractive to women from a variety of social and economic backgrounds who sought to make a contribution to their community through social action, or who wanted to learn a new subject or craft, or who were simply lonely or bored and in need of companionship. They support an argument that the lack of coherence in the inter-war women's movement, detected by Susan Kingsley Kent, was its strength rather than its weakness.¹⁹⁸ In a variety of ways, ranging from education for citizenship and a chance actively to promote the 'common good', to the simple provision of new opportunities for social activities, they provided a step to empowerment and equality for many women within a context that celebrated rather than denied femininity. Margery Corbett Ashby expressed something of the logic which inspired them when she told the NUTG in her 1930 presidential address that she hoped to see members, 'so confident of equality that they can devote themselves to the improvement of their homes without feeling shut in by them'.¹⁹⁹ It is a logic which calls into question Susan Kingsley Kent's suggestion that post-war feminists did not challenge but 'in fact contributed to, a reconstruction of gender that circumscribed the roles, activities and possibilities of women'.²⁰⁰ It supports, on the other hand, Johanna Alberti's scepticism about whether membership of organisations like the WIs, the NUTGs, and the WCGs was necessarily anti-feminist, and Margaret Morgan's argument that membership of the WI was 'a natural continuation of suffrage work' because it created a cultural space for women.²⁰¹ All of this indicates that late-twentieth century arguments which denigrate the activities of inter-war women's movement as anti-feminist are not only anachronistic but misplaced. Rather than being anti-feminist, the assertion of women's rights as women was realistic within the context in which it was done. Inter-war women who embraced feminine values did not downgrade women; the responsibility for this lay rather with those who criticised them. Indeed, one of the strengths of the inter-war women's movement was that it

Reform.

¹⁹⁷ Johanna Alberti, Review of Kent, *Making Peace*, in *Women's History Review*, 5 (2) (1996), 304-06 (p.305).

¹⁹⁸ Kent, *Making Peace*.

¹⁹⁹ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p.197.

²⁰⁰ Kent, *Making Peace*, p.141.

²⁰¹ Alberti, Review of Kent, p.305; Morgan, 'The Women's Institute Movement', p.30.

was informed by the understanding that women would never empower themselves by attempting to replicate men.

This realisation was closely linked to a concept of citizenship which was different from the male-orientated form which had been dominant until the later nineteenth century.²⁰² There is evidence that some of the women who became involved in the Liverpool women's organisations under consideration did so because they were attempting to fulfil their citizenship duties by pursuing activities and interests which were usually perceived to belong to the feminine sphere. They were claiming that their participation within society, on their own terms, using their own skills, would be useful in transforming that society for all. They wanted acknowledgement of their citizenship without losing their individuality. They did not want to become like men, but to have access to the same rights and opportunities as men. The unique contribution which women could make was an important aspect of their demand for full participation in determining the social and political agenda. To some extent, it may be argued that some of these women were working from what many historians now perceive as a 'social' or 'new' feminist angle: one which makes it possible for women to add a 'political role without disrupting either their self-image or the expectations of the men around them'.²⁰³ It is significant in this respect that one of the main proponents of new feminism, Eleanor Rathbone, was a leading figure in the Liverpool WCA and LCWC, and undoubtedly inspired many other women in the city to participate in public life through her example. Rathbone, and some at least of those she worked with, rejected an equality feminist discourse which would have placed male citizenship as the goal, because they were moving away from a position where activity must always be defined in male terms. This was the important point: the replacement of the male model with one which acknowledged the value of women because they were different. The primary objective and rationale of the organisations which have been examined here, and of the women who joined them, was not to fight for the rights and good of women in a way which deliberately confronted and challenged the male-dominated order of things, but to work through education, participation, and organisation for the welfare and improvement of society as a whole, for an idea which these women in their commitment to an active female citizenship clearly perceived, and sometimes articulated, as the common good.

²⁰² It should be noted, however, that Kathleen B. Jones has recently argued that 'feminists have not formulated or articulated a coherent theory of female citizenship': 'Citizenship', p.785.

²⁰³ Black has labelled this 'social' feminism, which is akin to the British label 'new' feminism: Black, *Social Feminism*, p.61.

Chapter Two

Profiling Publicly Active Women: Expectations, Inspirations, and Associations

In 1914 Sarah Everton was thirty-three years old, she was married with two children, and lived with her family in a large, three-floored terrace house in a pleasant road in Anfield, north Liverpool. That summer war broke out in Europe, but the year also brought devastating news of a more personal nature for the Evertons when Sarah was told that she only had six months to live. She resolved that in the short time she had left she would devote her time to 'making a difference'.¹ Sarah joined forces that year with Ethel Warhurst, a local headmistress, in setting up a branch of Eleanor Rathbone's new Women Citizens' Association (WCA) in Anfield. Perhaps by a miracle, Sarah lived for another forty-five years, during which time she remained Secretary of Anfield WCA and took an active role in a number of the schemes which they initiated. She was supported in her interests by her husband and her family. Sarah's experience underlines the reality that the inspiration for women's public activity is sometimes to be found in their private lives. Many other women who became active in public life, in a variety of forms, shared Sarah's commitment to using their public or social action as a means to contribute to society or to 'make a difference'. Their inspiration and opportunities for activity, the amount of time they devoted, and the friendships they developed as a result, were strongly influenced by their personal lives, daily routines, background, and status.

In illuminating certain aspects of women's involvement in public life, a number of historians have highlighted the importance of looking at women's private lives. Sandra Stanley Holton suggests that the study of 'ordinary women's lives is important', since 'the majority of suffragists . . . fitted in their political activity alongside other more everyday aspects of being a woman: work, family, commitments, love and friendship'.² Margaret Morgan's view, that women's reasons for joining particular organisations must be considered within the context of their lives, echoes this point. '[H]ad I been alive at the time of the suffrage campaigns', she has written, 'my allegiance would have had more to do with my already existing networks of women, what fitted in with child care arrangements, or was close to available transport rather than

¹ Interview with Mr John A. Everton, Liverpool, 15 August 1996.

² Sandra Stanley Holton, 'The Suffragist and the "Average Woman"', *Women's History Review*, 1 (1) (1992), 9-24 (p.11).

ideological purity'.³ Susan Dabney Pennybacker has also highlighted the need to find out more about the background of women who took part in public activity, and to consider what inspired this participation.⁴ By looking at the biographies of women active at a local level we can begin to examine the relationship between women's private lives and their public activities during the period after 1918.

Over twenty-five years ago Leonore Davidoff argued that, 'in addition to the anecdotal approach to women's affairs, there has been a perhaps unjustified emphasis on unusual women and unusual activities: feminine pathbreakers, women writers and the suffrage movement. It is surely important to look at the social and domestic lives of the majority of Victorians, both men and women, in the context of their commitments and activities'.⁵ Recent work on women's biography suggests there has been a shift from biographies which concentrate on individual women to 'group' biography which examines the lives of a number of women. The subjects of such work are often united by membership of a circle drawn together by shared concerns, interests, or friendship. Such an approach moves away from the traditional emphasis upon individual exceptional women. Work which focuses upon one member of a group whose activity informs that of the others can often increase our understanding of the concerns and interests of the group as whole. Liz Stanley and Ann Morley's study of the life and death of Emily Davison is insightful in its use of this wider approach.⁶ Davison is studied within the context of a network of women active in the suffrage movement in order to understand her infamous death at the Derby in 1913. While Stanley and Morley's subject defied convention, the subjects of Barbara Caine's biographical study of the lives of Richard Potter's ten daughters were, with two exceptions, rigidly conventional.⁷ Caine uses the collective biographies as a means to discover more about the lives of upper-class women between 1845 and 1949. The relationship of sisterhood which Caine investigates, though less voluntary in its nature than other women's networks, was complicated by other alliances created by the geographically separated Potter women. Similarly, Pat Jalland's work on the lives of the female members of fifty important political families offers another insight

³ Margaret R. Morgan, 'The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute Movement, 1915-1960' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1992), p.22.

⁴ Susan Dabney Pennybacker suggested that 'we learn little of these women or their personal and philosophical motives': Review of Patricia Hollis, Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), in Gender and History, 1 (1) (1989), 238-40 (p. 239).

⁵ Leonore Davidoff, The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season (London: Croom Helm, 1973), p.14.

⁶ Liz Stanley with Ann Morley, The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison: A Biographical Detective Story (London: The Women's Press, 1988).

⁷ Barbara Caine, Destined to be Wives: The Sisters of Beatrice Webb (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

into multifarious female experiences.⁸ In a similar vein, Sybil Oldfield's *Spinsters of this Parish* charts the 'escape' of two women who were 'extraordinary enough to be interesting, ordinary enough to be significant' from the 'restrictive' background of late-Victorian England.⁹ The women, suffragist and pacifist, Mary Sheepshanks and novelist Flora Mayor, were friends, and Oldfield uses their lives to trace the contrasting journeys of two women who, despite remarkably different adolescent lives, met at Newnham. In *The New Women and the Old Men*, Ruth Brandon uses a similar multi-biographical approach as a means to explore the contrasting lives and views of 'new thinkers' and Victorian social reformers such as Karl Pearson, Havelock Ellis, Olive Schreiner, and Eleanor Marx; an approach which shows how the close associations woven among these individuals sheds more light on each of them.¹⁰

Although much biographical work has focused on the lives of important Victorian and Edwardian women, less work of this kind has been done on the lives of women active in inter-war Britain. But this imbalance has begun to be redressed, most notably by Brian Harrison's *Prudent Revolutionaries* and Johanna Alberti's *Beyond Suffrage*.¹¹ Group biography, argues Harrison, 'clarifies the range of talent available to the public life of a generation and illuminates the interaction between its leading personalities'.¹² While these studies have opened up the lives of high profile active women, we know much less about the lives of women who were prominent at the local level after 1918. Caine recently suggested that 'the growing interest in the lives, experiences and activities of past feminists who were not leaders of major national campaigns suggests a new approach in general to the biography of feminists - exploring how they lived and understood the broader situation of women.'¹³ Studies of individual women who made their contribution to public life at a local level during the inter-war have much to offer. Judy Giles, for example, has drawn on oral and literary evidence to investigate women's experiences of home life, especially the role which class played in determining these experiences.¹⁴ Further work is needed on the experiences of those women who moved between the public and private spheres.

⁸ Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

⁹ Sybil Oldfield, *Spinsters of this Parish: The Life and Times of F. M. Mayor and Mary Sheepshanks* (London: Virago, 1984), p.vii.

¹⁰ Ruth Brandon, *The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question* (London: Flamingo, 1991).

¹¹ While both studies examine the lives of politically active women, their approaches differ. Alberti begins with the variety of individual biography which Harrison employs throughout, but then adopts a thematic approach. See Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace 1914-1928* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

¹² Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p.2.

¹³ Barbara Caine, 'Feminist Biography and Feminist History', *Women's History Review*, 3 (2) (1994), 247-261 (p.247).

This chapter will adopt a multi-biographical approach to examine the lives and experiences of women active at a local level in Liverpool between the wars, exploring their backgrounds, personal circumstances, and interests, and the nature of the links between them. By looking beyond public activities and considering women's lives as a whole, we can begin to understand to what extent, and in what form, education, marriage, religion, politics, and class influenced women's opportunities and activities in this period. Although the sample of sixteen women (eight single and eight married) studied is small, it is nevertheless valuable. It has much to tell us about the involvement of women in public life, not only adding to current research in this field but suggesting that a number of prevailing historical interpretations concerning women's involvement may be open to challenge or modification. It reveals that although there were similarities between the backgrounds and inspirations of some of the women in the group, there were also significant differences, even amongst the middle-class women who might be expected to form the bulk of those involved in public work.¹⁵ This warns us to be wary of making generalisations about the female participants in work of this kind. The picture which emerges of women active in public life in inter-war Liverpool is complex, multi-dimensional, and kaleidoscopic. At the same time or at different times, women might undertake different roles as citizens, wives, independent women, mothers, friends, volunteers, workers, campaigners, or politicians, and were part of different networks and associations.

Martha Vicinus has argued that,

during the inter-war years the major professional occupations for women - teaching, nursing, and social work - remained largely single-sex ghettos. But unmarried women who worked in these jobs had lost the richly nurturing women's subculture of the past without gaining access to an aggressively married and heterosexual world. Married women had been pushed back into a new, equally confining version of the domesticity that had dominated their lives before the suffrage movement and the war.¹⁶

The evidence from Liverpool suggests that these views are open to question. The experiences of the women whose lives and careers are examined below indicate that the division drawn between single women associated with work and the public domain, and married women associated with

¹⁴ Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain 1900-1950* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

¹⁵ The size and constitution of the sample has been determined to some extent by the availability of source materials. The absence of source material for the majority of the women who were active in Liverpool means that it is impossible to determine how representative the sample is.

¹⁶ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp.291-92.

domesticity and the private domain has been drawn too sharply. While it is true that, for many women, marriage meant exclusion from the world of paid work, there were other opportunities for them to remain within the public sphere. The continuing spirit of voluntarism and the existence of women's political and non-political organisations were significant factors. Inevitably many women were forced to negotiate their public interests around their role as wife or mother, but how far this role restricted other aspects of their lives was often dependent upon practical matters like domestic support. Furthermore, some organisations engaged in public work acknowledged that there were women with domestic commitments which prevented them from entering paid employment who were still willing and able to make a contribution to public work. This is clear from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association (SSFA) appeal made in 1919 for volunteers for office work and visiting, which suggested that,

This work should appeal especially to women who have home claims which prevent them from giving themselves entirely to public work, and to those who hesitate to compete in the crowded labour market for paid occupations and yet desire to make some contribution of their own to the tasks of reconstruction.¹⁷

In a manner sensitive to post-war concerns about unemployment, the SSFA was offering women the opportunity to make a contribution to reconstruction without competing with men, or indeed single women, for paid employment. Women's leaders did not usually draw distinctions between married and single women. Instead, some of them used the language of citizenship, which they hoped could provide common ground for all women. Theoretically, they encouraged women who chose to enter the public space to do so on the basis of women's potential for citizenship, an identity which could override differences of class, gender, status, and religion. The following study reveals how the many women who did so took advantage of the widening opportunities for involvement at a variety of levels in public life. It indicates that during the inter-war period Liverpool provided the setting for a richly integrated 'movement' of women in which professional women frequently mixed and co-operated with married women in a wide spectrum of organisations, campaigns, and initiatives; although significant differences sometimes continued to exist between the two groups.

The women whose lives are detailed below each contributed, in different ways, to the public life of inter-war Liverpool. The following biographical sketches attempt, as far as possible, to locate the women in their context; though the brevity of some of the sketches reflects the

paucity of the evidence. They show that the women came from varied backgrounds (in terms of location, education, class, status, religious convictions, and political affiliations) which was due partly to generational differences between some of them. The women are dealt with chronologically from the birth of Essie Ruth Conway in 1862 to Ethel Wormald's birth, thirty-nine years later. In 1918 four of the women did not yet fulfil the age requirement for the new female franchise. In spite of the differences between the women, the study will show that many of them were friends or worked together for important causes; some shared political or religious beliefs; and others had common interests in welfare movements or women's organisations, usually regardless of contrasting religious and political beliefs. The biographies provide a basis for the subsequent discussion of how changes in education and employment opportunities affected women's expectations and possibilities, of the reasons why women became involved in public life, how this involvement was affected by issues like marital status, household arrangement, and domesticity, and what this reveals about women's networks and friendships.

I

Biographies

Essie Ruth Conway (1862-1932)

When Essie Ruth Conway died, a colleague, rather appropriately, remembered her as 'big-hearted and brave', a woman who had 'set a standard for us all to emulate'.¹⁸ Essie was born in Old Swinford, Worcestershire, and educated at Corngreaves School, Staffordshire, and at Lincoln Training College. She went to Liverpool in 1882 to take up a position as assistant mistress at Upper Park Street Council School. One of her colleagues commented that she was a 'born teacher' who was 'entirely absorbed in her work, fully conscious of its responsibilities and opportunities'.¹⁹ At the age of forty-two, Essie was appointed as headmistress of the newly opened Tiber Street Council School, where she remained until her retirement in 1926.

During her career Essie developed a considerable reputation as a union leader. In 1910 she was elected to the Executive of the National Union of Teachers (NUT). By 1918 she had risen to the Presidency and remained at the forefront of the leadership thereafter. She sat on the

¹⁷ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 1 January 1919.

¹⁸ Liverpool Record Office (hereafter LRO): Essie Ruth Conway press cuttings: *The Schoolmaster and Woman Teacher's Chronicle*, 28 December 1934.

Consultative Committee on Education set up in 1924 by the Labour Government, which produced the Hadow Report in 1926. Other non-teaching organisations to which she belonged included the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the WCA. As a member of the Liverpool Women Patrols Committee she actively supported the local campaign for women police. She also found time in her busy schedule to be a volunteer for the Personal Service Society (PSS). In December 1932, following a short illness, she died at her Hartington Road home, near Sefton Park, which she shared with her friend, Ada Booth (see Map 2.i. for location of sample group).

Nessie Stewart Brown (1865-1958)

In 1895 the journalist Sarah Tooley published a series of interviews entitled 'Ladies of Liverpool'. Among her interviewees was Nessie Stewart Brown, 'a lady for whom the word "advanced" has no terrors'.²⁰ Born Nessie Muspratt in 1865 at Seaforth Hall, a large Grecian-style mansion on the northern banks of the Mersey, she was the second daughter of Edmund Knowles Muspratt, founder of a local chemical plant, and his wife, Frances.²¹ Nessie's father was a Liberal Non-Conformist who was actively involved in politics during the 1860s. He was also a keen European traveller, and his four daughters benefited from trips abroad as well as an education at Cheltenham Ladies' College. In 1880 Nessie joined her parents in Tegernesse in the Bavarian Highlands, and on other trips the Muspratts took in Italy. Part of Nessie's education took place in Germany, and she later attended the University of Liverpool.²² Edmund Muspratt fostered independence of mind in his daughters, teaching Nessie 'never to fear being in a minority if [she] had conscientious reasons'.²³

In 1888 Nessie married Egerton Stewart Brown who was a barrister. The couple settled in a large, comfortable home in Liverpool on Ullet Road, close to Princes Park. Nessie's husband encouraged her to maintain the interest in Liberal politics which had been nurtured by her father. In 1891 Nessie organised the second Women's Liberal Association in West Derby. When Egerton participated in the local elections in 1893, Nessie made her first public speech. She quickly developed her own public profile by becoming Chairman of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society, working alongside Eleanor Rathbone. Nessie went on to play an active role in its

¹⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 20 December 1934.

²⁰ Sarah Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', *The Woman at Home IV*, 21 (1985), p.174.

²¹ *The Times*, 28 April 1958.

²² Edmund Knowles Muspratt, *My Life and Work* (London: John Lane, 1917), pp.215, 230.

²³ Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', p.174.

descendant organisations, the WCA and the LCWC, as well as being a long-time member of the National Council of Women (NCW; formerly the NUWW) and a prominent WILPF member. Concerned not only with the welfare of humans, Nessie also sat for fifty years on the Ladies Committee of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

In 1919 she stood successfully for Liverpool City Council for Sefton Park East and was Chairman of Liverpool Liberal Women's Council, as well as President of Waterloo and Seaforth Women's Liberal Council. Even though she stood unsuccessfully as a Free Liberal candidate at Waterloo in the 1922 general election, her continuing commitment made her one of the driving forces for women's associational liberalism in Liverpool between the wars. She was well known locally for her work (see Chapter Five). As *Cox's Year Book* declared in 1924, '[t]he Liberal Party in Liverpool possesses no more fearless and eloquent woman champion than Mrs Stewart Brown'; a devotion for which she was also recognised 'in political circles throughout the Country'.²⁴ In 1926 Nessie remained with the Liberals, though she witnessed her brother, Sir Max Muspratt, lead an exodus of five from the party. In 1940 Nessie left Liverpool for Anglesey, where she remained until her death in her ninety-third year at her home, on the banks of the Menai Straits.²⁵

Frances Ivens (1870-1944)²⁶

Mary Hannah Frances Ivens was born in Harborough Parav, Warwickshire. Her father, William, was a timber merchant; he and his wife Elizabeth already had four children when Frances, as she was known, arrived in 1870. When Frances was only seven, her mother died from consumption, after which the children were sent to boarding school. As a schoolgirl Frances developed a talent for French, coming second in England in the Oxford Senior Certificate. Her immediate post-school years back at home 'just "pottering about"' gave no hint of the distinguished career which was to follow. Frances seems to have busied herself enjoying countryside activities, playing cricket and tennis, gardening and participating in village life.²⁷

At the age of twenty-four she entered the London School of Medicine for Women. She appears to have taken well to her new studies and soon distinguished herself as a superb student. She was educated at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine for Women, at University

²⁴ *Cox's Liverpool Annual and Year Book* (1924), p.229; *Women's Liberal Magazine*, 11, November 1920, p.139.

²⁵ *Liverpolitan*, April-May 1940, p.17.

²⁶ Eileen Crofton, *The Women of Roayumont: A Scottish Women's Hospital on the Western Front* (Scotland: Tuckwell, 1997), pp.236-50.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.238.

College, London, and in Dublin and Vienna. In 1907 she was appointed Honorary Medical Officer for Diseases of Women at Liverpool's Stanley Hospital.²⁸

Frances was decorated by the French for her work as director of the operations of a branch of the Scottish Women's Hospitals during the First World War.²⁹ The branch was at an abandoned Cistercian abbey twenty-five miles from Paris, the Abbaye de Royaumont. The suffragist writer and actress Cicely Hamilton also worked there as a clerk and she paid tribute to Frances in her autobiography *Life Errant*.³⁰

After the war, Frances returned to Liverpool and immersed herself in activities, many of which were centred around the local WCA. She was a vocal supporter of the local campaign for women police, and was also interested in welfare causes. Before the war, she had sat on a number of Council of Voluntary Aid committees. After 1918 she worked for a period as honorary surgeon to the Liverpool Rescue Society and House of Help, as well as sitting on various PSS committees. In 1922 she supported Eleanor Rathbone's political campaign for Granby. A lecturer in midwifery and gynaecology, she was an honorary surgeon of the Liverpool Maternity Hospital, and President of the Federation of Medical Women (1925-1926).³¹ Her home was on Gambier Terrace, a section of Hope Street overlooking the Anglican Cathedral where in 1930, at the age of sixty, she married barrister Charles M. Knowles. The couple made their home in Truro where she died in 1944.

Jane Raffle (1870-1941)

Jane Skilling was born in Everton in 1870. The youngest of seven girls and six boys, she was raised in the home of her childless uncle, a retired seafarer, and his wife. After attending a local dame school, the young Jane trained as a milliner. In 1891 she married William Raffle, a trained carpenter who had followed his nine brothers from their home in Scotland to Liverpool in search of work. The couple settled in Low Hill, Everton, near Jane's aunt. They later moved to Wordsworth Street, off the north end of Hartington Road, and then settled nearby in one of the small terrace houses on Coltart Road, off Lodge Lane, on the southern outskirts of the city centre. Jane gave birth to five children. Following a breakdown in health, William Raffle retired from his

²⁸ William T. Pike, *A Dictionary of Edwardian Biography, Liverpool* (Edinburgh: Peter Bell, 1987) [f.p. 1911], p.218.

²⁹ Lis Whitelaw, *The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), p.139.

³⁰ Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1935), p.101. For details of life at Royaumont, see Leeds University, Liddle Archive of the First World War: Scottish Women's Hospital Collection.

³¹ *Liverpool Red Book* (1928), p.565.

trade, and became a church officer at Sefton Park Presbyterian Church.

Jane's public activities were centred around the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG), with which she became involved around 1911 and maintained her interest in throughout her life. Her association with the WCG led her to involvement with the WCA after the First World War.³²

Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946)

Eleanor Rathbone was the second daughter of Liverpool Unitarian philanthropist and Liberal MP William Rathbone VI and his second wife, Emily A. Lyle. She was born on May 12 1872 in London; the only child of William to be born outside Liverpool, as the family was in residence at the time at Princes' Gardens because Parliament was in session.³³ In 1893 Eleanor entered Somerville College, Oxford, to read classics. After her return to Liverpool in 1897, she threw herself into social work by becoming a visitor for the Liverpool Central Relief Society. Soon after she was appointed as a manager of Granby Council School and became a member of the Women's Industrial Council. Eleanor's interest was soon captivated by the campaign for women's suffrage, and she became the Parliamentary Secretary of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society. In 1909 she was the first woman elected to Liverpool City Council as an Independent for Granby ward. Four years later she pioneered the WCA in Liverpool as a means to prepare 'ordinary' women for enfranchisement. Eleanor took over the Presidency of NUSEC from Mrs Fawcett in 1920. In 1922 she stood as an Independent candidate for Granby with the support of the WCA and though unsuccessful in 1929 was elected Independent MP for the Combined Universities.

In 1902 while working at the Victoria Settlement, Eleanor met Elizabeth Macadam, a Scottish social worker, who became her lifelong companion. In 1919 Elizabeth's work took her to London and Eleanor soon followed her. Despite her increasing national commitments, Eleanor maintained close associational links with Liverpool during the inter-war period. She maintained a Liverpool base at Oakfield, a small house on Penny Lane near the large Rathbone family home at Greenbank. Eleanor was active in almost every form of women's public activity discussed in this thesis, and she thus deserves her place in this sample. It is unnecessary, however, to detail her life at length here, because it has already been the subject of a number of studies.³⁴

³² Interview with Mrs Jane Saxby, Liverpool, 16 February 1998.

³³ Mary Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949), p.23.

³⁴ See also, Johanna Alberti, *Eleanor Rathbone* (London: Sage, 1996).

Ethel Warhurst (c.1875-1949)

Ethel Warhurst was born in Yorkshire. Her training, which was in education, took place at Edge Hill College, and she later studied in the United States, Canada and Italy. She was one of the first English women to be awarded the Froebel Certificate, named after the pioneer of the kindergarten system. In 1913 Ethel returned to Liverpool when she was appointed headmistress of Queens Road Council School. Later, she worked at Anfield Road Council Infants School. Ethel had numerous interests in her non-working life: she was a Methodist lay preacher, an expert on the identification and culture of flora, and established her own learned society - The Botanical Society - of which she was president.³⁵ A stalwart of the WCA from 1913 onwards, Ethel's other interests included the PSS and the RSPCA. She lived with her sister in Argyle Road, Anfield, where her immediate neighbour was Jessie Reid Crosbie, a pioneering school teacher recognised for introducing parent-teacher co-operation to Liverpool.

Margaret Beavan (1877-1931)³⁶

The eldest of the three children of Liverpool insurance agent Jeffrey Beavan, Margaret Beavan was born on 1 August 1877. Around 1890 the Beavan family joined their father in America where he was located. There the children were taught by a governess. On their return to England the fifteen year old Margaret attended Belvedere School, where one of her classmates was future spiritualist and preacher Maude Royden.³⁷ Margaret went on to study maths at Royal Holloway, during which time her father returned home and died of typhoid.

On her return to Liverpool from university, Margaret spent a term helping out at a local boys' preparatory school. She then took a Sunday School class at the Earle Road Mission, teaching pre-adolescent boys. With her sister Jessie, she helped out with a church-run Girls' Club. In 1900, at the age of twenty-three, Margaret began helping as a volunteer with an experimental class for disabled children run by Edith Eskrigge at the Victoria Settlement. She moved to the Invalid Children's Aid (ICA), a branch of the Kyrle Society.³⁸ In 1908 when the ICA became

³⁵ Letter to the author from Mr John A. Everton, 26 January 1997; LRO/ACC/3538: Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Collection (three boxes of unlisted material; cited hereafter as LRO/WCA/B1/2/3), Box 1: press cutting c.1949.

³⁶ See Ivy B. Ireland, *Margaret Beavan of Liverpool: Her Character and Work* (Liverpool: Henry Young and Sons Ltd, 1938).

³⁷ Sheila Fletcher, *Maude Royden: A Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989)

³⁸ The Kyrle Society was a large philanthropic society formed in the 1880s by Sir William Forwood and

independent of the Kyrle Society, Margaret became its Honorary Secretary. Thereafter her ventures in public life increased. She developed the idea of post-hospital care for children with the Leasowe Open-Air Hospital for Children and established the Ellen Gonner Home for Children. In 1918 her work with children was acknowledged by a cheque for £1,300 from leading citizens of Liverpool. When, in the same year, the Maternity and Child Welfare Act gave each locality the duty of providing for its infant children, she organised the Child Welfare Association (CWA).

Her reputation as a local, and eventually national, expert on child welfare led to her appointment as one of Liverpool's first women magistrates in 1920. The following year she was elected to represent Princes Park on the City Council as a Liberal. By 1924 she had joined the Conservatives. The local party leader, Sir Archibald Salvidge, orchestrated her appointment as Liverpool's first female Lord Mayor in 1928. Following her triumphant Mayoral year, she agreed to stand as the Conservative candidate for Everton in the May 1929 general election. The campaign was a disaster for her and the party (see Chapter Six). Her health, which had always been poor, broke down shortly afterwards. In late February 1931, Liverpoolians lined the streets to watch the funeral procession of 'the little mother of Liverpool'.³⁹

Lilian Mary Mott (1879-1952)

Lilian Mary Reynolds was born on 10 April 1879 at Wanstead, Essex, into an Evangelical Anglican household. She was the youngest child and third daughter of Charles Henry and Beatrice Anna Reynolds (née Richardson). Mary, as she was known, enjoyed an excellent education, distinguishing herself as a brilliant student at Cheltenham Ladies College (1892-98) where she was a favourite of its pioneering principal, Miss Dorothea Beale. From Cheltenham, she went on to Newnham, where she studied Maths. She inspired her tutor, Philippa Garrett Fawcett, to write, 'I feel confident that her undoubted power, coupled with her industry and thoroughness will enable Miss Reynolds to achieve distinguished success in whatever career she decides to adopt'.⁴⁰

Mary's future took a different turn when she met a promising young Cambridge scholar, Charles Francis Mott. She was then eager for new challenges: 'I rather think I have had enough of Newnham as is good for me', she wrote to a close friend in May 1903.⁴¹ Soon after, she left

members of the Rathbone family.

³⁹LRO/M364/CWA: Child Welfare Association Collection (hereafter LRO/CWA)/7/3: cutting *Daily Mail*, 23 February 1931.

⁴⁰C. F. Mott, *Lillian Mary Mott: A Memoir By Her Husband* (Privately published, 1956), p.37.

⁴¹Ibid., p.49.

Newnham and took a post as science mistress at the new St Paul's Girls School in Kew, where one of her pupils was Mary Stocks (then Brinton). At Christmas 1904 she married C. F. Mott and from then on her life was determined, to a considerable extent, by the demands of her husband's career.⁴² From 1905 to 1922, the Motts lived in three different places, Giggleswick, Stafford, and Chester. Finally, in 1922, they settled in Liverpool when Charles took over the Directorship of Education from J. G. Legge. Mary and their two young children, Nevil and Joan, settled into their new home in Falkner Square, near the University. Later, in the 1930s, when the newly built Mersey Tunnel provided easier access to the Wirral, the Motts left the city and settled in Poplar Road, Oxton, a leafy suburb of Birkenhead.

Soon after her marriage, Mary set out on the path to public activity. She began work connected with the local Board of Guardians in Leeds. The constitutional suffrage campaign inspired Mary's support; but although she admired the Pankhurst spirit, she did not approve of their violent tactics. While resident in Chester, she emerged as a leading figure in the local WCA and she soon became active in the Liverpool branch. She worked voluntarily for the PSS and assisted Cicely Leadley Brown in her work for child adoption. She led the way in setting up a family planning clinic in Liverpool in 1926.⁴³ Though not politically active herself, Mary played an important role in the political careers of two leading women politicians. In 1926 she travelled to Shropshire with Liverpool colleague Mrs Shackleton to support Edith Picton-Tubervill's successful campaign for Labour at Wrekin.⁴⁴ Later, according to Eleanor Rathbone, she and another friend, Mrs Hogg, persuaded Eleanor to stand for Parliament for the Combined Universities in 1929.⁴⁵ By the late 1930s, Mary's interest, like that of many women, turned to international matters, and she focused upon initiatives to alleviate the distress of child refugees of the Spanish Civil War and Nazi Germany.

Sarah Everton (1881-1959)

Sarah Ann Richardson was the oldest of eleven children. Her parents met while they were in service in Shropshire. At the time of her birth in 1881, Sarah's family was resident in Higher Bebington on the Wirral. Her father's work in timber sales soon took his young family to Liverpool where they settled in Toxteth. Sarah attended St Luke's Primary School until she was

⁴² Ibid, pp.37, 48, 51.

⁴³ For a history of the clinic, see Mary Macaulay, The Story of the Mother's Welfare Clinic 1926-1951 (Liverpool: n.p., 1951).

⁴⁴ Edith Picton-Tubervill, Life is Good: An Autobiography (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), p.167.

⁴⁵ Mott, Lillian Mary Mott, p.113.

thirteen. She then helped her mother to care for her younger siblings. In 1904 Sarah married John Everton who worked in the city. Their first home was in September Road, Anfield. In 1906 Sarah gave birth to a daughter, and a son arrived soon after. The discovery of an apparently fatal illness in 1914 sparked the beginning of a new phase in Sarah's life. With local headmistress Ethel Warhurst, Sarah established an Anfield branch of the WCA. She remained as secretary of that branch throughout the inter-war period, as well as sitting on the WCA Council. She played a principal role in a number of associated ventures including Eleanor Rathbone's Working Women's Holiday Service, and the Women Helpers' League; and found time to undertake voluntary duty for the Women Patrols and the PSS. The Everton family were active members of their local Baptist church in Anfield where the children were members of the Band of Hope.

Dorothy Keeling (1881-1967)

Dorothy Keeling was born in 1881, the seventh of nine children.⁴⁶ Her father was the headmaster of Bradford Grammar School. The family home 'was comfortable but in no sense luxurious'.⁴⁷ Mr Keeling, who was in the Holy Orders, forbade his children to attend any place of worship other than the Church of England. Keeling was educated at home until her fourteenth year, when she was sent to a large grammar school. Less keen than her sisters to become a teacher, and having failed by two marks in the Intermediate Exam of the Royal College of Music, she became involved in social work. Dorothy worked first with the local Brazabon Society and went on to organise a Ragged Sunday School. In 1907, at the age of twenty-six, she went to work for the Bradford Guild of Help. Dorothy was soon promoted to part-time district head, and then full-time Honorary Secretary. By 1917 she was based in Manchester as General Secretary of the National Association of Guilds of Help. In 1919 Dorothy was invited by Eleanor Rathbone, Elizabeth Macadam, and Frederick D'Aeth to come to Liverpool to set up the PSS, and to act as leader of the Offices of Friendly Help at the Victoria Settlement. In 1927 she joined her friend, Ellinor Black, in her flat on Hargreaves Road, off Lark Lane in Aigburth.⁴⁸ As PSS Secretary, Dorothy was at the centre of welfare schemes within Liverpool. A fervent supporter of Labour, she attempted to impose a new democracy into social work during the 1920s. She combined her work with membership of the WCA and the Women Patrols Committee, as well as being an

⁴⁶ Dorothy C. Keeling, The Crowded Stairs: Recollections of Social Work in Liverpool 1919-1940 (London: National Council of Social Service, 1961).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁴⁸ Dorothy C. Keeling, Ellinor I. Black, 1891-1956: A Tribute (n. p., 1956), p.6. I am grateful to Mrs Margaret Simey for lending me her copy of this tribute.

active supporter of the campaign for women police.

Margaret Fitch (1885-1932; see Plate 2.i.)

Margaret Mary Nicholson was born in Liverpool in 1885. She was the second daughter and middle child of Edward Nicholson, medical Superintendent of the Ocean Steamship Co., and his wife, Sophie (née Edger). The family resided briefly at West Kirby, Wirral, but lived mainly around the Abercromby area of Liverpool. Before his marriage at the age of forty, Dr Nicholson had travelled extensively; he was recognised as the leading published authority on poisonous Indian snakes, as well as being self-taught in Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, and fluent in French.⁴⁹ As a result, Margaret received 'a careful home-education', supplemented by governesses.⁵⁰ She became fluent in French and was a gifted musician. She later attended courses on scientific studies at Liverpool University College.

Margaret was raised in a Positivist household. Her mother had been adopted by Richard Congreve, who had brought Positivism to England following a close association with its founding father, Auguste Comte, in Paris. Her father was helped to an appointment in Liverpool by Albert Crompton, one of the people who helped to establish Positivism in Liverpool at the Church of Humanity in Falkland Street. During her youth Margaret lived at the home of prominent Liverpool Positivists Sydney and Jane Style, where she helped with the care of their two adopted children. In April 1907 Dr Nicholson's declining health prompted him to retire in search of a warmer climate, which he found in a small village outside Hyères, on the French Riviera; where Margaret joined her family for a short period. On her return to Liverpool she met Dr Arthur Fitch, a young Anglican surgeon friend of the Styles, from Suffolk. They married on 29 March 1913 at the little Positivist church in Falkland Street. Their son, Louis, was born a year later.

Arthur spent the war years on medical service in India, so Margaret and Louis joined her parents in France. The Fitch family was reunited in Liverpool in 1919. In February 1920 Olive Teresa was born. In the same year they adopted a ten year old Austrian boy, Anton Lediecker, the son of a Hungarian barber, Kasper Schneider, and his Czechoslovakian wife, Christine.⁵¹ The

⁴⁹ Barns Family Papers (hereafter BFP): Margaret Fitch, Edward Nicholson (pamphlet) (Liverpool: Lyceum Press, 1920).

⁵⁰ BFP: 'Commemoration for the Life of Margaret Fitch: The Temple of Humanity' (Liverpool, 1932), p.6.

⁵¹ Interview with Mrs Teresa Barns, Nether Wasdale, 12 April 1997. My thanks are due to Martin Fitch for providing a copy of his 'Anton's People: Anton's Family Tree' (1996).

Plate 2.i. Margaret Fitch (née Nicholson) c.1892
(reproduced with the permission of Mrs Teresa Barns)



adoption, which also brought Anton's brother, Otto, to live with a family in Birkenhead, was arranged through a convent in Woolton and its sister house in Vienna. The children were victims of the post-war famine in Austria, though specific details of the adoption are unclear.⁵²

Despite the fact that she suffered bouts of poor health Margaret's active interests, other than her Positivism, were varied. She was long-time secretary of the Liverpool branch of the WILPF, an active member of the Labour Party, and undertook voluntary work for the PSS. Arthur Fitch was active in a number of important causes central to his wife's network, including the WCA, the Women Patrols Committee, and the Women Police Propaganda Committee. Margaret continued to be active in peace and politics after 1930 when the family moved to Hampstead, London. She joined the Hampstead Labour Party and became secretary of the Hampstead League of Nations Union. In September 1932, at the age of forty-seven, she died of cancer in London.

Cicely Leadley Brown (1882-?)

Cicely Leadley Brown held the distinction of being one of the first women to drive a motor-car in Liverpool. She was born in 1887 at Heswall, Wirral, the youngest of eight children. Her education was organised mainly at home, although she spent some time at an Anglican convent in Oxford. She went on to study singing at the Royal College of Music. In 1912 Cicely was awarded a diploma in Social Science, which meant that during the war she was qualified for welfare work. She was awarded the MBE. for her role as a welfare worker looking after 5,000 women at two factories in Dudley near Birmingham. At the age of forty-two she achieved her ambition to become a barrister, and thereafter practised in the Chambers of Egerton Stewart Brown.⁵³

As a young woman Leadley Brown was 'an ardent member of the non-militant Women's Suffrage Party', and after the war she channelled her energy into the WILPF, the WCA, and the Women Patrols Committee.⁵⁴ In addition, she took the lead role in the Lancashire and Cheshire Adoption Council, set up following the 1926 Adoption of Children Act; and she was active on various PSS committees, most notably those concerned with training.

Ellinor Isabella Black (1891-1956)

Ellinor Isabella Black was born in Edinburgh on 10 April 1891. She was the first child, and only

⁵² Interview with Mrs Teresa Barns, 12 April 1997. Influences from the WILPF or the Labour Party may have prompted the adoption: *Labour Woman*, October 1920, p.155.

⁵³ *Liverpoltan*, November 1951, p.2.

daughter, of solicitor and future Banffshire Liberal MP (1900-1906) Alexander William Black and his wife, Ellinor. Both her parents were active in the church; her mother was active in the foreign missions and her father was a Church Elder. Ellinor was educated at an Edinburgh private school run by two Girton women. The sudden death of her father in 1906, when she was only fifteen, broke the happiness of her later education in Lausanne. 'Tell Lenna', her father had apparently whispered an hour before his death, 'I know that she will be one of the best and greatest women of her age'.⁵⁵ In 1910 Ellinor returned home from Switzerland; she was fluent in French, German, and Italian. At the age of twenty-three she began training for her social service diploma at the School of Domestic Economy.⁵⁶ The intervention of war led her to begin work in factory welfare at munitions factories in Gretna Green. In 1922 she graduated from the London School of Economics with first class honours in Sociology. From there she went to the Radcliffe Settlement, in Limehouse, Stepney, where she remained until 1924 when she returned to the LSE, as temporary tutor in the Ratan Tata Department. In October that year, at the age of thirty-three, Ellinor was appointed Lecturer in Social Science at Liverpool University. Although she became involved at a committee level with the PSS and the Victoria Settlement, the available evidence, which is limited, does not indicate that she participated in any of the main women's organisations in Liverpool. This is interesting, since her close friend and housemate Dorothy Keeling, was active within this sphere. Ellinor left Liverpool in the late 1930s to take up a post as Director of Social Studies at Sheffield University. Her death in 1956 merited a short notice in *The Times*.⁵⁷

Maud Melly (1893-1986; see Plate 2.ii.)

Maud Isaac was born in 1893. She was the youngest child, and only daughter, of Edith and Albert Edward Isaac. She enjoyed a prosperous Edwardian childhood; the family lived on Ivanhoe Road near Sefton Park. Like Margaret Beavan, Maud attended Belvedere School.⁵⁸ Her father was an actor musician, and as a youngster Maud developed similar interests. When she was sixteen, her mother refused to allow her to take up a position in the company of a Shakespearean actor-manager.⁵⁹ In 1912, when she was nineteen, her father died. Soon after, Maud converted

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Keeling, *Ellinor I. Black*, p.5.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 7 January 1956.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mr George Melly, London, 12 May 1998.

⁵⁹ This attitude was not unusual. See Helena M. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935), p.98.

Plate 2.ii. Maud Melly (née Isaac) c.1919
(reproduced with the permission of Mr George Melly).



from the Jewish faith to the Church of England. Her son, George, has indicated that some people believed that she did this partly to enable her to attend the Friday night dances.⁶⁰ Maud pursued her dramatic interests at an amateur level, and she soon became friendly with the artists at the Sandon Studios.

During the war Maud worked at the SSFA, under the direction of Eleanor Rathbone. In 1925, at the age of thirty-two, she married into one of Liverpool's leading families, the Mellys. Francis Heywood Melly, the only son of Samuel Heywood Melly, was the Director of a firm of Wool brokers. After their marriage, the Mellys lived in a flat on Linnet Lane, off Lark Lane. They had a son, George, in 1926, another son, Bill, in 1929, and a daughter, Andre, in 1933. Maud continued her dramatic interests, often performing work written by her close friend, Maud Budden. Another interest which was close to her heart was her work as a PSS volunteer, which she undertook three days a week.

Bessie Braddock (1899-1970)

When Bessie Braddock died on 13 November 1970 the flags in Liverpool flew at half-mast.⁶¹ She had been born Elizabeth Margaret Bamber, seventy-one years before on 24 September 1899, to Liverpool socialists, Mary and Hugh Bamber. Her father was a book-binder and guillotine worker at one of the Liverpool newsagents, and her mother was a local trade union organiser. Bessie's socialist schooling began very early; as a three week old baby her mother took her to meetings where she spoke in her capacity as national organiser of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers. At the age of nine Bessie recited William Morris's *The Coming Day* in the presence of Philip Snowden at a Labour meeting held at Sun Hall. At the age of fifteen she left Anfield Road Council School and began work as a seed packer. Later she 'escaped' to a small draper's shop, and then secured a job in the drapery department at the Co-operative Store in Walton Road.⁶² During the war, Bessie belonged to local pacifist groups. In 1921 she made her first public speech at an unemployment demonstration in the city.

On 9 February 1922 Bessie married John (Jack) Braddock, a skilled railway worker blacklisted for agitating for better wages, whom she had been courting since 1915. The ceremony at Brougham Terrace Registry Office was held during the couples' lunch hour. The same year the Braddocks helped to found a branch of the Communist Party in Liverpool, although their

⁶⁰ Interview with Mr George Melly; George Melly, *Scouse Mouse or I Never Got Over It: An Autobiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), p.5.

⁶¹ *The Times*, 14 November 1970.

association with the movement was brief. The Braddocks lived on Freehold Street in the Fairfield area, at the north end of the city. Having firmly established herself within the local Labour movement during the 1920s, as the 'the spokeswoman of the underdog' Bessie was invited to contest St Anne's ward in the 1930 election, and won.⁶³ Bessie made her presence felt on Council during the 1930s (see Chapter Six).

Ethel Wormald (1901-1993)

Ethel Robinson was born in 1901 at Whitley Bay. She was the fourth of five children born to Newcastle journalist John Robert Robinson and his wife. Ethel was educated at Whitley and Monkseaton High School. After a 'happy and healthy childhood' on the Northumbrian coast, and with the support of a King's Scholarship, she studied French, Latin, and English at Leeds University, where she also gained a teaching qualification.⁶⁴ At university Ethel met Stanley Wormald, an ex-serviceman and 'socialist intellectual' who was six years her senior and then finishing his education.⁶⁵ The couple married in 1923. Stanley's career took them back to Whitley Bay, and then to Hull. In 1926 and 1929 respectively their sons Derek and Michael were born. By 1929 Stanley had been appointed French master at Liverpool Institute and the family was settled in Wavertree, south Liverpool. Their first home was on Hillingdon Road, and they later moved to Prince Alfred Road, near the Bluecoat School.

Finding domesticity and motherhood limiting, Ethel began voluntary work with the PSS. Her father encouraged her to write articles for local magazines and journals. Written under a pseudonym, they were often about family life. She later became interested in the developing Townswomen's Guilds and had become the Liverpool Federation Chairman by 1935. Ethel later admitted that during the 1920s she had 'no political convictions whatsoever' though they were gradually 'sown in' by her husband, who was Chairman of the Liverpool Fabian Society for a time.⁶⁶ Ethel helped her husband in his four unsuccessful Parliamentary election contests, twice for the Wirral and twice for Combined Universities, during the 1930s. She became a member of Liverpool City Council during the 1950s, and in 1967 she was appointed as Liverpool's second

⁶² Jack and Bessie Braddock, *The Braddocks* (London: MacDonald, 1963), p.13.

⁶³ LRO/H920/BRA: Bessie Braddock Collection (hereafter LRO/BRA): cutting *The Illustrated News*, 10 November 1945.

⁶⁴ Wormald Family Papers (hereafter WFP): Ethel Wormald, Notes for a 'Women of the North' Lunch, 1985 (kindly provided by Mrs June Carrington, niece of Mrs Wormald). Telephone interview with Mr Michael Wormald, 10 March 1997.

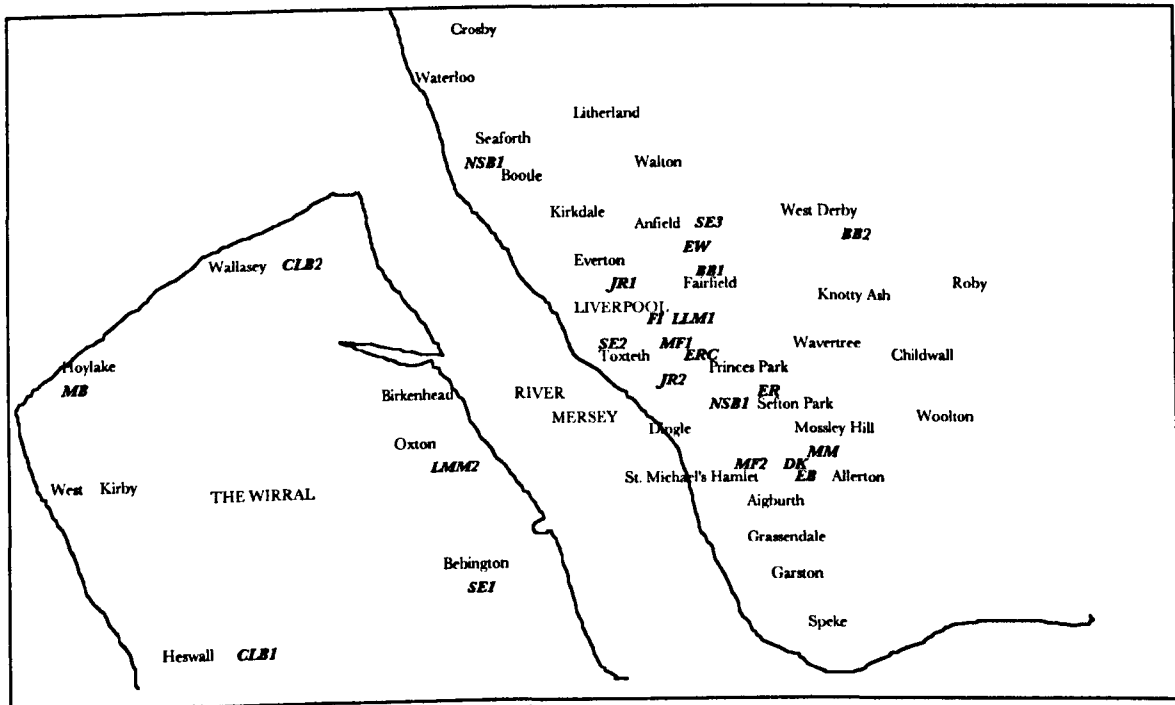
⁶⁵ WFP: D. Ben Rees, 'Obituary for Ethel Wormald', *The Independent*, 27 February 1993.

⁶⁶ WFP: Notes of an interview by Sheena Streater for the *Merseyside Woman's Paper*, 1985.

woman Mayor.

Map 2.i. Locations Where Members of the Sample Group Lived

(Initials indicate addresses of the sample. A number indicates a change of address)



Source: *Kelly's Directory*; *Liverpool Red Book*; Interviews.

II

Analysis of the Biographies I: Varied Backgrounds, Similar Outlooks

These short biographies illustrate that the women in the sample group had a wide variety of educational experiences. Their births spanned the years 1862 to 1901, a period when state schooling was limited and only gradually developed, when a wide variety of private forms of education existed, and when there was considerable debate about the future role of women in society. The ways in which this debate touched their lives depended, to some extent, upon their education. Opportunities for women to extend their education were increasing and this had an important impact upon many women's lives and aspirations. At Mary Mott's school, Thetford, for example, although the girls studied sewing and singing, for the most part they followed the same curriculum as the boys. At Cheltenham Ladies' College in 1883, Nessie Stewart Brown's sister

Hildergarde, who went there shortly before Nessie, smuggled in Olive Schreiner's recently published book, *The Story of an African Farm*. Hildergarde's friend, Annabel Jackson, remembered that at that time 'the whole sky seemed aflame and many of us became violent feminists'.⁶⁷ Higher education encouraged many young women to question their prescribed role and to seek careers at a time when it was still considered inappropriate for a young middle-class woman to work. University experiences nurtured feelings of independence and freedom, not least through the glory of 'a room of one's own'. But they were open only to a privileged minority. Mary Mott recalled that she was the first girl sent from Thetford to pursue her education at Cheltenham and Newnham. Eleanor Rathbone's entering of Somerville College to read Classics marked a new departure for her family, since the Rathbone Non-Conformity had barred earlier generations from attending, and was due partly to her father's respect for her ambition. A few of the women in the sample group (Nessie Stewart Brown, Ellinor Black, and Ethel Warhurst) had even wider educational experiences, finishing their education abroad, or (as in the case of Margaret Fitch) having a home-based education that was, because of the interests and experiences of her parents, both liberating and cosmopolitan. But access to higher or unconventional forms of education does not, either by itself or in part, explain the involvement of all the women in the sample group in public life. Some of them, like Sarah Everton, attended local schools, finished their formal education by their early teens, and went straight from school into low-paid jobs traditionally performed by women (in Jane Raffle's case making hats).

Increasing educational provision for women helped to widen their career opportunities, as the Census returns for the period 1901-1931 show.⁶⁸ As might be expected many of the women who became prominent in public life in Liverpool were employed in the professions. Teaching was the most common form of professional employment for Liverpool women at the start of this period and remained so at the end.⁶⁹ Four of the sixteen women in the sample group trained as teachers, and two of them became headmistresses. But other professional avenues, like the law, medicine, social welfare, and veterinary science, were beginning to open to women. In 1919 the Sexual Disqualification (Removal) Act enabled women like Cicely Leadley Brown to become lawyers. By 1921 women like Frances Ivens accounted for 7.5 per cent of the surgeons and physicians in Liverpool, an increase from 1.5 per cent in 1911. By the same time the category

⁶⁷ Jane Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.91.

⁶⁸ There are problems in using this data as modifications were made to the criteria on each occasion.

⁶⁹ The number of women teachers in Liverpool remained more or less constant between 1901 and 1931; as did the ratio of women to men in the profession, which was around 3:1. Domestic service remained the most common form of occupation for women in Liverpool. In 1921 there were 3,377 female teachers and 16,191 female domestic servants in the city: *Census of England and Wales: Lancashire County, Occupation and Industry Tables* (1901), (1911), (1921), (1931).

'social welfare worker' was included in the re-classification of occupations in the Census; and both Dorothy Keeling and Ellinor Black were beneficiaries of a growing state concern with such work. Paradoxically, some forms of restrictive legislation actually promoted the involvement of professional women in public activity. The marriage bar introduced by local authorities in 1918 and gradually adopted by many employers denied married women the opportunity to follow a professional career and, by doing so, encouraged many trained and motivated women to channel their energies into public life via voluntary endeavour.⁷⁰ Ethel Wormald recalled that it had 'shaped her life' because it prevented her from even beginning the teaching career for which she had spent four years studying.⁷¹

Some of the women engaged in public life lived on private means.⁷² Private incomes provided them with the freedom to develop their own interests, but this could also depend on personal motivation and family consent. When Frances Ivens returned home from school in the late 1880s, after an academic career in which she distinguished herself only in French, and decided to go into medicine, her family apparently 'laughed aloud at the idea of her doing *anything*'.⁷³ But Frances was not the only woman from a wealthy family in the sample group who appears to have been motivated to enter public life partly by the monotony and restrictiveness of her prescribed lifestyle. In 1915 Ellinor Black enrolled at the School of Domestic Economy because she had 'grown tired of the endless round of society gatherings expected of girls in well-to-do Edinburgh families'.⁷⁴ Margaret Beavan's biographer noted that although her parents never wanted her to work, 'she always had in mind that she must "do something", and though there seemed no prospect of her finding an occupation she still held to the idea'.⁷⁵ Where private income, personal motivation, and family blessing co-existed the experience for the fortunate woman could be truly liberating. Both Eleanor Rathbone and Margaret Beavan were able to use their financial freedom to channel their extensive energies into reforming initiatives. Eleanor's initial interest in social work developed into politics, and her horizons, which were initially local, quickly became national and international. Margaret, meanwhile, was able to develop her social

⁷⁰ See the case of Dr Margaret S. Miller, lecturer in Commerce at Liverpool University: Liverpool Daily Post, 1 May 1933.

⁷¹ WFP: Streater, 1985; Ethel Wormald, Notes.

⁷² Few women in the city enjoyed this luxury. In 1901 5,181 women, or 1.55 per cent of the total female population, lived on private means. By 1911 the figure had dropped to 3,403, or 0.88 per cent: Census of England and Wales: Lancashire County (1901), (1911). It is not possible to trace these patterns after 1911 as the re-structuring of Census classification meant that individuals who lived on their own means were merged into a more general class of 'unoccupied'.

⁷³ Crofton, Women of Royaumont, p.238.

⁷⁴ Keeling, Ellinor I. Black, p.5.

⁷⁵ Ireland, Margaret Beavan, p.16.

work in Liverpool to such an extent that she became recognised nationally for her child welfare initiatives.

Many less wealthy women, for whom employment was either impractical or not an option, sought a similar sense of purpose beyond their domestic role. The wife frustrated by the boredom of domestic life has long been an enduring, and much debated, image of the nineteenth century. Her inter-war equal seems to have been the middle-class wife, alone in her suburban home, often experiencing symptoms of loneliness and depression. For some women, this image was a reality. While Ethel Wormald often asserted her belief in the importance of the maternal role, she sought other challenges. When the family returned to Liverpool in 1930, following her husband's year-long teaching exchange in France, she felt 'somewhat lost in such an enormous city and . . . very much the need for an extra stimulus in my life. Having a good deal of time on my hands'.⁷⁶ She soon began voluntary work for the PSS. Another housewife, Sarah Everton, who felt, by contrast, that she had too little time because of a supposedly terminal illness, also looked to the public arena as the sphere in which she could 'make a difference'. Other women had different reasons for seeking their own space beyond family commitments. Jane Raffle's daughter recalled that the WCG provided her mother with a means for escape from the heavy atmosphere of her husband's Presbyterianism. Mr Raffle did not understand Jane's interest in the WCG, he worried about its possible impact on his role at Church, and encouraged the family to pray for their 'wayward' mother while she was at her meetings'.⁷⁷ But Jane refused to allow her family's religious convictions, which had prevented her from actively supporting the campaign for women's suffrage, to quash her WCG interest.

For other women religion provided the inspiration for public activity and ideology. It had played a key role during the nineteenth century in providing a route for women into public life, mainly via charitable enterprise, and this remained the case to some extent during the early twentieth century. Sarah Everton's local Baptist Church, Fabius, where her husband was organist and choir master and her children were raised as members of the Band of Hope, may have been an important influence on her service to the community. Similarly, as a young girl, Margaret Beavan was profoundly influenced by Dr John Watson, minister at Sefton Park Presbyterian Church; the same church attended by the Raffles. While she was at Royal Holloway, Margaret maintained a correspondence with the minister, from whom she 'learned to worship the civic ideal'.⁷⁸ But for some women religion was not a motivating factor. Mary Mott's private

⁷⁶ WFP: Streater, 1985.

⁷⁷ Interview with Mrs Jane Saxby, 16 February 1998.

⁷⁸ Ireland, *Margaret Beavan*, p.17.

correspondence, written during her twenties, details how she had begun to question religion. Although she never left the Church of England, her husband noted that she preferred to focus upon practical matters as religion had no place within her public work.⁷⁹ Eleanor Rathbone said in later life that she was not a churchwoman; and Bessie Braddock declared herself agnostic, as '[she had] no personal need for religion'.⁸⁰ By the inter-war period, although religion remained a guiding force for some women, its power appears to have been much reduced. The reasons for this are complex, but one of them may have been the emerging concept of citizenship, which could cut across religious divisions and provide an alternative form of inspiration for public work.

For Margaret Fitch, however, the concept of citizenship was tied closely with her religion, which meant that there were strong connections between her public activities and her faith. It is very likely that this link existed because of the nature of her religion, which was closely connected in turn with her family background. This religion was Positivism or the Religion of Humanity, devised by its founding father, August Comte, partly as a response to social movements in Europe during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It taught love for fellow men and focused upon Humanity, personified as the 'Great Goddess'. Humanity was the great being which incorporated the highest human qualities, and the highest ideal which could be taken as real. Comte believed that the collective worship of Humanity would inspire zeal for social service and love for fellows which would lead to the regeneration of society.⁸¹ He felt that the crisis which modern society faced stemmed from man's general disagreement on the question of fundamental social maxims. He saw the way forward for society in man's agreement on issues regarding its organisation, in the same way that certain truths within the sciences were agreed. 'Positivists believed that their benevolent instincts were strengthened by exercise in the contemplating of beauty and goodness'.⁸² Their religion encouraged workers and employers to 'consider the best interests of the other, and society itself'.⁸³

It is likely that Margaret's commitment to peace and the rights of individuals, regardless of nationality and class, sprang partly from her connection with Positivism and the Styles. Jane Style was an artist who was deeply concerned about the position of women and about social conditions in Liverpool; Otto Baier, who took over the leadership of the Positivist movement in

⁷⁹ Mary Mott's religious opinions are contained in her letters: Mott, *Lillian Mary Mott*, pp.52-68.

⁸⁰ LRO/BRA: Madeleine Were, 'Ma Bamber's Daughter: An Intimate Portrait of Bessie Braddock', *Lancashire Life*, 10 (2) (1962), pp.49-67.

⁸¹ John Edwin McGee, *A Crusade for Humanity: The History of Organised Positivism in England* (London: Watts & Co, 1931), p.42.

⁸² T. R. Wright, 'Positively Catholic: Malcolm Quinn's Church of Humanity in Newcastle Upon Tyne', *Durham University Journal*, 75 (2) (1983), 11-20 (p.12).

⁸³ McGee, *A Crusade for Humanity*, p.43.

Liverpool from Sydney Style in 1929, wrote of her, 'although no suffragist she was for ever a champion of women's emancipation'.⁸⁴ She was a member of the pro-Boer Committee organised by the Quaker Emily Hobhouse and was joined in this stance by Margaret Fitch (then aged fifteen). British policy during the Boer War was said to have been the first public event to have 'awakened strong feelings in [Margaret]'. The suffering of the Boer women and children herded into British concentration camps 'made it impossible for her henceforth to see in war anything but unmitigated evil, for which no excuse could be found'.⁸⁵ Jane Style's pacifism is also clear from her reaction to the outbreak of the First World War, when she 'feared that we shall never be happy again'. A paper she read to the WILPF, 'War, Its Cause and Prevention', which was printed in pamphlet form, was, according to Otto Baier, the 'clearest possible statement of the Positivist attitude towards the question of peace'.⁸⁶

Margaret Fitch's connections with Positivism and its supporters was probably not the only influence on her public work, belief in equality, social compassion, and pacifism. Others probably sprang from her family background (see Plate 2.iii.). Her father, Edward Nicholson (see Plate 2.iv.), was a keen advocate of sexual equality. Margaret noted that he considered the Burmese 'the most happy and loveable of any people he had met, partly on account of the exceptionally free life of their women'.⁸⁷ He was also a member of the Felibrige, the literary and political union of Provence, 'where the millionaire shipowner would sit next a date seller and a countess next a peasant labourer'.⁸⁸ His experiences as a surgeon in India appears to have influenced his daughter's concern for the plight of Indian women and her distrust of British imperialism, which was a common Positivist position.

The ideas and beliefs that Margaret Fitch was introduced to by her father and the Positivists seem to affected her profoundly, and probably partly explain her commitment to the developing labour movement. Her own unpublished fictional writing shows evidence of her thoughts on class and status. The first act of a play she wrote is set in an artist's studio in Paris.

⁸⁴ She created a Needlewomen's Guild which developed into a trade union; BFP: Otto Baier, 'An Address delivered in the Temple of Humanity, Liverpool on Founder's Day, in Memory of Jane May Style' (1938), p.12. Crompton's death in 1908 deprived Liverpool Positivists of a leader who had 'obtained for the Positivist case a hearing which it was not subsequently able to obtain'. The movement's new leader, Sydney Style, set about developing Positivism 'as a Church' at the new purpose built Temple of Humanity on Upper Parliament Street, erected in 1913. See McGee, A Crusade for Humanity, p.197

⁸⁵ BFP: 'Commemoration for the Life of Margaret Fitch' (1932).

⁸⁶ BFP: Baier, 'An Address', p.13.

⁸⁷ BFP: Fitch, Edward Nicholson, pp.10-11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.15.



Plate 2.iii. Margaret and Arthur Fitch on a 'No More War Demonstration' outside St George's Hall, Liverpool, c.1923.

Plate 2.iv. Margaret Fitch and her son Louis with her parents, Edward and Sophie Nicholson, at Hyères, France, c.1917. (reproduced with the permission of Mrs Teresa Barns).



The artist, Maurice de Barbeville, is painting a young model when they are interrupted by several visitors, including the artist's mother. At the end of the act the young model, Jeanette, becomes tearful at de Barbeville's apparent reluctance to acknowledge their relationship in front of his mother and his friends.⁸⁹ An unpublished novel or story, *Citoyenne Catherine*, written by Margaret and set in France during the years immediately after the Revolution, presents further evidence of her concern for all human suffering regardless of status. Her revolutionary heroine, Catherine, has the child of an aristocratic woman in her charge. The woman writes to Catherine, pleading with her to release the child back into her care. Tormented by her own cruelty, Catherine risks her life by smuggling the woman and child to a place of safety.⁹⁰

Margaret Fitch's example highlights the diversity of influences which were instrumental in drawing the support of quite different women for similar causes. Of the other women in the sample group, only Bessie Braddock fully shared her concerns, and Bessie's background, upbringing, class, and family life were very different. Whereas Margaret, her husband and their three children lived in a large, comfortable house in Falkner Square, their lives made easier by a certain amount of domestic help, Bessie Braddock had no children and lived with her husband in Freehold Street, in the less salubrious area of Fairfield, in a house shared with her parents and her husband's aunt (see Map 2.i.). Although, like Margaret Fitch's parents, Bessie Braddock's mother and father helped to encourage those interests, they were far less wealthy and had horizons that were essentially local. Bessie was also motivated by her memory of the terrible hardships experienced by the unemployed in Liverpool during the winter of 1906-1907.⁹¹ She recalled them queuing for soup by the steps of St George's Hall, 'their faces white with malnutrition and cold, [standing] out tiny and perishable against the black, enduring stone buildings'.⁹² Whereas the comparatively privileged position of the Fitch family enabled them to help her understand suffering on an international scale and to consider different cultural perspectives on equality, Bessie's helped to open her eyes to the suffering on the streets of her own city. Nevertheless, the difference between the influences on Bessie's and Margaret's public work should not be exaggerated. Margaret's journeys into the centre of Liverpool from her homes at St Michael's Hamlet, and later Grassendale, would have taken her through the considerable poverty which existed on the outskirts of the city; Bessie's pacifism is likely to have owed at least something to her undoubted knowledge of global events such as the First World War; and both women derived some of their inspiration from their husbands. Ultimately, in spite of quite considerable

⁸⁹ BFP: Margaret Fitch, unpublished play (n. d.).

⁹⁰ BFP, Margaret Fitch, *Citoyenne Catherine*, unpublished novel (n. d.).

⁹¹ Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.1.

differences in background and inspiration, both women arrived at similar conclusions about the ills and injustices of the world around them, and possibly viewed their membership of the Labour movement as a positive step towards combating them. Their examples are, perhaps, the best within the sample group of women which show that some of the women who became active in public life in Liverpool between the wars shared common interests and concerns despite significant differences in their upbringing, class, religion, politics, and family relationships.

III

Analysis of the Biographies II: Private and Family Life

During the inter-war period society was still in the process of undergoing 'profound change in relations between the sexes'.⁹³ Towards the end of the nineteenth century the ideas of sexologists had fuelled intellectual debate, and the publication of Marie Stopes' *Married Love* in 1918 brought such debate into the lives of ordinary people. By the end of the 1920s Liverpool women's organisations were discussing issues such as eugenics and birth control, and in 1926 Mary Mott was instrumental in setting up a family planning clinic in the city. Although the maternal role was perceived as central to the family life and heralded as the key to stability, increasing knowledge of birth control allied with changes in the law enabled women to enjoy a more assertive role within marriage. Nevertheless, as Judy Giles has suggested, 'domesticity, the home, housework and "private" life, shaped the day to day existence of most women and, despite expanding employment opportunities, continued to be the arena in which women of all classes sought to define themselves, whether as wife, mother, housewife, servant or mistress'.⁹⁴ The extent to which women could immerse themselves in public life continued to depend to a considerable extent upon their domestic circumstances. Here is another area of investigation which the lives of the sample group of women considered above can assist us to explore. They help us to address important questions regarding the domestic experience of women engaged in public life, including the influence or impact of marriage, the extent of support from family and friends, and the relationship between public activity and the ability to employ domestic help. It is appropriate, therefore, that half of the women in the sample group were married and half remained single; though one, Frances Ivens, married much later in life.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Leila J. Rupp, 'Sexuality and Politics in the Early Twentieth Century: The Case of the International Women's Movement', *Feminist Studies*, 23 (3) (1997), 577-605 (p.598).

Before embarking upon this analysis it is pertinent to discuss the role of, and contemporary attitudes towards, unmarried women in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, especially as there was a natural gender imbalance within the population.⁹⁵ In this period things were changing, as Beatrice Webb was aware in 1924 when she noted in her diary that the Labour MP Susan Lawrence 'belonged to the old order of irreproachable female celibates, which used to be an important caste in Victorian days but has no votaries among the younger generation'.⁹⁶ The element of pity for single women (inspired by the popular image of the financially vulnerable spinster) was declining as an increasing number of them began, or were seen as, replicating the independent new woman typified by George Gissing's Rhoda Nunn in the *Odd Women*.⁹⁷ The growing popular perception of strong, assertive, independent single women encouraged opposition and suspicion, especially during the post-war backlash against the women's movement. As Martha Vicinus has suggested, 'the very success of single women in public life threatened the status quo; independent women were accused of sex hatred and pilloried for preferring their own sex to men'.⁹⁸ Even 'active women' could be guilty of fuelling the new popular perceptions of single women.⁹⁹ The attachment of the label 'deviant' to single women stemmed from the organisation of society upon heterosexual relations, and the centrality of the family to post-war reconstruction policies. Single women were perceived as denying their sexual and maternal needs; and the growing recognition of the possibility of same-sex relations between women did little to help their image. While debate about homosexuality had been limited within the public domain, the banning of Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, prompted discussion about women's sexuality. But lesbianism was not given a sympathetic press during the 1920s, and in 1921 there was an attempt to pass an amendment to

⁹⁴ Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p.1.

⁹⁵ In 1921 there were 1176 women to every 1000 men in the age group 20-24, but the *Daily Mail's* 'surplus girls' were not a new phenomenon. Emigration possibilities and men's increasing reluctance to marry early meant that during the late nineteenth century many women remained single. This 'problem' had been exacerbated by the loss of male life during the First World War. In Liverpool, though women outnumbered men the difference was not startling. The *Daily Mail* used the phrase 'surplus girls' after 1919: Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.77. In 1911 Liverpool's female population accounted for 52% of the total (about 21,880 more women than men). In 1931 this had risen to 53% (about 44,772 more women): *Census of England and Wales: County of Lancashire*, Population Tables (1911), (1931).

⁹⁶ Quoted by Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p.139.

⁹⁷ George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (London: Virago, 1980) [f.p. 1893].

⁹⁸ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.285.

⁹⁹ As in 1912, when the spinster was laid open to a vicious attack on the pages of the *Freewoman*, and during the 1920s in Liverpool when the National Union of Women Workers circulated leaflets to recruit women patrols which explained that 'vinegary spinsters' were not required: Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality c1850-1940* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), pp.89-93; LRO/ACC/977: Josephine Legge Collection (file containing unlisted material): Women Patrols

the Criminal Law Amendment Bill which would have made it illegal. During the discussion of this amendment it was suggested that the lesbian was deviant, a lunatic 'who ought to be incarcerated or possibly incur the death penalty so that she might be eliminated from society'.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, the amendment was suppressed, but only because it was perceived as having the capacity to promote a 'new' idea. Disapproval of lesbian relationships was not exclusive to those outside women's networks, and may have been partly due to generational differences.¹⁰¹ Although women had enjoyed similar relationships by another name, Sheila Jeffreys suggests that by the late 1920s a 'distinction had been clearly drawn' which meant that these women were now on the 'edge of a precipice which might plunge them into the stigmatised world of the lesbian'.¹⁰²

For many single women active during the inter-war period the decision to remain single was influenced by career ambitions, as marriage often meant the end of any prospect of paid employment. When Mary Mott's former Principal at Cheltenham Ladies' College, Dorothea Beale, heard that Mary was about to marry, she declared that she 'felt inclined to forbid the banns as I wanted her for myself'.¹⁰³ The marriage bar meant that Ethel Wormald's marriage, almost twenty years later, compelled her to abandon her teaching career before it began; and the scholarship awarding body, which had funded her teacher-training, threatened her with a demand for repayment.¹⁰⁴ For both these women, marriage meant putting aside their career ambitions in favour of those of their husbands. Although both subsequently re-channelled their energies into public life via voluntary work, Ethel did so only after spending the later 1920s bringing up her two boys and received little support from her husband, who approved of women's public activity but was not keen for his wife to become involved.

The difficulties confronting even leading women activists in balancing domestic and public activities are nowhere better illustrated than in Vera Brittain's account of her attendance (with Winifred Holtby) of the unveiling of a statue for Mrs Pankhurst in Victoria Tower Gardens, Westminster, in March 1930. Then pregnant with her second child, Brittain gladly accepted Cicely Hamilton's offer of her seat in the enclosure. As a result she found herself amusing Sylvia Pankhurst's young son, John, who was placed unceremoniously on her lap while his mother met

Recruitment Leaflet (n.d. c.1915).

¹⁰⁰ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.79.

¹⁰¹ During the inter-war period lesbian couples within the international women's movement were often repudiated by their colleagues. For some of the 'tensions that simmered beneath the seemingly placid surface of the early twentieth-century international women's organisations', see Rupp, 'Sexuality and Politics', 577-607.

¹⁰² Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930* (London: Pandora Press, 1985), pp.126-27.

¹⁰³ Mott, *Lillian Mary Mott*, p.48.

¹⁰⁴ Telephone interview with Mr Michael Wormald, 10 March 1997.

old friends. Brittain recalled that,

throughout the speech I managed to keep the adaptable child amused by drawing a series of 'catties'. My subsequent recollection of the eulogy pronounced by Mr Baldwin on Mrs Pankhurst were somewhat vague, but I felt that I had contributed my quota to the success of the ceremony.¹⁰⁵

Many other active women had to perform a similar balancing act, whether they were workers or family women; and not all of them were as fortunate as Vera Brittain in having permanent, and apparently extremely adaptable, domestic help. The role of wife and mother often took precedence over public activities. This can be seen again in the sample group of women in the case of Margaret Fitch who, in 1930, left her Liverpool home and commitments and moved to London to ensure that her son, Louis, had a stable home-life while he attended University. Her husband Arthur, meanwhile, maintained his practice on Rodney Street, living in a flat above it during the week and joining the rest of the family at weekends. Although Margaret readily became involved with Labour and WILPF interests in Hampstead, taking part in discussions for the creation of a Labour Women's Section, and serving as secretary of the Hampstead branch of the League of Nation's Union, her family responsibilities remained her primary concern. In a tribute following her death, the Hampstead Labour Party secretary noted that,

She had not long moved from Liverpool to Hampstead, and her other work and her domestic duties had not allowed her to take a very large share in the Party's activities hitherto. But when I took over the secretaryship of the Party she wrote to me (and she repeated it to me many times after): 'Don't hesitate to ask me to do anything I can to help the Party'.¹⁰⁶

The degree of difficulty in juggling public activities and family life depended very much on individual circumstances, including the extent of domestic help available. Mary Mott was unable to undertake war work because she did not have 'much time for anything but running the house' as she only had 'a young girl to assist'.¹⁰⁷ Even when they had such assistance publicly active women might be wary of being viewed as neglectful of their domestic duties. Sensitivity about this

¹⁰⁵ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Experience: An Autobiographical Story of the Years 1925-1950* (London: Fontana in association with Virago, 1980) [f.p. 1957], p.61.

¹⁰⁶ BFP: cutting: H.C.B., 'Margaret Fitch: A Noble Soul Passes', 20 September 1932.

¹⁰⁷ Mott, *Lillian Mary Mott*, p.91.

is clear from Nessie Stewart Brown's statements in 1895 that the lives of active women 'will bear the utmost scrutiny', whereas inactive women were 'butterfly women . . . who lead objectless lives. They think there is no harm in idling away all the morning, spending all afternoon in society calls; returning home to dress, then out again . . . I should say that was neglect of one's home life decidedly.'¹⁰⁸ Bessie Braddock's mother, Mary Bamber, was heckled on one occasion at a meeting at the docks by men who challenged her to go home and wash her dirty kids.¹⁰⁹

Families like the Motts and the Stewart Browns lived comfortably on, what Mary Stocks has termed, 'a cushion of domestic service'.¹¹⁰ During the early 1920s, while they were living in Falkner Square, the Fitch family enjoyed the services of a cook and a housemaid.¹¹¹ A 'cushion' of three servants (a cook, general maid, and nanny) must have played an important part in enabling Maud Melly to participate in local dramatic ventures and devote three days a week to PSS volunteer work. This is reinforced by the recollection of Maud's son, George, of what occurred when the 'cushion' disappeared on the outbreak of the Second World War. On the morning of the evacuation of the Melly children to Shropshire, Maud, who had never had to boil an egg, set about cooking the breakfast, and domestic crisis erupted when the un-pricked sausages exploded under the grill.¹¹²

But if the luxury of domestic assistance helped some of the women in the sample group to engage in public activity, other women in the group managed to do so without it. Several of them were part of families that had only limited domestic assistance or no assistance at all. Apart from a young girl who helped on Saturdays, Jane Raffle had no domestic help during the week; though in her early married life (being unable to cook) meals were prepared for her by an aunt who lived next door, and by the time Jane became involved in the WCG only two of her five children were still living at home.¹¹³ Bessie Braddock's mother, Mary Bamber, had often to rely on the help of a neighbour with her children and clearly imbued her daughter with a commitment to domesticity,

¹⁰⁸ Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', p.174.

¹⁰⁹ Toole, Bessie Braddock, p.17.

¹¹⁰ Mary Stocks, My commonplace Book (London: Peter Davies, 1970), p.2.

¹¹¹ Their second home at St. Michaels, below Aigburth Vale, was sufficient only to accommodate the family. When they moved to Mersey Avenue, between Aigburth and Grassendale, in the late 1920s they began to take German students 'en famille' who provided some domestic help, though Margaret still did the cooking: Interview with Mrs Teresa Barns, 12 April 1997.

¹¹² Interview with Mr George Melly. Patterns of domestic service were changing as a result of shifting patterns of employment and increasing aspirations on the part of young women, who began to choose factory and office jobs offering more money and freedom. The number of female domestic servants in Liverpool in 1931 was 14,277. The numbers had been declining steadily from 23,069 in 1901, to 16,191 in 1921: Census of England and Wales, Lancashire County Occupation Tables (1901), (1921), (1931). The twenty-year gap until the next census makes it more difficult to consider how the pattern changed during the 1930s.

¹¹³ Interview with Mrs Jane Saxby, 16 February 1998.

since there was apparently 'no job in the home that Bessie could not tackle'.¹¹⁴ Indeed, even after becoming active in public life Bessie took pride in her ability to keep house for four people. She took responsibility for the cooking, shopping, and washing, and often described 'house-keeping' as a hobby in interviews.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Ethel Wormald, who did not become active in public work until the 1930s when her children were older, believed that 'a woman's place is in the home, in the special sense that her family must be her first responsibility, and that their need of help and counsel continues indefinitely'; though her side-line career as a free-lance columnist for local papers and journals provided Ethel with the luxury to assert such a view.¹¹⁶ Sarah Everton relied on the support of her family in attempting to balance their needs with her organisational commitments, but had to carefully organise shopping and meals in advance of her trips to London for NUSEC conferences.¹¹⁷

Domesticity was not the special reserve of married women. Cicely Leadley Brown appears to have been particularly 'houseproud'. In 1951 the *Liverpolitan* exclaimed that 'like many other clever women, Miss Leadley Brown is domesticated and runs her flat entirely herself and considers experimental cooking one of her hobbies; she is very fond of music, reading and gardening'.¹¹⁸ In much the same way, social science lecturer, Ellinor Black, 'took great pride and pleasure in equipping and maintaining' the homes she and Dorothy Keeling shared in Liverpool and Sheffield. Dorothy recalled that she 'achieved high standards in both cooking and housework, always insisting on having the best of equipment'.¹¹⁹ Their situation was not unusual. Often when women shared homes, one of them took the major responsibility for domestic duties. Mary Stocks' portrait of the Rathbone-Macadam partnership suggests that Macadam took on the caring role, releasing Rathbone for her political activities. This emphasis upon high standards of homecare is interesting, especially as women who combined domestic and public commitments were frequently presented in contemporary sources as particularly successful.

In addition to the amount of domestic service available to them, the involvement of women in the sample group in public life was also affected by the degree of support offered by husbands, partners, and friends. In February 1931 an article appeared, in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, which argued that Margaret Beavan's Mayoralty was an example to feminists that women could make their own success. It alluded to her single status with the suggestion that,

¹¹⁴ Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.21.

¹¹⁵ LRO/BRA: *Current Biography*, July 1957.

¹¹⁶ *Liverpolitan*, April 1951, p.3.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Mr John A. Everton.

¹¹⁸ *Liverpolitan*, November 1951, p.2.

¹¹⁹ Keeling, *Ellinor I. Black*, p.10.

It may have been an advantage to Miss Beavan that, being single, she was able to give an undivided mind to her civic duties. On the other hand she had no husband to stand behind her and help. What she did, she did by herself.¹²⁰

During her Mayoralty Beavan was disadvantaged because she had no equivalent of a 'Lady Mayoress' to provide emotional and practical support.¹²¹ She advised some young, female Salvation Army emigrants to marry, joking that '[i]t is alright being a spinster when you are young, but when you are getting on in years you want a man to look after you'.¹²² For women who sought to play a public role the support of an understanding partner was sometimes vital. The impact which an unsupportive partner could have upon a woman's public activity varied according to class and the work in which the woman was involved. Manchester Councillor Hannah Mitchell declared that she soon realised that 'married life is fatal to ambition, either in men or women perhaps, but doubly so for women . . . the most sympathetic man can never be made to understand that meals do not come up through the table-cloth, but have to be planned, bought and cooked'.¹²³ Jane Raffle was not alone in having a partner who did not understand, or did not fully approve of, her activities. Ethel Wormald's husband, Stanley, felt more comfortable when his wife maintained a discreet presence behind the scenes, and it was only after his death in 1951 that Ethel fully blossomed as a public figure.¹²⁴ Bessie Braddock was more fortunate because she married a man who shared her political philosophy and commitment to action. Similarly, Arthur and Margaret Fitch shared a passionate commitment to peace initiatives. In 1923 they travelled to Germany to meet WILPF friends. Arthur also appears to have been an important figure in the main network of active women with which his wife was involved.¹²⁵ Another married couple, the Stewart-Browns, shared a commitment to the Liberal Party. Although C. F. Mott was not actively involved in his wife's public interests, he seems to have supported her. After she died, he compiled a biography of her in which he carefully detailed the full extent of her public interests.¹²⁶ Shared commitment, or at least understanding of interests, seems to have been an important aspect of some of these marriages, as it was in a number of high-profile partnerships

¹²⁰ LRO/M920/MBE: Margaret Beavan Collection (hereafter LRO/MBE), press cuttings, Yorkshire Evening Post, 23 February 1932.

¹²¹ Her sister, Jessie, helped out on some occasions.

¹²² Liverpool Echo, 8 October 1928.

¹²³ Hannah Mitchell, The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell: Suffragette and Rebel, ed. by Geoffrey Mitchell (London: Virago, 1977), pp.112-13.

¹²⁴ Telephone interview with Mr Michael Wormald, 10 March 1997.

¹²⁵ Interview with Mrs Teresa Barns, 12 April 1997.

such as the Webbs, the Pethick-Lawrences, and the Corbett-Ashbys.

Other women discovered that companionship with like-minded women provided the rich, nurturing environment for engagement in public work. As Leila Rupp notes 'scholarship has long emphasised the importance of supportive relationships among women for the strength of the women's movement'.¹²⁷ For Cicely Hamilton, the shared home of her two closest suffrage associates, Christopher St John and Edy Craig, and their friend Clare Atwood in Kent was 'a place of escape from the pressures of work and London'.¹²⁸ Both before and during her marriage, Vera Brittain shared a London flat with Winifred Holtby. The friendship of Elizabeth Macadam was clearly important to Eleanor Rathbone's public career, as Macadam offered 'an affirming mirror, a confirmation that the life of an independent woman could be both active and emotionally fulfilling'.¹²⁹ It is also likely that Essie Ruth Conway obtained support and encouragement from her friend Ada Booth, with whom she shared her Hartington Road home. Dorothy Keeling and Ellinor Black became acquainted through their work and, because it was convenient for them, shared a flat in south Liverpool and, later, a home in Sheffield.¹³⁰ Keeling's funeral tribute to Black suggests the depth of a friendship which lasted over thirty years. Black had been due to retire in 1956 and Keeling recalled, 'I had so hoped that she would have time to develop some of the gifts and realise some of the dreams which only I knew anything about'.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Mott, Lillian Mary Mott.

¹²⁷ Rupp, 'Sexuality and Politics', p.578.

¹²⁸ Whitelaw, Cicely Hamilton, p.79.

¹²⁹ Susan Pedersen, 'Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946): The Victorian Family Under the Daughter's Eye', in After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain, ed. by Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.105-18 (p.116).

¹³⁰ Ellinor had previously shared the flat with another friend. When the friend left Liverpool Ellinor was reluctant to give up her first real home and invited Dorothy to join her there: Keeling, Ellinor I. Black, p.6. The two were briefly separated during the Second World War. In 1949 Ellinor was appointed as the director of the new School of Social Science at Sheffield University. Dorothy followed her there, returning to Liverpool six years later, after her friend's death: Keeling, The Crowded Stairs, p.153.

¹³¹ Keeling, Ellinor I. Black, p.13. Relationships like these have been laid open to varying interpretations. There is no evidence to suggest that the relationships between any of these Liverpool women went beyond friendship and companionship. Their private papers, potentially the most likely form of evidence to throw light on the issue, are lacking. As Lis Whitelaw recently pointed out, it is ironic that 'absence of evidence to the contrary is often adduced to "prove" that someone was heterosexual whereas lack of any evidence of heterosexual relationships is not considered enough to prove that a woman was a lesbian': Whitelaw, Cicely Hamilton, p.110. For problems of evidence generally, see also Jackson, The Real Facts of Life, p. 16. Ann Ferguson has pointed out that 'we need . . . a clear understanding of what is involved in the concept *lesbian* so as to be able to identify such women'. Her work makes it clear that definitions ought to be more fluid in order to account for the sheer variety of women's lifestyles. Ferguson has written of lesbianism as a choice of 'independent women and feminists who formed their own "urban subcultures" as an escape from the new, mystified form of patriarchal dominance that developed in the late 1920s: the companionate nuclear family'. This raises the question of whether lesbian partnerships were a result of emotional responses or motivated by a reaction against marriage and the implications of all that a relationship with a man might entail. See Ann Ferguson, 'Patriarchy, Sexual Identity, and the Sexual Revolution', Signs: Journal of

Support for public activity could also come from co-habiting sisters, especially as it was not uncommon - and often financially sensible - for unmarried sisters to remain living together. Margaret Beavan lived with her sister, Jessie, a key figure in Liverpool WCA, in Hoylake, and Ethel Warhurst shared a home with her sister in Anfield.

IV

Analysis of the Biographies III: Association and Friendship

The tracing of women's organisational and personal networks is a useful instrument for developing an understanding the involvement of women in public life in this period, as some studies of the suffrage campaign have shown.¹³² Liz Stanley used this method when exploring the life of Olive Schreiner, who 'lived deeply embedded in overlapping networks of feminist friendship', and discovered that via personal relations women 'often healed organisational divisions by forming connections across formal lines of separation'.¹³³ Several members of the sample group of women from Liverpool co-operated in a network of organisations and initiatives, at the centre of which was the Liverpool Council of Women Citizens (LCWC), which provided an umbrella for the main women's organisations in the city. This network brought together women of different political, religious, and class affiliations, on the basis of common aims and objectives, and by doing so helped to develop more personal contacts between them. But within these personal networks important sub-networks seem to have existed which were strongly influenced by shared culture.

The evidence from the sample group of women suggests that close friendships were much more likely to develop among those women who shared a similar status and lifestyle. Although the lack of private papers makes the drawing of firm conclusions difficult, the evidence, as it stands, suggests that Eleanor Rathbone, Mary Mott, Cicely Leadley Brown, Margaret Fitch and Nessie Stewart Brown formed one such sub-network. This was probably partly the product of geography

Women in Culture and Society, 7 (1) (1981), 158-72, (pp.159-60, 170).

¹³² A network is defined here as the relations or links between a group of individuals who co-operate as a result of sharing similar ideas or objectives. Often such networks are created around organisations, but may equally refer to individuals who share political or religious affiliation. On another level, a network may refer to a friendship circle. Though such networks may also stem from acknowledgement of shared aims, and may exist within organisations, they are more usually based upon shared values or class. Leonore Davidoff's work on nineteenth century society suggests the levels and ways in which various networks could operate: Davidoff, *The Best Circles*.

¹³³ Liz Stanley, 'Moments of Writing: Is there a Feminist Auto/Biography?', *Gender and History*, 2 (1) (1990), 58-67, (p.62).

and social status, since most of these women lived in the wealthier suburbs of south Liverpool (see Map. 2.i.). It may also have owed something to former suffrage connections, and to involvement in the WILPF and other bodies represented on the LCWC. Rathbone, Stewart Brown and Leadley Brown had all been active in the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society, and Mott also had connections with the suffrage movement. Although in most cases it is difficult to determine whether the friendships pre-dated common involvement in women's organisations, that between Margaret Fitch and Eleanor Rathbone stemmed partly from an old family connection between the Rathbones and the Nicholsons, who moved in similar social circles. It was probably also enriched by the two women's shared interests, most particularly peace initiatives and the plight of individuals in other nations. Contact between them was both personal and activity-related. The Fitch family often took holidays at the Rathbones' cottage at Formby, and when Eleanor was elected to Parliament in 1929 Margaret and her daughter Teresa took tea at the House of Commons with the new Independent MP¹³⁴ These links were further strengthened by the presence of Arthur Fitch at the spearhead of many of the ventures which Eleanor helped to organise in Liverpool during the 1920s, and by his support for her political career.¹³⁵

The Fitch family and the Rathbones were members of an elite circle of families in Liverpool which had been involved in public life in the nineteenth century and continued to be so in the twentieth, around which other networks of public activists were formed and revolved. The Muspratts' claim to membership of this elite circle was later, though no less real, than the Rathbones'. Both Dr Muspratt and William Rathbone VI had played a role in the development of Liverpool University. The position of Margaret Fitch's father as medical Superintendent of the Ocean Steamship Co. and (later) the Booth Shipping Line had brought him into close contact with Alfred and Philip Holt, and the Booths.¹³⁶ Family connections also existed between Mary Mott and Cicely Leadley Brown. Mott's father, C. H. Reynolds, was a merchant. Her parents had settled in Liverpool during their early married life, from which time Mrs Reynolds had kept their callers' book. When the Motts came to Liverpool, Mary recognised her friends' family names, like the Leadley Browns, recorded in her mother's book.¹³⁷ These women made marriages which confirmed their status within these circles. Egerton Stewart Brown was a member of a prominent banking family, and later practised law. Arthur Fitch gained an excellent reputation for his innovative medical research, and C. F. Mott was Liverpool's Director of Education. The position of Cicely Leadley Brown, a barrister and a single woman, was perhaps more ambiguous,

¹³⁴ Interview with Mrs Teresa Barns, 12 April 1997.

¹³⁵ Liverpool University Special Collections: RP/XIV: Rathbone Papers, Election programmes.

¹³⁶ BFP: Fitch, Edward Nicholson, p.12.

as she worked in the Chambers of Egerton Stewart-Brown. The Fitch children nicknamed her 'Deadly-Leadley', suggesting that she was well-known in their household.¹³⁸

The networks discussed above cut across religious and political lines. Margaret Fitch was a committed Labour woman, a peace campaigner and a Positivist. Eleanor Rathbone and Nessie Stewart Brown came from Liberal Unitarian backgrounds, although Rathbone was herself an Independent politically and the Church played no role in her life. Cicely Leadley Brown was an Anglican Conservative. But within the networks there could be tensions of other kinds. In a letter to her friend and former Liverpool colleague Annie Caton (a writer), written in 1951, Mary Mott expressed her feelings about the impact of Eleanor Rathbone's part-time presence in Liverpool on the WCA. She wrote 'E.F.R was always in my day in Liverpool an absentee chief and in my opinion that had very bad results. E.E. [Edith Eskrigge] should have been Chairman and supreme from early days, not in any relationship which involved subordination to E.F.R'.¹³⁹

Although evidence for Liverpool indicates that the impact of class as a determining factor in providing women with opportunities for joining organisations and for voluntary endeavour was decreasing after 1918, it is clear that it remained important in determining leadership and committee membership. The 'general' members of the LCWC provided the outer threads of its web, joined together by shared objectives which appear to have cut cross lines of class and religion. Nearer the middle of the web the threads became much tighter, especially among a group of elite families, as a result of a shared culture.¹⁴⁰ But these tighter networks remained linked to the wider web, and to broader groups. Sarah Everton was well acquainted with Eleanor Rathbone, probably as a result of co-operation on matters concerning Anfield WCA and the Working Women's Holiday Association.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Maud Isaac became attached to Liverpool's commercial and directorial elite by her marriage to F. H. (Tom) Melly. Although she carried on the traditional Melly commitment to philanthropy with her PSS work, her own interests in drama and art meant that she was a member of an alternative network centred around the Sandon

¹³⁷ Mott, *Lillian Mary Mott*, p.7.

¹³⁸ Interview with Mrs Teresa Barns, Liverpool, 17 April 1997.

¹³⁹ Mott, *Lillian Mary Mott*, p.125. Whether Mary felt the same at the time of Eleanor's leadership is impossible to determine. It is interesting that Krista Cowman has argued that Eleanor's leadership maintained the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society as a middle-class group as a result of her views on style of action and direction: "'Engendering Citizenship": The Political Involvement of Women on Merseyside, 1890-1920', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1994), p.186.

¹⁴⁰ Dorothy Keeling became an intimate friend of Mary Mott as a result of their shared interests. Eleanor Rathbone and Keeling also met regularly on a professional basis, and they had mutual friends; but whether they ever became close is questionable. Similarly, the Black/Keeling friendship was initially based upon their shared professional interest in social work. Although Keeling was a leading member of the WCA and took an active role in the campaign for women police, no evidence has been found indicating that Black joined her in these initiatives.

Studios and the local art scene. In this, and in other ways, Maud was quite different from some of the other women in the sample group. Her son remembers her as a thoroughly modern woman whose enthusiasm for the new age was reflected in her home and her dress, her attitudes, and by the way in which she embraced the Liverpool arts scene.¹⁴² Maud herself recalled the excitement which she had felt as a young woman clearly on the threshold of new freedoms:

Just before the twenties I was allowed to go to a dance at the Sandon, the only dance without chaperones! Everyone was in fancy dress and, to my unsophisticated outlook, it was Bohemia. I remember asking who was a very young, beautiful girl in a Spanish shawl - later to become a great friend - Maud Budden. The first cabaret I saw there was a great thrill, but all I remember was the Tango, then thought to be very daring.¹⁴³

Maud's close friends were dancers and artists. She was particularly close to the popular inter-war journalist Mary Ventriss and the writer Maud Budden, wife of Liverpool University's Professor of Architecture. This world offered Maud a sense of liberty. Maud Budden's dramas, in which she often acted, were recognised for their satirical form of social commentary. An article in the *Liverpolitan* in 1933 referred to Maud's roles 'in many a Sandon cabaret and Southern Murmurs as a most plausible mimic of the "so-refined" bourgeois of Mossley Hill, and the inanities of polite and impolite society, with its back parlours, shawls and excessive interest in the more unsavoury illnesses'.¹⁴⁴ Though not the youngest woman in this sample, Maud appears to belong to a new, or different, generation. The juxtaposition of her PSS work and dramatic interests may appear on the surface quite diverse, but both roles offered a similar sense of purpose and empowerment outside of the home.

The LCWC web of associations which has been described above was neither self-contained, nor complete, nor uniform. Some parts of it were not connected, or connected only loosely, with others. While Maud Melly appears to have embraced all that was new, Margaret Beavan found it more difficult to adapt to change after 1918, most especially those developments in the field of welfare and charity.¹⁴⁵ Margaret Beavan's close allies included the Muspratts and the Salvidges; in February 1931 Lady Helena Muspratt mourned 'the passing of a saint'.¹⁴⁶ In

¹⁴¹ Mr John A. Everton confirmed that his mother knew Eleanor Rathbone: Interview, 15 August 1996.

¹⁴² Melly, *Scouse Mouse*; R. F. Bisson has examined the Liverpool art scene: *The Sandon Studios and the Arts* (Liverpool: Parry Books Ltd, 1965).

¹⁴³ Bisson, *The Sandon Studios*, p.116.

¹⁴⁴ 'These Words are a Woman's', *Liverpolitan*, May 1933, p.20.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Margaret Simey, Liverpool, 25 November 1997.

¹⁴⁶ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 24 February 1931.

contrast, her sister Jessie, with whom she lived, was an active WCA leader and worked regularly with the Rathbone circle. Margaret Beavan had started out on a traditional path at the Victoria Settlement. It was after she created her own organisation that her views appear to have developed quite out of tempo with those of the women at the centre of the LCWC circle. Tensions often rose to the surface. In the early 1920s she became embroiled in public debate with Eleanor Rathbone over the WCA's proposed Working Women's Holiday Scheme.¹⁴⁷ Margaret's CWA had already organised a scheme for Tired Mothers in 1920. There is clear disapproval in her correspondence on the question of the WCA's proposed new scheme, dressed up as worries about overlap and wasting of resources. Eleanor Rathbone noted that the CWA was a children's organisation, and asked 'why should her great and admirable organisation try to *crab* this effort to meet a need which clearly lies outside their province?'¹⁴⁸ By March 1927, Margaret was also unhappy with the PSS's role, recording in her diary that although its secretary, Dorothy Keeling, was a 'very sincere worker' when she first came to Liverpool she had 'simply been spoiled by success'.¹⁴⁹ Dissension continued into 1928 when, during her mayoral year, Margaret incurred the wrath of the Liverpool Labour Party by organising a trip to Italy. When she met Mussolini, she not only expressed her admiration for his work but gave him Liverpool's blessing and, it was claimed, invited him back to the city. Nessie Stewart Brown publicly expressed her disapproval of the Lady Mayor's misreading of the situation.¹⁵⁰

The women at the very centre of the LCWC web in the sample group shared similar concerns and a similar cultural background. Their status was shared by other women who occupied a similar position in terms of politics or family influence, such as Lady Muspratt (Nessie Stewart Brown's sister-in-law). The women in this web shared an understanding of the concept of citizenship, perceiving it as a two-way process. They recognised the rights of individuals in relation to the state, but they also wanted women to fulfil their potential as citizens. As the previous chapter showed, as the leading members of organisations under the umbrella of the LCWC these women used the language of citizenship to encourage wider female participation in public activity.

¹⁴⁷ LRO/M364/CWA/7/3: press cuttings.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. *Daily Post*, 13 April 1926, cutting of Eleanor Rathbone letter.

¹⁴⁹ LRO/CWA/7/8: Diary of Margaret Beavan, 11 April 1927.

Conclusion

Although this chapter has focused upon the lives of a small sample of women, the evidence for which is uneven and fragmentary, it still reveals much about the nature of women's involvement in public activity in Liverpool between the wars. An investigation of the 'real' or 'private' lives of individual women engaged in local public work adds an important dimension to the study of women's participation in this work more generally; not least because there is a danger that the work of locally active women might not be accorded its due significance, and that the women themselves might easily be ignored as faceless campaigners or names on a committee list. At a basic level, the study of the locally active women of Liverpool in the sample group analysed above shows how richly varied the women in the group were in terms of their social status, education, religion, economic circumstances, their personal circumstances, beliefs, and interests, and their expectations, inspirations, and associations. The widening opportunities for less well off women contributed to, but do not entirely explain, this diversity, because there were distinct differences in the experiences and interests of the middle- and upper-class members of the sample group; something which reflects the rich variety of forces which inspired it. These included the basic desire of one woman for personal space beyond the family, the chance of another to 'make a difference' before (what she wrongly believed to be) her impending death, and the religious convictions of a third inspired by a philosophy rooted in French Revolutionary ideas. But what many of the women in the sample group, both wealthy and poorer (particularly those involved with the WCA and the LCWC) shared was a sense of purpose and citizenship, and a desire to contribute as such to the community or the public domain. Some of the women in the sample group can reasonably be described as deeply committed local crusaders, a few of whom also achieved national prominence. Although some of the other less prominent women did not orchestrate initiatives or chair committees, they attended the meetings, supported the campaigns, and gave their time as volunteers. The commitment of all these women to public activities played an important role in helping to override differences which were rooted in their personal lives. The networks built around the LCWC indicate that the unifying bond of citizenship meant that women's public activities often bridged religious, political, and cultural divides. They also show that the type of friendship circles that had existed within the suffrage campaign remained

¹⁵⁰ LRO/CWA/7/3: press cuttings.

important during the inter-war period; though these closer associations were more likely to be influenced and determined by class position and shared cultural values, and their full extent can never be determined because of the lack of surviving personal papers.

In the private sphere all of the women in the sample group were, in a sense, 'ordinary'. They were wives, lovers, mothers and friends, and they all had to balance their public activities with these roles, to varying extents. Some of them conform in some respects to Sandra Stanley Holton's view of suffragists as average women whose 'feminism drew its meaning from experiences that were the commonplace of women's lives'; but this can not be said of others, such as Margaret Fitch and Sarah Everton, who were motivated by inspirations that can hardly be described as commonplace.¹⁵¹ Another notable feature of the women in the sample group is the apparent absence of any serious tension between their private/domestic and public roles, even in the case of those who did not enjoy the luxury of domestic servants and the understanding of supportive husbands, partners, and families; though this may partly reflect the limited nature of the evidence. Many of these women sought to pursue new avenues of interest in public activity alongside their domestic role, rather than challenging the idea that women should be devoted to domestic life; indeed, some of them were clearly anxious about being seen to be neglectful of their homes and children. They continued to organise their households (a more hands-on experience for some), to care for their partners, families and (where they had them) children, and, in some cases, to give precedence to and organise their lives around the careers of their husbands. The importance of the fact that they sought and found time amidst all this 'to make a difference', as Sarah Everton put it, should not be underestimated. Indeed, their fulfilment of the duties traditionally expected of women makes their engagement in public activity all the more remarkable. Adaptable, practical, devoted, and hard-working, they played a significant part in helping to transform their world, and the role of women within it.

¹⁵¹ Holton, 'The Suffragist', p.20.

Chapter Three

Banishing 'Lady Bountiful'? Women's Involvement in Social Action and Welfare Initiatives

In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain philanthropy was one of the principal public activities of women, and Liverpool was a pioneering centre of philanthropic ventures.¹ However, in 1869 the rescue pioneer Josephine Butler declared that the philanthropic women of Liverpool had 'been left stranded . . . The wave has passed them by. Their work is taken out of their hands: their place - they know not where it is'.² Over the next seventy years much was to change in this field, within and beyond the city. The role of women in social action was transformed. The changes which occurred in the nineteenth century have been the subject of much research, but we know less about how women's role developed during the first half of the twentieth century when new initiatives brought fresh approaches to the plight of the needy and the organisation of welfare itself became an issue of debate.³ The use of a local study is particularly useful in this context, as much discussion has centred on the development and variety of women's contribution at the local level, the arena in which women's participation

¹ It has been noted that 'some of the more significant principles and techniques of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philanthropic action [originated] at the mouth of the Mersey': David Owen, English Philanthropy 1660-1960 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), p.454. Some of the terms used during the course of this chapter require comment. Although technically the term philanthropy means benevolence, it is most commonly associated with the charitable endeavours of the privileged, particularly during the nineteenth century. Eileen Yeo notes that the term social work came into common use during the 1880s and appears most commonly in the context of paid employment: The Contest for Social Science. Relations and Representations of Gender and Class (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), p.247. Social work and the somewhat anachronistic term welfare have been used for convenience in this chapter in connection with both voluntary and paid work.

² Margaret Simey, Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1951), p.63.

³ For women and nineteenth century philanthropy, see Jessica Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy', Victorian Studies, 30 (1987), 183-210; Jane Lewis, 'Women and Late-Nineteenth-Century Social Work', in Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality, ed. by Carol Smart (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.78-99; idem, Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1991); Maria Luddy, 'Women and Charitable Organisations in Ireland', Women's Studies International Forum, 11 (4) (1988), 301-05; idem, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century Ireland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Frank Prochaska, The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain (London: Faber and Faber, 1988); idem, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Anne Summers, 'A Home from Home - Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century', in Fit Work for Women, ed. by Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp.33-63. For new developments in social work, see Keith Laybourn, The Guild of Help and the Changing Face of Edwardian Philanthropy: The Guild of Help, Voluntary Work and the State 1914-19 (Lampeter: Edwin Meller Press, 1994); Michael J. Moore, 'Social Work and Social Welfare: The Organisation of Philanthropic Resources in Britain, 1900-1914', Journal of British Studies, 16 (2) (1977), 85-105.

grew most rapidly.⁴ Women's social action in Liverpool during the inter-war period has remained relatively uncharted, though it is clear that they substantially increased their involvement in welfare endeavours at a time when the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector was changing. Important moves were made to ensure that the vast array of charities in nineteenth-century Liverpool became more extensive and better organised during the early twentieth century. The voluntary commitment demanded by this re-organisation attracted the involvement of women from a wide social and religious base. There was, at the same time, a growing movement for social work training as women sought qualifications for the work they were engaged in; though the development of training schemes and employment opportunities may have been inhibited to some extent by the continued willingness of many women to work on a voluntary basis.

This chapter aims to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the involvement of Liverpool women in welfare work between the wars by examining their roles within a number of welfare organisations, including the Victoria Settlement, the Council of Voluntary Aid (CVA), the Personal Service Society (PSS), the Liverpool Rescue Society and House of Help (LRSHH), and the Department of Social Science at Liverpool University. It explores how increasing co-operation and co-ordination of welfare services (through the development of umbrella agencies like the CVA and the PSS), the growing importance of social science as an academic subject, and the emergence of social work as a profession, affected women's participation and status within social welfare. It looks at the different ways in which established organisations, like the LRSHH and the Victoria Settlement, responded to these developments, and considers the implications of this for women's role.

These broad themes are dealt with in five main sections. The first traces the emergence of women's involvement in organisational welfare work in Liverpool before the First World War. It examines the origins, development, objectives, functions, and approaches of several welfare organisations in which women worked, the varied role of women's involvement, and the co-operation between the organisations. It shows how new initiatives like the CVA and the PSS, which offered multifarious opportunities for women's contribution, developed alongside established agencies of women's activity like the LRSHH which showed fewer signs of adapting to new trends in social welfare. An important aspect of these new trends was the increased emphasis which was placed upon training and expertise, and the next section of the chapter moves on to consider the growth, impact, and limitations of professionalisation in women's social welfare work. This includes an examination of the work and influence of Elizabeth Macadam, who was closely involved in the development of courses in social science at the University of Liverpool, and of the career of leading Liverpool social

⁴ For a discussion of voluntary welfare organisations at a local level before 1914, see Stephen Yeo,

worker Dorothy Keeling. The next section studies the gender dynamics of mixed-sex welfare organisations, examining the roles played by men and women within them and arguing that the situation in Liverpool does not conform to the generalisations which some historians have made about this subject. From gender the discussion moves on to explore the class dynamics of the welfare organisations being considered, including the widening of class participation and co-operation in welfare work, some of the reasons for this, and some of its limitations. It shows how this participation and co-operation was further enriched by the relatively new interest in holistic approaches to welfare, which included the organisation of a variety of clubs and activities. It also touches upon the promotion of religious co-operation by welfare organisations. The final section looks at how far the new, more sympathetic, attitudes towards understanding and dealing with the problems of poverty and the plight of the poor, which had been emerging before the First World War, affected the work of social welfare organisations in Liverpool in the inter-war period, especially the relationship between female visitors and their clients.

I

The Development of Women's Welfare Work in Liverpool

Throughout the nineteenth century women visited, cared for, and offered financial assistance to those who were sick, poor or in need of moral guidance; usually claiming authority on the basis of class, financial position, or religion. The incidence and nature of such activity varied according to locality. In Liverpool, aside from the well publicised activities of a few exceptional women (including Josephine Butler, Agnes Jones, Anna Jemima Clough, and Kitty Wilkinson), the recorded participation of women during this period appears to have been relatively limited. Margaret Simey has shown that while a number of, often abortive, schemes were developed to deal with the vast problems which faced Liverpool's poor before 1900, the presence of women was not readily welcomed; a view borne out by the fact that the Select Vestry leapt upon the cross-denominational Bible-reading activities of one group of women ministering to the sick in the Brownlow Hill Workhouse as an excuse for a blanket ban on all women visitors in 1854. If, as Simey notes, 'organised forms of philanthropy tended to become the private preserve of the particular clique among the local aristocracy who had been responsible for their initiation', then it follows that the horizons of many women, as far as welfare work went, barely stretched beyond home-based work such as sewing and fund-

raising via bazaars and concert evenings.⁵ The nature of such work, undertaken by both wealthy and less wealthy Liverpool women, means that it has left little imprint in the historical record.

There is, however, some evidence of attempts made to create a more varied mix of participants in organised forms of relief. The Central Relief Society (CRS) created in Liverpool in 1863, which pre-dated the London Charity Organisation Society (COS) (the organisation to which it eventually affiliated in 1874) by six years, appointed women visitors but failed to accord women the same prominence as men on its Executive Committee throughout its life-span until 1932, when it was incorporated into the PSS.⁶ Eleanor Rathbone, who became a visitor for the CRS on her return from Oxford in 1897, referred to her colleagues as 'lower middle-class people, very willing and interested, but not highly educated and quite untrained'.⁷ Her father William Rathbone had already attempted to mobilise women in 1886 with a scheme based on his interpretation of the German Ruhr Valley's Elberfeld experiment.⁸ Inspired by the current vogue for Settlements, Rathbone envisaged the possibility of widening opportunities for social action across the classes. He wondered why these Settlements were 'confined to University men' and declared that:

For my own part, I should like to see a band of earnest Christian workers - women as well as men - with hearts and heads in the right place, going in and out amongst the poor, not merely as religious visitors, but (while not neglecting this) sharing their joys and sorrows, lightening their burdens, bringing their wider knowledge to help meet the trials of life, firmly, though lovingly, correcting their errors and graver faults - . . . and when adversity comes, directing them where suitable help may be had.⁹

But Rathbone's vision of social work, which foreshadowed future initiatives, failed to take off at this juncture.

The establishment in 1898 of a women's Settlement in Netherfield Road, at the north end of Liverpool, provided the city with its first landmark in women's organised welfare. Its

⁵ Simey, *Charitable Effort*, pp.62-63, 74; Frank Prochaska, 'Charity Bazaars in Nineteenth Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 16 (2) (1977), 62-84; Leonore Davidoff makes a similar point: *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), p.56.

⁶ For the CRS, see Owen, *English Philanthropy*, pp.460-65. For the COS, see Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995). See also the comments of Mr Dowdall: 'The CRS was founded, as we all know, very many years ago and throughout that period its committee has always comprised men whose names have commanded confidence and respect': Liverpool Council of Social Service Archive (hereafter LCSS): Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid Collection (hereafter CVA) Minutes, Special Meeting with CRS (23 March 1917).

⁷ Mary Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949), p.51.

⁸ Moore, 'Social Work', p.90; Simey, *Charitable Effort*, pp.109-111.

⁹ Simey, *Charitable Effort*, p.110.

creation was the result of negotiations between the Liverpool Union of Women Workers, Dr Lilius Hamilton, a former nurse, and Edith Sing, a London settlement worker.¹⁰ Initially the Victoria Settlement, as it became known, suffered from a lack of continuity in terms of residents and a frequent turnover of wardens; the latter problem due, in Simey's view, to the 'difficulty of employing women who, though educated up to a certain point had not fully accepted the obligations of a professional career'.¹¹ Maude Royden, who spent a period at the Settlement in its early days, felt that things were badly run, and that the staff turnover was unacceptably high.¹² Royden confided to her friend Kathleen Courtney that she did not 'feel the least competent to distinguish between genuine and pretended distress. I wish I had some sort of training. They all look to me unspeakably poor, and I believe they drink like fiends! What is one to do? Poor, poor dears! I should drink if I lived in Lancaster street'.¹³ The arrival in 1903 of Elizabeth Macadam, a Scottish social worker who had experience of work at two London Settlements, was clearly a much needed development. She came in time to promote new attitudes towards dealing with poverty (which were more sensitive to the particular circumstances and needs of individuals) and greater professionalisation within social work. Her presence attracted other young women, the most prominent of whom was Eleanor Rathbone.¹⁴ The opportunities which settlement work opened up in this field are clear from the number of women who became prominent in other inter-war welfare initiatives who had served their apprenticeship at the Victoria Settlement.¹⁵

The decade before the First World War saw renewed interest in the debate as to how the problem of poverty should be tackled. Discussion was prompted in part by the impact of the findings of surveys by Booth in London and Rowntree in York, the poor health of recruits for the Boer War and the report of the Royal Commission on Poor Laws in 1909. Liverpool was acknowledged to be progressive in this area. According to Laybourn, the city 'was unusual with its Friendly Visitor scheme, its settlement movement, its social workers and its prominent citizens all working to introduce a more professional and scientific approach to philanthropy'.¹⁶ Leading Liverpool welfare workers and city leaders were considering the means by which a sense of organisation and direction could be introduced into a somewhat disordered welfare landscape. The establishment of the Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.132.

¹² Sheila Fletcher, *Maude Royden: A Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p.35.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.132.

¹⁵ Miss Emily Simey, who had worked at the Settlement, eventually became an assistant director of the COS. Other women came to posts in Liverpool from other settlements. See Charles Loch Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913: Its Ideas and Work* (London: Methuen, 1961), p.145. It was not until 1906 that the men's University Settlement opened at the south end of Liverpool.

¹⁶ Laybourn, *The Guild of Help*, p.17. Helen Bosanquet and Octavia Hill had promoted friendly visiting under the auspices of the COS.

(CVA) in 1909 and the creation of the Liverpool Personal Service Committee (PSC) in 1919 reflected a general trend across Britain which saw the development of many Councils of Social Service.¹⁷ Acting as an umbrella organisation for welfare endeavour in Liverpool, the CVA, which was supported by many of Liverpool's leading citizens, was intended to prevent overlap and waste by providing 'a centre of communication between approved charitable and benevolent institutions working in the city, and also between them and the Poor Law and other public authorities'.¹⁸

Once the CVA Executive Committee was organised a number of other committees were established to deal with specific issues, including medical charity, relief in the homes of the poor, children's institutions, reformatory agencies, homes for the aged and afflicted, and social improvement. Women were involved in this work at all levels. Demands for a visiting and casework society to complement the work of the CVA were reinforced by the circumstances of the First World War.¹⁹ In conjunction with the men's University Settlement, the Victoria Settlement organised friendly visiting but this was restricted to a few areas in the north and south of the city. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association (SSFA) also organised the visiting of servicemen's wives. Both Eleanor Rathbone and Elizabeth Macadam were convinced of the need to maintain these schemes and further their scope after the war. In January 1917 at Liverpool Town Hall Macadam told a meeting of volunteers who worked for the local War Pensions Committee that voluntary service had to continue after the war but that there was 'one class of distinction which must be swept away. The Lady Clare de Vere form of philanthropy' which was 'quite out of date'.²⁰ Her comments were echoed in 1918 by Rathbone, who told a joint meeting of the 'Provisional Committee for the Establishment of a Committee for Social Service in Liverpool' and the Executive Committee of the CVA that there was no body of trained workers to deal with disasters, and 'that there are needs other than distress to be dealt with which are not met by any existing committee other than the University and the Victoria Settlement'.²¹ By the end of the war Frederick D'Aeth, a former curate from the London Settlement Movement who had been appointed Secretary of the CVA, had drawn up a proposal for the creation of a new visiting and casework society which

¹⁷ For a history of the CVA (which became the Council of Social Service in 1933), see H. R. Poole, The Liverpool Council of Social Service 1909-1959 (Liverpool: Liverpool Council of Social Service, 1960). For a history of the PSS, see Dorothy C. Keeling, The Crowded Stairs: Recollections of Social Work in Liverpool 1919-1940 (London: National Council of Social Service, 1961). I am grateful to Mr Robin Currie, Chief Executive of the Liverpool PSS, for allowing me to consult PSS material located in the Liverpool Record Office.

¹⁸ LCSS: CVA Executive Committee Minutes (hereafter CVA ECM) (28 October 1909).

¹⁹ LCSS: CVA ECM (24 January 1911); (public meeting: 14 December 1911).

²⁰ Liverpool University Special Collections (hereafter LUSC): RP/XIV.3.91: Rathbone Papers: newscutting, January c.1917.

²¹ LCSS: CVA ECM (13 April 1918).

would complement its work and the work of the Settlements.²² The consensus that work had to continue after the war led to the creation in 1919, under the wing of the CVA, of the Personal Service Committee which broke away three years later and became the Personal Service Society (PSS).

The PSS presented itself as an organisation which was at the service of the people of Liverpool. In the words of one of its workers, Helen Forrester, who secured a clerical post in the early 1930s, its purpose was:

to make the poor aware of the many charities available to help them; to counsel; to provide a little legal aid given voluntarily by a few city lawyers; and to disburse in the most constructive way, funds donated to the organisation itself. The senior staff provided a friendly ear for sorrows to be poured into, and sympathetic visitors to the sick and other housebound people; they tried also to aid the elderly and the many despairing mothers who, under impossible circumstances struggled to make ends meet.²³

In its own words the PSS wanted to,

Secure for Liverpool citizens the full benefits of social legislation and other administrative measures (public and voluntary) for their welfare; and for this purpose: (a) To unite in one body voluntary workers who undertake friendly visiting (b) To supply information and advice to those in difficulty, and to provide a friend for those who need one.²⁴

The PSS was intended to be a guide and helpmate to all individuals who found themselves in difficulty 'irrespective of creed, politics or station'.²⁵ It was this approach which set it apart from approaches to relief adopted by the COS nationally and the CRS locally. The volunteers formed the main body of PSS workers, and most of them were women.²⁶ They were assigned to district committees which were organised on a ward basis. Table 3.i. shows how the PSS expanded between the wars.²⁷

²² LCSS: CVA ECM, Confidential Memorandum on Visiting; Preliminary Draft of a Scheme for a Permanent Representative Body of Voluntary Social Workers for Friendly Visiting and other Purposes (11 April 1917).

²³ Helen Forrester, *Liverpool Miss* (London: Fontana, 1983), p.128. Helen Forrester has confirmed that the social work agency which she describes in her books was the PSS: Letter to the author, 20 June 1997.

²⁴ First Annual Report of the PSS, quoted by C. F. Mott, *Lilian Mary Mott: A Memoir By Her Husband* (Privately published, 1956), p.106.

²⁵ Dorothy C. Keeling, 'St Christopher in Modern Life', in *Wesleyan Methodist Conference Official Handbook* (Liverpool, July 1928), pp.100-04 (p.100).

²⁶ Liverpool Record Office (hereafter LRO)/M364/Liverpool Personal Service Society Collection (hereafter LRO/PSS)/3/1-16: *LPSS Annual Reports* (1919-1940).

Table 3.i. Female and Male Membership of PSS Voluntary District Committees

Year	Number of District Committees	Male Members	Female Members
1922	6	37	62
1923	8	48	80
1925	11	63	86
1927	12	45	98
1928	15	58	118
1929	16	58	112
1930	15	54	111
1931	15	57	109
1933-34	16	59	105
1936-37	15	45	92
1937-38	17	62	108

Source: LRO/M364/PSS/3/1/1-14: *Annual Reports* (1922-1938).

Apart from visiting and allocating financial aid to clients, the PSS was responsible for launching and supporting a variety of schemes, including holidays for children and mothers, social afternoons for the elderly, a Clothing Committee to help the sick and newly unemployed, a lodging house for homeless boys, and marital guidance. These became important areas of joint action between women and men, and between the PSS and other women's organisations - most notably the Women Citizens' Association (WCA) and the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG). The PSS's Secretary, Dorothy Keeling, and a number of its volunteers were leading WCA members. This overlap in terms of membership proved significant in attracting new volunteers and led to co-operation on a number of projects. For example, Dorothy Keeling led an enquiry into the 'evils of unscrupulous money-lending' in association with the WCA, which led to the 1927 Money Lenders Act.²⁸ PSS workers were also involved in the committees of other WCA-linked projects, such as Liverpool Improved Houses and the Housing Advisory Bureau (which worked under the 1925 Housing Act to ensure that tenants managed to find habitable accommodation). Another co-operative activity for women organised through the PSS was the Tired Mothers' Holiday Scheme, operated by Margaret Beavan's Child Welfare Association, which offered mothers the opportunity for a short respite with only one small child. But the PSS was aware that the issue of holiday time also concerned men. In 1933 *News and Notes*, the PSS magazine for volunteers, explained that

²⁷ For reasons of economy the PSS did not publish lists in 1938-1939 or 1939-1940.

²⁸ LRO/PSS/3/1/6: *Annual Report* (1927), p.15.

'none of the schemes (holidays), as yet will admit "mere man"; the assumption being that the men are not nearly so pressed and have very much more free time than the women folk', though it went on to note that locally based recreation schemes were male-centred because 'most people would agree that men have the first claim upon us all'.²⁹

The creation of the CVA and the PSS must be seen in the context of the new wave of organising agencies which swept the country during the early twentieth century. But many other female-centred voluntary welfare societies whose origins lay in the late nineteenth century continued to function between the wars. These included the Liverpool Rescue Society and House of Help (LRSHH), which was affiliated to the Ladies Society for the Care and Protection of Young Girls. The LRSHH grew out of a midnight mission in July 1890. Like the organisations discussed above, it continued to operate during the war, seeing its role as providing 'an ever open door for the shelter and protection for some of the flotsam and jetsam'.³⁰ In 1918 its Committee looked forward to contributing to 'building this new world by helping to save the womanhood of our country', and felt that due to the 'unsettled labour conditions and the generally relaxed moral standards of our social life' the LRSHH would be in demand.³¹ By 1922 the organisation had become a non-sectarian rescue society offering shelter for 'any girl or woman, whatever her age, class, or condition, who for any reason finds herself destitute or in difficulties'.³² Its Committee saw its purpose as,

to strengthen those who are making a hard fight to keep straight, to raise those who have fallen, to safeguard those who are in danger, to guide, and restrain the foolish and wilful, to save those who are slipping downwards from the consequence of their folly or their sin.³³

It was maintained by charitable donations, subscriptions and appeals, though the Watch Committee began to make a small financial contribution to it during the 1920s.³⁴ In its work the LRSHH co-operated with other welfare organisations active in the city, including the PSS, the Travellers' Aid Society, the National Vigilance Association, the Catholic Women's League, the Catholic Aid Society, the Diocesan Rescue Society, the Salvation Army, the Women's Auxiliary of the Free Church Council, and the women patrols. But in the face of developments which promoted a new approach to care-giving, the LRSHH remained wedded

²⁹ LRO/PSS/11/1/26: *News and Notes*, 47 (April 1933).

³⁰ LRO/362/HOU: Liverpool Rescue Society and House of Help Collection (hereafter LRO/LRSHH)3/27: *Annual Report* (1918), pp.9-10.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² LRO/LRSHH/3/31: *Annual Report* (1922), p.7.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp.11-12.

³⁴ This was possibly prompted by Hunter Rodwell's support and his view that the LRSHH was saving the civic authorities from a serious responsibility: *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 March 1920.

to the old discriminatory style which had characterised its early work.

The rich variety of welfare organisations, old and new, in Liverpool during the inter-war period supports Jane Lewis's scepticism that there was a neat shift from nineteenth-century individualism to twentieth-century collectivism in welfare provision in Britain, and her argument that the country has always had 'a mixed economy of welfare - in which the state, the voluntary sector, the family and the market have always played different parts at different points in time'.³⁵ Welfare provision in Liverpool during the inter-war period was multi-faceted, and within its shifting and varied landscape there was considerable scope for women to participate at different levels, both on a professional and a voluntary basis.

II

'Social work is a profession in the making'

If the dominant theme of women's welfare activity during the nineteenth century was voluntarism then during the first half of the twentieth century it was professionalisation. 'Social work is a profession in the making' announced Elizabeth Macadam in 1925.³⁶ She referred to the growing emphasis upon the need for a code of practice for social workers, for increased training, and for acknowledgement of the necessary skills. As voluntary welfare work has long been recognised as a major source of empowerment for women, this raises questions about the impact of growing professionalisation on women's role at the local level, in particular whether it helped to disempower women contributors by marginalising them within its lower echelons and divorcing them from the decision-making process.³⁷ The Liverpool evidence suggests that the answers to such questions are far from straightforward.

Professionalisation is a much-used term which usually reflects the increasing emphasis placed upon acknowledgement of expertise in a particular field of remunerated work attained via specialised education and training; though the term is not without its ambiguities.³⁸ For Elizabeth Macadam professionalisation in the field of social welfare was linked to the progression of modern society, the 'increasing complexity' of which produced 'a new type of

³⁵ Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector*, p.3.

³⁶ Elizabeth Macadam, *The Equipment of the Social Worker* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1925), p.22.

³⁷ Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, p.311; idem, 'Women, Social Work and Social Welfare in Twentieth Century Britain: From (Unpaid) Influence to (Paid) Oblivion?', in *Charity, Self-interest and Welfare in the English Past*, ed. by Martin Daunt (London: University College of London Press, 1996), pp.203-23.

³⁸ Geoffrey Millerson has noted some of the ambiguities with the use of the words 'professional' and 'professionalise': *The Qualifying Associations: A Study in Professionalisation* (London: Routledge, 1964), pp.1-3. See also Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989).

service' called social work or social administration.³⁹ According to Simey 'the first generation of emancipated women' created the profession of social work when, having relinquished jobs to returning soldiers in 1918, they were 'desperate for work . . . [and so] turned the charitable jobs they had always done into a paid profession'. Their call for professionalisation was closely linked to an established belief that social work was an area in which women could claim precedence. Their general belief, in Simey's view, was that 'This [i. e. social work] is our territory. Here *we have priority*'.⁴⁰ In connection with the work of women in Settlements, Vicinus has also noted that the women were 'determined to turn philanthropy into a paid profession'.⁴¹ Women were now demanding remuneration for and recognition of their skills and experience in the field of social welfare. But there was also a growing acknowledgement that expertise rather than financial position, religious influences or general enthusiasm had to be the criteria for pursuing an interest in social work. 'Social ills' demanded 'for their solution gifts of the head as well as the heart', argued Margaret Sewell, pioneer of training at the Women's University Settlement.⁴² Macadam echoed this, writing that 'the spirit of love and devotion' was no longer the best thing 'to reconstruct public services on modern scientific lines'.⁴³ Instead, there was an increasing drive for pay, efficiency, rules, regulations, high standards, and training. The new spirit was evident in Liverpool in the development of a scheme for an association for the benefit of paid as well as voluntary workers by the Victoria Settlement in December 1915; and it can be seen again at the national level, in the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) and the National Federation of Women Workers conference held at the London School of Economics on the 'special effects of the demobilisation among social workers', on 9 November 1917. One of the main themes discussed at the conference was the need for training for all those undertaking social work.⁴⁴

Training for social work was not a new idea; the COS and Settlements had attempted to train their workers. But the new priority given to training was connected to a closer interaction between social theory and social practice, and the increasing interest in seeking solutions for, rather than simply treating, the problems of society. Many of the changes taking place within social work practice at the beginning of the twentieth century may be linked to the growing significance of social science as an academic discipline, reflected in the formation of Social Science departments in universities across the country. The links can be seen in

³⁹ Macadam, *Equipment*, p.16.

⁴⁰ Glenys Kinnock, *By Faith and Daring: Interviews with Remarkable Women* (Leicester: Ulverscroft, 1993), pp.42-43.

⁴¹ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p.227.

⁴² Margaret Sewell, 'The Beginnings of Social Training, 1890-1903', in Macadam, *Equipment*, pp.25-31 (p.25).

⁴³ Macadam, *Equipment*, p.16.

⁴⁴ *Common Cause*, 22 February 1918, p.584.

Liverpool in the formation of the School of Social Science at the University in 1904. It was an initiative in which Elizabeth Macadam (an unqualified employed social worker, a major force behind social work training, and the Warden at the Victoria Settlement) assisted Sir Edward Gonner (Professor of Economics at the University and a friend of the COS's Charles Loch) to co-operate with the Settlement and the CRS in order to realise his vision of establishing the School.⁴⁵ It was at this time that Macadam brought Frederick D'Aeth, who was to become CVA Secretary, to Liverpool to train social workers at the University.⁴⁶

According to Macadam, after the war 'training for social work began to be fashionable, and training schemes, good, bad and indifferent, sprang into being'.⁴⁷ At Liverpool University a diploma course in social work was open to graduates, a certificate course to non-graduates, and a degree course to those students who sought a career in social work administration. The Social Science department encouraged students to recognise the connections between social theory and practice. During the 1920s and 1930s various social work agencies in the city, including the CVA, the Settlement, the PSS, and the women patrols, welcomed students for work which enabled them to see at first-hand the practical problems facing members of the local community, and which taught them that the objective of the social worker was to recognise the client's - and to remember their own - humanity. The connection between the University and local social work agencies was further reinforced by the appointment of active social workers (including Margaret Beavan, Dorothy Keeling, Josephine Duckworth, Dorothy Peto, and Miss J. E. McCrindell) to positions as visiting lecturers at the University.⁴⁸ These women helped to even-out the gender balance of the Social Science department.

Something of the impact of professionalisation upon active welfare organisations can be seen from the case of the Victoria Settlement. Thirty-seven years after its doors were opened the annual report for 1935 described how the 'passing years have wrought many changes in women's work and full-time social work has been largely professionalised'; as a result of which a decision was made to institute some 'epoch making changes'.⁴⁹ The growing prominence of social work as a career had prompted the Settlement Committee to re-negotiate its position within the field. One of the main problems encountered by the Settlement was that the growing opportunities for women to engage in public activity

⁴⁵ Similar developments occurred in Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. For an explanation of the school's origins as a response to a circular from the new Special Committee on Social Education, see Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society*, p.111. The novelty of such a scheme is clear from the fact that, as Macadam recalled, the School was not immediately welcomed into the University's framework.

⁴⁶ Interview with Margaret Simey, Liverpool, 10 April 1997.

⁴⁷ Macadam, *Equipment*, p.37.

⁴⁸ LUSC: *Liverpool University Calendar* (1928-29).

⁴⁹ LRO/H331/852/VIC: *Liverpool Victoria Settlement Annual Report* (hereafter *LVS Annual*

gradually eroded one of the main functions of settlement work. When at their most popular, settlements had often been seen as a step on the ladder to a career in social work or as a 'finishing experience' for young women who had recently completed their schooling.⁵⁰ But such perceptions were less common by the late 1920s, a time when the settlements were under threat. According to Martha Vicinus, the 'sense of community which had been developed in settlements before the war could not sustain itself against forces heralded by the war'.⁵¹ One of these forces was improved employment prospects for women, which meant that there were many more opportunities for them beyond the boundaries of settlements.

The impact of such forces on the Victoria Settlement can be seen in the years 1924-1925 which saw a fifty per cent reduction in the number of residents. This was also due, to some extent, to the fact that many women could no longer afford to pay the residency fees. The evidence also suggests that settlers were combining their residency with work elsewhere in the community. Residents who worked outside the boundaries of the Settlement in 1925 included Miss Tidd Pratt, assistant director of the Women Patrols, and Miss Shaw, who worked for the Liverpool Union of Girls' Clubs. By 1935 the Victoria Settlement Annual Report lamented a further change, the use of the Settlement by some women as a base 'until they found a more salubrious neighbourhood in which to live'.⁵² Many women residents had become too involved with their outside work to take an active role, and as a result settlement life had begun to rely more and more on voluntary workers from outside.

By 1930 an academic degree was becoming a prerequisite for engagement in professional social work. This was an obstacle to Helen Forrester, who began employment at the PSS as a clerical worker. Perceiving the situation as hopeless, she wrote that although 'experience poured in upon me . . . at the back of my mind there was always the nagging thought that was I ever to make progress in the world of social work, I would need that precious piece of paper'.⁵³ It is clear from this that the impact of the development of university training for social work was a mixed blessing for some women. Although Liverpool University may have been keen to recruit mature students with some previous (usually voluntary) experience of social work, and its courses may have helped to give such work professional

Report) (1935), p.2.

⁵⁰ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.220. Simey notes that young girls who had attended Belvedere School or Cheltenham Ladies' College 'were particularly staunch supporters' of Settlements. The Victoria Settlement's pioneers were both Cheltenham educated. Many young women were sent by 'mothers aware of the social propriety of "slumming" or others came of their own accord, or some in defiance of their family's approval': Simey, *Charitable Effort*, p.132. Settlement work has been perceived as a female equivalent of emigration. As Ellen Ross comments, 'Hoxton or Bermondsey could feel as gripping as the Congo river. Young girls, their schooling completed, often yearned for the slums': *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.16.

⁵¹ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.287.

⁵² *LVS Annual Report* (1935), p.2.

status, the financial and practical demands involved could inhibit the prospects of many women. The time necessary to undertake a university course was doubtless too much for many women who had voluntary experience; it is significant that several women who held key positions in social work in Liverpool - Elizabeth Macadam, Ellinor Black, Dorothy Keeling, and Margaret Beavan - remained single and childless. Juggling a home life with study or employment was difficult. In 1919 an anxious student wrote to Elizabeth Macadam,

I am in a regular fix as my nurse is leaving me and that of course means that for the present I shall have to look after my little girl . . . I am terribly disappointed that I must drop my new work for the time being . . . my domestic affairs are all upside down just now.⁵⁴

For many women who had undertaken social work on a part-time and/or voluntary basis the opportunities for advancement to paid work were thus curtailed to some extent by the introduction of new qualifications, which could only be undertaken if a woman had the financial means and the time to devote to study. Surviving student records from Liverpool University indicate that most individuals who enrolled in the School of Social Science came from middle-class backgrounds.⁵⁵ This is supported by Helen Forrester's recollection of the reactions of students on PSS experience to the homes of clients: '[s]ome of the students were horrified at what they saw and were afraid of visiting alone'.⁵⁶ The financial and other burdens involved in taking such courses may partly account for the low numbers who enrolled on them in Liverpool and elsewhere in the early years in which they were offered. Statistics for the period up to 1918 suggest that nationally recruitment, and particularly recruitment of women, on these courses was low. By 1918 only 269 students had qualified for diplomas or certificates offered by the six universities with Social Science Departments, of whom only thirty-one were women.⁵⁷ However, the records indicate that the students who attended the social work courses at the University of Liverpool between the wars were mostly female.⁵⁸

The career of Dorothy Keeling, Secretary of the PSS from 1919 until 1940 and possibly the most prominent paid female social worker active in Liverpool during this period, reveals something of the changing nature of women's role within social action at this time, and how it was affected by more general changes within the sphere of welfare organisation. As we

⁵³ Helen Forrester, *By the Waters of Liverpool* (London: Fontana, 1983), pp.154-55.

⁵⁴ LUSC/A174: Student Dossiers, Social Science Department (hereafter LUSC/A174): Letter from Mrs B. to Elizabeth Macadam, 17 January 1919.

⁵⁵ Despite this, records indicate some variety in the background of students. They included the daughters of a missionary, a radio operator, and a financier: LUSC/A174: Student Dossiers.

⁵⁶ Forrester, *By the Waters of Liverpool*, p.103.

⁵⁷ Macadam, *Equipment*, p.36.

⁵⁸ LUSC/A174; See also LRO/PSS/1/19: PSS Training Sub-Committee Minutes (1936-1958), for

saw in Chapter Two, Keeling chose social work as an alternative to teaching. She later recorded that her interest in social work sprang primarily from an interest in people, a 'childhood concern about inequality' and the fact that 'there were few other openings in my young days for a satisfying career dealing not with things but with people'.⁵⁹ In common with many women her first experience of social work came through the church, though she soon became conscious that this work was shielded from the developing social services.⁶⁰ The changing structure of social service provision provided Keeling with her most important opportunity, when in 1907, at the age of twenty-six, she joined the innovative Bradford Guild of Help; though it is significant that she did not accept a salary, choosing instead to maintain her dependence upon her father.⁶¹ In 1913 she was promoted from the position of part-time district head to full-time Honorary Assistant Secretary. Four years later, when the General Secretary of the Manchester based National Association of Guilds of Help was drafted into the army, Keeling was appointed to his position.⁶² When her father died and it became necessary for her to take a salary for this position, she was forced to fight for the £250 which had been paid to her male predecessor.⁶³ It was around this time that Keeling came into contact with Frederick D'Aeth, who was a fellow member of the Committee of Social Service, of which she was Joint Honorary Secretary. D'Aeth was then contemplating ideas for the creation of a casework organisation in Liverpool to complement the work of the CVA, and he shared with Keeling ideas he had been discussing with Elizabeth Macadam and Eleanor Rathbone. In 1919 Keeling accepted an offer from D'Aeth, Macadam, and Rathbone to begin work as Secretary of the new PSS in Liverpool. The discussions surrounding her appointment are particularly interesting, as they led to a decision by the CVA Committee that if she did not accept the role, which was to be combined with that of leader of the Offices of Friendly Help at the Victoria Settlement, the PSS would not be created as a separate organisation; a decision which suggests that there was a shortage of women social workers of her calibre at that time.⁶⁴ Keeling's experiences highlight some of the ambiguities of women's social work at this time, particularly regarding the extent of its professionalisation. Like Elizabeth Macadam, she was experienced but neither technically trained nor formally qualified, and remained unsalaried for a time at the Guild of Help.

Keeling offered a model to many women who joined her in the PSS as professional

details of students undertaking practical experience.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁶⁰ Keeling, *The Crowded Stairs*, pp.9-12.

⁶¹ The development of Guilds of Help had also been influenced by the Elberfeld experiment in the German Ruhr, where individuals were bound to act as voluntary helpers for those in need. The GOH movement was to deal with the unsatisfactory legacy of COS work. Through its provision of large numbers of friendly visitors it mobilised many women. See Laybourn, *The Guild of Help*, p.58.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.210.

⁶³ Keeling, *The Crowded Stairs*, p.13.

social workers, many of whom were subsequently appointed to similar organisations across the country; a fact which highlights another important feature of the growth of professionalisation - increasing employment mobility. There are other examples of this in the careers of women in related areas of employment. Ellinor Black, for example, came from positions at a Stepney Settlement and the London School of Economics to a lectureship in the department of Social Science at Liverpool University in 1924. The same year a certain Miss Lothian came to the Victoria Settlement as sub-warden from Edinburgh School of Social Studies to replace Miss Prince, who left to take up work with a Girls' Club in St Helens.⁶⁵ Ten years later Muriel Wilson left the PSS to become the Secretary of the Sheffield Council of Social Service.⁶⁶

Koven and Michel have argued that 'in turn of the century America, England and Germany middle-class women transformed their roles as private charity providers by requalifying themselves as scientifically trained social workers'.⁶⁷ The evidence from Liverpool supports this view to some extent but also suggests that the situation in the city was more complex. There is no doubt that the growing acceptance of social science as an academic discipline and a site for professional activity, and increasing governmental concern for welfare initiatives, provided women with new opportunities to transform their contribution to social work - making it more scientific and professional. But this could be a double edged sword. The changes resulted in the closure of some of the hitherto informal routes to paid social work which had often been followed by women who had neither the circumstances nor the finances to undertake the new university social science courses.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the growth of professionalisation did not end reliance upon the voluntary sector in Liverpool; indeed, the demand for and contribution of volunteers actually appears to have increased, and for some women voluntary activity continued to be a way in which they could exercise power as public actors. Moreover, the situation in Liverpool suggests that Koven and Michel's drawing of a distinction between 'private charity providers' and 'scientifically trained social workers' is too sharp: as the careers of Dorothy Keeling and Elizabeth Macadam show, some of the women who were prominent in the field of welfare work in Liverpool between the wars do not appear to conform strictly to either of these two categories.

⁶⁴ Mott, *Lilian Mary Mott*, pp.106-07.

⁶⁵ Dorothy C. Keeling, *Ellinor I Black, 1891-1956: A Tribute* (n.p., 1956), p.6; *LVS Annual Report* (1924), pp.6-7.

⁶⁶ Keeling, *The Crowded Stairs*, p.132.

⁶⁷ Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, 'Gender and the Origins of the Welfare State', *Radical History Review*, 43 (1989), 112-19 (p.114).

⁶⁸ More generally, Jane Lewis has argued that once welfare initiatives became the concern of central government, women were marginalised within the system: Lewis, 'Women, Social Work and Social Welfare'.

III

The Gender Dynamics of Welfare Organisations

Distinctions of another kind, relating to the different roles of men and women within welfare organisations, have been observed by some modern historians. In an examination of women's 'benevolent organisations' in New York and Boston between 1797 and 1840, Anne Boylan argues that women can be divided into two groups: 'one was either a benevolent lady or a reformer, seldom both'. Benevolent ladies usually organised independently of men and provided aid, whereas reformers attempted to change conditions and often worked alongside men.⁶⁹ While acknowledging the fact that some women organised and ran their own charities, historians have noted that much nineteenth-century charity work was characterised by a gendered division of labour. Whereas women concentrated upon schemes for women and children, undertook personal social work, and organised bazaars and teas, men controlled the finances and sat on the committees.⁷⁰

Patterns of gender participation within Liverpool social welfare organisations between the wars varied considerably, depending upon when the organisations were created, the purpose for which they were formed, and the attitudes of the individuals in charge of them. There were older organisations, like the LRSHH, formed in 1890, which were run largely by women for women. Not unusually the list of Patrons and Vice-Presidents featured male civic and religious leaders (including the Mayor, the Bishop of Liverpool, the Chief Constable, and the City Coroner). Male intervention at committee level was restricted to local church men, a solicitor (from 1932), and male representatives of the Watch Committee.⁷¹ The continuing dominance of women on the LRSHH Committees was due to the fact that it dealt specifically with issues affecting women and children, particularly those of health and morality. By appointing one of its first women members, Caroline Whiteley, as its representative on the LRSHH General Committee in 1929, the Watch Committee acknowledged this female emphasis. The LRSHH conforms in many ways to Boylan's model of women-only benevolent organisations. But the view that men and women had different roles to play within welfare work was not confined to older social welfare organisations. Elizabeth Macadam argued that while it was a good thing to have some mixing of men and women on practical social work, 'women's work has its own aspects and difficulties best understood by women, and similarly

⁶⁹ Anne M. Boylan, 'Women in Groups: An Analysis of Women's Benevolent Organisations in New York and Boston, 1797-1840', *Journal of American History*, 71 (3) (1984), 497-523 (p.502).

⁷⁰ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*; Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, pp.9, 302.

⁷¹ LRO/LRSHH/3/29: *Annual Report* (1920).

men are better guided by their own sex'.⁷²

Nevertheless, the new welfare societies and organisations created after 1900 exhibited a greater commitment to the idea of mixed personnel. Created in 1909 by a committee of men and women which included Eleanor Rathbone and Elizabeth Macadam, the CVA proved to be an important focus for joint activity between men and women on an equal level - not least because it was an umbrella organisation beneath which other organisations retained their existence and identity.⁷³ Committee minutes and council member lists show that some of the women active on the CVA, such as Mrs Booth, Lady Muspratt, the Crosfield sisters, Florence Melly, and Emma Holt, were members of prominent Liverpool families, and were continuing philanthropic traditions in a new context. The presence of the wives of prominent men, including Frederick D'Aeth (CVA secretary) and Harold Darbishire (PSS Vice-Chairman), on the CVA and PSS Committees was not unusual. In addition, working women were represented on the CVA committees by members of the WCG. The women and men who sat on the various committees of the CVA were there to present the particular concerns and interests of their own organisations and they had a collective goal of instituting initiatives on the basis of a common concern for less privileged individuals; work which demanded joint action. Women co-operated with men under the auspices of the CVA on special sub-committees and at conferences established to investigate a range of welfare and social issues (many of which concerned the poorest members of the community), including care of unmarried mothers and their children, reformatory agencies, the National Health Campaign, money lending, and gambling. In some areas of this work a measure of gendered division of labour is detectable. For example, the Charities Fund and Statistical Committees were dominated by men, as was the organisation of a football competition for unemployed men.⁷⁴ But the policy of the CVA towards the involvement of women was markedly different from that of the CRS, which appointed women as visitors but appears not to have welcomed them onto its Executive Committee, a body chaired by the powerful Alderman Maxwell Hyslop Maxwell who - it will be shown in the following chapter - opposed the appointment of women to the police force during his period as Watch Committee Chairman.⁷⁵

As for the PSS, Chart 3.i. below indicates that women played a significant role as members of all three varieties of its committees. Predictably, the chart shows that women made their greatest contribution as members of the District Committees but it also indicates that they were well represented on the General and Executive Committees throughout the 1920s and the 1930s. Participation on the General Committee, which met only twice yearly,

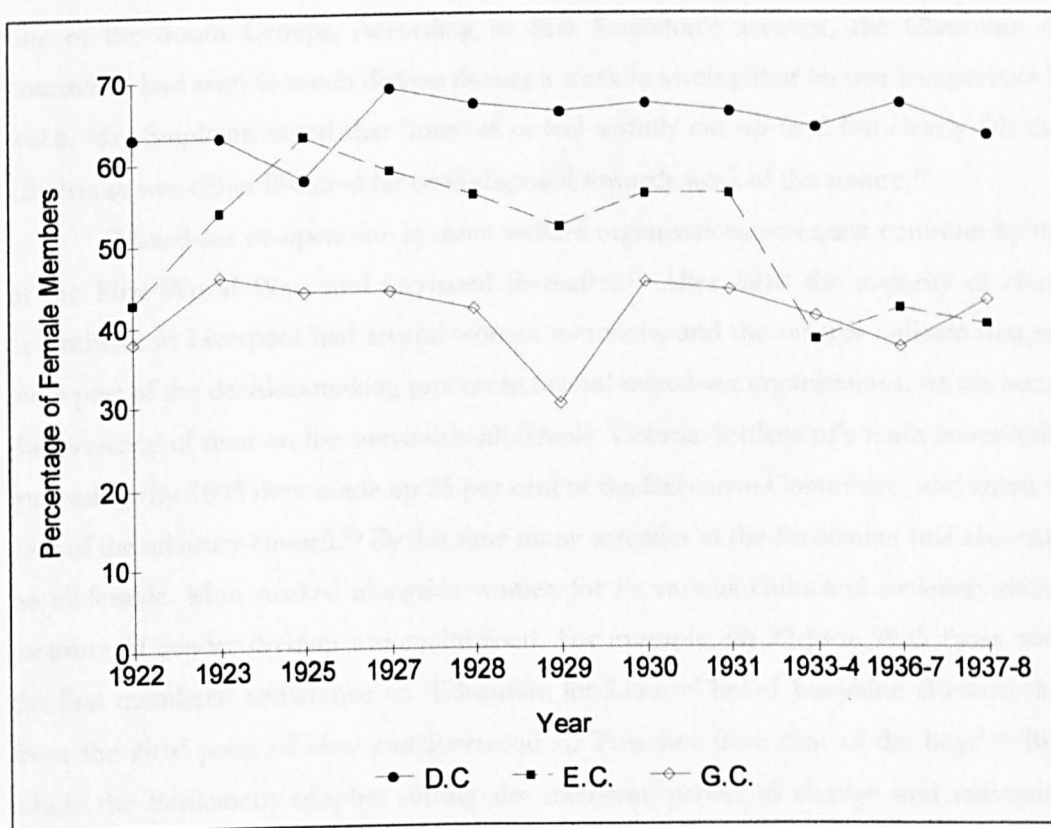
⁷² Macadam, *Equipment*, p.88.

⁷³ The presence of Rathbone and Macadam was reinforced by the presence of twelve other women at a later meeting on 4 February 1910: LCSS: CVA ECM (4 February 1910).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* (4 April 1932).

consistently showed the lowest membership, dipping quite considerably in 1929, though the Executive Committee also followed this pattern that year.

Chart 3.i. Comparison of Female Presence on PSS General, Executive, and District Committees



D.C.: District Committee.

E.C.: Executive Committee.

G.C.: General Committee.

Source: LRO/PSS/M364/3/1/1-14: *LPSS Annual Reports (1922-1938)*.

Women made their greatest contribution as District Visitors (see Chart 3.i). This was certainly due in part to the great expansion of voluntary welfare work during the First World War, which enabled many women to gain experience and confidence in all elements of visiting work. This was promoted in part, within and beyond Liverpool, by the SSFA; the Liverpool branch of which was taken over by Eleanor Rathbone.⁷⁶ The greater proliferation

⁷⁵ Keeling, *The Crowded Stairs*, pp.38-39.

⁷⁶ Susan Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 983-1006 (p.992). Immediate action was needed as a result of the rules concerning the payment of separation allowances and pensions, and the vast extent of common-law relationships in Liverpool. In response to this, Rathbone mobilised members of the local suffrage society and the two Settlements to form part of the vast army of 1,000 voluntary workers who worked across

of women volunteers in the PSS also owed much to the popular perception that they were better equipped to deal with individuals on a personal level, and the fact that more women than men had time to devote to such activity. It is interesting, however, that even though fewer men than women were members of the District Committees the men still managed to hold a comparable number of Chairmanships. A revealing insight into the division of labour which existed on District Committees may be found in the recollections of a member of the one of the South Groups. According to Mrs Stapleton's account, the Chairman of her committee had seen so much distress during a week in visiting that he was incapacitated for a week. Mrs Stapleton noted that 'most of us feel awfully cut up first' but clearly felt that the Chairman was either ill-suited for or ill-disposed towards work of this nature.⁷⁷

Mixed-sex co-operation in some welfare organisations was quite common by the end of the First World War, and increased thereafter.⁷⁸ After 1918 the majority of charitable committees in Liverpool had several women members, and the records indicate that women were part of the decision-making process in several mixed-sex organisations. At the same time the presence of men on the previously all-female Victoria Settlement's main committees was increasing. By 1935 men made up 25 per cent of the Executive Committee, and about 41 per cent of the advisory council.⁷⁹ By this time many activities at the Settlement had also ceased to be all-female. Men worked alongside women for its various clubs and societies; although a measure of gender division was maintained. For example, on 22 June 1935 those attending the first members' conference on 'Education for Leisure' heard Josephine Duckworth speak from the girls' point of view and Reverend E. Treachey from that of the boys'.⁸⁰ But as a whole the Settlement adapted during the inter-war period to change and maintained its prominence. It did so by presenting itself less as a community for women's social work and more as an important centre at the service of the local community which related to contemporary ideas about the provision of infant welfare programmes and leisure activities for young people.

The expansion of social science and social work training courses which resulted in the establishment of university departments produced another arena in which mixed-sex participation could grow. However, the process was a gradual one. Eileen Yeo suggests that the position of women in university departments during the inter-war period may be

twenty-nine districts of Liverpool for the SSFA: Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone*, pp.73-77. For some of these workers involvement in the SSFA may have been a route into work for the PSS, as it was for Maud Melly. See George Melly, *Scouse Mouse or I Never Got Over It: An Autobiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), p.78.

⁷⁷ LRO/PSS/11/5: Mrs Stapleton, *Memories of the PSS: By a Visitor* (Liverpool: n. p., 1930), p.98.

⁷⁸ Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, p.302.

⁷⁹ The lack of material makes it very difficult to date any change precisely: *LVS Annual Report* (1935), p.1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3.

characterised as 'responsibility without power', a view supported to some extent by Carol Dyhouse's recent work.⁸¹ This certainly appears to have been the case in the department of Social Science at Liverpool University. Although Elizabeth Macadam was the first lecturer in Social Science at Liverpool in 1911, she left for London in 1919 and it was not until 1924 that a second woman, Ellinor Black, was appointed as a full-time lecturer to a department which by then was dominated by men. This domination was not merely a matter of numbers. Keeling's recollection that 'as the only woman on the staff . . . and as departmental tutor, much of the interviewing of new students fell to [Black]' is telling not only about the way in which work was shared out in the department, but in her own apparent acceptance of her friend's situation.⁸² This is borne out by the departmental files which suggest that Black dealt with much of the entry correspondence.⁸³ Eileen Yeo has pointed out that even though Elizabeth Macadam was the first salaried university lecturer in social work in 1911, when the Charles Booth Chair of Social Science was created in 1923 it went to A. M. Carr-Saunders. When Carr-Saunders left to become director of the London School of Economics in 1937, he was replaced in 1939 by T. S. Simey rather than Mary Stocks.⁸⁴

In terms of gender dynamics, then, the organisations connected with social welfare work in Liverpool between the wars reveal a complicated picture. Some of those formed towards the end of the nineteenth century, like the LRHSS, continued to be run predominantly by women in the interests of women; something which reflects the fact that the idea that certain forms of social welfare connected with women, children and the home were the particular preserve of women remained strong throughout the period. In contrast, another organisation formed in the late nineteenth century, the Victoria Settlement, did not remain static, became more open to change and new ideas, gradually adapted its role and function and, in so doing, allowed and promoted greater mixed-sex co-operation in its organisation and activities as time went by. The 'organisations' formed in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the CVA, PSS and the Social Science department, present us with further variations. The CVA, in its role as an umbrella organisation, allowed for a greater amount of mixed-gender co-operation on committees. The PSS did more than any other organisation to encourage such co-operation, while preserving to some extent 'traditional' gender divisions in its practical volunteer work. But the Social Science department, although owing much to the initiative of a woman (Elizabeth Macadam) who became its first lecturer, soon came to be dominated by male academics.

⁸¹ Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, pp.293, 295; Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870-1939* (London: University College of London Press, 1995).

⁸² Keeling, *Ellinor I. Black*, p.6.

⁸³ LUSC/A174.

IV

'Visitors were drawn from all walks of life'

In studying the relationship between class or social position and women's social welfare work in Liverpool, it is important to bear in mind debates about this relationship more generally. Despite the image of 'Lady Bountiful' and the popular view of philanthropy as something that was practised purely by the wealthy for the benefit of the poor, welfare and caring was an experience common to women of all classes in Britain, though personal circumstances often determined the extent to which private concerns could be transformed into public duty. The image of charity as a form of social action exercised exclusively by the rich in favour of the poor may, to some extent, be an illusion resulting from the nature of the surviving evidence, from assumptions that working-class women were not usually in a position to provide aid, and from perceptions of working-class charity and welfare assistance as 'sharing'.⁸⁵ The studies undertaken by Lady Bell and Maud Pember Reeves, and the writing of Nurse Loane, suggest that working-class women frequently provided mutual support.⁸⁶ Ellen Ross has also noted this in inner London, where 'women's neighbourhood networks fostered a language of female need and interest'.⁸⁷ The assistance provided by working-class women to their peers could often be as informal as taking in washing or helping with elderly relatives, but it could also be as structured as founding orphanages or homes for the disabled.⁸⁸ Working-class women involved in organised charity sometimes acted as the 'missing link' between the classes. The choice of the women Ellen Ranyard recruited for her Biblewomen scheme in London in 1857 was informed by her observation that working-class women gained access to working-class homes more readily; and Celia Davies has shown how in Manchester and Salford the local health authority used working-class women who lived in the community as health visitors for the same reason.⁸⁹ Though possibly somewhat manipulative, such initiatives offered

⁸⁴ Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, p.293.

⁸⁵ For more discussion on this, and the possible meanings of philanthropy, see Alan J. Kidd, 'Philanthropy and the "Social History Paradigm"', *Social History*, 21 (2) (1996), 180-92; Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse*, p.27.

⁸⁶ M. Loane, *The Queen's Poor: Life As They Find it in Town and Country* (London: Edward Arnold, 1910); Lady Florence Bell, *At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town* (London: Virago 1985) [f.p. 1907]; Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About A Pound A Week* (London: Virago, 1979) [f.p. 1913]. Helen Forrester has also noted, from her own experience living in 1930s Liverpool, that it is important to consider the 'efforts made by poor women to help each other': Letter to the author, 20 June 1997.

⁸⁷ Ross, *Love and Toil*, p.59.

⁸⁸ Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse*, p.29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.48; Ellen Ross, 'Good and Bad Mothers: Lady Philanthropists and London Housewives Before the First World War', in *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women Philanthropy and Power*, ed. by Kathleen D. McCarthy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp.174-99 (p.181); Celia

opportunities for working-class women to develop interests and skills which could be channelled into more organised, mainstream initiatives after the First World War, such as the PSS; a trend which would have been supported by increasing attempts at democratisation by organisations anxiously responding to contemporary ideas about the necessity for class understanding.

The impact of the welfare activities undertaken by rich women for poor women has also stimulated debate. Some historians have seen the opportunities opened to privileged women by participation in public welfare as gender divisive, on the basis that the privileged women transmuted contradictory values to poorer women, encouraging them to concentrate on care for their homes and families while seeking an alternative role themselves.⁹⁰ Eileen Yeo has also suggested that this participation risked driving a 'scientific wedge' between rich and poor women.⁹¹ Jane Lewis, on the other hand, has questioned the characterisation of nineteenth-century charity as 'women controlling women', and suggests that the concern which informed much women's work was the desire to combat the problem of poverty.⁹² Moreover, Martha Vicinus has pointed out that charitable organisations 'united middle- and upper-class women and gave them greater access to poor women and children', with the result women's social action was perceived as a useful means by which inter-class understanding could be promoted.⁹³

In Liverpool attempts were made to promote mixed-class participation in social work by women, and there were hopes in some quarters that this could be on an equal basis. Dorothy Keeling certainly seems to have believed that this was possible. Her vision was that PSS visitors would be 'drawn from all walks of life': clergy (of all denominations), church workers, trade unionists, teachers, trades and business people, school attendance officers, labourers, housewives, and the retired. Reformers like Keeling had a vision of welfare givers acting on the basis of citizenship and their membership of organisations like the PSS, rather than on that of their social position. '[W]e felt', Keeling stated, 'that we established a rather new tradition in the history of social work; we did not want to rely solely upon the middle and upper-class voluntary workers who might find it impossible not to patronise and who might be unable to work on the terms of equality which true personal service demands'; a statement revealing much about the role she envisaged for working-class women, her views about some of the problems associated with the engagement of middle- and upper-class women in welfare

Davies, 'The Health Visitor as Mother's Friend: A Woman's Place in Public Health, 1900-1914', *Social History of Medicine*, 1 (1) (1988), 39-59 (p.42).

⁹⁰ Yeo points this out in *Contest for Social Science*, p.15. See also Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.239.

⁹¹ Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, p.15.

⁹² Lewis, 'Women and Late-Nineteenth-Century Social Work'.

⁹³ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.211; Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful', p.184.

work, and her own belief in equality.⁹⁴ Of all welfare organisations discussed in this chapter, the PSS appears to have offered the greatest possibility for inter-class co-operation through its considerable use of volunteers (the ‘backbone of the society’) and its decision to act as a clearing house for volunteers for other organisations.⁹⁵

Keeling’s vision of a ‘new tradition’ in social work was not, however, entirely in accord with the thinking of some of her colleagues, as is revealed by an article featured in the *Daily Courier* on 5 July 1923, entitled ‘Butterfly on the Wheel- Hard Way of Lazy Women-Parasites’. The article gave details of a discussion at a recent Annual Meeting of the PSS in Liverpool, in which women described as spending their lives in ‘ease, luxury and enjoyment’ had been ‘denounced unsparingly’. Mrs E. D. Simon, a former Mayoress of Manchester, had told the meeting that ‘we have no place in modern society for “lilies of the field”’. She argued that such women lived on the community because they did not give anything in return and their lives rested on the labour of their servants. Voluntary work for the PSS, it was suggested, ‘would give an opportunity to women of the leisured classes to pay back something of what they owe to those who are paying their way in the world’. Mrs Simon alluded to the need for the classes to understand each other, ‘one class looks at the other and says, “They are living lives of leisure and ease”’. These views reflected contemporary ideas regarding the need for some inter-class understanding.⁹⁶ It is clear that some of the speakers at the meeting shared Keeling’s concern for greater co-operation between the classes and may well have been motivated in part by ideas of citizenship. But there is no indication in the report of their meeting that they shared either Keeling’s concern to broaden class participation in the PSS or her fears about relying on better-off women because some of them could not work on terms of equality.

There is evidence, in fact, that an informal hierarchy, related to class, operated within the PSS. Within the office coloured overalls indicated rank. The newly appointed Helen Forrester was told that ‘we lowly types wear blue ones. Senior staff - the social workers - wear green ones’.⁹⁷ She later recalled that the volunteers, who were organised by the paid social workers, did not wear overalls. In her memory the clerical staff were working-class, the paid social workers were educated women, and the volunteers (who helped out in the office and conducted follow-up visits after visits performed by the paid social workers) were ‘ladies’.⁹⁸ Lack of evidence makes it difficult to determine whether or not the mixed-class base promoted by the PSS was reflected in their volunteer visitors. Although the PSS printed lists of volunteers, the fact that the majority of names appear without initials makes it very difficult to

⁹⁴ Keeling, *The Crowded Stairs*, p.27.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.122.

⁹⁶ LRO/PSS/1/1: LPSS Minutes cutting from the *Daily Courier*, c.6 July 1923.

⁹⁷ Forrester, *Liverpool Miss*, p.126.

identify workers. Several of the recognisable volunteers were professional women, members of prominent families, or active participants in other areas of public life. They included Ethel Warhurst, a member of the economic housekeeping committee, who was a headmistress and the Chair of the Anfield WCA; Emma Holt, a member of the PSS Council and a volunteer, who was a local shipping heiress; Florence and Eva Melly, also volunteers, who were Holt's cousins; Maud Melly, another volunteer, who was the wife of Florence and Eva's nephew; and Margaret Fitch, Lilian Mary Mott, Sarah Everton, Frances Ivens, and Ethel Wormald, who all served as volunteers and were prominent in different ways in public life.⁹⁹ Some of them were just the sort of women (that is, those who took 'a real interest in their fellow creatures, [and] have little or much time at their disposal') the PSS hoped to find work for.¹⁰⁰

But the growing concern to provide holistic solutions to poverty, and the rich variety of welfare activities and schemes which resulted from this in Liverpool, meant that welfare work was no longer the preserve of wealthy women. Organisations like the Settlement and the PSS presented service as the currency of the new community based welfare: 'May we . . . appeal for offers of service from old and young, from men and women, who, though they may have less to give of material things, are willing to give something of themselves'.¹⁰¹ In 1926 Muriel Wells, Warden of the Victoria Settlement, suggested that through the organisation of new schemes and activities women workers had the 'opportunity of bringing a wider outlook to those whose lives are restricted by their environment'; her vision was to give the surrounding people 'a chance of developing into the sort of individuals they were meant to be'.¹⁰² The organisation of activities and fund raising provided valuable opportunities for the women to develop their skills as organisers of public ventures and to gain satisfaction and a sense of self from the process. In March 1938, for example, Maud Melly took charge of a sale of work to raise funds for the PSS in which a number of her female relatives ran various stalls with other women. Although limited in scope, activities such as these should not be denigrated as trivial. Through them many women were acquiring new experiences and developing new

⁹⁸ Telephone conversation with Helen Forrester, 30 June 1997.

⁹⁹ For the public careers of these women, see Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁰ LRO/PSS/3/1/7: Annual Report (1928), p.15. Mrs Stapleton, who became a member of the South Group, began working as a PSS volunteer in 1922 because she felt that she had leisure time when her two children had grown up: LRO/PSS/11/5: Stapleton, Memories, p.4. After the birth of her second son in 1929, Ethel Wormald, denied the opportunity of teaching by the marriage bar, found herself feeling lost in such a large city and in need of 'some extra stimulus', and '[h]aving a good deal of time on [her] hands . . . became involved in voluntary work for the Liverpool PSS, which involved [her] in regular visiting of families in the dockside areas': Wormald Family Papers: Ethel Wormald, Notes for a 'Women of the North' Lunch, 1985. Maud Melly, who was not engaged in paid work and enjoyed the benefits of paid domestic help, could afford to spend at least three days a week on PSS activities: Melly, Scouse Mouse, p.77.

¹⁰¹ LRO/PSS/3/1/10: Annual Report (1931), p.19.

¹⁰² Muriel B. Wells, 'Six Years and a Half in Netherfield Road', Liverpool Diocesan Review, 1 (1926), pp.189, 191.

skills.¹⁰³

The PSS and the CVA also promoted religious co-operation in welfare work. Represented on them were several welfare organisations which had been developed by different religious establishments during the nineteenth century. Although these were not necessarily women's charities, they included the Catholic Children's Protection Society, the Society of Vincent de Paul, and the Jewish Community.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the Church of England, the Free Church Council, the Jewish Community, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Unitarians had representatives on the PSS Council.¹⁰⁵ In 1936, however, the opposition of Archbishop Downey to the promotion of birth control by the PSS led to most of the Catholic PSS workers being directed to leave the organisation and entering a new Catholic organisation which fulfilled a similar role to the PSS for the Catholic community. In 1936 Downey was invited to become a Vice-President of the PSS. At the same time Lilian Mary Mott (Deputy Chairman of the PSS 1935-1938) was featured in the Annual Report. She had played a leading role in initiating a birth control clinic in the city in July 1925, which received a grant from the City Council in 1935. When Downey learned that visitors could advocate the use of birth control if necessary, he wrote to all Catholic volunteers to instruct them to sever their links with the PSS. Following attempts at mediation by the workers, the four who were salaried were granted permission to remain in their posts. This episode resulted in the establishment of the Catholic Social Service Bureau (CSSB) in Trueman Street, under the auspices of the Catholic Aid Society. The appointment of Miss Margaret Blackledge, a former PSS worker who had built up a successful social service bureau in Hull, as its Secretary ensured that links continued between the two organisations. While the Archbishop spoke of admiring the 'humanitarian zeal and energy' of other organisations, he added that 'it would be folly to close our eyes to the fact that on certain vital issues our stand-point is poles asunder'. He made it clear that the CSSB's aid was 'primarily, though not exclusively for Catholics'.¹⁰⁶ This incident suggests that although numerous Liverpool organisations promoted religious co-operation on the basis of citizenship, and women worked together across religious divides, when an issue was fundamental to a faith the Church asserted its position.

¹⁰³ LRO/PSS/11/1/26: News and Notes, 71 (September 1938).

¹⁰⁴ I am grateful to Mr Andy Wood of the Nugent Care Society, Brownlow Hill, for allowing me access to the Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society Annual Reports (1924-1939).

¹⁰⁵ LRO/PSS/3/1/7: Annual Report (1928), pp.2-3.

¹⁰⁶ Keeling, The Crowded Stairs, pp.64-7. See also, Mott, Lilian Mary Mott, p.110-11; Mary Macaulay, The Story of the Mothers' Welfare Clinic 1926-1951 (Liverpool: n.p., 1951); 'Work of Social Salvage', Liverpool Daily Post, 13 April 1937.

New Approaches to Welfare Provision: Idea and Reality

Nineteenth-century social work has sometimes been interpreted as an attempt, in part, to exercise middle-class control, impose order in the homes of the working-class, and curb working-class culture. Jane Lewis has pointed out that during the latter part of the century working-class families were met by all manner of women visiting in an official capacity (including, for example, sanitary inspectors and district nurses).¹⁰⁷ These women represented authority, and their visits were often unwelcome. Historians have noted the imperialist or power-infused language of philanthropy, and the treatment of 'the poor' almost as children.¹⁰⁸ The encounter between the lady visitor Mrs Balkwill (the classic creation of Stephen Reynolds) and the working-class Perring family, provides us with a plausible view of how the visited must often have viewed their uninvited visitors. From the moment when she sweeps in without a knock, Mrs Balkwill's behaviour irritates the Perrings. She cringes as she pets the baby at 'arm's length' and, with 'an enthusiasm for standing up', proceeds in a condescending manner to instruct Mr Perring on how to vote.¹⁰⁹ Although Mrs Balkwill's purpose is electioneering, the important point is her general attitude, and the assumptions which she clearly makes. Dorothy Keeling's recollections show that disdain was not the preserve of privileged women. Whilst working for the Bradford Guild of Help in 1907, she encountered an official visitor who carried a brown paper sheet with her to sit on. On the other hand, she also came across an unofficial visitor (a former Lady Mayoress) who treated her clients with enough respect to leave her calling card.¹¹⁰

Relations between the classes had been subject to renewed scrutiny since the late nineteenth century, a process intensified by the rise of Labour and New Liberalism's commitment to welfare reforms during the Edwardian period.¹¹¹ Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century traditional views of social work as a means of controlling the poor, and attitudes about the causes of poverty and the best means of dealing with it, had been the subject of rigorous debate. With the growing appreciation that poverty had many causes, that 'the poor' were made up of many individuals with differing needs and circumstances, and that these individuals should be treated as equals by those who helped them, social work came to be viewed as a way of breaking down the barriers between rich and poor. This was evident, to

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, 'Women and Late-Nineteenth-Century Social Work', p.78.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, p.259.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Reynolds and Bob & Tom Woolley, *Seems So! A Working-Class View of Politics* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), pp.3-12.

¹¹⁰ Keeling, *The Crowded Stairs*, p.11.

¹¹¹ Including old age pensions, school meals, and school medical inspection.

some extent, in COS case work, though it continued to attract criticism because visitors were encouraged to maintain the distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor.¹¹² It was also apparent in the work of Octavia Hill and Helen Bosanquet, who felt that social workers should try to change habits by working with poor families as their friends rather than by dictating to them.¹¹³ New approaches such as these became much more marked after 1900, when women were perceived as the most efficient proponents of personal social work. The work of the Edwardian visitors Lady Bell, Miss Loane, and Maud Pember Reeves suggests that progress was being made towards a new understanding between visitor and visited. As Sally Alexander notes in her introduction to *Round About A Pound A Week*, 'Maud Pember Reeves did not presume to teach poor women how to run their homes; she wanted to learn about their daily lives from their own lips'.¹¹⁴ It is against this background - one in which there was greater understanding of the plight of the poor and of the structural causes of poverty, increasing possibilities for women to engage in social work, and an extension of women's citizenship status - that the involvement of Liverpool women in social work during the inter-war period must be understood.

The new attitudes towards the poor can clearly be traced in the work of social workers in Liverpool in this period. Social workers, both voluntary and paid, appear to have been more concerned with dealing with particular problems as they arose than with imposing middle-class values. There is little evidence that their efforts were anything other than genuine and progressive attempts to deal with poverty and the social problems it generated, and it is clear that these efforts were often welcomed by those who benefited from them. While it is possible to view Settlement based activities like the Children's Music Appreciation Class, drama classes, and the 'Picture Show' as attempts at 'cultural colonisation', it is probably more appropriate to see them as honest attempts to widen access to activities which might otherwise have been unavailable to those facing hardship.¹¹⁵ Many activities were geared specifically towards the problems faced by families. In 1934, for example, the PSS introduced economic housekeeping classes to 'benefit housewives who were having such a hard and depressing struggle to make ends meet'.¹¹⁶ According to PSS literature these classes, which were offered in conjunction with others on the care of babies and toddlers, sewing and sick nursing, were very popular. They were organised at Norris Green and other new isolated

¹¹² Lewis notes that the term 'helpable' replaced 'deserving' during the 1890s: 'Women and Late-Nineteenth-Century Social Work', p.81.

¹¹³ Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector*, pp.34-37. Lewis makes an interesting observation when she suggests that social workers were encouraged to see the poor's sunnier side, and then to change their habits: 'Women and Late-Nineteenth-Century Social Work', p.96.

¹¹⁴ Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week*, p.xxi. Miss Loane was a district nurse, Lady Bell was the wife of the leading employer in her area, and Maud Pember Reeves was conducting a survey on behalf of the Fabian Women's Group: Loane, *The Queen's Poor*; Bell, *At the Works*.

¹¹⁵ *LVS Annual Report* (1924), p.4.

housing estates with few amenities.¹¹⁷ It is likely that many of those attending enjoyed these classes as much for the camaraderie and cost-price meal that they offered as for the guidance they provided on economic housekeeping. The fact that eight of the thirty women who worked for the PSS in this capacity were unmarried (one of whom was a headmistress) raises questions as to whether the women who attended ever questioned their expertise on housekeeping for a family on a tiny budget.¹¹⁸ But the classes provide further evidence of the way in which the PSS encouraged participation from a wide variety of volunteers and served to promote (possibly unwittingly to some extent) increased contact and understanding between women of differing social status and condition.

The new attitudes towards welfare provision are also evident in the PSS's emphasis upon the need for, and the value of, personal service - which usually took place within the context of the family. The PSS's Annual Report for 1928 stated that 'hand in hand with the work which the State does for the masses should go personal service for the individual . . . Our work is based on the conviction that no two unemployed men are alike, no two widows have identical needs'.¹¹⁹ Since the nineteenth century women had been perceived to be the most suitable proponents of this form of welfare.¹²⁰ In Liverpool the PSS desired its visitors, many of whom appear to have belonged to the middle classes, to claim their authority on the basis of the large city-wide organisation for which they worked rather than their class, and to treat the people they visited not as lesser beings to be patronised but as 'clients' for whose rights they were fighting, and whose self-respect they had a responsibility to maintain. It urged its visitors to approach these clients 'in a spirit of friendship and comradeship, with the same courtesy that they would go into a friend's house'.¹²¹ George Melly, whose mother Maud was one of these visitors, noted in his autobiography that while it was 'perfectly true that The Personal Service [Society] was run on behalf of the working-classes by middle-class ladies', this was a result of the need for 'middle-class confidence' to deal with 'indifferent bureaucrats

¹¹⁶ LRO/PSS/3/1/12-16: Annual Reports (1934-1938).

¹¹⁷ LRO/PSS/3/1/12: Annual Report (1933-1934), p.10

¹¹⁸ LRO/PSS/11/1/26: News and Notes, 46 (March 1933).

¹¹⁹ LRO/PSS/3/1/7: Annual Report (1928), p.18.

¹²⁰ As can be seen in the example of the division of welfare labour practised by COS stalwarts Bernard and Helen Bosanquet; Bernard remained in the office, preferring Helen to do the visiting, because he never knew what to say. Yeo also notes that 'the wives of statisticians were often active in urban philanthropy but took no part in statistical investigations or learned societies': Contest for Social Science, pp.66, 288. The Webbs appear to have agreed with this view, arguing that 'the woman is specially adapted for sociological inquiry; not merely because she is accustomed silently to watch motives, but also because she gains access and confidence': *ibid.*, p.289. Interestingly, Ross McKibbin seems to have approached an analysis of the work of Edwardian visitors, Lady Bell, Miss Loane, and Helen Bosanquet, from a similar perspective. Discussing their work on social class, McKibbin writes that 'their sex and their occupations had much to do with the way they observed the world. As women they picked up details of domestic life that men would have missed': Ross McKibbin, 'Social Class and Social Observation in Edwardian England', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series, 28 (1978), 175-99 (p.177).

and red tape', and that his mother Maud 'so timid in controversy on a personal level, was a tiger on behalf of her clients. She knew their rights backwards and was determined they should get them'.¹²² This resolve to empower working-class clients in the face of emerging social services contrasted markedly with the attitudes and activities of earlier generations of women welfare providers; it was informed in part by an increasing awareness of the rights and mutual responsibilities of citizens.

The PSS's adherence to the new attitudes towards welfare provision is also reflected in its efforts to educate its workers. It attempted to make its voluntary workers aware of the approach to clients it desired through a series of leaflets which contained hints for visiting and occasional training classes. It also disseminated information through the publication *News and Notes*, which was launched in June 1929 as an experiment and continued throughout the 1930s.¹²³ Intended for private circulation among workers, *News and Notes* provided information on current PSS work, welfare relief available, developments in the field of welfare, and the problems faced by families (such as unemployment, malnutrition, and finance).¹²⁴ The PSS also gave its visitors the opportunity to attend lectures, such as the one given on housing by Duncan French, Chairman of the Housing Committee, in May 1932.¹²⁵ Mr French spoke to an audience of over one hundred, but on other occasions volunteers showed little enthusiasm for training classes.¹²⁶ Certainly *News and Notes* often had to include special pleas to volunteers to attend.¹²⁷

The promotion of the new attitudes and practices in visiting can also be seen in the practical work training undertaken by students from the Social Science Department at the University with the PSS, the CVA, and other Liverpool organisations. The reports on their work indicate that when they were engaged in visiting they were expected to gain the client's confidence and trust, be sympathetic and understanding, adopt a passive role of listening, and avoid being opinionated. One report on a 'good' student noted that, 'her manner when interviewing was sympathetic and she was able readily to get on good terms with those whom she saw in the office or when visiting'.¹²⁸ Another, by Frances Peck, assistant secretary of the PSS, described one young woman as a 'keen intelligent student with considerable judgement

¹²¹ LRO/PSS/3/1/2: *Annual Report* (1921), p.4.

¹²² Melly, *Scouse Mouse*, pp.77-78.

¹²³ LRO/PSS/11/1/26: *News and Notes*, 1 (June 1929).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*: 32 (June 1932); 45 (February 1933); 64 (November 1934); 57 (March 1934); 58 (April 1934).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*: 37 (June 1932).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*: 40 (September 1932); 42 (November 1932).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*: 43 (December 1932). The fact that District Committees appeared to spend meetings simply allocating and closing cases rather than discussing practice, suggests that many visitors relied solely on the 'hints for visiting' printed on leaflets produced for workers: LRO/PSS/1/5: South Group II Minutes(1921-1936); 1/6: Dingle Branch Minutes (1921-1925); 11/1/27: Leaflet for Workers (March 1927).

¹²⁸ LUSC/A174: Report on Miss F. E.

and common-sense for a girl of her age. She had a pleasant manner with the clients and readily appreciated their point of view'.¹²⁹ Conversely, a less favourable report described one student as 'too opinionated . . . her manner is unfortunate and is not always understood by the people whom she visits'.¹³⁰

Just as the limitations of the evidence make it difficult to determine how widespread the new attitudes towards the poor were among the visitors who worked for the PSS, so it makes it hard to judge the extent to which the visited were aware of these attitudes and were affected by them. It must also be borne in mind that the evidence tends to document welfare visiting from the perspective of the visitors or their assessors and superiors rather than from that of the people they visited.¹³¹ While some clients often asked for Maud Melly by name, others may have been more reluctant to accept her help, especially because of the stigma attached to the receipt of charity. Maud Melly 'recalled walking down a slum street to further some enquiry and hearing one elderly "Mary Ellen", the Liverpool name for those beshawled old women who were the matriarchs of the slums, remarking sarcastically to a contemporary, "There goes a bit of charity for someone's back-yard."'.¹³² 'The women in Netherfield Road,' wrote Muriel Wells, Victoria Settlement warden, 'tell you with obvious self-satisfaction, that they keep themselves to themselves'.¹³³ The families who were visited usually lived near one another in areas where neighbours were easily aware of any coming-and-going. It is questionable how many people felt that they were being helped by visitors. Although Dorothy Keeling hoped that the PSS could overcome the problems of class differences between visitors and visited, in reality class differences must have influenced interaction.¹³⁴ Even where visitors were working-class, it is likely that divisions which existed within the working-class would be magnified in this situation. As Eileen Yeo has suggested, since the numbers of visitors were increasing 'it is really no surprise that the poor should smudge any clear dividing line between different categories of visitor and treat the whole collective plague with suspicion and reserve'.¹³⁵ There is thus a need to recognise the possibility of a wide gulf between aim and reality in the work of the visitors.

¹²⁹ Ibid.: Report on Miss I. B..

¹³⁰ Ibid.: Report on Miss H. A. One of the few male students was criticised for being 'too brusque':
ibid.: Report on Mr J. P.

¹³¹ As Angela John points out, 'We have only their [the visited] opinions refracted through [the visitor] Lady Bell herself and it would be interesting to know what they might have said after closing the door when she left': Bell, *At the Works*, p.xvii.

¹³² Melly, *Scouse Mouse*, p.78.

¹³³ Wells, 'Six Years', p.187. See also Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain 1900-1950* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), esp. Chap.3.

¹³⁴ It is also questionable as to how far this attempt to overcome class difference may have been inspired by the belief that this was *necessary* in an age when deference was becoming increasingly irrelevant and even resented: see W. G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory: Volume III, Applied Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.61-2, 154-56, 221.

¹³⁵ Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, p.273.

The new ideas and practices of social work discernible in the activities of the PSS do not appear to have permeated the field of rescue work in quite the same way. The evidence here relates to case of the LRSHH. The rather condescending, even judgemental attitude displayed by some of its members during the first ten years of its existence (1890-1900) was still in evidence during the 1920s and 1930s. The emotive and often discriminatory language used by the LRSHH in its publication literature before 1900 was toned down, but did not disappear. The startling imagery of 'women perishing in a tidal wave of evil' and 'little untrained girls who are no more than street arabs' evident in 1900 was replaced by 1933 with references to 'the destitute and the unfortunate . . . waifs and strays of our city, the victims of their own and others' sin and folly'.¹³⁶ In 1919 the Committee discussed the necessity of establishing more classification within the House by providing separate accommodation for the 'destitute', the 'respectable', the stranded and those brought in by rescue workers. Though the plan does not appear to have been implemented in the House, this form of categorisation appears to have informed discussions throughout the period. The LRSHH Committee displayed similar attitudes towards its own staff. The appointment of a new assistant matron, Elaine Scholfield, in 1922 prompted the Committee to note that 'she is a working-class woman and will take her meals with the inmates'.¹³⁷

As was common in rescue homes, the LRSHH expected inmates to contribute to general household duties during their stay. It was a means by which order and discipline could be introduced into their lives. A discussion on this practice by the Committee in 1920 reveals more about its attitude towards the women in its care. Members felt that some inmates who made small financial contributions for their keep were treating the House as a hotel and did not feel the need to contribute to domestic work. The Committee minutes refer to the 'unspeakable filthiness of the habits' of some of the inmates, and the fact that when some did contribute they did so in a 'slatternly way', with the result that 'most of [it] needed to be done again'.¹³⁸ In fairness to the Committee, it should be noted that they often felt let down by some inmates: 'Mrs B.' was labelled as such a bad influence that she was not to be allowed back again; 'J. B.', an inmate in whom the Matron had had great confidence, 'de-camped' one night taking with her some of the best blankets, which she then pawned; and 'M.W.' broke the panes in the door for a second time when she turned up at the House one night very drunk.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, the attitude displayed by the LRSHH Committee is particularly interesting in

¹³⁶ LRO/LRSHH/3/1: *Annual Report* (1900), p. 8; *Ibid*/3/42: (1933), p.12.

¹³⁷ LRO/LRSHH/1/1: Committee Minutes (5 April 1922). Louise A. Jackson notes that in homes for girls the staff who had daily contact with inmates were often working-class: "'Singing Birds and Soap Suds": The Salvation Army's Work with Sexually Abused Girls in Edwardian England', *Gender and History*, 12 (1) (2000), 107-26 (p.109).

¹³⁸ LRO/LRSHH/1/1: LRSHH Committee Minutes (3 March 1920).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* (16 January 1924); Executive Committee Minutes (18 January 1928).

the light of the effort made by other organisations to empathise with the individuals whom they were seeking to assist.

The policy of selective empathy adopted by the LRSHH Committee may be explained to some extent by the nature and variety of women the House catered for. Concern was shown for women like the one who was admitted in January 1934 'black and blue from [her husband's] kicks and blows' with her 'completely terrorised' children; whereas disapproval was displayed to 'undesirable' ones like 'A.S.', suspected to be suffering from venereal disease, who was not only 'a bad influence' but also 'openly' admitted to visiting cafes and associating with men.¹⁴⁰ Whereas some of the other welfare organisations like the PSS often sought to help working-class families through 'good mothers' (whose circumstances were usually perceived to be beyond their control) in the context of the family, many of the women the LRSHH assisted were perceived as 'bad' and less deserving of respect, having (supposedly) succumbed willingly to drink and men, and having (in needing access to the House of Help) placed themselves outside of the family structure. The attitude displayed by the LRSHH Committee suggests the continuation of an older tradition of welfare work during the inter-war period, one based upon a limited and sometimes prejudiced understanding of the position and experience of many working-class women. It also raises questions about how far the discussion of new ideas of, and approaches to, welfare work in this period was merely rhetoric. It is significant that two of the proponents of the idea advanced in 1919 for classifying inmates of the LRSHH were the PSS Secretary Dorothy Keeling and the Director of the Women Patrols, Mabel Cowlin, and that together with Keeling other members of the LRSHH Committee (including Miss Lloyd Davies, Miss Breeze, and Miss Forster) these women were closely involved in the PSS and the CVA, the two organisations which were attempting to implement the new attitudes towards social work.¹⁴¹ The point serves to remind us that, even within some of the more progressive welfare organisations, the new attitudes probably took time to be accepted, may have been accepted only partially or superficially, and existed alongside more traditional views and practices.

Further questions concern the extent to which the attempts to widen the social base of welfare work was influenced by concepts of citizenship and the impact of the 1918 franchise extension. For prominent women like Dorothy Keeling who were involved in the WCA, the idea of citizenship was almost certainly an important motivating force; but how far this is true of many of the less prominent and less wealthy women engaged in social work is questionable. For many women, both prominent and less prominent, a range of personal motivations were

¹⁴⁰ LRO/LRSHH/1/2: Committee Minutes (24 January 1934); (5 December 1928); (9 August 1933).

¹⁴¹ LRO/LRSHH/1/1: Committee Minutes (2 April 1919). Miss Keeling was reported to be thinking of resigning from the Committee in February 1922, though no reason was given: *ibid.* (15 February 1922).

probably also involved. In the case of Ethel Wormald, for example, voluntary work was a supplement to a life as a wife and mother, a much needed stimulus for a woman who was denied the opportunity to work. Similarly, for Maud Melly the PSS provided a 'cause' through which 'she experienced a sense of purpose and fulfilment'.¹⁴² In the case of the PSS volunteer Margaret Fitch, however, it is likely that her commitment to the Positivist religion, discussed, in the previous chapter, was a strong motivating force. It is unfortunate that the limitations of the surviving evidence, particularly the lack of personal papers and diaries, and the private nature of religious observance makes the extent and range of personal motivations difficult to uncover.

VI

Conclusion

The multi-faceted and localised nature of welfare provision in Britain during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries provided much scope for women's involvement, increasingly on their own terms. The pattern of this involvement varied according to locality, and the experience of women in Liverpool is particularly interesting. The provision of welfare in the city, as elsewhere, was a mixture of amateur, professional, state-funded, and charitable ventures, an arrangement which allowed many women to participate. It operated by drawing upon a vast resource of women - some of them trained and paid, some trained volunteers, many more unpaid volunteers - for whom welfare and social work was but one aspect of a busy public life.

The development of the Victoria Settlement in 1898 and the creation of the School of Social Science fourteen years later were important landmarks in promoting women's participation in social action, as was the arrival in Liverpool of Elizabeth Macadam, who provided the city with its first professional female social worker. Important and timely links were then developed between the Settlement, the School, and the CRS. The resulting development of the CVA and the PSS was immensely important not only in helping to organise and focus the vast charitable scene which already existed in Liverpool, but also in organising volunteers, the majority of whom were women. One of the key players here was Dorothy Keeling, a rarity in some respects but a woman who wielded considerable power in the field alongside her male colleagues in her capacity as Secretary. Although Jane Lewis has argued that trained women who entered the social welfare field did so as practical frontline workers rather than as policy-makers, the work of Keeling and other women indicates that,

¹⁴² Melly, *Scouse Mouse*, p.77.

although certainly less prominent in the sphere of policy-making, women fulfilled both roles in inter-war Liverpool.

It is apparent that by 1939 women had made significant progress within Liverpool's welfare scene, from what had been a relatively weak base. Between the wars, the scope and scale of women's social action increased, as in other cities. This was encouraged by the growing concern with personal service, the better organisation and administration of welfare schemes, and the new ideas and approaches to welfare which were very different from those of the era of 'Lady Bountiful'. These ideas and approaches owed much to the developing concept of citizenship and the increasing professionalisation of social work. There was a growing recognition of the humanity of the individuals with whom social workers dealt. Increased understanding of the nature and causes of poverty inspired those interested in welfare to develop new schemes which adopted a more holistic approach to the problem. Nationally, the infant welfare movement had already helped to locate women at the centre of initiatives, and further empowered by welfare's changing ethos women capitalised upon the possibilities for increased participation in an arena where they had already claimed a unique role. Conscious of the growing concern to traverse class boundaries which had been expressed during the early part of the twentieth century, inter-war welfare workers displayed a determination to shake off the 'Lady Bountiful' image, a process which brought with it a re-examination of the relationship between visitor and client, and a move towards more democratic social work. This can be seen when the Guild of Help movement reached Liverpool in the guise of the PSS, an organisation which played a significant role in enlarging women's voluntary social work after 1919 and fostering greater understanding between its workers and the needy in the city, not least by appointing visitors from a wider class base. The work of the PSS and some of the other welfare organisations in which women were involved suggests that privilege, class authority and deference became less important in women's social work in Liverpool in the inter-war period.

Yet the evidence also suggests that the impact of these changes must not be over-emphasised. There were limits to the development of professionalisation, the broadening of class participation, the new attitudes towards poverty and the poor, and the increasing influence of ideas of citizenship in the social work scene in Liverpool between the wars. This can be seen in the work of the House of Help and its Committee, the attitudes of certain individuals, the financial and other barriers that prevented wider class participation in Social Science courses at the University (which appear to have recruited only middle-class women), and in the limited training and lack of formal qualifications even of advocates of the new approaches like Dorothy Keeling and Elizabeth Macadam. Despite trends towards professionalisation and the developing emphasis on the need for trained workers, much work

continued to be undertaken by volunteers whose endeavours continued to be restricted by finance and domestic circumstances. Keeling's hopes of opening out welfare work to the lower-classes were only partially realised. Even the PSS continued to be run by men and women of the same social status as those who had always led welfare organisations in the city, continued to rely on middle-class women volunteers as visitors, and maintained a hierarchical structure in which the more routine office jobs tended to be given to working-class women who wore a particular colour of uniform. More generally, it is questionable how far the ideas of extended citizenship and new conceptions of dealing with the poor percolated down from the leadership of welfare organisations to and through the ranks of 'ordinary' members and volunteers. Some, perhaps many, of these women engaged in welfare work for other reasons: because they had spare time on their hands, wanted a stimulus, felt inspired by religion or by humanitarian compassion for the poverty they saw around them, or desired to play a greater part in the life of the community. Some of these women were content to remain involved on a voluntary basis. Such women had existed in the late nineteenth century, and they were to be found active in other key areas of Liverpool civic life between the wars.

Other women combined within themselves new and old traditions. We have already noted that Maud Melly, in the memory of her son George, was a tiger when fighting for the rights of the clients she dealt with. But George Melly also remembered that

There was . . . a tendency to use her clients as a source of mildly snobbish anecdote . . . Sometimes also there was a failure of empathy . . . whenever a woman, deserted, beset by debt, another child on the way, chain-smoked through an interview . . . Although her work over the years gave her more awareness of working-class life and more than most of her set, she had no working-class friends.

There was, according to George, 'something of the *Lady Bountiful*' in his mother's visits to several old women who had been 'in service' and were 'ever impressed' by the condescension of Maud who 'basked a little too easily in the sycophancy'. In the view of her son, 'Maud was of course a woman of her time' to whose social assumptions '[i]t is pointless to apply today's standards', who 'derived satisfaction from being admired for her "selfless" dedication, but [who] achieved certain positive results, relieved some hardship.'¹⁴³ George Melly's comments serve to remind us that the women who engaged in welfare work between the wars were all individuals, on whom the impact of new ideas and attitudes is likely to have varied considerably. Maud Melly was dedicated to her social work, spending as many as three days a week over many years engaged in it, but her attitude towards it differed considerably from

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.78-9.

that of some of her contemporaries, like Dorothy Keeling and Elizabeth Macadam. For all her hard work and genuine compassion, Maud remained, in many ways, a product of her background and her class. In her and many other women from similar backgrounds who engaged in social work in Liverpool between the wars, something of the spirit of 'Lady Bountiful' lived on, albeit in a new form.

Chapter Four

‘Stalwart Amazons in Blue Serge’: The Campaign for Women Police in Liverpool

On 28 January 1930 Liverpool Watch Committee overturned a City Council resolution in favour of the appointment of women police to the city force.¹ The appointment of official women police was central to the aims of the women’s movement between the wars. Nowhere was the campaign played out more dramatically than in Liverpool, where it was driven by a Women Police Propaganda Committee (LWPPC), composed of leading citizens from across the political spectrum.² The energy of the LWPPC could not match the power of Alderman Maxwell Hyslop Maxwell, Watch Committee Chairman from 1901 until his death in October 1937. His opposition was validated by the Home Office’s decision to leave the matter to local discretion, despite the favourable recommendations of two government appointed committees and a Royal Commission.³ The Liverpool police force, like others, was prepared to use policemen’s wives and to accept women as unofficial police and ancillary staff, with the result that women were kept on the peripheral sphere of law and order. The situation was further complicated by the presence of the Women Patrols, an organisation which, though separate from the police force, received a small Watch Committee grant to undertake much of the work which campaigners argued should be performed by women police. Patrols worked throughout the inter-war years to promote the ability of women to perform police duty, and especially to ensure that the needs of women and children were met. The Liverpool Patrol Committee (LPC) was aware that the patrols enabled Maxwell to claim that he was fulfilling Home Office recommendations regarding the employment of women on certain police duties.

Paradoxically, the informal appointment of women on police duties, either as patrols

¹ Liverpool Record Office (hereafter LRO)/352/MIN/WAT: Liverpool Watch Committee Minutes (hereafter LRO/LWCM) (28 January 1930); LRO/352/MIN/COU/II: Liverpool City Council Minutes (hereafter LRO/LCCM) (2 January 1930).

² Many forces employed women to undertake ‘police’ duties, but they were not official or attested police. Under the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act women could be attested. For discussion of the campaign for women police see, John Carrier, *The Campaign for the Employment of Women as Police Officers* (Avebury: Gower, 1988); Chloe Owings, *Women Police: A Study of the Development and Status of the Women Police Movement* (Montclair: Patterson Smith, 1969); Joan Lock, *The British Policewoman: Her Story* (London: Robert and Hale, 1979).

³ PP1920, vol. xxii, Cmd. 877, p.1087, *Report of the Committee on the Employment of Women on Police Duties*; PP1924, vol. xii, Cmd. 2224, p.193, *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Employment of Policewomen*; PP1929, vol. ix, Cmd. 3297, p.127, *Report of the Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure*.

or unofficial policewomen, helped to deny women the right to official status and the benefits of a career enjoyed by men. Home Office reluctance to demand the appointment of women police meant that the conditions under which women served in police forces varied considerably across the country. This chapter investigates the impact of this reluctance in Liverpool. It examines the campaign for women police there, focussing on the strategies used by the LWPPC, the impact of these strategies, and the resistance they faced. To underline the unique nature of the campaign the chapter begins by considering the patrols, including the reasons for their creation, their function, and the way in which they developed. It moves on to examine, within a national context, the launch of the campaign in 1922 and its progress thereafter, before discussing the arguments presented by the LWPPC, Maxwell, the Chief Constable, and other interested parties. These arguments reveal much about the aspirations of women for a greater public role in this period, the ideas they developed, and the strategies they used to attain them, and the nature and extent of the opposition they faced. Ultimately the failure of Liverpool Watch Committee to appoint official women police until 1948 resulted from a combination of factors: the lack of a strong directive policy from the government, limited support from successive Chief Constables, and a lack of resolution in the City Council and amongst the public.⁴ Despite its ultimate failure, however, the campaign is of considerable importance in understanding the struggle of women for an equal role in public life, and some of the reasons for its longer term success.

I

The Liverpool Police Force and the Origins, Development, and Work of the Women Patrols

The Liverpool Constabulary, the first to be established outside the Metropolitan force, was created in 1836 and directly responsible to the Watch Committee.⁵ Liverpool was then notorious as 'the Black Spot on the Mersey' for the extent of its crime, poverty, drunkenness, and prostitution. Gradually, however, the city gained a reputation for designing social experiments to deal with such problems. Ventures such as the Police Aided Clothing Association (PACA) of 1895, and the 1898 scheme under which the Liverpool Corporation

⁴ The Chief Constables of Liverpool during this period were Leonard Dunning (1902-1912), Francis Caldwell (1912-1925), Lionel Everett (1925-1932), and A. K. Wilson (1932-1940).

⁵ Brian D. White, *A History of the Corporation of Liverpool 1835-1914* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1951), pp.16, 19. See also W. R. Cockcroft, 'The Liverpool Police Force, 1836-1902', in *Victorian Lancashire*, ed. by S. P. Bell (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1974), pp.150-68; idem, *From Cutlasses to Computers: The Police Force in Liverpool, 1836-1989* (Shropshire: S.B. Publications, 1991); George H. Pumphrey, *The Story of Liverpool's Public Services* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1940), Chap. 9; Eric Midwinter, *Old Liverpool* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971), Chap. 3.

took over the licensing of street children, helped foster links between the police and the community.⁶ At this time the Liverpool police force employed only men, but informal use was made of women auxiliaries and constables' wives to deal with the young and female victims of crime.⁷ Policemen had to obtain special permission to marry, and future brides were 'vetted'.⁸

It was not until 1912, however, that Chief Constable Francis Caldwell appointed Mrs Georgiana Euphemia Hughes, a thirty-five year old Sanitary Inspector, as Matron at the Main Bridewell.⁹ By 1914, in addition to Hughes the Liverpool force employed six female wardens and fifteen charwomen, and relied on the services of nineteen policemen's wives.¹⁰ But moves were being made outside the force for the appointment women police. At a meeting of the Liverpool Select Vestry (a board of ratepayers) on 21 July 1914 a certain Mrs MacDonald drew attention to the need for women police 'to discharge defined duties'; it was, she argued, 'essential in the interest of women and the community generally and that the Home Secretary be so informed'. She was seconded by Thomas White, the future local Conservative leader, who referred to the 'miserable reptiles who infest the streets of Liverpool to the danger of women and girls'.¹¹

Nationally, demands for women police had been made since the late nineteenth century. They were linked to the growing concerns of social purity campaigners, women's leaders, and others about the changing sexual climate - especially the supposed increasing level of immorality - and their calls for new ways to protect women and children.¹² The argument that measures were needed to ensure decent treatment for women and children who came into contact with the criminal-justice system, especially those whose contact was connected with sexual crimes, was central to the case for the appointment of women police. This was in tune with contemporary debates concerning general welfare needs.¹³ The

⁶ See Cockcroft, 'Liverpool Police Force', p.150; Michael Brogden, On the Mersey Beat: Policing Liverpool Between the Wars (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.102.

⁷ Brogden, On the Mersey Beat, pp.25, 27. For details of police-wives' terms: LRO/LWCM (3 February 1920).

⁸ Brogden, On the Mersey Beat, p.25.

⁹ LRO/LWCM (29 April 1912).

¹⁰ 1910 is the last year when details regarding staffing other than Police themselves were meticulously recorded: LRO/H352/2/WAT: Report on Police Establishment and State of Crime (hereafter RPESC) with Tabular Returns (1910).

¹¹ LRO/352/SEL: Liverpool Select Vestry Minutes (21 July 1914).

¹² For a discussion of purity movements, see Edward J. Bristow, Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700 (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Judith R. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Stefan Petrow, Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office 1870-1914 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹³ See, for example, Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', History Workshop Journal, 5 (1978), 9-65. Before the war, Edith Watson presented revealing accounts of women's experiences of justice in her column 'The Protected Sex', in the Women's Freedom League journal The Vote: Alison Woodeson, 'The First Women Police: A Force for Equality or Infringement?', Women's History Review, 2 (2) (1993), 217-32 (pp.218-20).

apparent threat of the white-slave trader preying on the young led some women to undertake protective observational work at ports and stations in Britain, Europe, and Canada.¹⁴ The success of this work prompted demands that it be extended to include patrolling parklands, inspecting lodging houses, and investigating assaults. The Metropolitan police came to be assisted by the National Vigilance Association (NVA), which was formed in 1885 and campaigned for social and moral purity. But there were growing demands for the creation of a separate women's police force which could be used to implement the new Criminal Law Amendment Act.¹⁵ The outbreak of war promoted the partial realisation of these demands and raised expectations even further.

The war helped to generate the movement for women police by exacerbating existing concerns about growing immorality and corruption, especially amongst women.¹⁶ The increasing incidence of young women on the streets, their greater freedom to travel, the apparent relaxation of parental control, and the growing independence of many single women, fuelled anxiety.¹⁷ Concerns were voiced about wives who 'drank' their separation allowance.¹⁸ Women were no longer perceived as the passive recipients of male desire.¹⁹ In Liverpool, as early as 1908 Chief Constable Dunning regarded the 'amateur' prostitute as a 'greater enemy to virtue than the professional street-walker'; and he also saw immorality as a threat to public health through the spread of venereal disease.²⁰ The demands of those who supported the appointment of women police grew during 1914.²¹ The National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) appointed an *ad hoc* committee to consider the issue, which decided to create a band of voluntary women patrols. Prompted by concerns regarding the impact of the changed conditions of war upon the behaviour of young women, the government welcomed the idea.²² A letter appeared in *The Times* in October 1914 requesting

¹⁴ Lucy Bland, 'In the Name of Protection: The Policing of Women in the First World War', in *Women in Law: Explorations in Law, Family and Sexuality*, ed. by Julia Brophy and Carol Smart (London: Routledge, 1985), pp.23-49 (p. 24).

¹⁵ See Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp.117-75.

¹⁶ Edith Tancred, *Women Police 1914-1950* (London: National Council of Women, 1951), p.1.

¹⁷ Successive Chief Constables returned to these themes: LRO/H352/2/WAT: *RPESC* (1895-1914).

¹⁸ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 15 October 1914.

¹⁹ Lucy Bland has termed this the 'sexualising of women: "Guardians of the Race" or "Vampires Upon the Nation's Health"?': Female Sexuality and Its Regulation in Early Twentieth Century Britain', in *The Changing Experience of Women*, ed. by Elizabeth Whitelegg *et al.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp.373-88.

²⁰ LRO/H352/2/WAT: *RPESC* (1908), p.39. In 1910 Dunning repeated his warning that 'there is little or no question nowadays of girls being led astray by professional procuresses, they can do all the tempting or soliciting themselves': *ibid.* (1910), p.68.

²¹ In July 1914 the Home Secretary met a deputation consisting of representatives of some twenty-four organisations, including the NUWW, the Women's Freedom League, and the Mothers' Union who presented arguments for women police: Bland, 'Guardians', p.234. See also Tancred, *Women Police*, p.1

²² See Philippa Levine, "'Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should": Women Police in World War One', *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994), 34-78 (p.42); Woodson, 'The First Women

donations for patrol work. It was signed by various organisations of a social, feminist, or religious nature, involved in the care and protection of women, young people and children - including the NVA, the Church Army, the Mothers' Union, the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).²³ This resulted in the creation of two separate women's policing organisations. The NUWW established the Women Patrols, and the Women Police Volunteers (WPV) were created by Margaret Damer Dawson, a former purity worker, and Nina Boyle, a suffragette.²⁴ The patrols were supported by a wide range of local organisations working with women and children.²⁵ The language of duty was used to inspire volunteers. Potential recruits were asked: '[i]f you are able to save one girl from temptation and the results of her thoughtlessness and ignorance, is it not more than worthwhile?' The public spirit which men had shown in offering themselves for work as special constables was presented as an example to be followed.²⁶ Some of the concerns which had helped to promote the new organisations are clear from the LPC Annual Report of 1915, which stated that 'many young girls found expression for their patriotism when war broke out by flocking to the camps' caught up in the wave of 'khaki fever'.²⁷ A year later the NUWW Annual Report expressed concern that 'the great social changes which have taken place during the last twenty years have given the opportunity for young people to take part in industrial life, and at the end of a long day spent in factory or office, hundreds of them seek excitement or social intercourse in the street'.²⁸ In the NUWW's view war brought the danger of 'war nymphomania'.²⁹ Across the country women patrolled in the vicinity of military camps, ports, cinemas, theatres, music halls, and pubs.

Police'; Bland, 'In the Name of Protection', pp.23-49.

²³ Bland, 'In the Name of Protection', p.26.

²⁴ Lock, The British Policewoman; Mary Allen, The Pioneer Policewomen (London: Chatto and Windus, 1925).

²⁵ See LRO/ACC/977: Josephine Legge Collection (file containing unlisted material) (hereafter LRO/JLC): NUWW of Great Britain and Ireland, Patrol Leaflet (n. d. c.1915). The organisations included the Catholic Women's League, the Church of England Temperance Society, the GFS, the Liverpool Civic Service League, the Liverpool Diocesan Association for Preventive and Rescue Work, the Liverpool Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Liverpool Vigilance Association, the Travellers' Aid Society, the White Cross League, the Women's Auxiliary of the Free Church Council, the WCA, the Women's Guild of the Free Co-operative Society, and the Women's Social Work of the Salvation Army.

²⁶ LRO/JLC: NUWW Patrol Recruitment Leaflet (n.d. c.1915); Liverpool Courier, 21 August 1914

²⁷ LRO/H3645/WOM (hereafter LRO/H3645): NUWW Liverpool Patrol Committee Annual Report (1915).

²⁸ *Ibid.* (1916).

²⁹ For late nineteenth-century attitudes to sexuality, see Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society; Michael Pearson, The Age of Consent: Victorian Prostitution and its Enemies (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1982); Ruth Brandon, The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question (London: Flamingo, 1991). For 'war nymphomania', see Susan Kingsley Kent, 'Gender Reconstruction After the First World War', in British Feminism in the Twentieth Century, ed. by Harold L. Smith (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), pp.66-83 (p.68).

The NUWW, like the police, was particularly concerned about Liverpool's situation as a conduit and garrison centre for troops.³⁰ Added to this were fears about the impact of war unemployment upon the moral behaviour and welfare of women. In Liverpool many women were forced into short-time work, and the authorities feared that this might push women into prostitution.³¹ The Chief Constable also worried that the poor were indulging in cheap methylated spirits, and newspapers reported excessive drinking among service wives.³²

It was in this context that the women patrols were established in Liverpool in 1914 by Mrs Lydia Booth and Mrs Edith Bright, pioneers of the local Mothers' Union. The NUWW provided the initial finance and further revenue was raised by public donations. In January 1915 Mabel Hephizibah Cowlin, a former Derbyshire headmistress who held a diploma in Social Studies from the London School of Economics, commenced work as the director of the women patrols; and later that year the LPC was granted £100 from the Watch Committee to cover expenses.³³ Cowlin's concerns reflected those of the NUWW. In 1917 she was anxious about the arrival of American soldiers, which turned Lime Street into a hive of activity as young girls eagerly awaited them.³⁴

Sixty-nine women were recruited as Liverpool patrols during the war. They commonly had the resources and time for this, being 'housewives, professional and business women, teachers, and social workers'; among them Anfield Women Citizens' Association (WCA) Secretary Sarah Everton. They patrolled notorious areas (such as Scotland Road), middle-class seaside areas (like Blundellsands), places where young people often congregated (including the Landing Stage, Lime Street, and Church Street), the dock surroundings, and the vicinities of the military camps at Litherland, Moor Lane, Seaforth, and Knotty Ash.³⁵ By 1918 they ran a hostel near Knotty Ash for young women who had become stranded.³⁶

The women patrolled in pairs, distinguished initially only by an armlet and badge. They were instructed to dress in a simple dark dress and coat, to wear an untrimmed hat, and to carry a guidebook, which contained the regulations, an authorisation card bearing the Chief Constable's signature, and a map. Their training included lectures on police method, and a system of shadowing was operated. They were supposed to liaise with city agencies such

³⁰ LRO/H352/2/WAT: RPESC (1918), p.10.

³¹ See Woodeson, 'The First Women Police', p.220; Liverpool Daily Post, 8, 15 August 1914, 28 April 1915; Liverpool Courier, 30 September 1914.

³² LRO/WOM: Liverpool Women Police Propaganda Committee Collection (hereafter LRO/WOM)/22/7: Dora Crosfield, 'On Patrol' (Leaflet) (n. d. c.1917); Liverpool Daily Post, 15 October 1914, 15 January 1915; Liverpool Courier, 15 June 1915.

³³ LRO/WOM/23/7: 'Funeral tribute to Mabel Hephizibah Cowlin' (1960); Tancred, Women Police, pp.1, 37, 39.

³⁴ Mabel Cowlin, 'Appendix III: Liverpool', in Tancred, Women Police, p.39.

³⁵ Metropolitan Police Museum, Charlton: Women's Patrol Collection (hereafter MPMC/WPC), Patrol Reports (1915-1918).

³⁶ LRO/H3645: Liverpool Patrol Committee Annual Report (1917).

as the girls' clubs, the recreation rooms, and various hostels. They carried the names and addresses of local clergy and various societies such as the GFS, YWCA, the Free Church Guild, the British Women's Temperance Association, and the Girl Guide Movement. Care of young women was their first priority; 'needy' girls were to be sent with 'someone trustworthy' to the nearest appropriate refuge.³⁷ Since the patrols had no independent powers, there was little they could do beside hope that their advice was taken.³⁸ But they were also instructed to carefully 'observe, note and report anything bearing on the social conditions of the district'.³⁹ Their work soon involved visiting organisations concerned with young people, and making improvements to the lighting facilities and the toilets in some areas. In Seaforth the Women's War Service Bureau (WWSB) helped them to convert a house into a social club where soldiers, sailors, and girls met socially. The club operated until 1928 and provided an environment where it was possible to monitor, survey, and 'police' behaviour.⁴⁰

In some ways patrol work became a form of street-centred social work. According to the LPC, the patrol '[helped] to raise the standard of order and decency' in her district, and because she maintained 'friendly relations with residents and frequenters', she became a sounding board for local parents.⁴¹ The counselling of families became common. For instance, in 1933 one father complained to a patrol about the behaviour of his eighteen-year-old daughter, who was taken off to a hostel by the patrol and 'found a good situation'.⁴² Home visiting became important, as patrols tended to 'follow up' their cases.⁴³ Ultimately, however, they could not take statements from women or children, whether they were offenders or victims. Nor could they escort or serve warrants on women, or make investigations into cases involving women. Such work had to be handed over to the police. In c.1930 the LWPPC stated that the patrols were 'unable . . . to take any Police action, in the course of their street duty, in such cases as the solicitation of women and girls by men, solicitation of men and youths by women and girls, living on the earning of prostitution, drunkenness, accident or illness in the streets, pocket-picking, shop-lifting, stealing, damage, etc., assaults, breaches of the peace'.⁴⁴

The patrols were not always welcome. On their first visit to Scotland Road they were pelted with stones.⁴⁵ On one occasion 'Miss G.', an overzealous patrol, was challenged by a man who felt 'insulted' by her standing too close one evening in the Orrell Road area of

³⁷ LRO/JLC: NUWW Patrol Leaflet (n. d. c.1915). For further rules and regulations, see LRO/WOM/22/5: NUWW Guidebook.

³⁸ The patrol did not have the power of police arrest, but could perform a citizen's arrest.

³⁹ LRO/WOM/22/5: NUWW Patrol Guidebook.

⁴⁰ Cowlin, 'Appendix III', p. 40.

⁴¹ LRO/H3645: Liverpool Women Patrols Annual Report (1929), pp.4-5.

⁴² *Ibid.* (1933), p.10.

⁴³ *Ibid.* (1917).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; LRO/WOM/22/4: 'The Need for Women Police' (NCW Leaflet, n.d. c.1933).

Litherland; her colleague had to use 'the utmost effort and tact' to calm him down.⁴⁶ As this incident suggests, patrol work involved subjective definitions of 'undesirable conduct' and varied interpretations of the appropriate response. Martin Pugh has suggested that some of the resentment felt by young men and women towards feminism during the inter-war years may be traced back to reactions to patrols. They were often viewed as 'frustrated spinsters or men-haters'.⁴⁷ Something of the nature of the reaction to them, as well as part of the reason they came into being, emerges in a speech made by Dr Kempthorne, Bishop of Lichfield, to the Patrols' annual meeting in 1916:

what the promoters of this splendid work are out for is not to claim rights but to take advantage of the opportunity for service in Church and State - they do not seek to destroy innocent fun, they are not evil minded, sourfaced people who see evils everywhere but they desire to prevent unhealthy excitement - which might lead to the most malignant evil.⁴⁸

Further insights into the reaction to patrols in Liverpool is provided by an extract from a conversation reported by a patrol in 1918: "Who are those women?" two young men asked two young girls the Patrols had found it necessary to keep a watchful eye on for several evenings. "Oh! They are the women patrols, and they are *everywhere!*" was the aggrieved answer.⁴⁹

Once patrols gained the right to wear a uniform after 1921 they were even more conspicuous. Their presence inspired some amusement. Dorothy Peto, Patrol Director from 1927 until 1930, was given the nickname Felix in the locality of Scotland Road. After spotting Peto with a new recruit, a little boy exclaimed, 'Er mother, come and look, Felix has got a kitten.'⁵⁰ But at times the patrols were appreciated. On one occasion a 'romantic schoolgirl' was saved by a patrol from a potentially threatening situation with two foreign sailors.⁵¹ On another, patrols were begged by a young woman who had been arrested to accompany her to the Bridewell because she was too drunk to be taken home; the following day they went with her to the Police Court and discussed her case with the Police Court Missionaries.⁵²

The patrols aroused debate about their proper role. Although this was sometimes

⁴⁵ Cowlin, 'Appendix III', p.41.

⁴⁶ MPMC/WPC, Hand-Written Patrol Report (May 27 n. y. d., c.1917).

⁴⁷ Martin Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.34.

⁴⁸ Liverpool Courier, 9 March 1917.

⁴⁹ LRO/H3645: Liverpool Women Patrols Annual Report (1918) (my italics).

⁵⁰ Interview with Miss Magherite White (former worker for Moral Board of Diocesan Welfare), Liverpool, 27 August 1996.

⁵¹ Tancred, Women Police, p.40; LRO/WOM/22/5: NUWW Guidebook for Women Patrols.

⁵² LRO/3645: NUWW Annual Report of Women Patrols (1917).

defined by the patrols themselves as 'befriending and protecting' women, there was sometimes a thin line between this and regulation.⁵³ The authoritative and elitist tone in the view expressed in 1915 by one patrol, Dora Crosfield, that patrols were agents of a 'new order . . . instruments of a Worker who is always right' and 'the salt of the earth' who 'must be sprinkled among the weeds', is unmistakable.⁵⁴ The ambiguous nature of the patrols' role set the tone for the debate which dominated the ensuing campaign for women police. The Chief Constable repeatedly asserted that as 'social rescue and preventive work' patrol work was 'outside the scope of police work'. Paradoxically, the ability to undertake preventive work, which provided the justification for the existence of the patrols during the war, became one of the obstacles which prevented them from being granted an official policing role after 1918.

The success of the wartime patrols and a desire for women to play a full part in policing prompted the NUWW to appeal for public and civic acknowledgement of their venture, and to encourage increasing professionalisation. This can be seen in Liverpool where, at a meeting at Church House in March 1917, Mrs Booth proposed the idea of establishing a training school in Liverpool for women police, which would be federated to the existing Bristol and Glasgow Schools.⁵⁵ The Liverpool Training School was opened in 1918, with the approval of the Chief Constable, and funded by voluntary subscriptions and student fees. Links with the University School of Social Science meant that students could specialise in either social work, police court work, or police work. The three-month courses combined practice and theory. They included report writing, investigation, patrolling, and special visiting, and subjects such as prostitution, children, drinking, and social reform were covered in lectures.

The delicate distinction between police work and patrol work came under scrutiny after 1918, when local patrol organisations across Britain were disbanded and a formal campaign was launched for the recognition of women's wartime contribution to police work. In Liverpool the Watch Committee was aware that support was growing for the appointment of women police, and it allowed the patrols to continue.⁵⁶ This may have been due in part to the fact that in 1919 the Chief Constable reported that due to an increase in duties connected with women and children, and other detective work, Mrs Hughes had been transferred from

⁵³ Woodeson, 'The First Women Police', p.218. See the discussion on WPV activities in Bland, 'In the Name of Protection', pp.23, 30-31.

⁵⁴ Crosfield, 'On Patrol'.

⁵⁵ Liverpool Courier, 9 March 1917.

⁵⁶ In 1918 Mrs Theo Stanley became Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police Women Patrols, 'the first definite official body of women police in Great Britain': Owings, Women Police, pp.27-28. She had been the leader of the London Voluntary Patrols, which were dissolved in July 1918: Tancred, Women Police, p.3. For Liverpool, see LRO/LWCM (October, November, December, 1918). Letters of support were received from Miss Gertrude Arkle of the Diocesan Social Council, Rev. W. O. Hunter Rodwell and the White Cross League, and the WCA.

the Main Bridewell to the C.I.D..⁵⁷ Nationally, negotiations between the new Chief Commissioner, Sir Nevil Macready, a supporter of women patrols, and the Home Secretary resulted in the first women police beginning duty in London on 25 February 1919.⁵⁸

In 1920 the Baird Committee was appointed to discuss the employment of women on police duties. It was made aware of, and possibly influenced by, information on police and patrol work in Liverpool. Leonard Dunning, Chief Constable of Liverpool from 1902-1911, told the Committee of his regret that the boundaries of police work had not been extended to deal with the considerable incidence of sexual immorality, due to the obvious 'risks' involved when male officers dealt with young girls, and that although 'no-one had suggested that police work could be done by women' he felt that women should have been assigned to work on such cases.⁵⁹ The Committee reported that 'in thickly populated areas, where offences relating to women and children are not infrequent, there is not only scope, but urgent need for the employment of police women'.⁶⁰ It felt strongly that the services of women police might be of great assistance in taking statements from those women and children who were the victims of indecent assault. It also advised that '[i]n the event of a local authority deciding to employ women to perform police duties . . . such women . . . should make the declaration of a constable in the same form as men, and they should be vested with the legal powers and status of a constable'.⁶¹ This appeared to offer a basis on which arguments in favour of women police could be built, but the positive recommendations were virtually nullified by a covering letter from the Home Office stating that policewomen should not be attested and that standardisation of pay should be deferred. This meant that there was no obligation upon local authorities to follow the recommendations. Local discretion thus became a dominant theme in the narrative of the Liverpool campaign for women police.

In response to developments in the Metropolitan force and the recommendations of the Baird Committee, the LPC decided that it was no longer appropriate for patrol work to be conducted by a voluntary organisation. Donations to the patrols were decreasing, particularly after the Armistice, although the Watch Committee had doubled its small grant to £200 in 1918, and a £600 grant in 1920 helped to pay the salary of four full-time workers. Even so, it was often difficult to obtain this funding, and requests for increases were usually denied.⁶² The LPC was also finding it increasingly difficult to attract volunteers, as women

⁵⁷ LRO/LWCM (14 October 1919).

⁵⁸ They 'were not attested and had not the power of arrest and were not eligible for pensions': Owings, *Women Police*, pp.27-28.

⁵⁹ Dunning was then HM Inspector of Constabulary: Lock, *The British Policewoman*, p.72.

⁶⁰ PP1920, p.5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁶² LRO/LWCM (17 October 1919), letter from Miss Royden, Honorary Treasurer of the Women Patrols Committee; (3 November 1919), letter from Hunter Rodwell; and (20 January 1920), a reminder letter.

returned to their old pre-war lives.⁶³ In August 1920, Mary Royden informed the Watch Committee that the LPC wished to hand over operations to the Police Authority.⁶⁴ The Watch Committee duly provided funding for the LPC to settle its debts, and Chief Constable Caldwell announced that he would examine the matter.

The image painted by Caldwell in his report to the Watch Committee on 7 December 1920 was of a force in which the Baird Committee recommendations had been met.⁶⁵ He reported that the twenty-nine women attached to the force were managing a wide range of duties: the custody and escort of female prisoners was done by the matrons; investigations of assault on women and children under the Children's Act were conducted by a female Inspector; and other women dealt with cases under the Immoral Traffic Act and the attending of women and children in court. Caldwell acknowledged that the work of the patrols was 'most valuable . . . in the prevention of immorality' but 'had never been' considered police duty. He concluded that although the patrols were useful auxiliaries he could find no reason for them to become official members of the police force, and that they should concentrate on preventive and rescue work. On a more positive note, he advised that patrol work ought to be funded by public money. He also presented three possibilities for the future: patrol work could cease altogether; the LPC could be asked to continue operations with the assistance of a Watch Committee grant; or a staff of women police (not necessarily sworn-in) could be appointed, at an approximate cost of £7,000.⁶⁶ Even though half the cost of the last option would be borne by the Treasury, the remaining £3,500 was unacceptable to the Watch Committee; instead it was decided that a £2,000 grant would be offered to the LPC. This not only provided the police with a supportive band of patrols but enabled Alderman Maxwell to claim that he was fulfilling the recommendations of the Baird Committee. The Watch Committee minutes of 25 January 1921 record that the Chief Constable was satisfied that the Committee had acted wisely, as he had obtained 'Confidential reports' indicating that women police were regarded as an 'expensive luxury' in London.⁶⁷

At a meeting in December 1920, the LPC, unaware of the Watch Committee decision, decided to submit a resolution to it urging 'the appointment of a strong body of women police adequately trained and paid as an integral part of the city Police Force in accordance with the terms of the Home Office report'. The LPC wanted to make clear that

⁶³ It was difficult to get volunteers in Knowsley where 'they very much question the need of guarding girls whom they have known so long': MPMC/WPC, Patrol Report (March 1915). See also *ibid.* (September, October, 1915; March, April 1916) for similar comments.

⁶⁴ LRO/LWCM (20 August 1920), letter from Mary Royden.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* (7 December 1920).

⁶⁶ The estimate included one inspector (£300), eight sergeants (£800), twenty-six constables (£5408), the rent of an office (£200), and additional expenditure (no allowance was made for pensions).

without official status the patrols could not 'undertake certain of the duties commended in the report as suitable for women police'.⁶⁸ In anticipation of an unfavourable decision, a request for an annual sum of £4,000, to enable them to continue their work and to allow them to employ at least ten special patrols, was also submitted. On 1 January 1921 the sum of £2,000 was granted by the Watch Committee, and the LPC had no choice but to accept. The grant made possible the appointment of four more patrols, bringing the number of full-timers to eight, including the Director. But the position of the patrols remained precarious. They had been marginalised, and care had to be taken to impress rather than antagonise their sponsors. The dilemma of the LPC was that it had to co-operate with the local authorities, and that, in the absence of Home Office regulations, this co-operation would allow these authorities to claim that women police were unnecessary.

Perhaps for this reason the authorities allowed the patrols to take on further duties in the 1920s, including the Inspection of Common Lodging Houses and the organisation of a waiting room for younger witnesses and single women at the Court. The Patrol Office, located in the city centre in Cases Street, was open twelve hours a day. The patrols liaised with the police and played an important role in the network of voluntary organisations active in the city, like the Liverpool Rescue Society and House of Help (LRSHH). They appear to have made progress on the streets, reporting, for example, that they gained the trust of the initially suspicious residents of the China Town area, around Pitt Street. The areas and environments they worked in must initially have been alien, even threatening, to them. Dorothy Peto recalled that patrol work required 'courage and initiative' and involved patrolling

the dockside alleys, where children might be found accosting seamen on behalf of their mothers; Pitt Street, with a Chinese population at the city end and a West Indian and African population at the other, punctuated by seaman's doss-houses and dubious cafes. Scotland Road, with its Irish and Italian residents ready to boil over at the least provocation. These, with Lime Street and its environs, offered a wide and varied field of work and of invaluable experience.⁶⁹

Dora Crosfield, a member of the LPC and an organiser for the Liverpool Union of Girls' Club, pointed out that patrol work, which involved facing the 'ugly realities of life', could endanger the purity of good Christian women.⁷⁰ But Peto saw it differently, claiming that by the late 1920s patrols had begun to see themselves as 'adventurers' in strange and hitherto

⁶⁷ LRO/LWCM (25 January 1921).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: Letter detailing outcome of LPC meeting (13 December 1920).

⁶⁹ Quoted by Lock, *The British Policewoman*, p.74.

⁷⁰ Crosfield, 'On Patrol'.

unexplored spheres rather than as Christian ladies in the 'lion's den'.⁷¹

Limited numbers meant that street duty had to be restricted to four main beats: the foreign quarter and Mill Street, which took the women into Toxteth; Scotland Road; Lime Street; and on and around Church Street. Sefton Park was patrolled on Sunday evenings, and during the school holidays the women patrolled four parks (Newsham, Sefton, Princes, and Stanley), and Wavertree playground, working with the WCA and setting up tents around which children could play safely. Two uniformed patrols worked each area, during the afternoon and evening; follow-up enquiries usually being conducted in plain-clothes.⁷²

The patrols were another manifestation of the attempt to increasingly regulate and intervene in the lives of working people. They provided an important link between the community and the police. One of the reasons they were allowed to continue was that they were regarded as contributing to the maintenance of social order by helping to curb sexual immorality and juvenile delinquency. As Chief Constable Caldwell noted in his report for 1925, 'I am satisfied that as rescuing, restraining and advisory organisations, the Women Patrols do a good deal of quiet, efficient and desirable work.'⁷³ Central to their concerns were the problems created by the increasing accessibility of the streets (the 'great unsupervised clubs' as the LPC annual report of 1919 referred to them) to young women.⁷⁴ The Annual Report for 1928 noted that 'street duty is, and always has been, the foundation upon which the development of our work extends'.⁷⁵ It also provides evidence of what this duty typically involved:

Two young girls (16 and 18) talking to a man in . . . Street. He looked well dressed and they were very ordinary. The man left them and went into a sweet shop, and we spoke to the girls. They admitted that they did not know the man . . . Advised them to go home. They did and gave names.

Middle-aged woman soliciting outside a public house. The man took no notice of her. She came to me, saying, 'I'm not trying to get a man!' She was excited and had been drinking; she said that she had kept out of trouble for ten years. I advised her to go home, and she went along [the] street quickly.⁷⁶

Work of this kind, which did not necessarily call for official police powers, helped to

⁷¹ Quoted by Lock, *The British Policewoman*, p.74.

⁷² LRO/WOM/21/4: 'The Need for Women Police' (Liverpool: Women Police Movement, Liverpool, Birkenhead and District, n. d. c.1930).

⁷³ LRO/H352/2/WAT: *RPESC* (1925), pp.15-16.

⁷⁴ LRO/H3645: *Liverpool and District Women Patrol Committee and Training School for Women Police Annual Report* (1919), p.7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* (1928), p.4.

support the view of those opposed to the appointment of women police that patrol work was surveillance work of a preventive kind and not police work. Its nature, and the reasons for the formation of the patrols who carried it out, is vital to an understanding of the campaign for official women police which began in Liverpool in the 1920s, the opposition which the campaign faced, and the failure of the campaign to achieve its objectives by 1939.

II

The Campaign for Women Police in Liverpool

By 1921 only twenty-nine women were attached to the Liverpool force. Of these, twenty-six were ancillary staff, including a Head Matron and her wardresses at the Main Bridewell, and three were women police. The latter were unattested and carried out limited duties. There were supposed to be women available at each district bridewell to search women and keep watch on them in the cells. In addition, there were the eight official women patrols. Before this provision could be expanded there were many obstacles to overcome. After the war the police woman was often regarded as repugnant or comic. Women police supporter Mrs Nott-Bower suggested in 1917 that many people were 'bemused' by the idea of women police, and that '[a]pparently the chief idea conveyed to their minds is one of stalwart amazons in blue serge hauling drunken navvies to prison'.⁷⁷ Popular unease or mirth about women police tended to stem from traditional views about the roles of men and women. The qualities perceived as necessary for policing were not usually those associated with women. The overtly masculine nature of policing resulted in part from the rigid nature of the organisation, which was uniformed, tightly administered, strictly hierarchical, and highly disciplined.⁷⁸ It also resulted from the fact that policing involved exercising authority, control, and power, often through the threat or use of force.⁷⁹ The Central Committee of the Police succinctly conveyed the authorities' attitude: 'we are unable to conceive of a woman who would be . . . fitted [to become an efficient police officer] . . . she would be an unnatural product'.⁸⁰

The first steps in the campaign for the appointment of women police in Liverpool were taken at a meeting convened by the LPC, the local branch of the National Council of Women (NCW), and the WCA, at 6 Lord Street, the WCA headquarters, on 13 February

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.5, 6.

⁷⁷ Doreen May, 'Women Police: The Early Years', *Police Review* (9 March 1979), p.359. I am grateful to the Liverpool Police Museum for access to this source.

⁷⁸ See recollections of Brogden's interviewees: *On the Mersey Beat*.

⁷⁹ Sharon Ouditt has noted that women were 'excluded from most forms of institutionalised discipline': *Fighting Forces. Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.16.

⁸⁰ MPMC/WPC, Police Federation of England and Wales, Report of Central Committee (1923-24),

1922. The LPC had requested that the WCA investigate the best means of 'bringing before the public the need for the appointment of women police' because it was no longer advisable for members to campaign for the reform due to reliance upon the Watch Committee grant. The result of these discussions, and others held a month later, was the creation of the Liverpool Women Police Propaganda Committee (LWPPC), which met for the first time on 16 March 1922. During the 1920s the LWPPC was composed of women and men active in the frontline of public life. There were city councillors from all parties, including Mabel Fletcher (Conservative and JP), Mr H. E. Rose (Labour and JP), Eleanor Rathbone (Independent); and there were leading members of the WCA, including Jessie Beavan, Edith Eskrigge, and Winifred Rathbone. Other members included Labour activists Annie Billinge, Dr Arthur Fitch (husband of Margaret Fitch), Mr J. S. Williams (Secretary of Liverpool Co-operative Joint Guild), and Mrs Louise Hughes (Guardian, and future Labour Councillor), as well as Lilian Mary Mott who was active in numerous causes, Miss Berthon (a local barrister), and Dr Ruth Nicolson (colleague of Frances Ivens). The appointment of Reverend W. O. Hunter Rodwell, rector of Walton and an Oxford graduate, to the Chair suggests a cautious approach in the face of the inevitable criticism that this was another female-driven campaign.⁸¹ The variety of support for the LWPPC reflected the national picture.⁸²

The launch of the Liverpool campaign was timely, as public interest became focused on the issue shortly afterwards by the threat of the disbanding of the Metropolitan Women Police during the spring of 1922. Not long after the Baird Committee had recommended the 'urgent' appointment of women police in large cities for duties associated with women and children in 1920, the Geddes Axe threatened to terminate these developments.⁸³ Late in March 1922 the issue was raised in the House of Commons by Nancy Astor, Margaret Wintringham, and Sir Arthur Steele Maitland.⁸⁴ On 3 May 1922 the NCW organised a huge protest meeting against the disbanding of the Metropolitan Women Police at Central Hall, Westminster, and the LWPPC sent a wire to the NCW stating that Liverpool was 'joining heartily' in London's protest.⁸⁵ In June the Home Secretary announced that until the financial climate improved he intended to retain only twenty women in the Metropolitan force, a

p.19.

⁸¹ For the membership, see LRO/WOM/1/1: Minutes of the LWPPC (hereafter LRO/LWPPC Minutes) (13 February; 5, 16 March 1922). Rodwell's commitment to the campaign may be explained by his connection to the Moral Board of Diocesan Welfare.

⁸² A number of women MPs championed the need for women police, including Conservative Nancy Astor, Liberal Margaret Wintringham, and Labour's Edith Picton-Turbervill. The support of leading local and national public figures like Eleanor Rathbone, the Bishop of Liverpool, Nancy Astor, and Lady Nott-Bower (the wife of the former Chief Commissioner of Police for London) was significant because it 'gave legitimacy to the issue and kept it in the public view': Carrier, *The Campaign*, pp.255-56.

⁸³ See Owings, *Women Police*, pp.29-31.

⁸⁴ *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard) (28 March 1922), c.1259-81.

decision which reinforced the view that women police were expendable.

During the Spring of 1922 the LWPPC began a propaganda campaign. Letters were sent to the press and over two hundred members of the clergy; packets of handbills were distributed to local societies and at the annual LPC meeting; over 900 circulars were issued, some of them posted in shops and cafes; and lists of speakers were drawn up.⁸⁶ The lobbying of councillors or prospective councillors and members of the Watch Committee, a policy pursued tirelessly throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, also began. On 26 June 1923 Alderman Maxwell promised a LWPPC deputation that he would consult the Chief Constable on the matter. The LWPPC made the Watch Committee aware that 'there is a strong demand amongst leaders of thought and social work in Liverpool for this reform'.⁸⁷

One of the key concerns of the LWPPC was that women often experienced thoughtless and haphazard treatment by the police, and that crime went unreported due to the carelessness of male officers and the embarrassment felt by young women about reporting sexual offences. It collected evidence to challenge the assertion that policing provision in Liverpool ensured that women's and children's needs were being met, and to support the argument that there were certain duties which women were especially suitable to undertake. To this end, it held discussions with Mabel Cowlin, the Director of the Women Patrols, on 21 September 1923.⁸⁸

On 4 October 1923 the NCW held another conference on the appointment of women police. It resolved to call upon the Home Secretary and the Secretary for Scotland to implement the Baird Committee recommendations by advising police authorities to standardise the conditions of service of women police, granting all women police the power of arrest, and ensuring that women comprised at least two per cent of the membership of all forces with 100 or more members and were chosen and supervised by women.⁸⁹ The LWPPC accepted this resolution on 8 October 1923, and resolved to make its views known to the Watch Committee. It wrote to Maxwell, stating that owing to the Watch Committee's unwillingness to accept women police Liverpool was being deprived of a Home Office grant which would permit the appointment of sixteen women police instead of eight women patrols.⁹⁰

On 21 March 1924 the LWPPC held a special meeting at which Hunter Rodwell

⁸⁵ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (3 May 1922).

⁸⁶ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (3 April; 3, 26 May 1922).

⁸⁷ Ibid. (19 July 1923).

⁸⁸ Ibid. (21 September 1923).

⁸⁹ Ibid. (8 October 1923).

⁹⁰ Ibid. (8 October 1923). This had been discovered at the NCW Conference on 4 October 1923. The Watch Committee had already concluded, with this knowledge, that the Patrols were the most economical option. See Carrier, *The Campaign*, p.100. The Baird Committee had recommended that all women employed on police duties would be servants of the local authority, yet in Liverpool the

informed members that the secretary of the NCW, Miss Green, had written to invite a member of the LWPPC to join a proposed NCW deputation to the Home Secretary regarding the appointment of women police on 26 March 1924. It was resolved that either Hunter Rodwell or Mabel Fletcher would take up the invitation.⁹¹ It would appear that this deputation was informed by the Home Secretary, Arthur Henderson, that he planned to appoint a committee (the future Bridgeman Committee) to review the situation since the Baird Committee.⁹² On 28 May 1924 Hunter Rodwell informed the LWPPC that it was possible for it to send a representative to give evidence to the Bridgeman Committee, and the LWPPC resolved to request the LPC to ask if Mabel Cowlin would undertake this role, and to suggest some points which Cowlin could emphasise. These included the need to train women police at special centres operated by women, and that the appointment of women police by the Chief Constable should be made at the recommendation of women officers.⁹³

The situation was hardly altered by the Bridgeman Committee report of September 1924. Although it noted that 'unofficial organisations of women police whilst deserving great credit for their pioneer work are not understood or readily accepted by the public at large', and was favourable in other ways to the appointment of women police, it left the matter to local discretion.⁹⁴ In response, LWPPC members poured their energies into gathering further support locally. A paid organiser was appointed, and representatives of organisations concerned with the welfare of young people were invited to join the campaign⁹⁵ Councillors, particularly Watch Committee members, were lobbied or asked to respond to questionnaires.⁹⁶ Attempts were made to attract the public support of influential political figures who were sympathetic.⁹⁷ Margaret Wintringham, Liberal MP for Louth, attended the annual meeting of the Liverpool Women Patrols in March 1925, and gave a speech there on 'Women Police and the Protection of the Child'. Wintringham emphasised the contribution which women police could make to a local force and to the moral uplift of the city.⁹⁸ The LWPPC sent Maxwell word of this 'crowded meeting'.⁹⁹

The position of the government remained unchanged. In January 1926 the Home Secretary, Sir Joynson Hicks, told a National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship

Chief Constable was adamant that patrol work did not lie within the sphere of police work.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* (21 March 1924).

⁹² Tancred, *Women Police*, p.5; PP1924, p.4.

⁹³ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (28 May 1924). In 1918 the Chief Constable had approved the creation of the Training School for Women Police in Liverpool, but in November 1929 it was decided to 'drop' this centre as training could only be done within the force: LRO/H3645: *Liverpool Women Patrols Annual Report* (1929), p.9.

⁹⁴ The Watch Committee decided that no action would be taken: LRO/LWCM (9 December 1924).

⁹⁵ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (23 September 1924).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* (31 October 1924).

⁹⁷ The LWPPC had already discussed inviting Nancy Astor: *ibid.* (8 October 1923).

⁹⁸ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 19 March 1925.

(NUSEC) deputation (on which Eleanor Rathbone represented the LWPPC) that although he favoured the appointment of women police, he had no intention of forcing local authorities to act.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the LWPPC appears to have been greatly encouraged by a Home Office circular sent to the Watch Committee in December 1926, informing it that 'the Secretary of State hopes . . . that the police authority will not lose sight of the desirability of appointing one or more police women where the circumstances justify that course . . . he will be glad if they will give the matter their consideration'.¹⁰¹ 1927 was to be a significant year in the LWPPC campaign.

Early in February 1927 the LWPPC discussed future options and decided to substitute the word *movement* for *propaganda* in its title.¹⁰² It also published a leaflet arguing its case.¹⁰³ In April Chief Constable Caldwell stated in his Annual Report that he advocated a continuation of the existing situation concerning the women patrols.¹⁰⁴ In May, when Caldwell presented his report to the Watch Committee the Committee passed a resolution that 'the requirements of those who advocate women police are met already', but Labour councillor Luke Hogan was 'dissenting'.¹⁰⁵ On 1 June Hogan and his colleague H. E. Rose, who were both LWPPC members, declared their opposition to Caldwell's views in Council.¹⁰⁶ Councillor Margaret Beavan noted in her diary that she supported Hogan's protest because 'since a large section of the country felt that in the interests of the women citizens, women police were necessary it was up to those in control not only to do justice but to be manifestly observed to be doing justice'.¹⁰⁷

On 5 July 1927 an 'informal' but significant 'conference on women police' for magistrates was held at the Sandon Studios. It was attended by several Liverpool magistrates, including Annie Billinge (WCG), Florence Beakbane (Liverpool Women's Unionist Federation), Eleanor Rathbone, and Maurice Eschwege, Luke Hogan, and H. E. Rose (Labour councillors). Short addresses in favour of women police were presented by, among others, Hunter Rodwell (who was in the Chair), Lyon Blease (Professor of Law at Liverpool University), Eleanor Rathbone, Mabel Fletcher, Annie Billinge, Luke Hogan, and Edith Tancred (Convenor of the Sectional Committee on Women Police). Hunter Rodwell defended the LWPPC against recent criticisms made in the press. Tancred referred to the

⁹⁹ LRO/LWCM (24 March 1925).

¹⁰⁰ LRO/WOM/1/1: Report of NUSEC meeting with the Home Secretary, 26 January 1926.

¹⁰¹ LRO/LWCM (31 December 1931).

¹⁰² LRO/LWPPC Minutes (3 February 1927).

¹⁰³ Ibid. (5 May 1927); LRO/WOM/21/3: LWPPC Leaflet 'Can You Answer the Following Questions?' (February 1927) (hereafter 'Can You Answer').

¹⁰⁴ LRO/WOM/10/4: Chief Constable's Report (April 1927), p.6.

¹⁰⁵ LRO/LWCM (24 May 1927).

¹⁰⁶ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (17 June 1927); LRO/LCCM (1 June 1927).

¹⁰⁷ LRO/M364/CWA: Child Welfare Association Collection (hereafter LRO/CWA)7/8: Diary of Margaret Beavan, 1 June 1927.

Baird recommendations and noted that there were 162 attested women police employed by police authorities. Mr C. J. Proctor suggested that the Watch Committee was afraid of the expense of appointing women police. Mabel Fletcher argued that the existence of three unattested women attached to the Liverpool police force indicated that the Watch Committee acknowledged that women were necessary for police-work. Three of the male speakers - Hogan, Lyon Blease, and Rose - noted the need to attract the support of all women's societies.¹⁰⁸ The main resolution of the meeting was that it was necessary that 'a sufficient number of attested police women for the purpose of Patrol, station, court, investigation and escort duty be appointed to the Liverpool force'.¹⁰⁹

This conference showed that the LWPPC had acquired influential allies, and further increased the pressure on Maxwell and the Watch Committee. The following month Maxwell published a lengthy 'Memorandum' setting out the policy of the Watch Committee against the appointment of women police which responded directly to the arguments advanced in the LWPPC leaflet of February.¹¹⁰ The LWPPC responded in the press, welcoming the Memorandum as 'a public recognition of the principle of women police by the Watch Committee'.¹¹¹

In 1928 the national campaign was boosted by a conference held on 22 May on 'Women Police from the National View' at Rushworth Hall, Islington.¹¹² It resolved that its delegates should urge their organisations to communicate the national importance of the employment of women police in forces with over 100 constables, and to press for the appointment of a woman Assistant Inspector of Constabulary at the Home Office.¹¹³ The resolution was supported by Labour MP Margaret Bondfield, and further acknowledgements came from the Under Secretary of State, John Anderson, Ramsay MacDonald, the Duchess of Atholl, Hilda Runciman, and the Countess of Iveagh.¹¹⁴ Public interest was further generated after Sir Leo Chiozzo Money, a close friend of the Home Secretary, was discovered

¹⁰⁸ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (Includes Report on Conference of Magistrates, 5 July 1927) (12 July 1927).

¹⁰⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 6 July 1927.

¹¹⁰ LRO/WOM/10/6: M. H. Maxwell, 'Memorandum on Women Police' (hereafter Maxwell, 'Memorandum') (August 1927). The presentation of the document to the Watch Committee does not appear in the minutes. The minutes refer to a letter from Rodwell concerning the Sandon Studio's meeting: LRO/LWCM (30 August 1927).

¹¹¹ LRO/WOM/1/1: Notes for a letter to the *Liverpool Daily Post*, 19 October 1927; WOM/10/1B: LWPPC Notes; WOM/10/7: detailed version of a letter to the press from Rodwell and Winifred Rathbone.

¹¹² This was attended by over sixty individuals, including members of the Mothers' Union, the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Women's Conservative Association, the Labour Party, the National Union of Teachers, the Soroptimists, the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, and the NCW: LRO/WOM/4/1-9.

¹¹³ LRO/WOM/10/1C: Resolution of Conference, 22 May 1928; Tancred, *Women Police*, p.34.

¹¹⁴ LRO/WOM/4/3: draft of a LWPPC letter sent to Margaret Bondfield, Lloyd George, Ramsay MacDonald, the Duchess of Atholl, Countess of Iveagh, and Mrs Runciman, n. d. May 1928; WOM/4/4-9: replies to the LWPPC letter, 23-24 May 1928.

in a compromising position on a Hyde Park bench with Irene Savidge, a twenty-two year old valve tester. After Money's demand for a full investigation into police conduct in the case was granted, questions were raised regarding the treatment of Miss Savidge by Chief Inspector Collins, who had dismissed Lillian Wyles, the female inspector, before Savidge was interviewed by the police.¹¹⁵

On 17 September 1928 the newly appointed Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure held its first meeting.¹¹⁶ Its members included Liverpool Conservative councillor and Lady Mayor Margaret Beavan, and some of the evidence it considered was supplied by the LWPPC.¹¹⁷ The evidence was anecdotal but indicated that despite the proclamations of the Watch Committee and the Chief Constable, young women were subjected to inappropriate policing by men. The LWPPC used it to emphasise two main points to the Commission. First, that women police had to be available to take statements from women and children (either suspects or those giving evidence in cases of sexual offence), to search, escort, supervise, and gain information from women prisoners in cells or awaiting trial, to watch women suspected of attempting suicide, to assist in brothel cases and enquiries for the Ministry of Pensions, and to take complete charge of all juvenile cases.¹¹⁸ Secondly, that there was a broad range of offences which required the involvement of women police.¹¹⁹ The Commission produced a report in March 1929 supporting the appointment of qualified women to investigate offences against women and children, to patrol parks, open spaces, and the streets. It also stated that 'while police matrons are well suited for the domestic duties in connection with the women's cells, attested police women should be employed for the escorting, searching and supervision of women prisoners in order that women prisoners may receive the same trained care and assistance as men', and women should receive equal training and have the same opportunity for experience as their male counterparts.¹²⁰ But the matter was again left to local discretion.

Nevertheless, the Commission gave further impetus to the Liverpool campaign, whose supporters raised the issue in Parliament. In the House of Commons in April 1929 one

¹¹⁵ For details of the case, see Lock, *The British Policewoman*, Chap. 8.

¹¹⁶ PP1929, p.1.

¹¹⁷ The evidence was collected by sending letters to local individuals and organisations with experience of dealing with women and children, and to women magistrates, which included questionnaires about their knowledge of how the women and children they dealt with were policed: LRO/WOM/5/1-4: correspondence relating to collection evidence for the Royal Commission (27 September; 6, 19, 28 October 1928). NUSEC also provided a questionnaire: LRO/LWPPC Minutes (9 November; 10 December 1928).

¹¹⁸ LRO/WOM/5/6a: letter from the LWPPC to E. E. Bridges, Secretary of the Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure (1 February 1929).

¹¹⁹ The offences included rape and intent, all offences under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, sexual offences under the Children Act, indecent assault or exposure, incest, abortion, concealment of birth, overlying of children, sudden infant death, infanticide, and bigamy.

¹²⁰ LRO/WOM/7/4: questions put to Maxwell by Margaret Beavan.

of Liverpool's Conservative MPs, Major Jack Cohen, asked (on behalf of the LWPPC) if fresh legislation would be necessary to make the employment of police women in city and borough forces compulsory.¹²¹ The answer of the Home Secretary, Joynson-Hicks, was that,

I do not think it is a matter for compulsion but one which should be left to the discretion of the local authorities. I have always felt that legislation would be necessary, but I am not quite certain on that point. In any case, I should not like to exercise any powers I have over these great local authorities, which I think would be an infringement of the right of self-government.¹²²

Cohen then asked whether Joynson-Hicks was aware that the wish of the majority of Liverpool City Council was frustrated by the refusal of the Watch Committee to proceed with the appointment of women police, and if he would like to suggest a method by which this situation might be resolved; but the question was ruled out of order.

The LWPPC also attempted to win support from Chief Constables outside Liverpool in 1929, sending them an investigative survey which evoked some positive responses.¹²³ In addition, it continued lobbying municipal candidates.¹²⁴ On 26 November 1929 Luke Hogan and Margaret Beavan presented a motion to the Watch Committee advocating, with reference to the Royal Commission, the appointment of a limited number of women police, but it was defeated by a show of hands.¹²⁵ In the same month Beavan questioned Maxwell about how far the recommendations of the Royal Commission, on which she had sat, were being carried out or contemplated by the Watch Committee.¹²⁶ Shortly afterwards, a 'Memorial' advocating women police, signed by sixty prominent citizens, 'representing all shades of political and religious opinion including five or six MPs', was sent by the LWPPC to the City Council.¹²⁷ It repeated demands made by the LWPPC to the Royal Commission and

¹²¹ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (15 April 1929). Mrs Howroyd replaced Rodwell as LWPPC Chairman when Rodwell vacated the Chair due to parish commitments: *ibid.* (18 March; 15 April 1929).

¹²² *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard) (18 April 1929), c.384-85.

¹²³ The Chief Constable of Great Yarmouth stated that 'Given the right type of woman, one who understands human nature, and who is sympathetic to the old and young, and who can inspire confidence; not inclined to listen to too much scandal, educated and capable of acting according to the law, such women as Police officers are essential to all forces': LRO/WOM/8/14.

¹²⁴ LRO/WOM/6/4: letter to candidates (5 September 1929).

¹²⁵ LRO/LWCM (26 November 1929).

¹²⁶ LRO/WOM/7/4: questions put to Maxwell by Margaret Beavan.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*:7/3: letter from Hunter Rodwell to City Councillors regarding the Memorial to be presented to the LCC on 4 December 1929. Signatories to the Memorial included the Bishop of Liverpool, Archbishop Downey, Rabbi Morris Goldstein, Conservative MP Major Cohen, Labour MP Joseph Gibbins, Independent MP Eleanor Rathbone, Women's Liberal Council Chairman Nessie Stewart Brown, Frances Ivens and Henry Cohen (members of the medical profession), the Vice Chancellor of the University, Charles Reilly (Roscoe Professor of Architecture), and the influential heiress Emma Holt.

sought the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.¹²⁸ On 2 January 1930 the Council, then dominated by the Conservatives, carried a motion (by sixty-nine to sixty votes) presented by Margaret Beavan and seconded by Luke Hogan that 'the time has arrived when a limited number of women should be appointed as an integral part of the Police Force'.¹²⁹

The breakdown of the Council vote is revealing (see Table 4.i.). It would appear that, so far as the Conservatives and Labour were concerned, the appointment of women police had become a party issue. All of the Labour councillors voting supported the motion, whereas the great majority of Conservative councillors voted against; though sixteen were absent on that day. Interestingly, seven Liberal councillors appear to have been hostile to the motion. It is significant that four of the nine Conservative councillors who voted for the motion were women and that they constituted four of the five Conservative councillors on the Council. It is also significant that, with the exception of one Conservative councillor, all of the women councillors from all of the parties (a total of twelve: five Conservatives; five Labour; one Centre Party; and one Independent) voted for the motion. The one woman councillor who voted against it, Nancy Proctor, may have had special reasons for doing so. Although it is possible that they were non-party, it may be that having only recently been returned to the Council for the Dingle at a by-election in November 1929 Proctor felt uneasy about going against the party line at an early stage in her Council career. It is possible, therefore, that the specific motion of appointing women police may have divided the Liverpool City Council on gender as well as party lines, though some uncertainty about this must remain.

Table 4.i. Breakdown of City Council Vote on Women Police, 2 January 1930

	Members	For	Against	Absent
Conservative	77	9	52	16
Labour	59	54	0	5
Liberal	12	3	7	2
Centre	7	2	1	4
Independent	2	1	0	1
Total	157	69	60	28

Source: LRO/352/MIN/COU/II: (2 January 1930); *Liverpool Red Book* (1930).

¹²⁸ One of the factors which may have influenced those who signed the Memorial was that years of indecision had caused Liverpool to lose talented candidates who had worked as patrols. Miss Sloane became Leicester's first attested policewoman and Miss Peto, the Patrol Director, was appointed to an advisory post to the Chief Commissioner at Scotland Yard: LRO/WOM/6/9: letter from Rodwell to prospective signatories to the Memorial. Other losses included Miss Nicoll-Jones, who became the Organising Secretary in Rangoon for the Vigilance Society, and Miss Lucy Evans, who took the place of Norwich's attested policewoman, Edith Clarke, in 1933.

¹²⁹ LRO/LCCM (2 January 1930). The five male Conservatives who voted for the motion were Herbert J. Davies, Gifford Ollason, Sir Arnold Rushton, Alderman Shelmerdine and George Williamson.. An examination of their (limited) biographies does not reveal any obvious reason for this. Rushton and Shelmerdine were possibly influenced by their experience as magistrates: *Liverpool Red*

Despite being passed by Council, five days later the motion was halted by the Watch Committee. The issue was taken up by the local press.¹³⁰ A variety of local organisations (including branches of the WCA, WCG, the Co-operative Society, St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, Liberal Clubs, and the Edge Hill Independent Labour Party Women's Committee), sent letters of support for the motion to the Watch Committee. But when the Watch Committee considered the matter on 28 January 1930 it voted (by a majority of four) against the motion.¹³¹

The Watch Committee vote (as Table 4.ii. below shows) reflected the same party and gender divisions as the main Council vote. Once again, all the Labour members voted for the motion; the great majority of the Conservatives voted against it; and the two women members, one of whom (Caroline Whiteley) was Labour and the other (Margaret Beavan) a Conservative, voted in favour. Here the weight of the Conservative majority, and the small number of women on the Committee, meant that the motion was defeated. As an autonomous body, the Watch Committee was entitled to refuse to implement the Council decision.¹³² Maxwell was reported as saying that 'if the Council insists on having women police it must appoint a new Watch Committee'.¹³³ Just over a year later Caroline Whiteley repeated the motion, but it was lost again.¹³⁴ The LWPPC decided to seek guidance from the Home Office. A letter detailing recent events in Liverpool was sent to the Home Secretary, J. R. Clynes, with a request for a meeting at which it was planned to present Clynes with the recent Memorial supporting the Liverpool campaign. The LWPPC pointed out that although the motion had been lost by twelve to eight, it might have been twelve to eleven but for the unavoidable absence of three 'declared' supporters.¹³⁵ Clynes replied that he was too busy to deal with the issue which was a matter for the Watch Committee.¹³⁶

Book (1930), pp.541, 570, 577, 579, 586.

¹³⁰ For example, see *Liverpool Daily Post*, 2 January 1930; *Liverpool Echo*, 7 January 1930.

¹³¹ LRO/LWCM (28 January 1930).

¹³² The Watch Committee had asked Walter Moon, the Town Clerk, to write to the Home Office to establish the rights of the Watch Committee in relation to the City Council because there was 'some division' among members. John Anderson replied for the Home Office that it was an autonomous body under the Municipal Corporations Act 1882: LRO/LWCM (28 January 1930).

¹³³ *Policewoman's Review*, February 1930, p.274.

¹³⁴ LRO/LWCM (12 May 1931).

¹³⁵ LRO/WOM/3/6: letter from the LWPPC to J. Clynes (3 February 1930).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3/7: letter from J. Clynes to the LWPPC (10 February 1930).

Table 4.ii. The Watch Committee Vote on the Motion for the Appointment of Official Women Police, 28 January 1930

	For	Against
Conservative	1	11
Liberal	0	1
Labour	6	0
Nationalist	1	0
Total	8	12

Source: LRO/352/MIN/WAT: (28 January 1930).

In April 1930 Mabel Cowlin forwarded a copy of a letter from Sir John Anderson, at the Home Office, to the LWPPC. It stated that at a recent meeting of the Police Council (attended by representatives of Police Authorities, Chief Officers, and varying ranks of police), the Council had been invited to review the position on women police but had decided that although there was scope for the employment of women police on 'special duties' the details of women's work should be left to the decision of local authorities, and that in light of this it was not appropriate for the Secretary of State to take action.¹³⁷ The LWPPC planned to draw the Home Secretary's attention to the fact that the phrase 'local discretion' had become 'meaningless and inoperable' in Liverpool.¹³⁸

Together with Dorothy Peto, the Patrol Director, Mrs Winifred Rathbone kept up the pressure locally by outlining the difficulties posed by the limited number of patrols in an article in the *Liverpool Daily Post* on 17 March 1930:

Of these eight [Patrols], the director is engaged primarily upon administrative work; the assistant director, beside being in charge of the case work, is more and more in request for advice and practical help in relation to affiliation and kindred cases in the police courts; the secretary is obviously required in the office at Cases Street; whilst the hostel Patrol can manage but little street duty in addition to the investigations concerning the stranded girls brought to use by the police and from other sources. This only leaves four Patrols for regular street duty, each one being allotted to one district.¹³⁹

Peto and Rathbone wished to impress upon the Watch Committee that much of the preventive work undertaken by patrols was part of police duty, and that 'it should be acknowledged, paid and controlled by the citizens whom the police at once serve and

¹³⁷ LRO/WOM/14/2: copy of letter from Sir John Anderson to Miss Green, NCW Secretary (9 April 1930; 6 June 1930).

¹³⁸ LRO/WOM/14/C: LWPPC Notes.

¹³⁹ LRO/WOM/23/3: 'Women Street Patrols', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 March 1930.

represent'.¹⁴⁰

As the Watch Committee continued to oppose the City Council resolution, in July 1930 the Council refused (by a majority of eight) to pass the minutes of the Watch Committee, which found itself unable to pay salaries and other expenses. As a compromise, two more women police were appointed.¹⁴¹ During the autumn of 1930 the LWPPC lobbied municipal candidates, attempting to ensure that there was a sympathetic majority on the Watch Committee when it was re-appointed in November 1930 and focusing its attention on wards where councillors were seeking re-election.¹⁴² It also wrote to local head-teachers, asking them to consider the importance of the reform for the children in their care.¹⁴³ The letters contained a leaflet advising ways to help and requesting them to '[a]ir the subject!'.¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the issue was discussed again in Parliament.¹⁴⁵

In February 1931 the LWPPC wrote to organisations in other areas that were fighting for the appointment of women police, and received some replies indicating that it had taken the issue further than some of its counterparts.¹⁴⁶ The uniqueness of the Liverpool campaign was highlighted again on 11 March 1931 when Lady Cushendon gave an address supporting the appointment of women police, which referred to the breakdown of local discretion in Liverpool, to a meeting organised by Labour MP Edith Picton-Turbervill in the Committee Room of the House of Commons.¹⁴⁷ Supporting Cushendon, the Liverpool Conservative MP for West Derby, John Sandeman Allen, told the meeting that 'local authorities sheltered behind the Home Secretary'.¹⁴⁸ The meeting was attended by representatives of women's organisations from across Britain and about fifty MPs, and it called upon the Home Secretary to draft regulations for women police for submission to the Police Council.¹⁴⁹

Although this had no immediate impact, on 28 April 1931 the Home Secretary, Sir Herbert Samuel, and the Secretary of State received a deputation of MPs who called for action on the subject of regulations. On 14 July 1931 draft regulations were finally submitted to the Police Council, of which Dorothy Peto (then Staff Officer for Women Police at

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ LRO/WOM/20/2: Liverpool Women Police Movement Committee Annual Report (1929-1930).

¹⁴² LRO/WOM/6/12: letter sent to supportive municipal candidates; Liverpool Daily Post, 24 October 1930.

¹⁴³ LRO/WOM/6/15: LWPPC draft letter sent to 323 teachers (October 1930).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 6/16: LWPPC Leaflet (October 1930).

¹⁴⁵ See Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) (18 December 1930), c.1416; LRO/WOM/9/8: LWPPC Notes.

¹⁴⁶ LRO/WOM/12/1: copy of a general letter to be sent by Mrs Winifred Rathbone (9 February 1931); *ibid.* 12/2: letter from Aldershot WCA to LWPPC (18 February 1931); and see *ibid.* 12/3-20.

¹⁴⁷ LRO/WOM/15/1a: Leaflet detailing meeting (11 March 1931).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 15/5: LWPPC Notes.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid./14: Conference (11 March 1931), programme details.

Scotland Yard) was a member.¹⁵⁰ But even after the issue of statutory regulations modelled on those for men on 7 October 1931, the situation in Liverpool remained unchanged. A Home Office circular stated that 'under this regulation, the discretion of the local police authority as to the employment of women police is maintained'. The LWPPC reacted angrily, declaring that the Home Secretary's solution,

of endeavouring to bring pressure of opinion to bear upon local police authorities is not only ludicrous, but an insult to our intelligence - it is absolutely clear that the only pressure that can be of the least avail must be brought by the Home Office - intensive propaganda in towns and cities is to no avail because there is no strong lead from the Home Office.¹⁵¹

This was an admission that its local efforts had been defeated.¹⁵² Figures on the numbers of attested and non-attested police women in county and borough forces published in the *Policewoman's Review* in 1930 must have intensified the disappointment (Table 4.iii. below). Although the provision in some of the other major cities, like Manchester and Newcastle, was similar to that in Liverpool, it remained one of the minority of boroughs without attested women police officers. Furthermore, although few of the borough forces with attested women police had more than two of them, most of these boroughs had significantly smaller populations than Liverpool. The fact that all of the county forces had attested women police, including the Metropolitan force with forty-six and Lancashire with seventeen, can only have added to the LWPPC's frustration.

In a book published in 1951 Mabel Cowlin suggested that the appointment of women in other 'more enlightened' police forces eventually had an impact upon the situation in Liverpool.¹⁵³ During the 1930s the issue of women police was kept alive in Liverpool by women's organisations following the disbanding of the LWPPC.¹⁵⁴ Maxwell's death in 1937 appears to have had little impact on the opposition of the Watch Committee. Despite having worked through two world wars and twenty intervening years, it is revealing that the patrols received only a brief, though significant, reference in the Police Report for the year (1947) in which they were disbanded: 'I have to acknowledge', stated Chief Constable Winstanley, 'the co-operation and assistance rendered to the police by the women patrols during the many

¹⁵⁰ Ibid/15/6: LWPPC Notes.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.: Notes (possibly for a speech) on the Home Office circular (October 1931).

¹⁵² See also *ibid.*/13/2: copy of a letter to the *Liverpool Daily Post* from Lyon Blease and Judge Thomas Paxton.

¹⁵³ Cowlin, 'Appendix 111', p.43.

¹⁵⁴ In 1934 the WCA sent the Watch Committee a copy of a National Council for Equal Citizenship (NCEC) resolution calling for local authorities to appoint fully attested women police under the Police Regulations of October 1931: LRO/LWCM (24 April 1934); LRO/ACC/3538: Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Collection/B1: LWCA Council Minutes (April-July 1936).

years of their existence. They have been most helpful and rendered a great social service to the city.¹⁵⁵ A few months later, on 1 January 1948, twenty official women police were appointed in Liverpool.¹⁵⁶

Table 4.iii. Number and Status of Women Appointed to Borough and County Forces by October 1930

Forces with attested women police				Forces with non-attested women police	
	Number		Number		Number
Bolton	5	Metropolitan district	46	Birkenhead	1
Bootle	1	Northampton	2	Birmingham	6
Bradford	1	Norwich	1	Bristol	5
Cambridge	2	Nottingham	4	Carlisle	1
Chesterfield	2	Oldham	1	Hove	1
Colchester	2	Oxford	1	Huddersfield	1
Eastbourne	1	Oxfordshire	2	Liverpool	3
Gloucestershire	8	Sheffield	6	Manchester	4
Great Yarmouth	1	Stoke on Trent	2	Newcastle on Tyne	3
Hertfordshire	2	Sunderland	1	Shropshire	2
Ipswich	1	Sussex, West	1		
Lancashire	17	Tunbridge Wells	1		
Leeds	2	Walsall	1		
Leicester	1	Yorkshire, West Riding	3		

Source: *Policewoman's Review* (October 1930), p.62.

III

The Debate Over the Appointment of Women Police in Liverpool

The arguments advanced by the LWPPC and its supporters, and those of Maxwell and the police force, throw considerable light on the issues which prompted and sustained the campaign for women police in Liverpool. The clearest expression of the two cases occurred in 1927, with the publication by the LWPPC and Maxwell of documents which presented arguments for and against the appointment of official women police respectively.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ LRO/H352/2/WAT: RPESC (31 December 1947).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. (31 December 1948).

¹⁵⁷ 'Can You Answer'; Maxwell, 'Memorandum'.

The arguments of the LWPPC appeared in a four-page leaflet published probably in February and entitled 'Can you answer the following questions?'. The three key questions were: 'Are women police needed?'; 'What is the work of the women patrols in Liverpool?'; and 'Why is it necessary to press for women police in Liverpool?'. In response to the first question, the leaflet quoted extracts from the Baird Committee, and an extract from the report of His Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary for 1919. It noted the Baird Committee's opinion,

that in thickly populated areas, where offences against the law relating to women and children are not infrequent, there is not only scope but urgent need for the employment of Policewomen. In particular, we feel strongly that in the investigation of cases of indecent assault upon women or children the services of policewomen may be of great assistance in taking statements from the victim.

Another extract from paragraph 21 of the Baird report listed the duties 'suggested to us [the Committee] as appropriate for policewomen to perform'. These included:

Investigation under the Children's Act, 1908; the Immoral Traffics Act, 1902-1912, and similar Statutes; attendance at Court when cases of female or juvenile offenders are being dealt with; inspection of common lodging houses (where this falls on the police); supervision of parks and open spaces; visiting of licensed premises, cinemas, registry offices, etc.; prevention of offences by prostitutes, and generally speaking any work in connection with offences committed by and against women and children.

The leaflet reprinted the Baird Committee's statement that:

Only 6 of the 57 Chief Constables who have had personal experience of their work express views definitely against their employment, and among advocates of policewomen we found several Chief Constables who were at first strongly opposed to their appointment.

The leaflet quoted at length the views of the Report of the Inspectors of Constabulary in 1919 that women could undertake specialist work with women and children, particularly in the area of juvenile crime and prostitution:

her very sex gives her influence over the child whose mischief has brought him under the notice of the police, before the mischief takes the definite form of crime, and over the mother to whose neglect the offence of the child is so often due; she can speak to the giddy girl before her giddiness makes her slip down the first step towards prostitution and

disease, as no man can speak without risking the accusations of undue interference which have often stopped the efforts of the police to save foolish girls from themselves.

Anticipating the counter-argument that such work was most successfully undertaken by the patrols, the leaflet went on to consider the patrols. It noted that they were 'the only body of women working on the streets for the protection of women and children', acted as 'Inspectors of Common Lodging Houses, and are in constant touch with all the organisations at work for Rescue and Preventive Work', dealt with '996 cases . . . referred to them in 1926 for special investigation and enquiry', undertook 'accurate and exhaustive enquiries . . . in numberless cases of children and stranded women and girls', but numbered only eight. The leaflet addressed the question of why it was necessary to press for women police 'when the patrols are doing such excellent work already'. It pointed out that the patrols could not make preliminary investigations in cases of assault on women and children, or take charge of women and juvenile offenders and witnesses at court, or investigate widows in receipt of pensions. It also contended that eight patrols were insufficient for a city with a population of over 800,000 and a male police force of 1,732 which, in 1925, had witnessed 829 juveniles come before the courts, a further 545 cautioned by the police, and a large number of women appearing before the courts either as offenders or as witnesses 'in cases often connected with serious offences against morality'. It also asked whether, 'Since the "Prevention of Crime" is recognised as being the first duty of the Police', it was unreasonable 'that highly-trained women who are specially suited to such work among women and children be given official status'. The leaflet went on to argue that the current position of women police, with neither security nor pension provision, limited the number of women able to train for police-work. In conclusion, it stressed that women police would not 'supplant men' but serve alongside them 'in the special interest of women and children', and stated that the time had come for women to be accepted as 'authentic members of the Police Force. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act makes this legal'.

It is not certain how many copies of this leaflet were printed or who they were circulated to, but it is clear that it came to the attention of Maxwell. He considered it important enough to respond in writing in the Memorandum he published in August 1927. The Memorandum adopted the headings and structure of the LWPPC leaflet, and dealt with the same three main questions. Even though it repeated the leaflet's contents, the Memorandum was a more substantial document, an indication of how seriously Maxwell treated the LWPPC's arguments.¹⁵⁸

According to Maxwell the special needs of women and children who had suffered

¹⁵⁸ Maxwell, 'Memorandum', p.2.

indecent assault were already provided for; and if sworn-in women constables were appointed the preventive and rescue work of the patrols 'which cannot be performed by sworn-in constables, would have to be sacrificed' because the Committee could not finance two separate bodies.¹⁵⁹ Maxwell asserted (Clause 9) that 'women (not attested) have been employed by the Watch Committee for years for police work'. He made it clear that his arguments were supported by the Baird Committee's local discretion clause. The paternalistic nature of his arguments is clear:

It is quite apparent that no woman could properly be asked to risk the consequences of arresting a man, particularly of the type who commit offences against women and girls, nor is it desirable that they should be asked to deal in the streets with the virago type of female. To this extent the value of the police woman is inferior to that of the male constable and the only way in which it is suggested that they may do better than a male constable is in preventive and rescue work.¹⁶⁰

Maxwell challenged the LWPPC's claim that the number of women police and patrols was inadequate. He contended that there were many societies with women workers who worked for the protection of women and children (Clause 23), that only sixteen lodging houses were subject to the work of the patrols (Clause 25), and that only 110 of the 996 cases referred to the patrols in 1926 were referred to them by the police (Clause 26). He noted that almost all juveniles proceeded against or cautioned by the police appeared on summons or on bail accompanied by one or both parents rather than by male police (Clause 33). Maxwell also argued that the cost of women police would have to be met by the public, and this might require a reduction in the number of male constables' (Clause 35). He pointed out that the Chief Constable was 'quite satisfied' with the number of women employed by the Watch Committee (Clause 50), and played down the involvement of male police in taking statements in cases of suspected indecent assault or indecent exposure, the number of such cases which came before the courts, and the number which were connected with parks (Clauses 51-56). When he came to the question of attesting women police Maxwell used a technicality. He argued that the three women presently attached to the Liverpool force were appointed before the Baird Committee reported in 1920 and before it was legal to swear in a woman as a constable, and that these women could not be sworn in because the statutory regulations governing the appointment of constables imposed an age limit of thirty, and the Liverpool age limit was twenty-five (Clauses 16, 57). Maxwell's concluding arguments noted that 'the work [uniform attested police women] could perform can be done better by a non-official body

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4.

such as the Liverpool Women Patrols' (Clause 57). He maintained that the current organisation of the police insured 'that the interests of females [were] fully secured' (Clause 58), that patrol work was predominantly preventive and not the duty of the police, and that it was not appropriate to imbue the patrols with police powers. In his view the patrols had the freedom to deal with situations which attested women police had no jurisdiction over and in which their badges might hinder rather than promote their usefulness. Maxwell argued that the three women appointed to police work were specially trained and 'could do no more if they were sworn in as constables' Clauses 58-60). He also referred to the Chief Constable of Hull's view that 'women are not suitable physically or temperamentally for police work' (Clause 61).¹⁶¹

Some of Maxwell's arguments echoed, or were echoed by, those of successive Liverpool Chief Constables. For example, in 1910 Dunning suggested that prevention of the growing 'impurity among boys and girls' was 'outside of the province of the police - touching as it does immorality which is not unlawful'.¹⁶² In 1924 Caldwell informed the Bridgeman Committee that he was content that Patrol work was 'more far reaching and effective than it would have been if [the patrols] were appointed members of the force, chiefly for the reason that as private individuals they have greater freedom of action than they would have had as constables'.¹⁶³ Much the same point was made by Everett in his report on Uniformed Women Police to the Watch Committee in 1927. Maxwell and the Chief Constables were in agreement that the intervention of uniformed women police would 'have a tendency to drive the evils aimed at still further underground'.¹⁶⁴ Everett also shared Maxwell's views about the physical unsuitability of women for official police work, declaring:

what exactly could uniformed women do, apart from what the plain clothed women perform? If their presence is expected to be a greater safeguard against the pest, [I] consider the male police have a much greater opportunity by reasons of physical capabilities, and it has never been seriously contended that they are negligent in this respect, rather the reverse.

He also shared the view about the adequacy of the current provision in Liverpool and the distinction drawn between police work and preventive work, stating in his report of 1927 that:

The main requirements of those advocating women police are met already. What remains amounts to this - requisite and good as is the rescue preventive work, is it within

¹⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 6-16.

¹⁶² LRO/H352/2/WAT: RPESC (1910), p.68.

¹⁶³ PP1924, p.6.

¹⁶⁴ LRO/WOM/10/4: Chief Constable's Report (1927, issued 6 April 1928), pp.4-5.

the responsibility of the police authority to provide it, or, indeed, is it police duty at all? Many consider not, and hold the view that a too official status would defeat its object, but that voluntary associations should be assisted.¹⁶⁵

Similar views were expressed in a different way by the Chief Constable in his report for 1929, in which he described his perception of the relationship between the police and the patrols:

I liken such an arrangement in its relationship to the police to that of the Red Cross Society to the Military on active service, in the latter case caring for the physically injured, and in the former the morally damaged, but as the Society forms no part of the fighting forces, for obvious reasons, so the social work, valuable and essential as it is, should not be hampered by legal restrictions or other safeguards which are necessary for the police to comply with in their warfare.¹⁶⁶

The Chief Constables also advanced other arguments against the appointment of attested women police. Everett's report in 1927 stated that the intervention of a policewoman would cause the public to resent 'official interference' and could 'result in legal actions against the police'.¹⁶⁷ But other evidence suggests that the force was conscious of the need to encourage policemen to take particular care when dealing with women. One retired officer told Mike Brogden that:

We were well warned about women the day we came into the force. We had to avoid them . . . you got girls making certain allegations. Once the allegation was made, your name was mud . . . You wouldn't get into an ambulance or get into a police van with a woman unless you had another witness with you. You daren't be with a woman alone.¹⁶⁸

A major weakness in Maxwell's argument was the distinction he drew between ordinary police work and preventive and rescue work (Clauses 28 and 61). At one point in the Memorandum his argument appears to be contradictory. Responding to the LWPPC leaflet's use of the Inspectors of Constabulary report of 1919, he placed in bold type (Clause 21) the report's comment that the 'prevention of crime is the first duty of the police', and went on (Clause 22) to note that the report suggested 'a high ideal of police duty as being a social service comparable to the work of the church and social reformers' and that this 'view is not yet the view of the tax payer', but then declared that 'Everybody agrees that the prevention of

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ LRO/WOM/10/8a/b: Chief Constable's Report (1928, issued 9 April 1929), p.5.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid./10/4: cutting from Report of the Chief Constable (1927), p.5.

¹⁶⁸ Brogden, On the Mersey Beat, p.25.

crime is the first duty of the police'.¹⁶⁹ This duty appears to have been carried out in practice by male police constables in Liverpool. They frequently spoke to people unofficially while on the beat, and their work was aimed predominantly at preventing crime. As Brogden notes,

The mandate of these officers was to keep the Liverpool streets clean, as a kind of uniformed garbage-men. Its most common manifestation was that of 'moving on' any person, young or old, who committed the sins of playing pitch-and-toss on the street corner or chatting outside the public house after licensing hours. Arrests, other than for minor misdemeanours, were rare.¹⁷⁰

In this sense, the function expected of the average beat policeman was quite similar to that expected of the woman patrol.

Maxwell's arguments about the adequacy of the extent of the provision of policing by women are contradicted by the evidence collected by the LWPPC for presentation to the Royal Commission in 1929. Hunter Rodwell received two letters from Liverpool mothers whose daughters had been affected by the 'dreadful scourge of indecent exposure'. 'We don't complain to the police', wrote one of them, 'as the ordeal of interrogation by policemen adds to the injury already suffered by the girls'. If the girls went to be interviewed they faced the prospect of spotting the offender at the police station, where they could be detained for several hours. The only effective deterrent, this mother argued, was the presence of plain-clothed women police on the streets, as well as at bridewells to accept charges.¹⁷¹ The LWPPC referred to two cases to support its view that there was a need for women police to interview female defendants. In the first a young single woman, who had placed her child in an attaché case, was forced to give her story to a policeman, who accompanied her to the inquest. The second case indicated that the lack of adequate and appropriate policing by women, as well as a lack of women magistrates, could lead to miscarriages of justice. A girl who had given evidence in an indecent exposure case said, as she left the witness box, 'I simply could not tell those men (the policeman and the magistrates) what the prisoner said to me. I know it spoilt the case'. On another occasion, a young woman who had suffered a miscarriage in a cell at a bridewell was forced, because there was no woman on duty, to wait to be attended by the matron, who was seven or eight minutes away.¹⁷² The LWPPC's

¹⁶⁹ He drew a distinction here, however, between the duty of the police to protect citizens from violence and theft and the question of prostitution which 'the law does not make . . . illegal': Maxwell, 'Memorandum', pp.7-8.

¹⁷⁰ According to Brogden, 'Children were a normal target of street policing': *On the Mersey Beat*, pp.1, 36, 100.

¹⁷¹ LRO/WOM/5/6a: details of evidence sent to the LWPPC for submission to the Royal Commission.

¹⁷² Interestingly, the evidence Rodwell selected came from a woman JP outside the immediate

evidence also included the testimony of a woman JP from Lancashire that, in her opinion, cases of criminal assault upon children had to be dealt with by women since they often aroused so much horror and excitement in the child's family that the proceedings often became 'unfair' on the accused man and were delayed.¹⁷³ Independent evidence confirms some of the LWPPC's findings. On one occasion, a distressed young woman who appeared at Lark Lane police station claiming that she had killed her baby was taken into a cell, held down, and had her nose held and salt water poured down her throat by male officers who suspected her of having taken an overdose.¹⁷⁴

Maxwell's argument about the physical unsuitability of women for police work was made at a time when such arguments were being openly challenged. In August 1929, for example, the *Policewoman's Review*, a national publication, depicted 'a tired little waitress' commenting that, 'I often think it's queer what things people object to women taking on . . . They don't think it's quite nice for them to be police, but they don't mind them being nurses, or rescue workers, or missionaries'.¹⁷⁵ Margaret Beavan, who had supported the motion of appointing women police in the Watch Committee vote of 1930, was quoted by the *Manchester Guardian* early in 1931 as suggesting that the opponents of women police were 'a little Victorian in their ideas'.¹⁷⁶

There is some evidence that Maxwell only developed the arguments in his Memorandum in response to growing pressure from the supporters of the appointment of women police in 1927, and that before this the issue was of little consequence to him and some of the other members of the Watch Committee. At the informal conference for magistrates organised to support the campaign on 5 July 1927 Hunter Rodwell had informed the delegates that the Watch Committee did not 'seem to take [the matter] seriously', Luke Hogan recalled that the Watch Committee (on which he sat) treated it as a joke, and Mabel Fletcher argued that much opposition to women police was due to 'sheer prejudice'. Other evidence suggests that one councillor (though not one who sat on the Watch Committee) had a very low opinion of the campaign and some of its supporters.¹⁷⁷ In a letter to the press in 1927 W. H. Young, Conservative councillor for West Derby, presumed to speak for the people of Liverpool when he argued:

There is practically no demand for this so-called reform, and the lukewarm interest displayed by a few is the result of ceaseless efforts made by the innumerable feminist organisations such as the "Six Point Group," "Equal Citizenship League," "Women

Liverpool area: *ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Brogden, *On the Mersey Beat*, p.144.

¹⁷⁵ *Policewoman's Review*, August 1929, p.225.

¹⁷⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 January 1931.

Police Propaganda Committee," "Women Citizens' Association," whose whim . . . is to prove that men and women are interchangeable.

As well as lumping together quite distinct organisations, Young suggested that the LWPPC Chairman, Hunter Rodwell had been 'beguiled' by the women members of the LWPPC. 'It is the old story - "Will you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly" and he has walked in or, rather has been "taken in", and the Amazons have thus secured a notable victim.'¹⁷⁸ With the suffrage campaign still fresh in some minds, fear that the campaign was fuelled by 'radical' feminism was a predictable criticism.¹⁷⁹ Young's language was characteristic of the suspicion and resentment which frequently confronted demands that appeared to challenge the prescribed passivity of the feminine role.

The notion of the incompatibility between policing and femininity which can be found in the views of Maxwell and successive Chief Constables was also expressed by J. Gordon MacLeod, of Shaw Street, Presbyterian Church, Liverpool, in a letter sent to the local press in 1930. Macleod wrote that police work 'is against the best interests of the women themselves, both from a physical and a feminine point of view - it revolts the average feeling to think of women, our mothers, our sisters, or our daughters having the duty thrown on them of arresting drunken and dangerous men.' He claimed to base his argument on research involving the 'interrogation' of sixty people.¹⁸⁰ 'I hope', he asserted, 'that, whatever other Watch Committees may do, our Watch Committee will reject this mostly imagined and manufactured demand for so unnecessary and so unnatural a change in our civic government'.¹⁸¹ How widespread such views were is impossible to determine. Since no real poll was ever conducted it is difficult to estimate whether the general populace of Liverpool opposed, favoured, or were indifferent to the introduction of women police; though the fact that Maxwell's view remained unchallenged in the Council throughout the 1930s suggests that opposition or indifference predominated.¹⁸²

As for the reaction of the ordinary constables to the prospect of women police, we have little beyond anecdotal evidence. When Chief Constable Everett had a chance encounter with Hunter Rodwell in July 1927 he told him that 'the case [for women police] is

¹⁷⁷ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (12 July 1927).

¹⁷⁸ LRO/WOM/17/2/A: press cutting, letter of W. H. Young (c. July 1927). For Young, see Liverpool Red Book (1928), p.592.

¹⁷⁹ Such fears and criticisms were widespread. An article referring to the issue of women police as one of the symptoms of 'a malaise that has seized post-war England' alerted the *Policewoman's Review* to this form of criticism. Concern centred around the possibility that the denunciation of the campaign as 'a farcical manifestation of feminist agitation' could influence those who remained undecided: Policewoman's Review, June 1931, p.18.

¹⁸⁰ Evening Express, 8 January 1930, letter from J Gordon MacLeod, of Shaw Street, Presbyterian Church.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

hopeless . . . all the male members of the force are dead against it'; but there is no independent evidence to support this comment.¹⁸³ Earlier that month, Hunter Rodwell told the conference of magistrates held to support the appointment of women police that if members of the force actually understood the LWPPC aims at least nine out of ten would support them.¹⁸⁴ The NUWW Patrol Reports state that the police force welcomed and supported the work of the patrols during the war, but there is little evidence to justify this or to determine if this support continued after the war; not least because of the deep tensions which had arisen within the force itself by 1919.¹⁸⁵ In this year Merseyside became the 'key centre' of the police strike which began with a dispute in London the previous year. The strike resulted in the dismissal of the strikers and their replacement with men who were often ex-servicemen.¹⁸⁶ The background of these ex-servicemen is unlikely to have made them well disposed towards women police, and it is also possible that female influence may have been regarded as threatening to the dynamics of everyday policing. Mike Brogden's work illuminates the 'reality' of policing, including the daily coping strategies of the average lower-ranking policeman, and has noted the 'antipathy of the city force to women police' and the fact that women appeared in conversations almost entirely as 'wives and whores'.¹⁸⁷ It is possible that some male officers may have seen women police, whose supporters saw them as a force for moral order, as a threat to the way in which they conducted some of their daily duties, such as the practice of turning a blind eye to the activities of prostitutes they knew to be poor and trying to make a living.¹⁸⁸ It is also possible that women were perceived as a threat to jobs and the level of salaries, something which Maxwell hinted at in his 1927 Memorandum.¹⁸⁹ Police officers were used to dealing with women perceived to be in need of 'policing', they were accustomed to being supported by women in ancillary positions, but they were not used to working with them on an equal basis.

¹⁸² The possibility of a referendum was mentioned in a press letter: Liverpool Echo, 9 January 1930.

¹⁸³ LRO/LWPPC Minutes (12 July 1927).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*.

¹⁸⁵ LRO/H3645: Liverpool Patrol Committee Annual Report (1917).

¹⁸⁶ See Ron Bean, 'Police Unrest, Unionization and the 1919 Strike in Liverpool', Journal of Contemporary History, 15 (1980), 633-53; Gerald W. Reynolds and Anthony Judge, The Night the Police Went On Strike (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

¹⁸⁷ Brogden, On the Mersey Beat, p.2.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.124-29. See also the Patrol Report concerning the police attitude to prostitutes working around the Adelphi Hotel: MPMC/WPC, Patrol Reports (10 March 1916).

¹⁸⁹ The Chief Constable had hinted at this to Rodwell when the two men had a chance meeting:

Conclusion

Despite the length of the campaign for women police in Liverpool, the extent of support it secured before 1930, the strength and reasonable nature of its arguments, and the weaknesses in the position of its opponents, it appears that it ran out of momentum soon after the Watch Committee decision of 1930; though the issue was kept alive by the WCA which had played a leading role in the LWPPC. The campaign of the LWPPC was in line with the national campaign and rested partly upon traditional views of women's role as carers and nurturers, even though such views were closely associated with ideas that they were weak, vulnerable, and in need of care themselves by the dominant male. Its demands, focusing on the need for women to work alongside men equally rather than 'supplanting' them, and reflecting a belief that only through such co-operation and the utilisation of women's distinctive but equally valuable skills could the whole community benefit, were hardly radical.¹⁹⁰ They were based on arguments that by virtue of their femininity women had much to contribute to policing, in terms of raising moral standards. These arguments emphasised that the distinctive skills and perspective associated with women's domestic role as mothers and sisters were appropriate for and could make an important contribution towards certain aspects of police work, especially those involving the policing of women and children, at a time of growing concern about the immorality of the young. In essence, the commitment of the authorities to influencing the behaviour of young people, particularly young girls, was presented as a justification for maintaining the women patrols. After the war, the concern to protect young sexually active women and to reduce juvenile delinquency remained a significant thread in discourses on the behaviour of the working-class.

Unsurprisingly, the view that women were imbued with the ability to nurture and to care was not debated, and there was general agreement that women subject to police custody and brought before the courts either as defendants or witnesses should be dealt with by women. The point at issue was whether the abilities of women as carers and nurturers, and their physical and mental capacities, were appropriate for some of the more 'demanding' aspects of police work, such as carrying out arrests. The Watch Committee and successive Chief Constables argued that it was the very capacity of women to be nurturers and carers

LRO/LWPPC Minutes (12 July 1927).

¹⁹⁰ LRO/WOM/17/C: LWPPC declaration, 'Points to Bear in Mind' (October 1930); NCW Leaflet, 'The Need for Women Police' (n. d.); LRO/WOM/22/4. Sandra Stanley Holton has noted that J. S. Mill argued 'that the existence or otherwise of distinct male and female natures could only be determined when both sexes shared equal opportunities to develop their full potential': *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

that made their entry into police work unnecessary and even counter-productive, and they drew a sharp - and somewhat unrealistic and contestable - distinction between preventive and rescue work and police work; the latter, in their view, required physical and psychological qualities possessed only by men, and the most that women could do was to play a supporting role. Thus, in the face of the recommendations of two government committees and one Royal Commission, the clear evidence of the requirements of the city, and the experience of numerous other police forces, Alderman Maxwell successfully blocked the appointment of attested women police, and did so partly by maintaining the existence of the patrols who were seen by him as an adequate outlet for the limited contribution to policing that women were able to make.

It is also significant that the women who demanded the reform were drawing lines of division between themselves and 'other' women, the 'powerless' women who they considered needed their support and regulation. Their demands for government legislation were not designed to benefit all women in the same way; not every woman could aspire to becoming a policewoman, since entry was strictly limited to women of certain educational standards and personal qualities. On this level, the campaign provides a valuable insight into the various ways in which women experienced inequality. The evidence that exists suggests that the women who became women patrols were middle-class and that, unconsciously, they helped to prevent the emancipation of working-class women and to reinforce the way in which, as Judy Giles has argued, they were 'defined publicly' by others, often in terms of their 'sexuality', whether this be maternal or deviant.¹⁹¹ The patrols had clear views about inappropriate behaviour and how to deal with it; it was, some of them believed, a pity that women walked the streets from one cafe to the next, and far better for such women to 'join a Club'. Such beliefs in the function of some women as moral guides and protectors helps to explain why successive Chief Constables and the Watch Committee were prepared to maintain the existence of the patrols for more than thirty years. They became a part of the vast organisation of voluntary welfare workers and other interested individuals who sought to intervene in the lives of the working-class in this period.

Despite its limitations and negative features, however, the campaign for women police in Liverpool achieved some notable successes and is significant in other ways. The successes included the appointment of women patrols in 1914, their continued operation after 1918, and the winning of Council funding to support them. Although there were not many of them, and their powers fell far short of those possessed by male police constables, they were nonetheless important. In many ways, the patrols were in a similar position to the ordinary

Press, 1986), p.10.

¹⁹¹ Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain 1900-1950* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p.97.

police, imbued with the power to regulate the behaviour of young people, especially girls. Although some of their contemporaries undoubtedly saw them simply as fulfilling the maternal role of women, they challenged traditional ideas regarding women's conduct. During and after the First World War they patrolled the streets unaccompanied by men, dressed in a uniform, and actively engaged in the social and moral regulation of women, children, and others who were strangers to them. They offered, as Sharon Ouditt has noted of other forms of women's war work, 'a challenge to feminine identity'.¹⁹² The successes of the campaign also included the City Council's decision in 1930 to support the appointment of women police in Liverpool, in spite of the fact that the Conservatives, who mostly opposed the motion, were the dominant party. Although this certainly owed something to party politics, it is likely that the campaigners, who were always keen to attract support from anyone with public influence and authority, played an important part in making women police a cross-party political issue, and in attracting the support of male and female councillors from several political parties.

These achievements were based not only on the imaginative manipulation of traditional ideas about the differences between the role of men and women in society, but on the use of an impressive range of methods to air the issue and to win support. These included constructing formal organisations such as the LWPPC to promote the campaign and co-ordinate it as closely as possible with the national movement; conducting research on the issue through questionnaires and other means and presenting the findings to Home Office Committees; lobbying the support of local municipal candidates, councillors, MPs, JPs, clergymen, academics, head-teachers, and other influential interested parties; encouraging at least one MP to ask questions in the House of Commons; writing letters to the Watch Committee and to local newspapers; developing logical and coherent arguments based partly upon the evidence of Home Office committees of enquiry and other official bodies; and circulating leaflets which set these argument out in a clearly understandable format.

Although the majority of the women who were active in the campaign were active in other areas of public life, for them and their colleagues the campaign played an important part in enriching their participation in public life, helping to accustom them to active involvement. These women were publicising and stimulating debate on issues concerning the equal citizenship of women beyond those raised by the suffrage campaigners. Before July 1927 the issue of women police was treated by the Watch Committee as a joke and dismissed out of hand. By August 1927, as pressure from the campaigners mounted and their support base appeared to be increasing, the Watch Committee Chairman felt the need to publish a lengthy Memorandum defending and justifying his Committee's refusal to appoint women

¹⁹² Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, p.3.

police. Though the Committee maintained this policy for the remainder of the inter-war period, the issue of women police had ceased to be a laughing matter. Indeed, the LWPPC and its supporters contributed to the national campaign. Only a year or so after the Watch Committee decision of 1930, Liverpool's experience was cited in a Commons meeting on the subject of women police as an example of the breakdown of local discretion.¹⁹³

The significance of the campaign for women police in Liverpool is also reflected in the challenge it offers to the view of some modern historians that during the 1920s the varied interests of feminists caused a division of the feminist movement into two camps: 'equality' and 'new' feminists. The campaign indicates that this division has been drawn too sharply. Neither label adequately explains the ideological basis of the campaign, which was influenced by ideas which have been associated with both 'new' and 'equality' feminists. The LWPPC advocated that all the duties concerned with women and children were to be allocated to women. It campaigned to prove that skills which were seen as the peculiar preserve of women, and which had often been devalued, were useful within the public sphere, presented femininity as a basis for empowerment, and reflected the development of a feminism which had been active since before the First World War. Its members were not like Susan Kingsley Kent's militants, who were forced to reassess their views on masculinity and femininity during the war and change tactics accordingly. Neither were they feminists who demanded absolute parity with men. Nor, despite the importance they placed on the needs of women and children in supporting their demands, were they strictly 'new' feminists. Their concerns for the rights and welfare of women and children sprang primarily from practical considerations rather than from feminist ideology. First and foremost, these women were humanists. They argued that womanly virtues had a place in policing, and in this were close to the position of suffragists who argued that such virtues had a part to play in political life.¹⁹⁴ 'We do not want to be bad imitators of men; we neither deny nor minimize the differences between men and women', Millicent Fawcett declared, '[t]he claim of women to representation depends to a large extent on these differences'.¹⁹⁵ Thus, although far less successful than the suffragists, and not nearly so well known, the women who campaigned for the appointment of women police in Liverpool between the wars were motivated by and fought to promote ideas which were similar to those held by some of the women who campaigned for equal citizenship. In this they made their own contribution to the progress of women towards a wider public role.

¹⁹³ LRO/WOM/14: Conference (11 March 1931), programme details.

¹⁹⁴ Helen Taylor argued that, 'It is just because there was so much difference between men and women that it was essential the feminine side of things should be allowed full and free expression. In these times we had learnt that brute strength was not the source of righteous law, they would rejoice to take among law givers that half of the human race which represents its most pitiful and sympathetic instincts.' Quoted by Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, p.12.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.13.

Chapter Five

Women's Role in Liverpool Politics Between the Wars, I: Elections and Associations

After 1919 women were entitled to compete for positions of responsibility in national as well as local government, which meant that the political and civic arena was no longer a protected masculine preserve. The introduction of (limited) women's political citizenship was perceived by many as long overdue, but the permission granted to women to seek election to Parliament was unexpected (partly because women under thirty could be elected to a body for which they had no right to vote) and an opportunity open only to a few. Legislation offered the possibility of change but did not guarantee it, and this meant that for the majority of women who sought to participate in electoral politics, local elections (in which they had been allowed to stand as candidates since 1907) offered the most potential between the wars.¹

The adoption of women as candidates in municipal elections between the wars was limited. Even though women's organisations tried to promote women's political role in the early 1920s, and the parties attempted to appear committed to this, Liverpool women made only a small splash in municipal politics. A select group enjoyed success comparable to some of their male colleagues, but the majority found themselves working hard for little reward when they sought a seat on Liverpool City Council. In total, women accounted for only 7 per cent of all candidates in Liverpool municipal elections during this period. Liverpool parliamentary elections were also dominated by men. The city press might have claimed Eleanor Rathbone as Liverpool's first woman MP in 1929, but she was an Independent who represented the Combined English Universities rather than any city constituency.² Liverpool did not elect its first woman MP until 1945, when Labour's Bessie Braddock was returned at the Exchange constituency.

The limited opportunities for women to participate at the forefront of politics meant that most of those who wanted to be politically active in Liverpool were confined to involvement in local political associations. These were the first venues for women's organised political activity. The Liberals were the first party to encourage this. In 1880 the first Women's Liberal Association

¹ See Patricia Hollis, 'Women in Council: Separate Spheres, Public Space', in *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1880-1914*, ed. by Jane Rendall (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp.192-213.

(WLA) appeared, though major development did not follow until 1887 when the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF) was established, to which individual WLAs could affiliate. The success of the Liberals in the 1880 election inspired the Conservatives to form the Primrose League in 1883. By welcoming women as canvassers and fund raisers both parties recognised them, albeit selectively, as useful and capable workers.³ This has been a key area of research for historians of women's political role, though studies have tended to concentrate on early forms of the organisations in which they became involved, and Liberal women have received less attention than Conservatives.⁴ Research has also shown that before 1918 women were contributing to the various organisations which formed the Labour movement.⁵ Further studies have concentrated on the membership by Labour women of women-centred organisations like the Women's Co-operative Guild and the Women's Labour League.⁶ The gap between the study of women's contribution as associational members and the study of their participation in local government was bridged by Patricia Hollis's study *Ladies Elect*, which focuses on the period 1865 to 1914.⁷ During the last decade we have begun to learn more about how women's political role developed on the national scale after 1914. Biographical methods have been used to examine individual women who were politically active at the national level, inside and outside Parliament.⁸ The first generation of women who sat in the House of Commons, and the interests of women MPs, have been studied in some detail.⁹ Work on the involvement of women in working-class politics has

² *Liverpool Echo*, 4 June 1929.

³ The 1883 Corrupt Practices Act increased demand for voluntary helpers.

⁴ See, for example, Linda Walker, 'Party Political Women: A Comparative Study of Liberal Women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914', in *Equal or Different*, pp.165-91. For the Primrose League, see also Janet H. Robb, *The Primrose League, 1883-1906* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942); Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880-1935* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), Chap. 3. Tory women were also studied in Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why do Women Vote Tory?* (London: Virago, 1987); G. E. Maguire, *Conservative Women: A History of Women and the Conservative Party 1874-1997* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

⁵ See Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); June Hannam, "'In the Comradeship of the Sexes Lies the Hope of Progress and Social Regeneration": Women in the West Riding ILP', in *Equal or Different*, pp.214-38.

⁶ See Gillian Scott, *Feminism And the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London: University College of London Press, 1998); Christine Collette, *For Labour and for Women. The Women's Labour League, 1906-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Caroline Rowan, 'Women in the Labour Party 1906-1920', *Feminist Review*, 12 (1982), 74-91.

⁷ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

⁸ See Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace 1914-1928* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁹ See, for examples, Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House: The Women M.P.s, 1919-45', *Historical Journal*, 29 (3) (1986), 623-54; Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959*

revealed the limited success of Labour women and has shown that throughout the inter-war period the majority of women remained 'outside positions of policy-making power in both the Labour Party and the Co-operative Movement'.¹⁰ In addition, there has been an examination of the relationship between Labour women and feminism between the wars.¹¹

This chapter aims to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the political role of women during the inter-war period by examining their involvement in politics in one city. By focusing on Liverpool it is possible to develop our understanding of how the first age of joint political citizenship was experienced by prominent and 'ordinary' women, how they reacted to the increasing opportunities for political activity, and the way in which local parties responded to their position. By examining women's role, both as participants in local elections and as members of local associations, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of research concerning the role of women in this period, and to do so for a city where this role has not been fully explored. Few studies have focused on the role of women in political life in Liverpool in the inter-war period. Krista Cowman's examination of women's work in local parties, trade unions, Poor Law and School Boards, and the suffrage campaign, concentrates on the period 1890-1920.¹² P. J. Waller's book on Liverpool politics does not investigate the role of women.¹³ Sam Davies's study of the Liverpool Labour Party, though concentrating mainly on the inter-war period and incorporating a valuable chapter on Labour women, is primarily concerned with the economic, social, and political influences on the local Labour Party's development.¹⁴

After briefly outlining the local political landscape in Liverpool between the wars, this chapter examines several aspects of women's involvement in politics in Liverpool. These include the involvement and degree of success of women in parliamentary and municipal elections, the arguments used by some of them that women had a role to play in politics by virtue of their feminine attributes and skills, and the attitudes of the main parties towards their role. The reasons for the greater involvement of women in local rather than parliamentary elections are discussed, as is the identity of some of the candidates and some of the obstacles that confronted them (such

(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992)

¹⁰ Pamela M. Graves, *Labour Women: British Women in Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.1.

¹¹ Pat Thane, 'The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-1945', in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Harold L. Smith (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), pp.124-43.

¹² Krista Cowman, "'Engendering Citizenship": The Political Involvement of Women on Merseyside, 1890-1920' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1994).

¹³ P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1981)

¹⁴ Sam Davies, *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool, 1900-1939* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996).

as limited financial resources, the nature of the wards they were allowed to contest, and the prejudicial attitudes of voters), some of the reasons why they did well or badly in elections, and what the geographical distribution of women candidacies in local elections reveals about women's involvement. The chapter also explores wider aspects of women's involvement in politics by examining their role in local political associations in Liverpool, especially those linked to the three main parties: Conservative, Liberal, and Labour. Although this activity was low profile, and has consequently received much less attention from historians, it is equally worthy of study. This is because it involved far more women from a much broader variety of social backgrounds, and played an important part in increasing women's political awareness and participation. The resurgence and development of these associations after 1918 is considered, as is the attitude of party leaders to them, their social and educational function, some of the reasons why women joined them, the electioneering work they encouraged and expected women members to undertake, and certain aspects of their distribution and membership.

I

The Local Political Context

The Liverpool political scene between the wars was characterised by Conservative rule, the decline of Liberalism, the rise of Labour, and party factionalism that was fuelled by class, ethnic, and religious conflict.¹⁵ By the first half of the 1920s the once powerful Liverpool Liberals were in a serious state of decline. According to Waller, by 1924 the party was 'no longer a municipal force', it had become a 'conservative, class-bound, suburban rump, excluded from all vital areas of power and interest in the city'.¹⁶ The 'Free Liberals' were isolated from their former colleagues who were gravitating towards the apparent safety of an alliance with the Conservatives.¹⁷ Firmly believing that Liverpool Liberalism no longer offered them a viable alternative to the growing force of the Labour Party, five Liberal members, led by Sir Max and Lady Muspratt, crossed the Council floor in 1925 to join the Conservatives, a move which was noticed in London.¹⁸

¹⁵ For an explanation of Liverpool politics, see Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*; Davies, *Liverpool Labour*.

¹⁶ Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, pp.296, 279.

¹⁷ Sydney Jones, Burton Eills, and Herbert Rathbone were the Free Liberals who opposed Max Muspratt's and F. C. Wilson's support of the Conservatives.

¹⁸ *Liverpool Courier*, 22 February 1926. Muspratt made it clear that his move was 'mainly a local one': *Liverpool Echo*, 20 February 1926.

By contrast, Labour's star was rising, though by no means rapidly. Liverpool Labour did not win its first parliamentary seat until a by-election at Edge Hill in 1923, and municipal election results were poor until the late 1920s.¹⁹ In 1929 Labour won one quarter of the twenty-four wards they contested in the municipal elections, and four seats in the general election. These developments suggest that the clear trends in Liverpool politics between the wars were Conservative strength, Liberal weakness, and Labour growth (see Table 5.i.).

Table 5.i. Number of Seats Won by Parties in General Elections, Liverpool 1918-1935

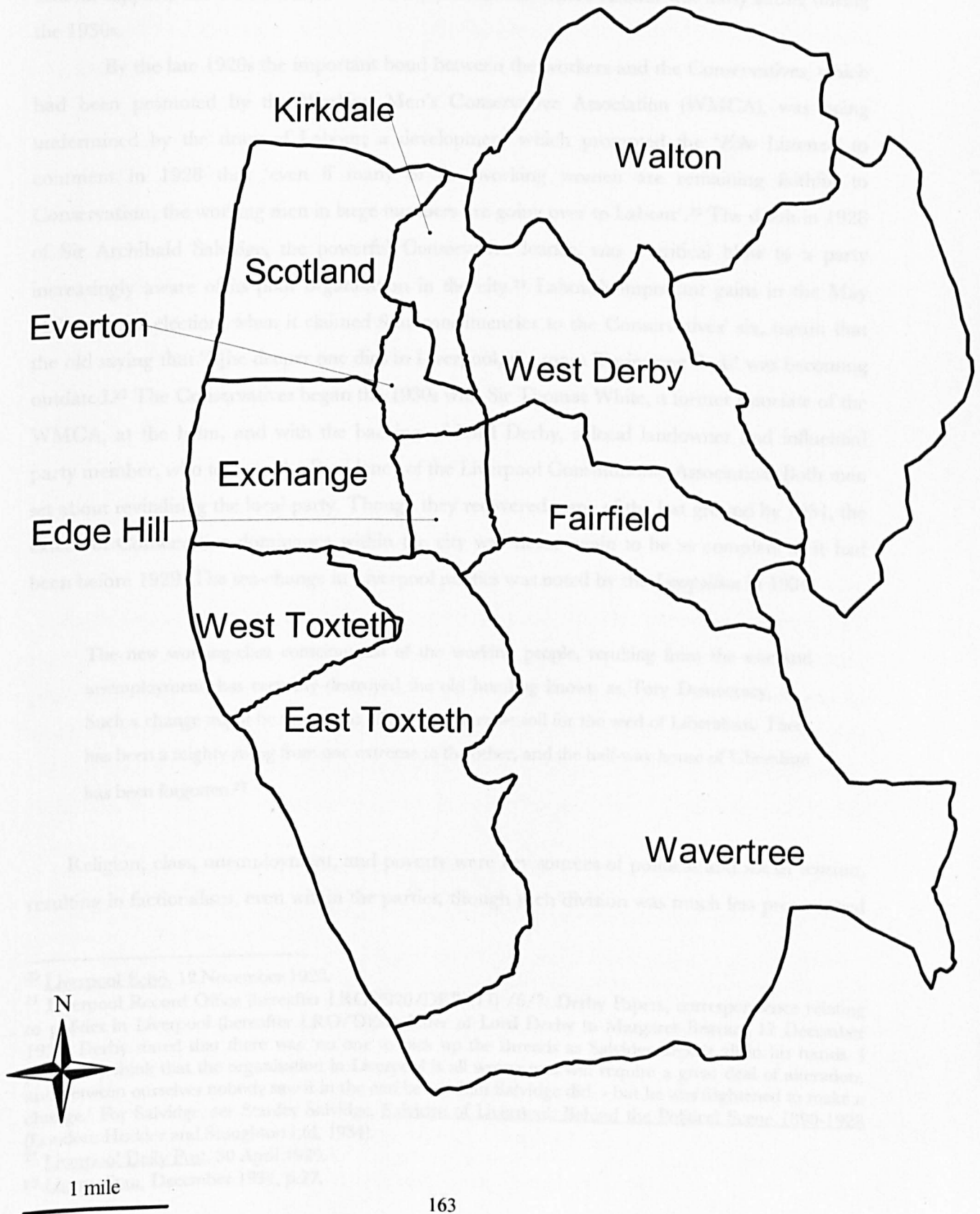
Year	Conservative	Labour	Liberal	Nationalist
1918	10	0	0	1
1922	10	0	0	1
1923	7	1	2	1
1924	8	2	0	1
1929	6	4	0	1
1931	10	1	0	0
1935	8	3	0	0

Source: *Liverpool Red Book*.

Liverpool municipal politics was characterised by Conservative strength in the south (Princes Park, Aigburth, Allerton, Childwall, Sefton Park East and West, Wavertree, and Woolton) and the core wards on the east side of the city (Kensington, Old Swan, West Derby, and Breckfield) (see Map 5.i.). Fairfield and Anfield on the north east fringes of the city centre were permeated by Liberalism, as was Warbreck on the west side of (strongly Conservative) Walton and Fazakerley. One of the main changes to the map between the 1920s and 1930s was the addition of the Croxteth ward, resulting from council house building on the east side of the Liverpool division, which was predominantly Labour after 1928. A second important development was that which occurred around the wards which bordered the river in the north (Sandhills, North and South Scotland, and Vauxhall), the home of Nationalist support during the early 1920s but an area later permeated by Labour. The lower wards which bordered the river, Great George and Brunswick, also became sites of Labour strength during the 1930s, as did the more inner-city St Anne's, a ward which showed fairly mixed support during the 1920s. Inland, those wards around the central district (Everton, Low Hill, and Edge Hill) showed strong Labour support during the 1920s, though they became more mixed during the 1930s as Conservatives

¹⁹ Not one of Labour's twenty-one candidates was returned in 1920. By contrast the Tories won twenty of the twenty-two wards they contested. Sam Davies has pointed out that 'compared with the national picture' Liverpool Labour was 'weak': *Liverpool Labour*, p.19.

Map 5.i. Liverpool Parliamentary Constituencies Between the Wars



and Protestants competed for support. Conservative dominance in the South, permeated by some Liberal support, was broken only in Garston (by the docks) where Labour was fairly strong during the 1930s.

By the late 1920s the important bond between the workers and the Conservatives, which had been promoted by the Working Men's Conservative Association (WMCA), was being undermined by the draw of Labour; a development which prompted the '*Echo Listener*' to comment in 1928 that 'even if many of the working women are remaining faithful to Conservatism, the working men in large numbers are going over to Labour'.²⁰ The death in 1928 of Sir Archibald Salvidge, the powerful Conservative leader, was a critical blow to a party increasingly aware of its poor organisation in the city.²¹ Labour's important gains in the May 1929 general election, when it claimed four constituencies to the Conservatives' six, meant that the old saying that '[t]he deeper one digs in Liverpool, the more Tories one finds' was becoming outdated.²² The Conservatives began the 1930s with Sir Thomas White, a former associate of the WMCA, at the helm, and with the backing of Lord Derby, a local landowner and influential party member, who took on the Presidency of the Liverpool Constitutional Association. Both men set about revitalising the local party. Though they recovered some of the lost ground by 1931, the extent of Conservative dominance within the city was never again to be as complete as it had been before 1929. The sea-change in Liverpool politics was noted by the *Liverpolitan* in 1934:

The new working-class consciousness of the working people, resulting from the war and unemployment, has certainly destroyed the old humbug known as Tory Democracy, . . . Such a change might be thought to afford a favourable soil for the seed of Liberalism. There has been a mighty swing from one extreme to the other, and the half-way house of Liberalism has been forgotten.²³

Religion, class, unemployment, and poverty were key sources of political and social tension, resulting in factionalism, even within the parties, though such division was much less pronounced

²⁰ *Liverpool Echo*, 12 November 1928.

²¹ Liverpool Record Office (hereafter LRO)/920/DER (17) /6/7: Derby Papers, correspondence relating to politics in Liverpool (hereafter LRO/DER): letter of Lord Derby to Margaret Beavan, 17 December 1928. Derby stated that there was 'no one to pick up the threads as Salvidge kept it all in his hands. I personally think that the organisation in Liverpool is all wrong and will require a great deal of alteration, and between ourselves nobody saw it in the end better than Salvidge did - but he was frightened to make a change.' For Salvidge, see Stanley Salvidge, *Salvidge of Liverpool: Behind the Political Scene 1890-1928* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1934).

²² *Liverpool Daily Post*, 30 April 1929.

²³ *Liverpolitan*, December 1934, p.27.

in the case of the Conservative Party. By the late 1920s twelve of the forty-four men who had stood as members of the Irish Party had found new homes either as Independent or Labour candidates.²⁴ The 'election addresses and political sympathies' of those who 're-appeared draped in Labour colours' at Sandhills, Great George, Brunswick, and Vauxhall 'remained unchanged'.²⁵ The Liverpool Labour Party was plagued by religious division, a prominent example of which was the controversy over the possible sale of the Brownlow Hill site for the Catholic Cathedral in 1930.²⁶ The right-wing Catholic-led group within the party, directed by Luke Hogan, predominated, while the left-wing socialists found themselves the less powerful minority during the 1930s. By 1935 the Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party (LTCLP) had been effectively sidelined by the National Executive Council, which had defined the Labour Council Group as the definitive authority in the city.²⁷

It was within this complex and deeply divided political landscape that women interested in developing their political role found themselves.

II

Women and Parliamentary Elections

Thirty-six women sat in the House of Commons during the inter-war period, but none of them represented a Liverpool constituency.²⁸ The period did not begin well for potential women parliamentarians in the city. In 1918 Labour's Mary Bamber did not feel the time was right for women parliamentary candidates and decided not to stand for the Everton constituency for which she had been selected.²⁹ It was left to Eleanor Rathbone to fly the flag for women parliamentary candidates in Liverpool, when she stood as an Independent at East Toxteth in 1922.³⁰ Her

²⁴ The Nationalist Party became known as the Irish Party in 1922; in August 1925 the Irish Party became the Catholic Party; in December 1925 the Catholic Party became the Centre Party.

²⁵ Sam Davies *et al.*, Genuinely Seeking Work: Mass Unemployment on Merseyside in the 1930s (Birkenhead: Liver Press, 1992), p.151.

²⁶ For a discussion of religion and Liverpool Labour see, Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism, pp.323-27.

²⁷ Davies *et al.*, Genuinely Seeking Work, p.155. For a discussion of the relationship between the Catholic caucus and the Labour Council Group, see Davies, Liverpool Labour, pp.69-73. For a history of the LTC, see Will Hamling, A Short History of the Liverpool Trades Council 1848-1948 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1948).

²⁸ Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement, p.154.

²⁹ This was the reason minuted: LRO/331/TRA: Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party Collection (hereafter LRO/TRA)/6/7: Liverpool Labour Party Minutes Special Meeting of the Party and Representatives of all Divisional Parties, Clarion Cafe (24 November 1918).

³⁰ LRO/ACC/3538: Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Collection (three boxes of unlisted material; cited hereafter LRO/WCA/B1/2/3), Box 2: LWCA Annual Report (1919-1921), p.11.

campaign was unsuccessful, but the fact that she won 40 per cent of the vote delighted members of the WCA, her sponsors, who commented that it was 'generally good' that a woman non-party candidate had polled nearly 10,000 votes in a Conservative constituency.³¹

The same year another Liverpool woman was given the opportunity to stand for Parliament, though it was in a constituency north of the division. Nessie Stewart Brown, Rathbone's first women colleague on the city Council and fellow suffrage campaign veteran, was adopted unanimously as a Free Liberal candidate for Waterloo. Stewart Brown was one of nine women representing the Liberals across the country that year, and she and three others were members of the Executive Committee of the WLF. The work involved in campaigning for the forthcoming general election meant that Stewart Brown retired as councillor for Sefton Park East. Like Rathbone, she was supported in her bid for Westminster by local branches of women's organisations, including the WLF, the WCA, and the British Women's Temperance Association. When she failed to be elected, the *Women's Liberal Magazine* paid tribute to her as 'a keen and indefatigable worker for Liberalism' and applauded her for reducing the majority of the 1918 election.³² Two years later, in May 1924, Stewart Brown, then in her sixtieth year, resigned from the WLF Executive Committee and, though continuing to work with WLAs in Liverpool, did not fight another election.³³

Having waited over four years to select its second woman candidate, Liverpool Labour was represented at Fairfield in 1924 by Mrs Mary A. Mercer, a Birkenhead councillor.³⁴ Mercer achieved 37 per cent of the vote in a fairly predictable defeat by the Conservatives in a difficult ward where, according to her party, she carried 'the Labour standard in the face of great opposition and prejudice'.³⁵ Though Mercer did not contest another Liverpool seat, she was appointed as Birkenhead's first female, and first Labour, Mayor in 1924.

The enfranchisement of women under thirty in 1928 intensified the interest of local commentators in the question of women's parliamentary candidacies. The press were speculating early in 1929 that Sarah McARD might possibly stand as an ILP candidate in the forthcoming election.³⁶ In April it was rumoured that Nancy Stewart Parnell, of the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, would represent the Liberals at West Toxteth. The Liberals were anxious to support the young teacher who was said to be 'largely instrumental in finally inducing the Premier

³¹ LRO/WCA/B2: *LWCA Annual Report* (1922-1923), pp.3-4.

³² *Women's Liberal Magazine*, 17 July 1922, p.47.

³³ *Women's Liberal News*, May 1924, p.44.

³⁴ LRO/TRA/21/1: LTCLP Council Minutes (21 May 1924).

³⁵ *Labour Women*, December 1924, p.200; and see *ibid.* (September 1920), p.141, for a feature on Mrs Mercer.

³⁶ *Evening Express*, 7 January 1929.

to give the vote to women of twenty-one'. According to a friend, Stewart Parnell was forced to decline the offer because she 'could not afford to risk her bread and butter'.³⁷ In the event, neither McArd nor Stewart Parnell stood in any inter-war general election.

In the same year the Liverpool Conservatives gave the much-loved Margaret Beavan an opportunity to stand for Parliament. She was handpicked for the job of maintaining the increasingly precarious Conservative grip on Everton, but her campaign (the implications of which will be discussed in the following chapter) was a disaster. A few years later Bessie Braddock was selected as the Labour candidate for the Exchange, a 'cast iron Tory stronghold' at the heart of Liverpool's business district, but had to wait until 1945 to secure election there.³⁸ Miss Nelia Muspratt was also adopted shortly before the Second World War as the Liberal candidate for Wavertree.³⁹

It is clear that women's contribution to parliamentary politics in Liverpool between the wars was limited and, with the exception of the 1929 Everton fiasco, fairly uneventful. The five women selected as candidates already enjoyed a high profile, in one form or another. Their scarcity suggests that local parties were reluctant to appoint women candidates, though it may also have been due to a reluctance of women to put themselves forward for selection. Some of the possible reasons for this will be considered below.

III

Women and Municipal Elections (see Map 5.ii.)

Eleanor Rathbone 'opened the doors of the Council chamber to women' when she was elected as an Independent candidate for Granby ward in 1909.⁴⁰ In January 1918 she was joined by Nessie Stewart Brown, who won a by-election for the Liberals at Sefton Park East, and in 1919 by Mabel Fletcher who was elected for the Conservatives at Sefton Park West. The success of Labour's Mary Bamber at an Everton by-election in 1919 meant that the three main parties began the inter-war period with a woman councillor each. But this equity proved to be short-lived.

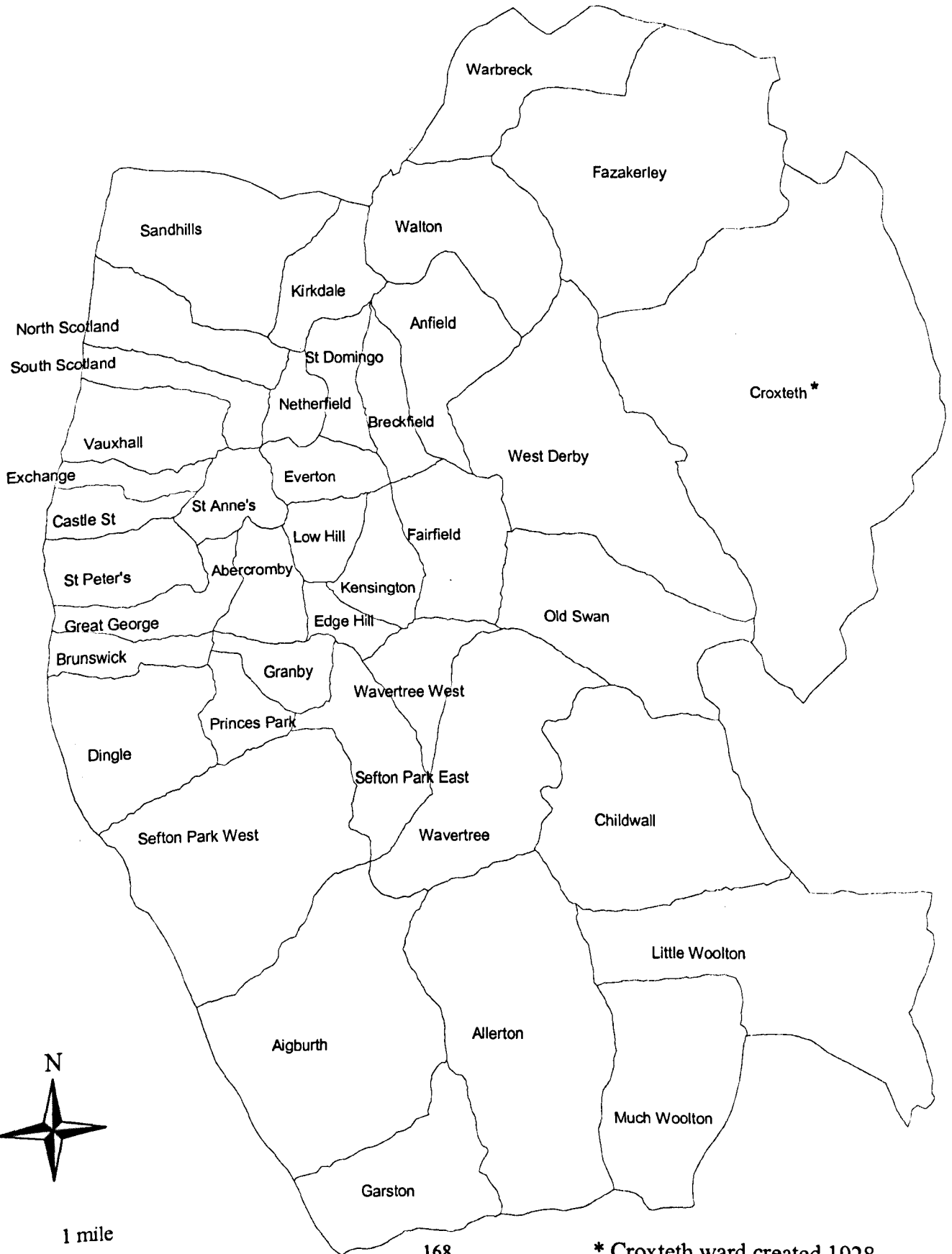
³⁷ *Liverpool Echo*, 8 April 1929.

³⁸ LRO/H920/BRA: Bessie Braddock Collection (hereafter LRO/BRA): cutting *Illustrated News*, 10 November 1945.

³⁹ Bristol University Special Collections (hereafter BUSC) Women's Liberal Federation Collection: *WNLF Annual Report* (1939), p.8.

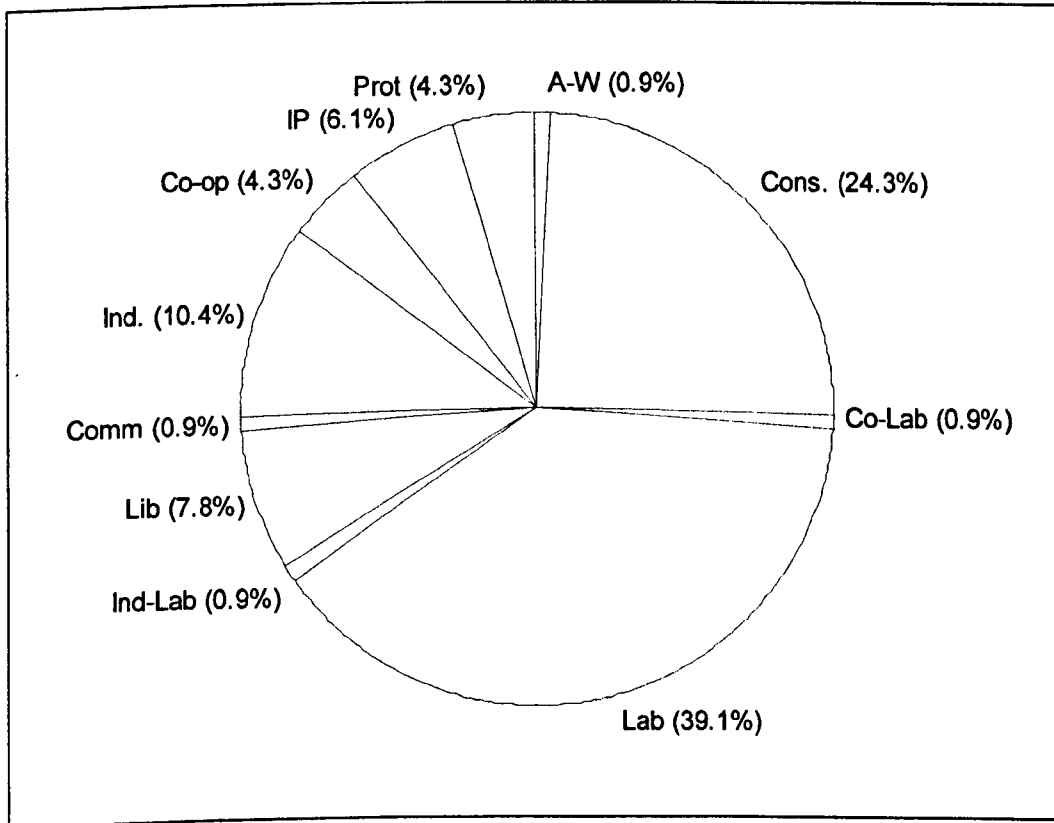
⁴⁰ *Liverpolitan*, November 1933, p.5.

Map 5.ii. Liverpool Wards Between the Wars



Seven-hundred and sixteen individuals stood for election to Liverpool City Council between the wars. Only fifty-two of them were women, and only half of the fifty-two were elected.⁴¹ Out of a total of 1,521 possible candidacies at November municipal elections between 1919 and 1938, women candidates stood on just 114 occasions as representatives of eleven out of thirty-seven possible parties (see Chart 5.i).⁴²

Chart 5.i. Share of Women's Candidacies by Party



Source: *Liverpool Red Book*.

Notes

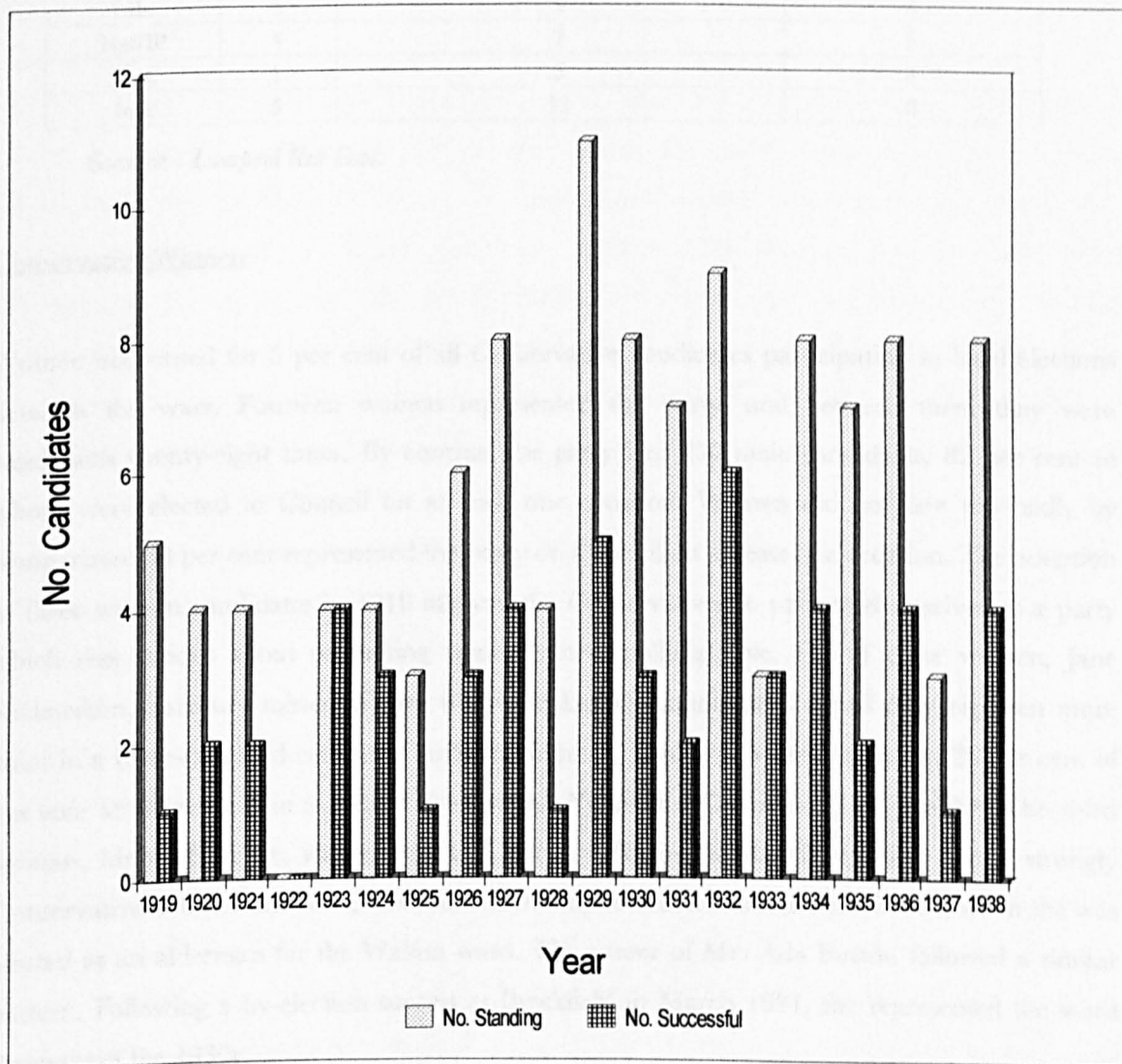
(A-W: Anti-Waste; Cons: Conservative; Co-Lab: Co-operative Labour; Lab: Labour; Ind-Lab: Independent Labour; Lib: Liberal; Comm: Communist; Ind: Independent; Co-op: Co-operative; IP: Irish Party; Prot: Protestant Party).

While the number of women's candidacies reached a peak in 1929 and maintained a fairly steady level during the 1930s, there was no clear pattern to women's success rate in municipal elections

⁴¹ Liverpool Municipal Election results, collected from *Liverpool Red Book* (1919-1939). For invaluable statistical information, see also Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, pp.237-385.

(see Chart 5.ii). A total of 107 by-elections took place in Liverpool between the wars, seventeen of which were fought by women candidates. Women tended to perform better at by-elections, their success rate being 67 per cent (it was only 44 per cent in all inter-war November elections). Although Labour adopted the highest number of women candidates, candidates from other parties enjoyed more success (see Table 5.ii).⁴³

Chart 5.ii. Performance of Women Candidates in Liverpool Municipal Elections 1919-1938



Source: *Liverpool Red Book*

⁴² Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, p.247.

⁴³ By-elections not included.

Table 5.ii. Number and Success Rate of Women Candidates for the Main Parties in Liverpool Municipal Elections 1919-1938

PARTY	Total no. women candts.	Total no. occasions when a woman candidate stood.	Total no. occasions when a woman candidate was returned.
Cons.	14	28	19
Lab.	20	44	11
Lib.	6	9	8
Nat/IP	4	7	5
Prot.	1	5	3
Ind.	5	13	8

Source : *Liverpool Red Book*.

Conservative Women

Women accounted for 5 per cent of all Conservative candidates participating in local elections between the wars. Fourteen women represented the party, and between them they were candidates twenty-eight times. By contrast the party had 258 male candidates, 82 per cent of whom were elected to Council on at least one occasion. Women did not fare too badly by comparison: 68 per cent represented the party on Council on at least one occasion. The adoption of three women candidates in 1919 allowed the Conservatives to present themselves as a party which was serious about promoting women's new political role. One of these women, Jane Richardson, narrowly missed victory when the Labour candidate scooped only eighteen more votes in a three-cornered contest at Anfield. Another, Margaret Mason, won just 26 per cent of the vote at Brunswick, in a contest won by the Nationalist Councillor J. A. Kelly.⁴⁴ The third woman, Mabel Fletcher, was elected to Council following a May by-election at the strongly Conservative Sefton Park West, and was consistently returned thereafter until 1930, when she was elected as an alderman for the Walton ward. The career of Mrs Ada Burton followed a similar pattern. Following a by-election success at Breckfield in March 1931, she represented the ward throughout the 1930s.

Fletcher and Burton provided the Conservatives with solid representation, as did three other women who had a comparable record of success between the wars, all of whom had entered municipal politics as Liberals. One of them was Margaret Beavan who in 1924 gave the

⁴⁴ Neither Richardson nor Mason stood again. Richardson died in 1925.

Conservatives victory at Princes Park, where she had been returned as a Coalition Liberal three years earlier, and represented the ward until her death in 1931. The second was Lady Helena Muspratt who won Childwall (a ward she had represented since 1920 as a Liberal) for the Conservatives in 1926 and held it for them until 1934, when she was elected as an alderman.⁴⁵ The third was Gertrude Wilson, who had been elected initially in 1923 as a National Liberal at Allerton, was returned in 1925 as an Independent candidate, and joined the Conservatives in 1931.⁴⁶ Between them, these three women served for about forty years on Liverpool City Council. The evidence suggests that the support they received in elections resulted from more than party attachment.

Two other Conservative women who were elected found their experience limited to one term on Council. One of them, Nancy Proctor, received little reward for the enormous dedication she displayed for the Party at Dingle. She contested the ward on five occasions, though her Council experience was limited to the years 1929 to 1934. Out of a total of 258 male Conservative candidates only one, T. H. Nabb, experienced anything comparable to Mrs Proctor's repeated failure.⁴⁷ Other disappointments included Rosa Hoch's failure to repeat her 1924 success at the unpredictable Granby ward in 1927; Essie Ruth Conway's failure in 1926 at Edge Hill, where she faced a Labour Party in the midst of a successful run, but managed to win about 41 per cent of the vote; and the defeat by Labour of both Miss G. E. Bartlett and Barbara Whittingham-Jones at Croxteth in 1929 and 1936-1937 respectively.

Labour Women

Women accounted for only 7 per cent of the two hundred and forty-one individuals who represented Labour in municipal elections between the wars. These twenty women stood for election on forty-four occasions.⁴⁸ Only 25 per cent of them were elected to Council on at least one occasion, compared with 40 per cent of the male candidates. While not too much should be read into Mary Bamber's by-election victory at Everton in 1919, Labour women's apparent slowness to make progress must be viewed in the context of the Party's generally poor municipal election experiences during the early 1920s. Julia Taylor's defeat at the strongly Conservative Sefton Park West ward in 1920 occurred in a year when her twenty male colleagues suffered the

⁴⁵ In 1923 she stood as a National-Liberal.

⁴⁶ *Liverpool Courier*, 22 February 1926.

⁴⁷ Nabb was unsuccessful on the four occasions he stood.

⁴⁸ Fifty-five, including by-elections.

same fate.⁴⁹

Between 1920 and 1927 the eight women who contested wards for Labour were all defeated. But Mrs Caroline Whiteley's victory in a 1928 by-election at Wavertree West was the beginning of an upturn in the fortunes of Labour women. The same year Labour won fifteen of the thirty-two wards it contested. In the following year Labour's Mrs Mary MacFarlane won a by-election at Scotland North, and her colleague Sarah McArd was returned at Edge Hill. In 1929 Labour adopted a male and a female candidate (Mr G. H. Boothman and Mrs M. L. Hamilton) to contest Croxteth ward, both of whom were elected.

The 1930s proved to be a more successful decade for Labour women. With the exception of the politically fluid Granby ward represented by Mary Cumella (1934-1937), the wards in which they performed successfully in municipal elections were by then fairly solid Labour strongholds. They included Scotland North, where Mrs MacFarlane was successful between 1929 and 1938, Croxteth, held by Mrs Hamilton from 1929 until 1937, Edge Hill, held by Agnes Mitton between 1934 and 1937, Brunswick, held by Mrs Cain from 1937, and St Anne's, the seat of Bessie Braddock from 1930 onwards.

Sarah McArd, a prominent member of the Women's Labour Sections (WLS), displayed enormous resilience by representing Labour on a total of nine occasions in the municipal elections. St Domingo, a Protestant/Conservative ward was the site of her first attempt in 1925. For three years from 1926 she stood at the strongly Conservative Old Swan ward. An uncontested by-election at Edge Hill in 1929 was her first taste of success, but she failed to retain her seat in 1931. Three more unsuccessful attempts followed: in 1934 she faced the Conservatives at their Wavertree West ward, in 1936 she lost out to the Protestant Party at St Domingo, and her failure to get elected at Fazakerley in 1938 was not surprising as the ward had returned a Labour councillor only once since 1930. An uncontested by-election at Edge Hill was scant reward for such dedication. As Sam Davies has commented 'lesser persons must surely have given up early against these sort of odds'.⁵⁰ At least twelve male candidates suffered similar multiple failures at the municipal elections.

Liberal Women

The first women to stand in Liverpool municipal elections represented the Liberal Party. In 1907 a Miss Johnson unsuccessfully opposed the Conservative candidate at Dingle. Her fellow

⁴⁹ In 1923 Labour failed to win any of the nineteen seats which they contested, but in the following year won four of the twenty-four seats they fought: Davies, Liverpool Labour, Chap. 3.

candidate Miss E. Robinson, who contested West Derby, was also defeated by the Conservatives. No other women candidates represented the Liberals until Nessie Stewart Brown's by-election victory in 1918 at Sefton Park East.

Between 1919 and 1938 only six women stood for the Liberals, on nine separate occasions. In the same period the Liberals were represented by sixty-seven men, only 40 per cent of whom were elected to Council on at least one occasion. Lady Muspratt failed to match the success of her sister-in-law, Stewart Brown, when she stood at Fazakerley as a Liberal candidate under the terms of the Extension Order in 1918. Three years later Jessie Beavan also failed at Sefton Park East, though the WCA, which supported her, was encouraged by the fact that she polled even more votes than Stewart Brown or any other Liberal at that ward.⁵¹ Jessie's sister Margaret, was elected at Princes Park in 1921, but when she contested the ward again in 1924 it was as a Conservative. The loss of Muspratt and the Childwall ward in 1926 was a further blow to the party. During the 1930s the Liberals were represented by two women, who both contested wards where the party had a good track record. Miss Mary Mabel Eills represented St Peter's from 1930 onwards, and Mrs Christine Boyle was elected to Childwall in 1934. Both women had family ties in their wards: Eills's father had represented St Peter's ward, and Boyle's husband already represented Childwall. The small number of women who contested wards for the Liberals between the wars was partly a reflection of the fact that the party contested increasingly few wards after 1923, when they won five of the fourteen they fought. During the 1930s they contested between two and six seats annually, and their success rate was fairly respectable.

Other Women Candidates

When Eleanor Rathbone decided that it was no longer practical for her to seek re-election to Liverpool City Council in 1935, she had represented Granby ward for twenty-six years. She was the longest serving female city councillor before 1939, and the longest serving Independent councillor, male or female. Five women and thirty-four men stood as Independent candidates in Liverpool local elections between the wars. Only Mrs Fernie, who was unsuccessful at Vauxhall in 1934 and 1935, did not represent another party at a different time. Caroline Whiteley contested Much Woolton and Wavertree West in 1932 as an Independent. She was councillor for Much Woolton for three years from 1932, a ward where her husband was also elected as an Independent in 1934. In 1932 MacFarlane was elected for Labour at Scotland North with a

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.183.

⁵¹ LRO/WCA/B2: LWCA Annual Report (1919-21), pp.11-12.

massive 92 per cent of the vote, which probably owed something to the fact that her opponent was a Communist. When she stood in the ward as an Independent in 1935 against Labour's H. Gaskin, she received only 14 per cent of the vote. Gertrude Wilson, long-time councillor for Allerton from 1923, represented the ward as an Independent from 1925 until 1931, but chose to end her political career as a Conservative.

Ward location, a key influence on the success or failure of all candidates, was particularly significant for women who stood for the Protestant Party and the Irish Party. Reverend H. D. Longbottom's Protestant Party was represented at the local polls between the wars by fourteen men and one woman, Mrs Longbottom. Netherfield and St Domingo to the North of the city were the only two wards where the Protestant Party scored any success in municipal elections. After standing unsuccessfully at Kirkdale in 1930 and 1931, Longbottom was fortunate enough, in 1932, to be adopted by the neighbouring St Domingo ward, the more strongly Protestant ward, which Rev. Longbottom had represented since 1930. With her husband, Longbottom represented the ward throughout the 1930s.

Forty-four men and four women stood under Nationalist colours between the wars, fifteen of whom (thirteen men and two women) were elected to Council on at least one occasion. Alice McCormick was the first woman to represent the Irish Party in Liverpool, at the Exchange from 1923 until her death in 1935. Her success is consistent with the pattern of Irish/Nationalist support in that ward. In 1927 the party obtained its second woman councillor, Miss Mary O'Shea, at the then Nationalist Scotland South ward, but she died in 1929.⁵² The two other women adopted by the Irish Party were not successful. The first, Elizabeth Geraghty, a prominent social worker and member of West Derby Board of Guardians, was defeated by Labour's Davie Logan at Scotland North in 1924. Geraghty's male colleagues at St. Anne's, Sandhills, and Scotland South suffered the same fate that year, although their proportion of the vote was considerably higher than her 18 per cent share. The second, Miss L. Murray, attracted 24 per cent of the vote at Great George in 1929, a time when Nationalist strength within the ward was being diluted by Labour.

The Co-operative Party was the only party which adopted more female than male candidates to fight municipal elections, but it did not secure representation on the Council. It contested eight elections; five of its eight candidates being women.⁵³ In 1930 Co-operative candidate Julia Taylor was defeated at Sefton Park West; a ward she had contested unsuccessfully

⁵² She died only two years later.

⁵³ The candidates were Mrs Blair at Warbreck in 1919; Mrs Billinge at Sefton Park East in 1919; Mrs Daniels at Warbreck in 1920; Mrs Davison at Fazakerley in 1927; and Mrs J. G. Taylor at Sefton Park

ten years earlier as a Labour candidate, and one controlled by the Conservatives since 1924. In 1932 Agnes Mitton was defeated as a Co-operative candidate at Abercromby, but won Edge Hill for Labour in 1934. The Communist Party suffered a similar lack of support on the sixteen occasions that it contested municipal seats between the wars. Mrs Bruce was the only woman among the nine candidates who represented the party. She was heavily defeated by Labour's T. H. Dunford at Sandhills, a former Nationalist stronghold, in 1931, when she polled only 12 per cent of the vote; though she fared slightly better than I. P. Hughes who, the following year, secured just 198 votes, only 6 per cent of the total.

IV

Women's Involvement in Elections in Liverpool: An Overview

The evidence of women's experience in national and local elections in Liverpool suggests strongly that the optimism of women's organisations, like the WCA, regarding women's prospects as frontline political actors was somewhat misplaced. Mindful of women's new role as electors, local parties had to appear at least willing to allow them the opportunity to increase their political role, though they displayed a greater willingness to test out the popularity of women candidates at local rather than national level. As Patricia Hollis has suggested, '[l]ocal government seemed to offer a sphere of work and a way of going about it particularly suited to women'.⁵⁴ The political parties, the electors, and politically active women all tended to perceive local government, with its emphasis upon the needs of the local community, as a natural venue for women's public work. The fact that women had been playing a significant role in the management of local initiatives, such as Poor Law and the School Boards, since the late nineteenth century, facilitated the promotion of women candidates at local level. As a result women slipped more easily into their new role as potential local councillors.

Many women who were keen to pursue political activity found their initial inspiration in the needs of the local community. Millie Toole claims that Mary Bamber wanted to fight for local working women, which may account for her reluctance to pursue a parliamentary seat.⁵⁵ It also seems likely that positions in local government appeared more attainable to women than those in national government because there were more local government posts to compete for, and

West in 1930: *Liverpool Red Book* (1919-1930)

⁵⁴ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.6.

⁵⁵ Millie Toole, *Mrs Bessie Braddock MP: A Biography* (London: Robert Hale, 1957), pp.31-32.

competing for them was less financially burdensome. A career in local government also allowed more time for family and domestic responsibilities. Of the twenty-six women elected to Liverpool City Council between the wars, nineteen were married and at least two, Mrs Hamilton and Mrs Waterworth, were widowed - though whether they had children is unknown. On this basis, it would seem reasonable to assume that a proportion of them faced similar domestic struggles to those described by Hannah Mitchell who, when she was finally elected to Manchester City Council in 1924 as an ILP member, had to organise her housework around her new Council commitments until she was able to get help from a neighbour.⁵⁶ Some women may have had to fit Council work around paid employment; Nationalist Councillor Alice McCormick helped to run her father's poultry store in St John's Market, and Mary O'Shea was a nurse.⁵⁷

While domestic responsibilities undoubtedly curtailed the political horizons and involvement of some women, some of the skills used within the home were frequently regarded as central to women's usefulness as local political actors. Analogies made between women's perceived nature, their domestic role, and the role which they could fulfil in local government, were used by active women to help justify women's interest and efficacy in local politics. In the early 1920s Margaret Beavan argued that '[i]t is imperative that in the best interest of this city we have more women in the Council . . . There are some things in which the experience of a woman is far wider and closer than that of a man can ever be, matters which intimately concern the life of the home, the care of the young'.⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Labour's Mrs Hamilton, campaigning at Croxteth in 1929, suggested that 'a municipality was a home on a big scale and needed the services of women just as much as an ordinary home did'.⁵⁹ Like Beavan, she believed that women could contribute a special understanding which was particularly relevant to the needs of the local community. Citing the inadequacies of the new housing estates located outside the city at Norris Green, she commented that the Conservatives had built them without providing any recreation grounds or libraries, and there was little for the children to do. 'A possible reason for this', she ventured, 'was that some of the members of the Council were so ancient as to have forgotten that children were born'.⁶⁰ Eleanor Rathbone also believed in the value to local government of some of the domestic qualities and skills of women. In 1928 she wrote in a newspaper article that 'the chief experience of women was of preserving goodwill on the domestic

⁵⁶ Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell: Suffragette and Rebel*, ed. by Geoffrey Mitchell (London: Virago, 1977), p.203.

⁵⁷ *Cox's Liverpool Annual and Year Book* (1924), p.231.

⁵⁸ Ivy B. Ireland, *Margaret Beavan of Liverpool: Her Character and Work* (Liverpool: Henry Young and Sons Ltd, 1938), pp.166-67.

⁵⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 25 October 1929.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

hearth', and the town council had 'very much the same qualities as the home. It had its quarrelsome people, its talkers, as well as its silent members'.⁶¹ In another article, published later that year, Rathbone noted that 'from the standpoint of preserving order without acrimony' in Council Margaret Beavan had been the best Liverpool Mayor for many years.⁶² Views such as these helped to promote the idea that local government was attainable for women; though there was a danger that they could also help to reinforce and justify women's confinement to local politics.

Despite such views, in reality certain women were far more likely than others to be candidates in local and national elections. Beatrice Webb expressed her concern in 1918 that the majority of women who were elected to local councils were 'drawn almost exclusively from the propertied classes', and that this 'one-sided representation' should be 'remedied'.⁶³ The background of the first women councillors in Liverpool indicates that Webb's fears were well-founded. That of Eleanor Rathbone is well known, and the comment of the *Echo* when she became the first Liverpool woman elected to Parliament in 1929 is revealing. 'Liverpool can rejoice unreservedly in Miss Rathbone's victory', it declared, '[i]t is fitting that one who bears a name which for so many generations has been a symbol of all that is best in the life of Liverpool should now be the city's first woman MP'.⁶⁴ It is clear that certain women found it easier to pursue political activity because they were well-known citizens, or members of prominent or well-connected families. They included the former Lady Mayoress, Helena Muspratt, who was one of the first women to stand for election locally and secured election at Childwall, and Margaret Beavan, the well-known and much-loved Child Welfare Association pioneer, who was elected at Princes Park.

Various obstacles stood in the way of women who wished to pursue a local political role. Nessie Stewart Brown, a leading Liberal and the wife of a successful barrister, expressed her concerns about one of them - finance - in a letter to the local press in 1919. She pointed out that few women were able to afford the cost of contesting a seat, and few party organisations were willing to pay. 'Until the expenses are lowered or borne by the city', she argued, 'I see little hope of getting many of the right sort of women to stand for the Council'. At least two talented women she knew were 'not in a financial position to offer their services'.⁶⁵ Another obstacle was identified

⁶¹ *Liverpool Echo*, 19 January 1928.

⁶² *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5 October 1928.

⁶³ Beatrice Webb, 'The End of the Poor Law', in *Women and the Labour Party*, ed. by Marion Phillips (London: Hadley Bros. Ltd, 1918), p.56.

⁶⁴ *Liverpool Echo*, 4 June 1929.

⁶⁵ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 October 1920.

nearly ten years later by Annie Caton, a writer and former Liverpool activist and ICWC member, who suggested that although finance was a problem women's political progress was also retarded by their 'diffidence and the fact that they [were] not keen party members'.⁶⁶ In addition, the hesitancy of some women was not helped by the fact that the local parties often gave little encouragement and support to women candidates. In Liverpool, with the exception of certain leading women, local parties exhibited little enthusiasm for selecting women candidates to contest secure wards. Many of the women who were chosen to contest Liverpool elections found themselves facing near impossible odds. For example, when Liverpool Labour adopted Miss Kennedy to contest West Derby in 1935, they had not scored a single success in the ward since 1919.⁶⁷ The attitude of the political parties is likely to have been influenced in part by fear of negative electorate responses. They were undoubtedly aware that prejudice against women politicians was widespread and sometimes intense.⁶⁸ They had to tread carefully, especially because the favouring of male candidates may not have been confined to male voters.

Determining the reasons why women did badly or well in local elections is difficult, partly because there are so many possibilities. Their failure or success could be influenced by, among other things, the nature of the ward, the level of traditional support for their party there, general electoral trends, the quality and contacts of the opposition, and the popularity of particular individuals. It must also be borne in mind that the proportion of the population with the municipal franchise varied considerably from ward to ward, and turn-out in elections was frequently poor; though there appears to be no obvious correlation between voter apathy and the performance of female candidates (see Map 5.iii. and 5.iv.).⁶⁹ Five of the seventeen municipal election contests between 1918 and 1939 where the turn-out was 30 per cent or less involved

⁶⁶ Fawcett Library, London/MICA/B1-4: Margery Corbett-Ashby Papers/B3: press cutting, Daily Herald, 21 September 1928.

⁶⁷ This was not restricted to Liverpool. In 1934 the future Labour MP Edith Summerskill was given the opportunity to contest the Middlesex County Council elections in a ward which had always been held by the Conservatives: Edith Summerskill, A Woman's World (London: Heineman, 1967), p.40.

⁶⁸ A revealing episode, though one which occurred beyond Liverpool, is that of one Labour female councillor who, while she was canvassing, was hit over the head with a broom by an angry man who exclaimed, 'Bloody woman, coming here, telling me how to vote': Daniel Weinbren, Generating Socialism: Recollections of Life in the Labour Party (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), p.158. When Edith Summerskill stood for election to Middlesex County Council in 1934, she met men for whom 'even the sight of a woman in a canvassing squad suggested a veiled threat to [their] creature comforts': Summerskill, A Woman's World, p.41.

⁶⁹ In 1921 Much Woolton had the highest turn-out in a municipal election (78%). But in 1923 only 37% of the electorate turned out. Garston's average turn-out was 61%, and Childwall and Dingle both achieved a rate of 57%. The lowest turn-out was recorded at Anfield in 1936 (23%). On average only 39% of Croxteth and Abercromby wards' voters turned out in municipal elections and, with an average of only 37%, Warbreck's electorate proved the least likely to vote during the inter-war period: Liverpool Red Book (1919-1939).

women candidates, but whether there was a link between female involvement and low turn-out is far from clear.⁷⁰

There was a higher incidence of women's candidacies in the more prosperous wards to the south of the city inhabited by an electorate which was probably more familiar and comfortable with publicly active women (see Map 5.iii.). Women may have found it much more difficult to gain support in working-class wards along the river to the north of the city, where gender roles were more rigidly defined. In the southern wards like Granby, Allerton, and Childwall a high rate of candidacies by women was achieved by the repeated success of Eleanor Rathbone, Gertrude Wilson, and Lady Muspratt, women who were prominent and active citizens before they stood as municipal candidates. A total of twelve female candidacies occurred at Sefton Park West between the wars, the highest in any ward in Liverpool. The ward was dominated by the Conservative Mabel Fletcher during the 1920s (see Map 5.iii. and 5.iv.).⁷¹ In addition, six of the seven Labour candidates who contested the ward between the wars were women. It is possible that the Labour Party interpreted Fletcher's success as a sign that the ward electorate, which included a large female element, welcomed women candidates, but far more likely that it allowed more women candidates to stand there because the ward offered little potential for success.

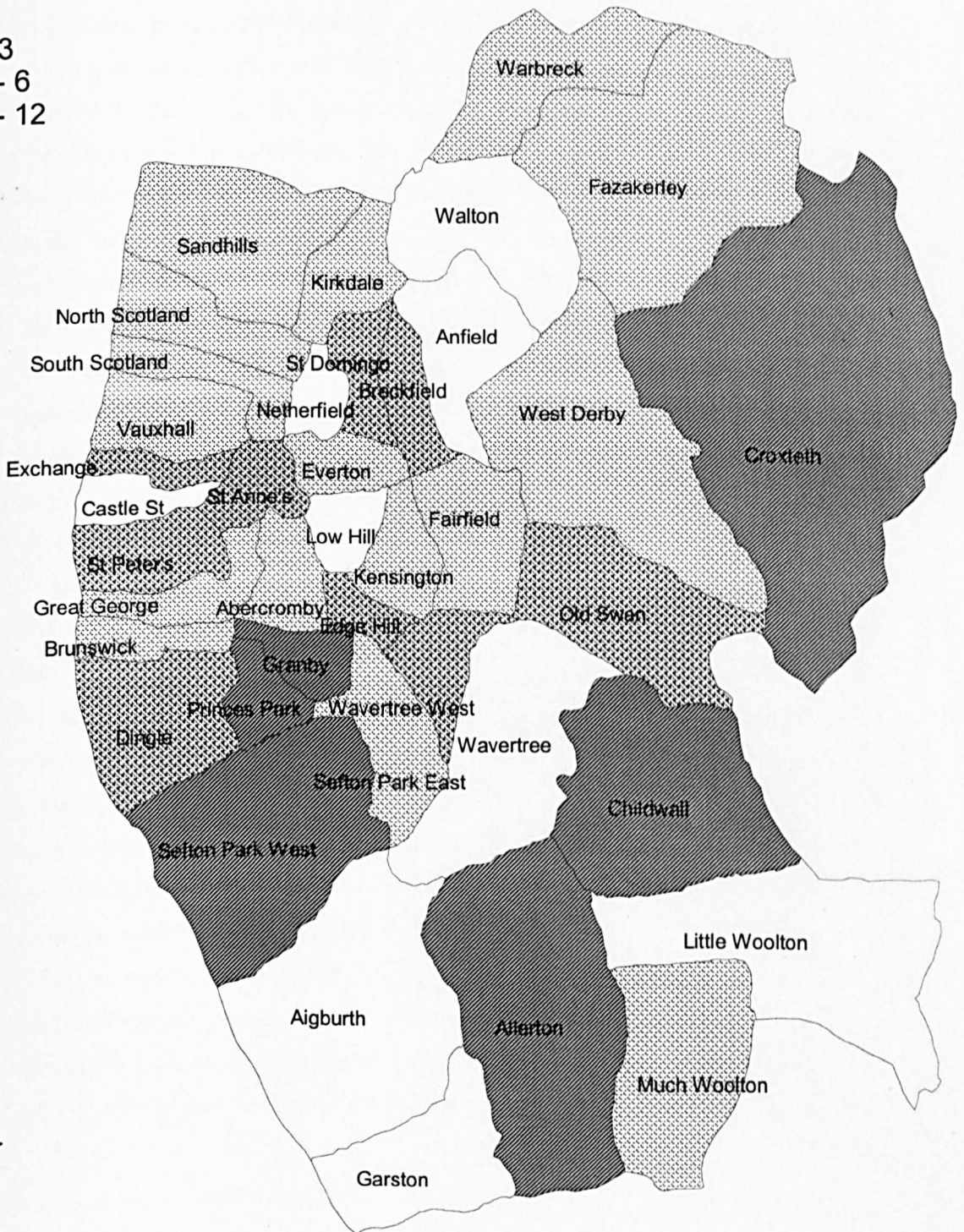
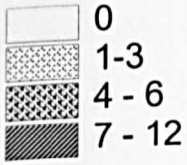
Croxteth was an important ward for women candidates (see Map 5.iii. and 5.iv.). Eight of the twenty-nine candidates who stood for election there after it was first contested in 1928 were women. The greater opportunities for women there may have been due in part to the fact that there was no tradition of male representation. Furthermore, by 1928 women candidates were less unusual. Croxteth quickly developed into an important base of support for the Labour Party, which won nine out of the eleven municipal contests there before 1938. The Conservatives also adopted a number of women candidates at Croxteth, possibly because the area was perceived to be heavily populated by families. Among the wards never contested by women candidates was Castle Street, in the business district, where the Tories and the Liberals shared a support base; Netherfield and Low Hill, in the North; and Aigburth, Wavertree (both of which were Tory strongholds), Little Woolton, and Garston in the South (see Map 5.iii.). It is possible that at wards like Netherfield, Low Hill, and Garston, where support for the Tories and Labour was split relatively evenly, both parties were reluctant to adopt a woman candidate for fear that an adverse response might tip the balance against them. Such a situation may well have occurred at Dingle

⁷⁰ The five were those between Bessie Braddock and Mrs Hughes at St Anne's in 1930, Sarah McArd and A. Shennan at Old Swan in 1926, Mrs Bruce and a Labour candidate at Sandhills in 1931, Mrs MacFarlane and a Communist candidate at Scotland North in 1932, and Mrs Fernie and a Labour candidate at Vauxhall in 1936: *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Liberals won seats here in 1920, 1922, and 1923.

Map 5.iii. Location and Number of Female Candidacies in Liverpool Municipal Elections 1919-38

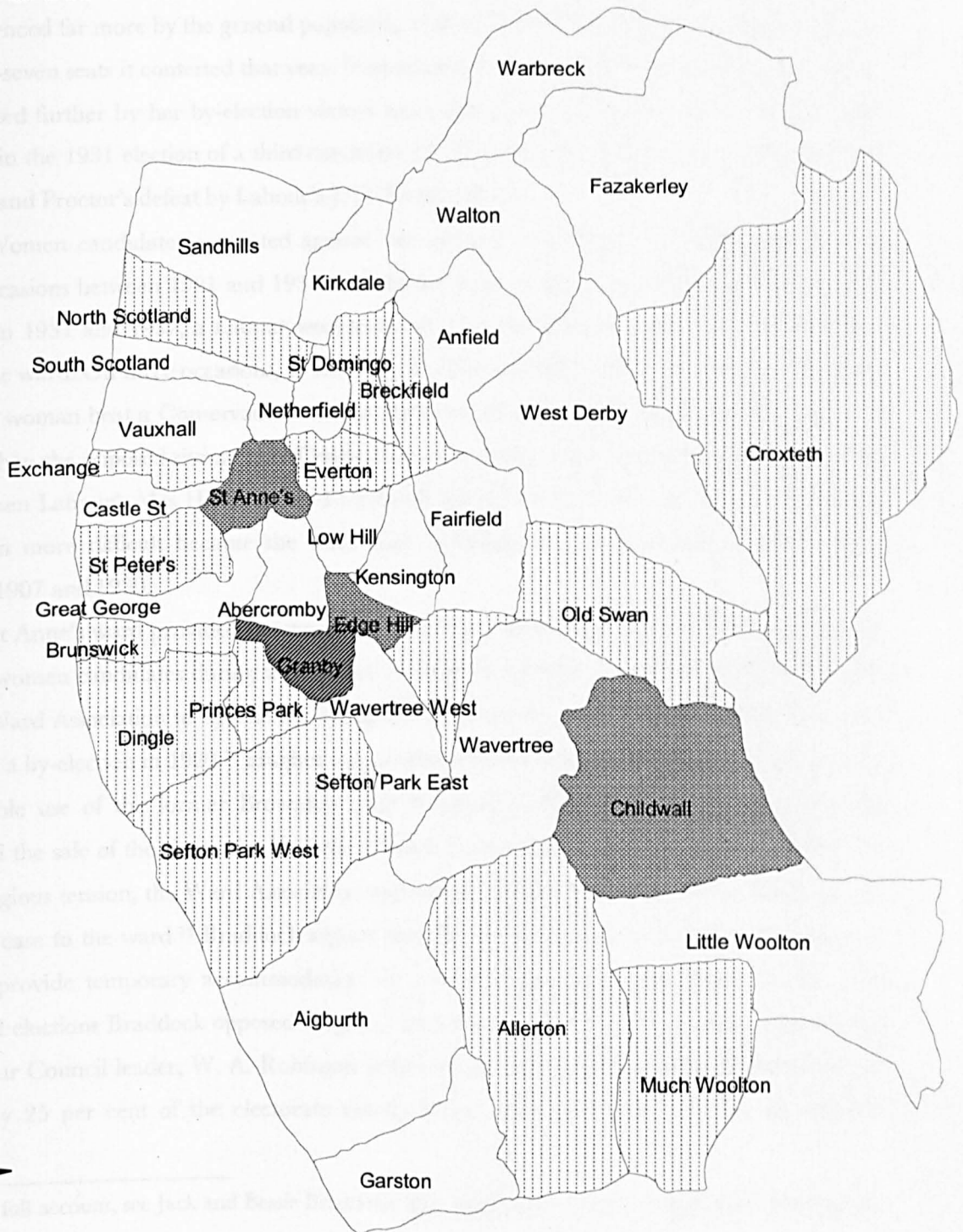
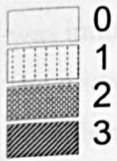
Occasions Councillors



1 mile

Map 5.iv. Liverpool Wards Represented by Women Councillors Between the Wars

Number of Councillors



1 mile

in 1929, when Nancy Proctor contested the ward for the Tories. Although Proctor won a respectable 49 per cent of the vote, it was not sufficient to maintain the Conservative hold of the ward, which had been maintained for the previous nine years. It may be, however, that the result was influenced far more by the general popularity of the Labour Party, which won nineteen out of the thirty-seven seats it contested that year. Determining the reason for Proctor's defeat in 1929 is complicated further by her by-election victory soon afterwards, her further victory in 1931, the presence in the 1931 election of a third candidate (the Protestant R. Bradley) who may have split the vote, and Proctor's defeat by Labour's J. D. Towers in 1934.

Women candidates competed against one another in Liverpool municipal elections on eleven occasions between 1921 and 1938. On at least three of these, at Childwall in 1926 and at Allerton in 1931 and 1937, a Labour woman faced a Conservative woman with a firm support base in the ward. On three occasions, at Croxteth in 1929 and 1936 and Wavertree West in 1929, a Labour woman beat a Conservative woman. Labour's Mary MacFarlane stood little chance of success when she opposed sitting Irish/Centre Party Councillor Alice McCormick at Exchange in 1929. When Labour's Mrs Hickling faced Liberal Mary Eills at St Peter's in 1930, her task may have been more difficult because the ward had previously been represented by Eills's father between 1907 and 1930.

St Anne's ward provided the venue for what was perhaps the most interesting encounter between women candidates during this period. In 1930 Bessie Braddock was invited by the local Labour Ward Association to oppose the sitting Labour councillor Louise Hughes, who had been elected at a by-election in 1929.⁷² Hughes was at odds with the Ward Association over the issue of the possible use of the former Brownlow Hill Workhouse. Hughes was a Catholic, and she supported the sale of the site to the Catholic Church for the purposes of erecting a cathedral. To avoid religious tension, the Ward Association approached Bessie Braddock, who was agnostic, to put their case to the ward.⁷³ Braddock argued that the site should be used, in the short-term at least, to provide temporary accommodation for people during slum clearance.⁷⁴ In the 1930 municipal elections Braddock opposed Hughes, who was supported by the Catholic Church and the Labour Council leader, W. A. Robinson under the banner of Independent Socialism. In the event only 25 per cent of the electorate voted, 60 per cent of whom supported Braddock.⁷⁵

⁷² For the full account, see Jack and Bessie Braddock, *The Braddocks* (London: MacDonald, 1963), pp.69-72.

⁷³ Though Braddock described the electorate of St Anne's as 85% Catholic (*ibid.*, p.72), there was only one Catholic church in the ward, as compared with five Anglican churches: Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, p.309.

⁷⁴ Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.69. For Labour plans see *Liverpool Echo*, 4 February 1930.

⁷⁵ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.98; Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.72.

According to Millie Toole, it was the first occasion that a non-Catholic had defeated a Catholic in a Catholic ward.⁷⁶

The study of women's involvement in local and national elections in Liverpool after 1918 has shown that they began to make an important contribution to electoral politics between the wars, though it was far stronger in municipal than in parliamentary elections. The tiny group of women who became involved in parliamentary politics were already prominent in some form in public life. Local politics offered more scope to politically ambitious women, though success rates varied considerably. All the Liverpool parties publicly welcomed women into the fold, but often allowed them to contest very difficult or unwinnable fights. A small group of women proved to be particularly successful in municipal politics. Though the women who were active as municipal candidates tended in the early part of the period to be individuals who had previously been prominent in public life, they came to include by the later part of the period less well known women, especially in the Labour Party. The small number of women adopted by Liberal Party appear to have been placed in favourable wards, where they performed fairly well. Analysis of women's participation suggests that while gender may sometimes have played a significant role in the selection of an electoral candidate, once a woman actually stood for election her chances of success tended to rest upon her political position. Though a non-party organisation like the WCA was keen to support women's candidacies, with the exception of Eleanor Rathbone, this was done on a party-basis. Electoral politics, however, was only one aspect, albeit an important one, of the involvement of Liverpool women in politics between the wars. Another was their membership of local political associations, which will be discussed below.

V

Local Political Associations

After 1919 local parties had to consider new methods to attract and involve women members who would appeal to new women voters. One of these was through local political associations, in which many women had been active before the First World War.⁷⁷ The following section discusses those associations attached to the three main parties: Conservative, Liberal, and Labour.⁷⁸ It considers what they offered and expected from their women members, the

⁷⁶ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.98.

⁷⁷ Cowman, "Engendering Citizenship", Chaps. 4 and 8.

⁷⁸ Most ILP branches seem to have been mixed, though there was a separate women's section at Edge Hill.

distribution of their branches across Liverpool, and the identity of those who joined them.⁷⁹

The immediate post-war period was one of organisation and revitalisation for women's local political associations in all three main parties. In the case of the Conservatives, the Women's Unionist Federation (WUF), established in Liverpool in 1909, continued to expand between the wars.⁸⁰ Even so, at a meeting of the Board of Managers of the Liverpool Constitutional Association in March 1920, the President, Sir Archibald Salvidge, leader of the Liverpool Conservative Party, led a discussion on ways in which women could be better represented in the organisation of the party; a concern which reflected party activity at the national level.⁸¹ Liberal women had been very active in Liverpool before the war, and in 1918 Miss Telford, the Women's National Liberal Federation (WNLF) organiser for the North, advised the Women's Liberal Associations (WLAs) in the city on the quickest means to resume operations.⁸² Throughout the inter-war period, the WNLF emphasised the necessity of maintaining momentum in the face of repeated electoral setbacks.⁸³ The Labour Party was also concerned to develop women's involvement. Nationally it began in 1918 to replace the Women's Labour League (WLL) with separate Women's Labour Section (WLS), which were intended to bring women closer to the party and allow them more autonomy.⁸⁴ In Liverpool this was assisted by the fact that, aside from one short-lived WLL branch at Edge Hill in 1913, the WLL had made no impact.⁸⁵ By April 1918 Liverpool was reported to be one of the ten areas where women's sections had been started.⁸⁶ In May 1922 the creation of a Liverpool Labour Women's Central Council (LLWCC), composed of delegates from the WLS, was recommended by the newly amalgamated LTCLP.⁸⁷ Mamie Anderson, a member of the National Women's Association and an organiser for the Liverpool and District Working Women's Advisory Council (LDWWAC), led a meeting on May 31 to form the LLWCC, on which two women from each of the eleven constituencies were to act

Bessie Braddock was the chief organiser of the Communist Party during the early 1920s, indicating that men and women worked together. Liverpool played host to Oswald Mosley during the 1930s. By March 1934 the British Union of Fascists claimed to have 10,000 members in six branches on Merseyside: Liverpolitan, March 1934, p.20.

⁷⁹ It is true, of course, that the activities of these associations by no means embraced all local political activity of women, many of whom contributed in other ways to their parties.

⁸⁰ The Primrose League was organised in Liverpool, but its presence on Merseyside was sporadic before 1920 and minimal thereafter, when its three branches (West Derby, Beaconsfield, and Wallasey) dwindled to only one.

⁸¹ Liverpool Courier, 23 March 1920. See Maguire, Conservative Women, pp.73-96.

⁸² BUSC: WLF Annual Report (1918), p.12.

⁸³ Ibid., WNLF Annual Reports (1919-1928, 1936-1939).

⁸⁴ Labour Woman, February 1918, p.258.

⁸⁵ Collette, For Labour and for Women, Appendix 2.

⁸⁶ Labour Woman, April 1918, p.279.

⁸⁷ LRO/TRA/11/1: LTCLP Minutes, Council (3 May 1922).

as representatives. Mrs Hughes of Toxteth was appointed Secretary and Mrs Alice Elliott was appointed Chairman, a position which she retained for two decades.⁸⁸ The following year Marion Phillips, the Chief Woman Organiser, lent her support to local developments when she spoke to the LDWWAC at Southport about the organisation of WLS.⁸⁹

Liberal women's organisations remained distinct, to a certain extent, from the party, a situation encouraged by the WNLF which advised that Liberal women should assert their independence from their male colleagues 'while at the same time co-operating to the fullest extent possible with the men's Liberal Associations'.⁹⁰ Liverpool was not the strongest satellite of WNLF representation between the wars, but the city had special significance for women Liberals since, according to Nessie Stewart Brown, it was at a meeting there that the Liberal Federation first recognised women's work for the party.⁹¹ Stewart Brown appears to have provided an important driving force for women's associational liberalism in Liverpool between the wars. She had been connected with it since 1891, when she had organised the second WLA in West Derby, and was well known both locally and nationally for her work. As *Cox's Year Book* declared in 1924, '[t]he Liberal Party in Liverpool possesses no more fearless and eloquent woman champion than Mrs Stewart Brown'; a devotion for which she was also recognised 'in political circles throughout the Country'.⁹² She remained faithful to her Liberal roots throughout the 1920s and 1930s, despite her brother Max Muspratt's decision to lead an exodus from the party.

A small group of women, some of whom were linked by family ties, played a major role in Liverpool Liberal organisations, particularly during the 1920s. Among them were Elizabeth Holt and Mrs Hugh Rathbone, both members of prominent Liberal families. Following family tradition, Holt's husband, Richard, was President of the Liberal Federal Council between 1920 and 1928.⁹³ Her mother-in-law Lallie, one of the sisters of Beatrice Webb, had been the first President of the WLA in Liverpool. When the Liverpool Central WLA affiliated to the WLF on 19 May 1914, Holt was the President.⁹⁴ She was also the President first of East Toxteth WLA, and then of Sefton Park East WLA, until 1932. During the 1930s Rathbone was President of the Liverpool Liberal Women's Council, of which Nessie Stewart Brown was the Chair. As Chair also

⁸⁸ *Labour Woman*, July 1922, p.111.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, March 1923, p.43.

⁹⁰ BUSC: *WLF Annual Report* (1918), p.13.

⁹¹ See the membership returns: BUSC: *WNLF Annual Reports*. The number of branches and membership in Liverpool was relatively limited compared to that of other cities: Sarah Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', *The Woman at Home IV*, 21 (1895), p.174.

⁹² *Cox's Liverpool Annual and Year Book* (1924), p.229; *Women's Liberal Magazine*, 11 November 1920, p.139. Coverage of Liverpool Liberal women is relatively limited in this magazine.

⁹³ Robert D. Holt was leader in the period 1879-1889.

⁹⁴ BUSC: *WLF Annual Report* (1914).

of South Liverpool Liberal Federation, Stewart Brown provided an important link between male and female Liberals. She and Elizabeth Holt also had links with national women's Liberalism via the WLF, as they were both members of the Executive Committee at the beginning of the inter-war period, and later became Vice-Presidents.⁹⁵

Conservative women, or at least those represented in the LWUF, did not actively seek to assert their independence from the party in the same way as WLA members. As far as the Conservative Party leadership was concerned, women had a distinctive role to play (which was related to their gender), as Salvidge's comments at the 1921 LWUF Conference indicate:

In the Women's Federation they had a real live factor at the back of Conservatism in that city, which would see that the flag was never lowered, and that Liverpool would maintain its proud position of being the 'Metropolis of Conservatism' in the UK.⁹⁶

There is no mistaking the admiration in Salvidge's words, though his phrase 'at the back' is telling. Statements made by another prominent Liverpool Conservative, Sir James Reynolds, at the same conference concur with those of Salvidge. He spoke of how the face of politics was changing, with women taking their part 'on their own account in the affairs of the city . . . [which] meant almost the salvation of the city', as their influence was a balancing one.⁹⁷ The theme of women's reasoned influence was revisited shortly before the 1923 Municipal Elections when Salvidge told the LWUF conference that women's support had staved off the revolutionaries. 'It was the women', he said, 'who seemed not only to weigh up correctly the situation, but who placed a true estimate on the promises of the gilded pill which was presented by the Socialist Party'.⁹⁸

The extent to which the LWUF influenced the party is debatable. The Party certainly recognised the women's efforts down to the 'rank and file', without whose work 'all effort would be fruitless'.⁹⁹ According to outspoken caucus critic Barbara Whittingham-Jones, the LWUF was a 'dutiful harem', and its members had no real impact upon the party in terms of decision-making. In a stinging attack in 1936 she denounced the LWUF as one of the 'small sundry fry', to

⁹⁵ BUSC: WLF Annual Reports (1918-1928). Nessie Stewart Brown was on the Executive Committee between 1918 and 1924 and listed as a Vice-President from 1926; Elizabeth Holt was on the Executive Committee between 1918 and 1920, and a Vice-President from 1922.

⁹⁶ Liverpool Courier, 26 April 1921.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Liverpool Courier, 24 October 1923.

⁹⁹ LRO/329/CON: Liverpool Conservative Party (hereafter LRO/CON)/1/3: Liverpool Conservative Party Annual Report (1924-1925).

be classed in same league as the Junior Imperial, 'neither of which ever say "boo"'.¹⁰⁰ It seems probable that tension may have arisen between women like Whittingham-Jones, who sought election as a local councillor at Croxteth in 1936 and 1937, and LWUF members, who may have appeared to be taking on the apparently subsidiary role which the Primrose League dame may have cast for herself. This tension was possibly compounded by the fact that the wives of Liverpool's Conservative elite were at the centre of the LWUF. In 1919 Countess Derby was its President, Lady Petrie (wife of Sir Charles Petrie, Chairman of the Liverpool Constitutional Association until his death that year) was its Chairman, and Lady Salvidge (wife of Petrie's successor) was its Honorary Secretary. By the late 1930s room was becoming available for more 'ordinary' women to rise to these leadership positions. Despite Whittingham-Jones's view, not all LWUF members were supportive wives; one of them was the popular Conservative councillor Mabel Fletcher. The LWUF may not appear to have been the most liberating environment for women in the 1920s, but it is important to consider its appeal to those women who chose to join. For many women, membership of it presented the opportunity to play a key role in, what was to Conservatives, a larger and more important objective than gender politics: fighting the socialist threat.

VI

The Social and Educational Function of the Local Political Associations

Women's experiences of, and responses to, the opportunities offered by local political associations varied according to individual situations and objectives. Many women may have felt these associations to be limiting, but many others were probably content to be members. For some membership may have fulfilled a desire to become politically active, because it presented an opportunity, perhaps previously unimagined, to participate in an interest outside the home. It is important, therefore, to examine what local political associations could do for their women members and what these members were often expected to do for the party. An important aspect of this is a consideration of the ways in which the associations politicised ordinary women and used their skills to improve the municipal position of political parties.

The associations' publications provided much advice for women organisers, though to what extent organisers followed it almost certainly varied. It is not clear how Labour or Liberal

¹⁰⁰ Barbara Whittingham-Jones, *The Pedigree of Liverpool Politics: White, Orange and Green* (Liverpool: n.p., 1936), p.6.

women in Liverpool felt about their individual journals, but the new publication *Home and Politics* did not impress the LWUF Chairman. When the Central Party Organisation asked her to promote its sale in Liverpool, she decided against ordering any copies 'owing to its unattractiveness', which might result in a loss being incurred.¹⁰¹ Such publications offered advice which may have been useful to inexperienced women, but which was obvious to others. Thus, while the advice given in these publications may give some indication of what was expected of women's associations, it should be viewed with caution.

The publications and other evidence indicates that while some women joined political organisations for purely political reasons, others saw them as social outlets. Clever emphasis upon the social nature of meetings meant that associations could be presented as accessible to women, not only aiding recruitment but ensuring continued membership. 'As we want to appeal to all kinds of women it is well to have social gatherings as well as business meetings and educational lectures', counselled *Labour Woman* in 1920.¹⁰² The timing and style of meetings could play a significant role in determining membership. Organisers were encouraged not only to be aware of the interests and commitments of members, but also to alternate meeting times. In 1921 *Home and Politics* recommended that tea and cakes should be served to supplement speeches and discussions since there was 'no better way of breaking up the formality of a meeting and of giving opportunity for members to talk over what they have heard amongst themselves'.¹⁰³ *Labour Woman* even suggested in 1920 that, if there was a piano, meetings could open with a song.¹⁰⁴ The tea and chatter which women could expect at meetings not only made for a more congenial and welcoming atmosphere, it was designed to provide an incentive to new women members. Charabanc trips and picnics organised during the summer, when many organisations ceased to meet, were, no doubt, planned for the enjoyment of women and children, but they also provided an ideal means of ensuring that contact was not lost when meetings were not in progress.¹⁰⁵ Women Liberals seem to have been well aware of the value of the 'social'. In February 1920 Liverpool WLA held a social at St Barnabas Hall, Penny Lane, at which there was entertainment and dancing.¹⁰⁶ In 1923 readers of the *Women's Liberal Magazine* were advised that '[p]robably the most satisfactory gathering of all is the mixed variety, where the social side and a popular political

¹⁰¹ LRO/CON/8: LWUF Executive Committee Minutes (26 January 1921).

¹⁰² *Labour Woman*, September 1920, p.137

¹⁰³ *Home and Politics*, March 1921, p.2; October, p.1.

¹⁰⁴ *Labour Woman*, September 1920, p.137.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, September 1925, p.154. The women of Low Hill WLS frequently drove off to various destinations in up to five vehicles during the summer of 1925. The charabanc trip was a favourite pastime of Labour and Conservative women. Summer picnics were organised by Low Hill, Childwall, and Fairfield WLS.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, February 1920, p.59.

address are combined'.¹⁰⁷ When, in February 1929, the Liberals organised 'political concerts' at Wavertree, the press pointed out that the combination of music and speeches was designed to attract the 'flapper's' vote in particular.¹⁰⁸

Social events were also important to fund raising. They were used by Liverpool women Liberals to raise funds for the Million Fighting Fund, launched at the Annual Meeting at Southport on May 5 1925 to collect money for Liberal Party re-organisation.¹⁰⁹ According to the WNLF, the women were the 'hardest workers in raising the Million Fighting Fund'. They distributed leaflets which highlighted the need for the organisation of events such as bazaars and penny collections.¹¹⁰ The Rathbone family invited the Liberals to use Greenbank Pavillion, South Liverpool, as a venue for Party events, a number of which, held in 1926, were in aid of the Million Fighting Fund. These events were frequently for the whole family, as in the case of the children's party organised in May 1926, during which Mrs (Hugh) Rathbone donated many prizes.¹¹¹ In the following month the Rathbones played host to an 'At-Home' attended by all officers and paying members of the wards and women's associations of Wavertree.¹¹² Such occasions, frequently organised by women, played an important role in maintaining a Liberal culture within families.

The evidence suggests that Liverpool Labour women's association programmes tended to be organised on a scale which was not as grand as those of their Conservative and Liberal contemporaries. If WLS organisers followed the advice of their party publication, their events would have included a strong social element, though these 'socials' tended to be more closely connected with political business. For example, a concert and social evening organised by the LLWCC in May 1925 took place immediately after a conference on food prices at which the key speaker was Marion Phillips.¹¹³ Labour women did not appear to enjoy the same variety of local social connections as the Liberals or the Conservatives in Liverpool, though in July 1928 Lord Derby granted them permission to hold a Carnival at Knowsley Park to celebrate 'Women's Month'.¹¹⁴ The women's sections often joined with the LTCLP to celebrate important events in the Labour calendar, such as the annual May Day celebrations.

Accounts of Labour women's experience indicate that the preparation for, and smooth

¹⁰⁷ *Women's Liberal Magazine*, May 1923, p.53.

¹⁰⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, February 25 1929.

¹⁰⁹ BUSC: *WNLF Annual Report* (1925-1926), p.23.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹¹¹ *Liberal Women's News*, June-August 1926, p.110. Hugh Rathbone was Liberal MP for Wavertree (1923-1924).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, September 1927.

¹¹³ *Labour Woman*, June 1925, p.101.

running of, events which involved the whole party often fell upon the WLS. For example, when Liverpool Labour women and men attended the North West District rally for Men and Women's Day on June 14 1924, an event addressed by six male speakers, the Southport WLS 'undertook the heavy duty' of providing tea for 700.¹¹⁵ The tone of articles in *Labour Woman*, and the attitude of some Labour men, suggests that this was the norm. Pamela Graves quotes the example of Jim Cole, an electric welder from Merseyside, who suggested that 'basically the women ran the social side leaving the politics to the men'.¹¹⁶ The expectation that women should do the 'drying-up, the washing-up, and run the raffles' at social events they usually organised is often cited as a widely held grievance of Labour women.¹¹⁷ In November 1924 the LLWCC was not only 'invited' by the LTCLP to appoint six members to sell rosettes at a carnival it was organising, but also had the catering 'placed before' it.¹¹⁸ In January 1926 the LTCLP requested each women's section to organise a fund-raising social event.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, preparations for the annual May Day Demonstration, an important date in the Labour calendar, appear to have been shared, as all WLS and ward associations were asked to decorate lorries for the event.¹²⁰ There is no direct evidence to suggest how Liverpool women felt about such expectations, but it can hardly be doubted that some of them must have found being banished to the tea urn or the rosette stall frustrating. Many others, however, may have looked upon such roles as a useful and fulfilling way to participate in party activity.

In addition to providing women with social activities, and using their organisational skills, associations were committed to enriching their political awareness. Eleanor Rathbone had drawn attention to this issue in 1913, when she established the WCA. While the WCA offered a non-party approach to politicisation, local political associations were, of course, keen to recruit and educate women with their political ideology. One of their key concerns, particularly during the 1920s, was the need to educate new women members about politics and to train them to become useful speakers, organisers, and canvassers for the party.

Visiting and resident speakers were hugely important in the annual programmes of women's associations. Difficulty in finding women speakers seems to have been a problem for the associations discussed here. The WNLF complained in 1923 that the 'demand for speakers [had]

¹¹⁴ Ibid., June 1928, p.93.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., July 1924, p.114.

¹¹⁶ Graves, *Labour Women*, p.74.

¹¹⁷ Weinbren, *Generating Socialism*, p.158.

¹¹⁸ LRO/TRA/21/1: LTCLP Carnival and Dance Committee Minutes (24 November 1924).

¹¹⁹ LRO/TRA/11/2: LTCLP Finance Committee Minutes (22 January 1926).

¹²⁰ Ibid.: LTCLP Executive Committee Minutes (8, 15 November 1926). Women played an important role in organising this event: *ibid.*: May Day Demo Committee (27 January 1927). See also LRO/TRA/21/2:

been incessant'.¹²¹ In 1924 the number of women who could and would speak for the party was still 'absurdly inadequate', as it was again in 1925. At this time disappointment was expressed at the discovery that there were still 'many constituencies which are virtually dumb and cannot produce one orator for our lists. These areas are the first to cry out for "star" speakers or "a speaker from London"'.¹²² Liverpool should not have been berated too fiercely by the WNLF, as one of its 'stars' was Nessie Stewart Brown, who had been speaking on a circuit which included Lancashire and Derbyshire since the 1890s.¹²³ The LWUF's annual programmes tended to be heavily weighted towards male speakers, and the limited number of women who spoke generally came from outside Liverpool. The common solution to this problem was the creation of a national speaker's panel, though the educational activities of the associations suggest that they all adhered to the view, put forward in *Labour Woman*, that if a women's section wanted to have good meetings then it had to find speakers from within its own ranks.¹²⁴

Similar strategies, in the guise of debates and speakers' classes, were adopted by all three associations to improve members' speaking skills and to encourage them to take a more active role. LWUF members were encouraged to study subjects for debates which were held on an 'open discussion night' created specifically as a 'further opportunity for women to acquire facility in public speaking'.¹²⁵ If organisers of Labour women needed help in structuring a programme they could use suggestions set out in *Labour Woman*, which pioneered a series of twelve suggested lectures or classes designed to increase women's political understanding and provide them with support in organising and running meetings. The first series of classes was to be based around the subject of the position of the mother in the home and the reasons why she should be taking part in public life.¹²⁶

The use of annual programmes to increase women's political knowledge was also a feature of the work of other women's organisations, like the LCWC and the WCA. By the mid-1920s the WNLF, always keen to promote this aim, proudly announced that 'it is noteworthy that WLAs are now showing a desire for educated and specialised speeches, we do not receive the simple old demand for a "lady speaker"'.¹²⁷ Discussion topics advised for WLA meetings included issues like foreign policy, the League of Nations, housing, and the cost of living. The *Women's*

LTCLP Executive Committee Minutes (13 December 1929).

¹²¹ BUSC: *WLF Annual Report* (1923-1924), p.23

¹²² Ibid. (1924-1925), p.21; *WNLF Annual Report* (1925-1926), p.22. Labour was also collecting a panel of speakers: *Labour Woman*, August 1921, p.133

¹²³ Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', p.174.

¹²⁴ *Labour Woman*, April 1920, p.64.

¹²⁵ LRO/CON/8/2: LWUF Executive Committee Minutes, Programme 1921-1922.

¹²⁶ *Labour Woman*, July 1921, p.108

Liberal Magazine noted that 'such talks make the reading of newspaper articles increasingly interesting to the average Liberal woman', a habit which Nessie Stewart Brown had been encouraged to adopt at an early age by her father.¹²⁸ Study Circles, at which women were able to read about and discuss current political issues, were encouraged, and the WNLF even produced a handbook to provide ideas.¹²⁹ LWUF members enjoyed lectures on similar topics to Liberal women, though they also wanted to be entertained. The LWUF carried on the tradition of the Lantern Lecture, popularised by the Primrose League. Members attended lectures which covered a range of topics from contemporary issues like municipal politics, the navy, housing problems, and health in the home, to less challenging, though informative, topics like 'Over the Sunset Trail - from Sandy Hook to San Francisco', which was about travel.¹³⁰

VII

Women's Work for Elections

As well as harnessing women's organisational and catering skills and educating them, the parties were particularly keen to use them at election times. The general consensus that canvassing and personal communication were keys to electoral success meant that women were perceived as ideal candidates to undertake this work. Through the pages of *Labour Woman* Marion Phillips constantly stressed the importance of women's role as canvassers.¹³¹ Arthur Peters, the Labour Party's National Agent, rallied the women supporters in 1918 by paying tribute to their 'invaluable assistance' as workers in the Committee rooms and as canvassers and organisers. 'It is quiet work and makes little splash', he declared, 'but its value is none the less for that'.¹³² Liberal women were also reminded that 'more elections are won by the knocker than by the platform'.¹³³ This view was echoed in a LTCLP discussion on a forthcoming by-election in West Toxteth in 1924, when it was suggested that 'elections are won on the doorstep, canvassing is very important' and hope was expressed that the women's division would be especially helpful in this work.¹³⁴ Labour women undertook much of this work in Liverpool. In 1924 the West Toxteth WLS was

¹²⁷ BUSC: *WLF Annual Report* (1924-1925), p.21.

¹²⁸ *Women's Liberal Magazine*, July 1923, pp.53-54.; Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', p.174.

¹²⁹ BUSC: *WLF Annual Report* (1923-1924), p.23. See, for example, *Labour Woman*, November 1924, p.176.

¹³⁰ LRO/CON/8: LWUF Executive Committee Minutes, Annual Programmes (1919-39).

¹³¹ See, for example, *Labour Woman*, November 1924, p.176.

¹³² *Ibid.*, February 1918, p.262.

¹³³ *Women's Liberal Magazine*, December 1923, p.81.

complimented by the LTCLP for 'the very fine work' which it was conducting in the division.¹³⁵ The LTCLP also expressed its appreciation to rank and file women for their 'unselfish efforts' following the 1929 General Election.¹³⁶ The same year M.P. H. L. Mond paid tribute to the Conservative women of East Toxteth, who had helped him to secure victory in the May election; they had been 'perfectly marvellous', he declared enthusiastically, '[i]n all my experience in electioneering campaigns I have never seen so much energy and enthusiasm as they have displayed to our great cause. I take my hat off to the women of East Toxteth. It has been a great delight and an honour to work with them'.¹³⁷ Election work could even have its bonuses; so pleased was Alderman L. S. Cohen with the efforts of the LWUF towards the municipal elections in 1919, that he presented them with a gift of £10.¹³⁸

Parties and women's associations were anxious to stress that *all* women could participate in election support. The WNLF's 'crusade scheme', in which women were organised into groups and allocated a certain number of voters to visit, was devised in 1920 to ensure that all WLA members could play a role in attracting new voters.¹³⁹ The *Liberal Women's News* stressed in October 1924 that '[i]f you are an *ordinary woman* you can canvass and knock on doors'.¹⁴⁰ Labour encouraged its women members to participate in various ways, including door-knocking, speaking at meetings, organising informal meetings in courts or alleys, or simply visiting the local co-operative store wearing Labour colours.¹⁴¹ Classes and day schools geared specifically for women canvassers were organised by all three parties, and supplemented by advice in the women's journals. A day school was organised in December 1928 at Birkenhead for members of the LDWWAC, the second session of which featured an address by Mamie Anderson, the national organiser, on 'Special points for women canvassers from *Labour and the Nation*'.¹⁴² Women's leaders stressed the importance of preparation. Writing in the *Common Cause* in 1919, Elizabeth Macadam suggested that 'the type of canvasser who is wanted today should be a cross between a missionary and a teacher; she herself must be educated before she can hope to educate others'. She furnished her point with the example of a recent by-election held in the North, where canvassing had been undertaken by working-class members of the WCA, who (she emphasised) had all been fully

¹³⁴ LRO/TRA/21/1: LTCLP Council Minutes (16 April 1924).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*: LTCLP Executive Committee Minutes (15 August 1924).

¹³⁶ LRO/TRA/21/2: LTCLP Council Minutes (5 June 1929).

¹³⁷ *Daily Post*, 16 March 1929.

¹³⁸ LRO/CON/8: LWUF Minutes (9 January 1920).

¹³⁹ *Women's Liberal Magazine*, March 1920, p.67.

¹⁴⁰ *The Liberal Women's News*, October 1924, p.80.

¹⁴¹ *Labour Woman*, February 1920, p.32

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, December 1928, p.188.

prepared for their role.¹⁴³ It is likely, however, that not all women who went out canvassing had the benefit of skills gained at special classes and day schools, as places were limited, and that the level of expertise at classes varied from branch to branch.

VIII

The Distribution and Membership of Women's Associations in Liverpool

An examination of the pattern of the distribution of the branches of local political associations in Liverpool gives some indication of how widespread they were; how the pattern of activity developed during the inter-war period; and the areas where the three political parties attracted an active female membership. It also throws some light on the socio-economic background of this membership. In identifying the location of local branches, it should be noted that a mere listing is no guarantee that a branch was permanently active; certain branches may have been formed at specific times to help organise electoral contests.¹⁴⁴ Another problem when investigating branch location is that they were not necessarily organised uniformly according to a ward or constituency pattern.¹⁴⁵

The LWUF seems to have been fairly widespread. In 1923 there were thirty branches.¹⁴⁶ These seem to have been organised in areas where the Conservatives were strong in municipal elections: namely, Warbreck, Fazakerley, and Walton in the North, and West Toxteth, and St Michaels in the South. Working-class Catholic strongholds like Scotland and Brunswick, and the predominantly working-class areas around the city centre like Everton (where Labour organisation was also important), also show evidence of LWUF organisation. The LWUF was not the only form of Conservative organisation for women. Tuebrook, to the north of the city, boasted the first Women's Conservative Club outside London, which opened in March 1927.¹⁴⁷ Some seven years later, a Ladies Conservative Association was organised at Sefton Park.¹⁴⁸

The dispersal of WLAs in Liverpool appears to have been less widespread than that of the LWUF, but we have few records of actual membership numbers. The largest of the five branches

¹⁴³ *Common Cause*, June 1919, p.128.

¹⁴⁴ See the pertinent comments about Labour ward party associations in Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, p.65.

¹⁴⁵ Not all branches of Conservative women's organisation were technically LWUF, but for convenience LWUF will be used.

¹⁴⁶ LRO/CON/8: LWUF Executive Committee Minutes, press cutting, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 October 1923.

¹⁴⁷ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 April 1928.

¹⁴⁸ Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, p.405.

in existence in 1919 was at East Toxteth, a second was close-by at West Toxteth, and there were others at nearby Wavertree, Liverpool Central, West Derby, Fairfield, and Exchange. By 1926 new branches had been organised at Garston and Sefton Park East and West, suggesting that the WLA was attempting to mine support in the three wards where the Liberals had been successful in the early 1900s. The wards along the river, from Vauxhall down to Aigburth, the lower-middle class housing districts around Walton, Anfield, and Fairfield, and the mixed-class area of Wavertree formed the key sites of WLA organisation during the 1920s. The Liberals won support in municipal elections in wards around this area, including Castle Street, St Peter's, Sefton Park West, and Aigburth. WLA organisation reached a peak in 1929, when eight branches were in operation, and fell into decline thereafter. By the 1930s the WLA had moved out of the Exchange and West Toxteth, but remained in the middle-class areas of Aigburth and Sefton Park, and the lower middle-class areas towards the north of the city. But by 1936 there were only four branches remaining.

Areas of traditional Labour organisation, including Edge Hill, Low Hill, Everton, Netherfield, Wavertree, Wavertree West, and East and West Toxteth formed the key areas where WLS were initially created. Labour women organised only very briefly in the working-class, traditionally Catholic, localities along the river (Scotland North and South) in 1926. Sam Davies has suggested that here and in other wards 'ward Labour Parties, let alone women's sections, were a rarity; and an informal political organisation based on close-knit ethnic and neighbourhood ties dominated'.¹⁴⁹ Lists of women's sections suggest that their organisation was at its height in 1925, when nineteen branches were in operation, and again in 1930, when twenty branches functioned. Numbers dipped after 1930, though sixteen sections were listed in 1936. The areas where branches operated around 1930 included wards on the city edge, where Labour had a significant level of support, including Low Hill, Edge Hill, Everton, and Kirkdale; wards which were predominantly Conservative but exhibited some Labour support, like Dingle; wards which were dominated by the Conservatives from 1919 to 1938, like Walton in the north, and Princes Park, Sefton Park West, and Wavertree in the south; and one ward, Fairfield, where the Conservatives shared support with the Liberals throughout the 1920s and 1930s. During the late 1930s the women's sections consistently listed branches in lower middle-class areas, where they had a minimal level of support (such as West Derby and Old Swan); in areas of new working-class housing, where support again was minimal (such as Fazakerley and Walton); around areas where Labour was traditionally strong (such as Edge Hill, Everton, and Wavertree); in areas of mixed-

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.170.

class habitation around the city (such as Granby and Abercromby); in the relatively middle-class Sefton Park West area; and at Fairfield, Kirkdale, Low Hill, Kensington, Breckfield, and Great George. The popularity of the Labour women's organisation at Croxteth may have been due to its social attraction to women who had moved to the new housing estates at Dovecot and Norris Green, which lacked community networks and 'preceded the development of transport services'.¹⁵⁰

Determining the size and nature of the membership of women's local political associations in Liverpool is difficult due to the lack of evidence. Even where membership figures exist, they sometimes provide only snap-shots at infrequent intervals rather reliable indications of long-term trends. Furthermore, as branches were not organised on a uniform ward or constituency pattern, it is not always possible to make useful comparisons.

Membership figures for the LWUF indicate healthy growth during the inter-war period, from 600 in 1923 to over 12,000 a decade later.¹⁵¹ The Labour women's sections also appear to have grown rapidly, though membership varied considerably from area to area. The growth in the membership of the West Toxteth branch was so rapid that by Spring 1925, when membership reached 351, it had outgrown the Labour Hall.¹⁵² This increase occurred not long after the Labour victory in the 1924 General Election, when J. Gibbins was returned. The fact that at municipal level the Conservatives continued to dominate two of the three wards in West Toxteth (Dingle and Princes Park), suggests that the women's local organisation in West Toxteth owed more to national than local political trends.¹⁵³ Nearby Wavertree WLS reportedly had only about twenty-five members, though they appear to have been good attenders.¹⁵⁴

During the immediate post-war period the WLA seems to have suffered the most drastic loss of members, a development linked to wider political trends. In 1918 the East Toxteth branch (WLA branches often covered whole constituencies) had 290 members, but by 1919 this had fallen to 103, and in 1920 to only 50; a pattern which can be traced at the other branches.¹⁵⁵ The Liverpool Central branch suffered a drastic decline from seventy to thirty members between 1918 and 1920. West Derby, which had 110 members at its inception in 1918, appears to have closed down almost immediately. The Wavertree branch was something of an exception. Although the

¹⁵⁰ See Madeleine McKenna, 'The Suburbanization of the Working-Class Population of Liverpool Between the Wars', *Social History*, 16 (2) (1991), 173-89 (p.186).

¹⁵¹ *Liverpolitan*, October 1933, p.9. A subsequent press report listed 10,000 members in 41 branches: *Liverpool Echo*, 15 May 1935.

¹⁵² *Labour Woman*, April 1925, p.58.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, August 1922, p.127.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, April 1928, p.60.

¹⁵⁵ There is a break in WLF Annual Reports between 1928 and 1936.

membership of 108 recorded in 1918 declined to thirty by 1921, it experienced a resurgence. By 1925 there were 72 members, and by 1929 the number had risen to 126. Wavertree seems to have emerged as a key site of organisation for women Liberals, especially as this increase occurred alongside the emergence of a branch at Wavertree West in 1926 (with a membership of 60 that was maintained until 1929).¹⁵⁶ This was probably due to in part to the fact that, as a parliamentary constituency, Wavertree covered a large area, including Woolton, Allerton, Childwall, and Aigburth. But it was also due to Liberal electoral success at Wavertree in 1923, when Hugh Rathbone was returned with a small majority; and to the returning of Liberal councillors at Wavertree, Aigburth, Allerton, and Childwall during the 1920s. Further south, Garston had its own WLA branch from 1925 that may have attracted many of its 100 members from adjacent Aigburth and Allerton. The Liberals had previously had some success in this ward from 1905 until 1911, but their candidates were unsuccessful during the mid-1920s. This ward was dominated by the Conservatives during the 1920s, though Labour's J. Dutton represented the ward from 1919 to 1922, and Labour took a firm hold by 1930. It is interesting, therefore, that the Garston branch of the WLS had only about one fifth as many members as the WLA branch in 1925.

The new, private middle-class housing estates at Allerton and Much and Little Woolton appear to have been markedly unpolitical (in terms of women's organisations) compared with the middle-class areas which divided them from the river, such as Aigburth and Sefton Park West. It is possible that this is because they preferred to maintain their links with associations in the areas in which they had previously lived; but there may have been other reasons for this which are now impossible to determine.

IX

Conclusion

At one level, an examination of women's role in Liverpool politics between the wars reveals few surprises. With the exception of three candidacies, Liverpool parliamentary politics remained essentially a male preserve. The only Liverpool women to be elected to the Commons was the distinguished Eleanor Rathbone; though she did not represent any one of the eleven city divisions. Women's frontline political role was limited to municipal electoral contests. In these women made

¹⁵⁶ BUSC: WLF Annual Reports (1918-1928).

slow and sporadic progress, despite the tendency of their parties to put them forward as candidates in hopeless contests. There was a clear perception amongst both men and women interested in local politics, even among some of those who occupied prominent positions within the local party organisations, that women possessed qualities and attributes that were well suited to an active and increased role in municipal elections, both as ordinary party workers and as candidates. But the extent to which this perception led to significant actual change, should not be overestimated. Local parties spoke the language of progress, but in practice their words were not easily translated into action; no individual party stood out as the champion of women's progress in electoral politics. Nevertheless, the initial proliferation of the traditional *Lady Elect* in municipal elections gave way, to some extent, to the participation of less prominent women. Although the pattern of women's participation in local elections was not characterised by continuous and steady growth between the wars, and by the late 1930s prominent local women's organisations (unhappy with the extent of women's progress) were re-assessing ways to increase women's contribution to local politics, it is clear that women's candidacy rates rose during the 1930s.¹⁵⁷

Many more women were making an important contribution to local politics at a different level, as members of local political associations. Though participation here was certainly less dramatic than fighting local elections, for many it offered fulfilling opportunities. Although the activities of these associations may be interpreted as more social than political, serving to reinforce rather than to challenge traditional gender roles, their importance in the general politicisation of women has probably been underestimated. Within such organisations many women experienced new friendships, experiences, and ideas (social, educational, and political). The traditional tea-parties and charabanc trips they organised took place within a political context and, arguably, had an important political function. To discount their importance because they do not match up to the politicisation techniques of modern feminism is anachronistic. They must be assessed by the standards and expectations of their own time, a period when many women were still in the dawn of their political day. It was perfectly logical for these associations to attract the involvement of women by traditional methods of respectable social activity; they could hardly have done otherwise. But along with tradition, signs of gentle change may be discerned. The talks that took place within some of these associations, before or after the women sipped their tea, clearly show that, within an environment that was in some ways familiar and congenial, women were being exposed to new political ideas. In this sense, and in the wider one of encouraging a broader group of women to participate in party politics (albeit at a basic level), their approach marked a

¹⁵⁷ The WCA helped to organise a Local Government Society in 1938: LRO/WCA/B1: LWCA Council Minutes (1937-1938).

departure from traditional roles. There was certainly a strong social element to local associations, but the meetings were geared towards the gradual politicisation of ordinary women. It might be said that women were being socialised into political culture. Through these associations many women must have been introduced for the first time to issues and debates, both political and non-political, of which they had no previous experience. The emphasis upon educating women members was consistent with the approach of non-political women's organisations in Liverpool, and there can be no question that political parties used these associations to increase the role and support of women. This role, it is true, often involved everyday tasks, like licking envelopes and making tea, and took place beyond the edge of the political spotlight, but its importance in party progress and in introducing women to interests, such as political culture, beyond the home should not be underestimated.

An examination of the activities of women's associations tells us much about perceptions of women as political participants during the 1920s and 1930s. Many women enjoyed the combination of social and political activities, while a smaller but far from insignificant number were more eager to get on with the business of fighting elections. But while the need to increase women's presence in political and civic life was generally acknowledged during the inter-war period, women remained dependent upon their political colleagues, local commentators, and the electorate to help them make further progress. This backing was not always forthcoming. There were, as we have seen, many reasons for this, ranging from lack of finance to fears about the response of the electorate to women candidates. One of these reasons, the conflicting perceptions of women's appropriate role, has received little attention for the inter-war period. It is with this aspect of women's political and civic role that the following chapter is concerned.

Chapter Six

Women's Role in Liverpool Politics Between the Wars, II: 'Too sensitive for the rough and tumble of public life'? Representations of, and Reactions to, Women in Civic and Political Life

In late February 1931 the city of Liverpool was mourning the death of its 'little mother', the child welfare pioneer Margaret Beavan. Less than two years before she had failed in her bid to maintain the Conservatives' grip on Everton at the May 1929 General Election. Even though Everton had a reputation for violent elections, the campaign of 1929 had been remarkably fierce.¹ Sharing his party's disgust at the reaction which its candidate had faced, Stanley Baldwin congratulated her on 'an unusually gallant fight'.² In nation-wide tributes the press implied a connection between her death and the disastrous campaign. The 'blow of that election' was likened to 'a collision with a steam-roller', and elsewhere it was claimed that 'if ever a woman had a broken heart, it was Miss Beavan'.³ The day after Beavan died, the *Liverpool Daily Post* reminded its readers of how 'she had to combat very bitter opposition, and this combined with disorderly scenes at her meetings, imposed great strain on her frail constitution'.⁴ Her close friend, Max Muspratt, declared that '[s]he was too sensitive for the rough and tumble of public life, her heart was practically broken and her courage was dimmed'.⁵ The tragedy of her death, at the age of fifty-four, in a hospital she had helped to build was deeply felt by her supporters.

Beavan's death in 1931 opened old wounds. Liverpool Conservatives had selected her as their first woman candidate because they felt that her wide appeal would guarantee victory in a precarious seat. At the time the image of a tiny woman caught up in the storm of the Everton campaign was attractive to the Conservative Party, the press, and many of Beavan's supporters. The drawing of a link between her death and the disastrous campaign suggests that the issue of the suitability of certain forms of political activity for women was still a matter of some debate.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, women had been negotiating their progress

¹ 'Meetings they call them!', wrote Millie Toole, 'one in which the audience remained the audience, the speakers the speakers was rare': Millie Toole, *Mrs Bessie Braddock MP: A Biography* (London: Robert Hale, 1957), p.56.

² Liverpool Record Office/M364/CWA: Child Welfare Association Collection (hereafter LRO/CWA)/7/3: press cuttings (hereafter LRO/CWA): *The Vote*, 27 Feb 1931.

³ *Liverpool Echo*, 23 February 1931.

⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 February 1931.

⁵ *Ibid.*



Plate 6.i. Margaret Beavan, Lord Mayor of Liverpool 1927-1928

(Source: *Liverpool Red Book* (1928))

into public life in the face of conflicting notions of appropriate female conduct and femininity, which often varied according to class. Such notions ensured that women always remained 'the other' and substantially controlled women's entry to, and behaviour within, the public sphere.⁶ Earlier chapters have shown that these notions limited opportunities available to women. The existence of early opportunities in philanthropic activity, social work, and certain aspects of local government work, such as membership of Guardian and School Boards, owed much to the view that they were relatively suitable forms of female involvement. But politics, which even at the end of the nineteenth century was often highly combative, was popularly regarded as outside the proper boundaries of women's public activity. Although women were becoming involved in backstage political organisation, even by 1918 women's participation in frontline political activity was rare.

This chapter is concerned with representations of, and reactions to, women as participants within politics between the wars. In a period when women were, theoretically, in a position to begin to make progress as political actors, both at municipal and national level, issues regarding the appropriate roles and behaviour of men and women remained unresolved. Varying perceptions of, and reactions to, femininity influenced the experiences of women in this sphere. The reaction to women as political actors may have been affected by the changed social context of inter-war society. Susan Kingsley Kent has argued that the upheaval of war promoted the desire to return to pre-war patterns of gender roles, and it is clear that post-war reactions to the increasing involvement of women in public life often betrayed unease with, or thinly veiled criticism of, their progress.⁷ It is possible to interpret an apparently harmless comment made by the *Liverpool Courier* in 1923, in praise of Lady Mayoress Rushton, in this way: 'Liverpool should be proud', it stated, 'of the wife of her first citizen - *to be more correct, co-first citizen*, in these *splendid* days of the Sex Disqualification Act'.⁸

During the Edwardian period women had taken centre stage as public actors in the suffrage campaign.⁹ After the war, when they sought to reclaim some of that space, as official political actors, reactions varied. Women were not perceived as natural inhabitants of the public sphere, and responses to their involvement in politics tended to be coloured by perceptions of them, first and foremost, as female. This chapter will investigate representations of, and reactions to, women who were active in Liverpool politics between the wars. It also will consider the implications of these representations for debates concerning the participation of women in local politics and civic life.

⁶ For discussion of the category of woman in history, see Denise Riley, 'Am I that Name?' *Feminism and the Categorisation of 'Women' in History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

⁷ Susan Kingsley Kent, 'Gender Reconstruction After the First World War', in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Harold L. Smith (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), pp.66-83.

⁸ *Liverpool Courier*, 24 July 1924 (my italics).

⁹ For responses to women, and the way in which they represented themselves, see Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), esp. Chaps. 3 and 4.

The first section explores the impact of perceptions of femininity upon the roles which women were allocated as public/political actors. It examines the way in which understandings of women's role played a crucial part in determining the sort of women suitable for frontline politics. The second section broadens out the discussion by assessing reactions to women within the political domain. It investigates the impact of models of appropriate femininity on women's activity (especially by examining the roles offered to women once they became political actors), considers how responses to women in the public/political domain often confirmed and strengthened gender divisions, and explores how responses to women's dress and appearance were used to reinforce difference.

The final section of the chapter uses two case studies to examine the main themes in more detail: the first examines the campaign of Margaret Beavan to win Everton in 1929. This is particularly appropriate because Beavan was the only woman to contest an inter-war election for Liverpool Conservatives, but also the only woman chosen by the Conservatives to become Mayor (in 1927). The discussion investigates the reasons why Beavan was invited to stand, why she accepted the invitation, the violence of the campaign, and the Labour Party's reaction to her. It explores the implications of the campaign for our understanding of contemporary perceptions of women's appropriate role in politics. The second case study considers the significance of the emergence of Labour's Bessie Braddock as a prominent local politician. A study of her career is particularly valuable because, as a fierce advocate of the rights of working people, Braddock often appears as the antithesis of the traditional 'lady elect', and because it throws important light on the way that some political women chose to present themselves in public. An analysis of the role of these women, the way in which they were viewed and represented, the way they presented themselves, the reactions they inspired, and the debates they provoked, will help to develop our understanding of some of the ways in which women's role in local politics developed during the first age of equal political citizenship.

I

Women's Role in Politics

Patricia Hollis has written that in the early years women 'found it very much harder to win seats on the great city councils. In Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool only women with an outstanding reputation were successful'.¹⁰ In Liverpool this trend continued after the First World War. The women who joined Eleanor Rathbone on Liverpool City Council during the years

¹⁰ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

immediately after the war were already prominent locally. It is likely that the public profile and experience of women like Nessie Stewart Brown, Helena Muspratt, and Margaret Beavan strongly influenced their decisions to stand for Council, and the decisions of their parties to select them. Labour's Mary Bamber is perhaps the one exception, though she had an important reputation as a socialist and trade union organiser.

Marriage to a man who was politically active was another factor which often stood a prospective woman candidate in good stead. Helena Muspratt attracted attention in 1920 when she became the first wife of a sitting councillor to be elected.¹¹ The Muspratts were the first in a line of married couples active on Liverpool City Council between the wars: other 'teams' included the Braddocks, the Whiteleys, the Burtons, and the Boyles. When Christine M. Boyle stood for the Liberals at Childwall in 1934, readers of the *Liverpolitan* were reassured that since Alan Boyle was a Councillor of some six years experience there would be 'nothing of the novice about her [his wife's] work as a Councillor, for she has taken a full share of the burdens which he has had to bear in connection with his municipal duties'.¹² The question of how marital/familial support might operate between active couples was not missed by the press. When the Muspratts crossed the Council floor in 1925, it was reported that Lady Muspratt had been the first to decide on the course of action but had waited until her husband was ready. The press playfully turned this idea of the loyal wife on its head, leading Muspratt to 'laughingly [repudiate] the suggestion that the petticoat influence had been at work in his house'.¹³ Later in the year, the Muspratts told the press that Sir Max never consulted his wife about his work, and while she might ask for his advice she never took it.¹⁴

The death of a husband or father, or his promotion to the aldermanic bench, launched more than one woman's political career in Liverpool, as it did for a number of women parliamentarians.¹⁵ The death of long-time Old Swan Conservative councillor, John Waterworth, in May 1938, was followed in November by the election of his wife Jennet to the ward. Daughters of active or former councillors were often well supported in their father's ward. Mary O'Shea, who took South Scotland from Labour in 1927, followed in the footsteps of her father, John O'Shea, who had represented the ward as a Nationalist before the war. Gertrude Bartlett, who was adopted unanimously by the Conservatives for Croxteth in 1929, was the daughter of an alderman. When Burton Eills was appointed as an alderman in 1930 his daughter Mary Eills stood for the Liberals at St Peter's. In their public conduct Mary Eills and her sisters fulfilled the image of supportive

1987), p.398.

¹¹ For Childwall.

¹² *Liverpolitan*, December 1934, p.11.

¹³ *Liverpool Courier*, 22 February 1926.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11 October 1926.

¹⁵ Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House: The Women M.P.s, 1919-45', *Historical Journal*, 29 (3) (1986),

daughters, attracting high praise from the *Liverpolitan* which revealed how, during their father's Mayoralty, they had 'won golden opinions for their charming activities and *savoir faire*'.¹⁶

Experience of Poor Law and other forms of welfare work often had a favourable impact upon the political interests and activity of some women. Poor Law work had developed as a key arena for women's participation since 1875. In Liverpool although women never equalled their male colleagues numerically on the Boards of the old Unions of West Derby, Toxteth Park, and the Select Vestry, they formed a substantial minority. In line with the nation-wide trend noted by Patricia Hollis, and with the experience of women like Hannah Mitchell in Manchester and Susan Lawrence in London, a number of the women who had served on the Liverpool boards found their way into the city's municipal elections, and a small proportion made it to the City Council. Such experience did not guarantee success, as Mrs Elizabeth Geraghty, a prominent social worker and a member of West Derby Guardians, discovered when she contested Scotland North for the Irish Party in 1924; but it certainly helped. Long-serving Allerton councillor Gertrude Elizabeth Wilson was already a distinguished welfare worker when she began her civic career in Liverpool as a member of the Board of Guardians. She had worked with servicemen during the Boer War, and had been honoured by France and Britain for similar work during the First World War. In 1922 her husband was elected Mayor. Her campaign for Allerton in 1923, as a National Liberal, brought internal Liberal division to the surface, not least because the Tories presented her *good work* as reason not to oppose her.¹⁷ Mrs Longbottom, President of the Protestant Women's League and Councillor for St Domingo during the 1930s, also had a welfare background, working with women and girls. Conservative and Liberal women were much more likely than Labour women to have earned their candidature by welfare work. It was more usual for Labour women to enter politics through activity within party sections rather than social work. This was so, for example, in the case of Sarah McArd, who stood for Labour on nine separate occasions, and in that of Bessie Braddock, who as Mary Bamber's daughter attended her first meeting at barely a month old.¹⁸

As Patricia Hollis has shown, the widening concerns of local government in the years preceding 1914 meant that it was perceived as a 'suitable job for a woman'.¹⁹ After 1918 women continued to develop their expertise in those areas associated with the family. In Liverpool the public interests and concerns of active women generally involved those areas traditionally identified as 'feminine': usually meaning any work associated with children, health, welfare, and housing. On

p.625.

¹⁶ *Liverpolitan*, July 1938, p.4.

¹⁷ The issue ran somewhat deeper. The Free Liberals (Stoddart, Eills, and Gates) placed an Independent Liberal candidate (Frank Williams) against her because the Wilsons supported Muspratt.

¹⁸ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.9.

¹⁹ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.421.

Council these interests were reflected in the pattern of women's membership of committees. When Labour's Mrs Cole stood at Dingle in 1925, she campaigned on her concerns for the welfare of children, housing, and health.²⁰ Women often emphasised their expertise in those areas, as in the case of Essie Ruth Conway, a headmistress and former NUT President, who expressed an interest in joining the Education Committee when she fought Edge Hill ward for the Conservatives in 1926.²¹ Other women, like Margaret Beavan, viewed the Council chamber as the most appropriate forum in which to pursue their special interests. It would be unfair, however, to argue that women who campaigned on these issues were unadventurous or behaving according to type. Women candidates were aware that such issues were of the utmost importance to the families, especially the women, whom they sought to represent; and because these issues were very familiar to women candidates, they provided ideal material for confident and successful campaigning.

Joining committees which reflected personal interests must have helped enormously to ease women into their new role. Once they found their feet on Council, they could and did seek new opportunities in less familiar areas. As the table below indicates, the committees of Liverpool City Council which showed the greatest incidence of women members between the wars included the Baths, Parks and Gardens, Port, Sanitary and Hospitals, Uniform and Clothing, Education, Libraries, Museum, Arts, and Music committees.

Table 6.i. Incidence of Female Membership on Selected Committees of Liverpool City Council (Number of Women/Total Number of Committee Members)

Year	1920	1923	1925	1928	1930	1932	1935	1939
Finance and General Purposes	0/22	0/21	0/21	0/24	0/28	0/28	0/30	0/28
Estate	0/19	0/18	0/18	0/18	0/20	0/19	0/20	0/19
Watch	0/20	0/21	0/22	0/22	02/25	01/24	01/26	02/25
Health	01/20	02/21	02/21	03/21	02/21	02/22	04/24	03/24
Tramways, and Electric Power and Lighting	0/28	0/30	0/30	0/30	0/33	0/34	01/03	01/23
Housing	03/25	01/24	01/26	01/26	02/26	02/28	05/28	01/28
Libraries, Museums, Arts and Music	0/20	0/21	0/20	0/21	02/23	02/23	03/22	02/22
Water	0/21	0/21	0/21	0/21	0/23	0/24	0/24	0/24
Baths	01/18	0/19	03/18	02/19	03/22	02/19	02/19	0/20
Parks and Gardens	01/22	01/22	02/23	01/23	02/25	03/25	01/26	0/24
Port, Sanitary and Hospitals	02/18	04/21	06/22	05/21	05/20	08/35	09/34	09/34
Parliamentary Special Committee	0/41	0/35	0/37	0/28	0/36	0/38	0/37	0/35
Council	3:147	4:148	7:151	7:152	12:157	11:157	14:157	9:157

Source: *Liverpool Red Book* (1919-1939).

When Labour's Mary Bamber was elected for Everton in 1919 she joined the Health and Housing Committee. Mabel Fletcher, Conservative councillor for Sefton Park West during the

²⁰ *Liverpool Courier*, 14 September 1925.
²¹ *Evening Express*, 30 September 1926.

1920s, was a leading local proponent of women police. In 1926 she used her position on the Parks and Gardens Committee to stress the need for women patrols in parks to protect children.²² When Margaret Beavan joined the Council in 1921, she was appointed to those committees which dealt with child-centred welfare issues, where her expertise was particularly valuable. These decisions gained the full approval of local commentators, most likely because women appeared to be working in their area of expertise. When Christine Boyle was elected to Council in 1934, the *Liverpoolian* declared that '*sound judgement* has been shown in electing her as a member of the Health, Hospitals and Public Assistance Committees', she had some experience as a volunteer visitor with the PSS.²³ Those committees which dealt with finance, estates, transport, and parliamentary matters were dominated by men between the wars (see Table 6.i.). One important development was the partial breakdown of male domination of the Watch Committee in 1929. But despite these important developments, the committees associated with children, health, welfare, and leisure remained the key areas of women's involvement in Liverpool local government before 1939.

The evidence from Liverpool indicates, therefore, that the involvement of women in political life, and public perceptions of this involvement was often influenced by their social status and prominence, by their family attachments - often to politically active fathers or husbands - and by their previous experience in various forms of social and welfare work which were often regarded as the particular preserve of women. When women stood for election to Council they often campaigned on such traditional social and welfare issues, and they maintained their interest in them after being elected. But the experience of some Labour women, most notably Bessie Braddock, indicates that new developments were taking place. Some of these women were entering politics by political as much as by social/welfare routes. The fact that there were not many of them does not belie the importance of this. It shows the emergence, at the local level, of a new kind of political woman, even though reactions to them still tended to be influenced primarily by understandings of femininity.

II

Communication, Class, and Clothes: Reinforcing Femininity

Women's public/political activities were frequently overshadowed by reactions to them as 'women', an experience summed up by a woman factory inspector working during the 1920s who explained the reaction she experienced in court. 'When I stand up', she said, 'my appearance, my dress, my

²² *Liverpool Echo*, 25 May 1926.

manner of speech are all criticized. I, too, am on trial. In addition to my legal case I am also required to prove my right to be a parliamentary speaker'.²⁴ With this view in mind, the purpose of this section is to look more closely at how women's experience of the public domain was influenced by the way in which they presented themselves, the way in which they were represented by others, and the reactions which they prompted.

The experience of women entering the public sphere often resulted in reactions which magnified gender difference. Press commentary, in particular, often betrayed a desire to maintain clear differences between men and women, a re-assertion of learned gender roles. For example, in 1921 the *Liverpool Courier* noted that:

Most people's impression of committees is that they are dull affairs, and generally speaking there is something to be said for that view. The advent of ladies to the Council chamber has consequently added a brighter touch to committees although at present despite the popular impression as to the ladies' vocal powers, the recruits are not inclined to say very much.²⁵

This commentary suggests that women's involvement in the public sphere was not regarded in the same way as that of men. The tone might appear courteous, the ladies are singled out for flattery, but they are flattered for their appearance rather than their words, and they are implicitly criticised for their failure to speak. Further evidence suggests that this was a perspective which prevailed over the ensuing twenty years. When, in 1926, Lady Muspratt was profiled by the *Courier*, she was applauded for her various achievements as a local councillor and welfare and charity worker, only for the journalist to conclude that 'when eventually I left her, I could not help reflecting that above all her worldly success, her proud position and achievement in her life, *Lady Muspratt triumphs most as a mother*'.²⁶ When Christine Boyle was elected to Childwall ward for the Liberals in 1934, she attracted praise as '[a] fine speaker, with a charming manner'.²⁷ A profile of Mary Eills, Liberal Councillor for St Peter's, featured in the *Liverpolitan* in 1938 implied that her public demeanour was worthy of approval because though 'scarcely ever heard in debate' she '[brought] a *keen intelligence* to bear on the city's many problems'.²⁸ Such descriptions suggest that journalists had a preconceived model of appropriate 'feminine' behaviour to which active women were expected to conform, a model which they reinforced through their writing. The way in which women like Mrs Boyle and Miss Eills presented themselves in public conformed to this model. Such behaviour may have helped

²³ *Liverpolitan*, December 1934, p.11 (my italics).

²⁴ Quoted by Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House', p.629.

²⁵ *Liverpool Courier*, 25 February 1921.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 October 1926 (my italics).

²⁷ *Liverpolitan*, December 1934, p.11.

to ease the progress of women into public life, but at the same time it also imposed a restraint or control upon women's behaviour as public/political actors by re-affirming gender differences.

Responses to Margaret Beavan's appointment as Mayor in 1927 present a useful example (see Plate 6.i.). The uniqueness of her role was emphasised by debate on the correct term of address for a woman Mayor. 'It goes against one's natural instinct', argued the *Daily Post*, 'to call a lady a lord'.²⁹ Eventually it transpired that her official title was Lady Mayor of Liverpool.³⁰ Near the end of her year of office some Conservatives were still rather amused by the linguistic dilemma, and had got as far as considering the unlikely event of a woman Mayor marrying while in office. 'In these days of equality', said the Rt Hon L. S. Amery, 'I am not quite sure that men get equal rights. If a mere man becomes Lord Mayor, his wife at once seizes for herself the title of Lady Mayoress'.³¹ The requirement of new language to accommodate women's role reinforced the perception of them as settlers in male territory. Amery's apparently jolly comment hints at a latent tension that sprang from the ramifications of women's increasing achievements.

Commentators made sense of Beavan's new role as Mayor by juxtaposing the dignity of masculine civic office with her femininity. Caption writers used fairy-tale language when describing her: she was a 'Fairy Godmother' and 'Queen to thousands of children'. They also played with seemingly improbable headlines about her. A headline announcing 'Lord Mayor who sews' drew the reader's eye to a story on Beavan's embroidery for the Liverpool Women's Hospital Bazaar.³² One editor published a photo of the Lady Mayor rolling up her sleeves whilst helping out at the opening of Lodge Lane wash-house, accompanied by the caption 'Lord Mayor rolls up her sleeves. Miss Beavan lends a hand at wash-houses'.³³ Stanley Salvidge (the son of the Conservative leader) helped to confirm Beavan's 'Cinderella' status by presenting her in her daily role at work with the children. In January 1928 he wrote in the *Echo* that, 'Some influential dames paid a formal call at Margaret Beavan's first attempt at a babies' hospital to express their approval of her efforts. They found the present Lord Mayor of Liverpool upstairs in a coarse apron hard at work bathing her ailing charges'.³⁴ Images associated with femininity and maternity played a key role in Salvidge's narrative. The tone and content of other reports suggest that some commentators did not really know how to deal with 'public women'. The *Evening Express* praised Mayor Beavan for handling

²⁸ *Ibid.*, July 1938 p.4. (my italics).

²⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 6 October 1928. When Mrs Mercer was appointed as Mayor of Birkenhead in 1924 the title was confirmed as Mr Mayor: *Liverpool Courier*, 11 November 1924.

³⁰ Letter from S. J. Sykes, Honorary Canon of Liverpool, St Mary's Vicarage, Waterloo: *Liverpool Daily Post*, 10 December 1927.

³¹ *Liverpool Echo*, 26 October 1928.

³² *Ibid.*, 3 October 1927; *Liverpool Courier*, 25 November 1927.

³³ *Liverpool Courier*, 13 September 1928. The title Lady Mayor was not always adopted.

³⁴ *Liverpool Echo*, 28 January 1928.

'difficult situations with *statesmanlike* skill' though '*never once [had] she lost her femininity*'.³⁵ The prospect of the 'public woman' may have remained a troublesome concept for many during this period; but it may also have been a difficult transition for some women themselves. Active women soon discovered that the nearer they came to centre stage, the wider and more critical their audience became.

Women politicians also had to overcome practical problems and restrictive attitudes when attempting to communicate their political message. During the inter-war period the majority of candidates did not even have access to radio, but they relied on meetings, posters, handbills, and the local press.³⁶ The public meeting was the main venue at which candidates in local and general elections had access to their audience; and it was sometimes a particularly daunting prospect for women, who as a group had little experience of public speaking and were often confronted by widely held beliefs that this was not proper for them. Lilian Lewis Shiman has shown that although it was common for women to address informal religious gatherings in the 1800s, when religion became more organised there was a good deal of opposition to this.³⁷ By the second half of the nineteenth century it was not customary for women to address formal public meetings. Nessie Stewart Brown claimed to be the first woman to speak on a municipal platform when she responded to the vote of thanks during her husband's 1893 municipal campaign.³⁸ Forty years later, the *Liverpolitan* confirmed that this was 'an unwomanly if not immodest act in those days'.³⁹ Informal meetings were not usually addressed by a woman, as Millie Toole's description of the response to Mary Bamber suggests, 'mostly it was men who moved into the circle of light around the street lamp, attracted by the unusual sight of a woman speaking in public'.⁴⁰ The suffrage campaign offered many women the experience of speaking in public, both formally and informally. As former WSPU member Hannah Mitchell wrote, when she recalled her experiences campaigning as an ILP candidate in 1923, '[e]lectioneering presented no difficulties to me. I knew the party programme by heart, had my own ideas of public service as well, and enough experience of public speaking to put them before the electors'.⁴¹ Many other women who, like Mitchell, were schooled in the Labour movement may have been accustomed to this aspect of political work. Following in her mother's

³⁵ LRO/M920/MBE: Margaret Beavan Collection (hereafter LRO/MBE): cuttings *Evening Express*, 4 October 1928 (my italics).

³⁶ Daniel Weinbren has also noted this: *Generating Socialism: Recollections of Life in the Labour Party* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), p.75. After 1923 candidates could buy press space at a cheap rate. *Liverpool Courier*, 15 October 1923.

³⁷ Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Women and Leadership in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.24, 101.

³⁸ Sarah Tooley, 'Ladies of Liverpool', *The Woman at Home* IV, 21 (1895), p.173

³⁹ *Liverpolitan*, June 1933, p.6.

⁴⁰ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.14

⁴¹ Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell: Suffragette and Rebel*, ed.

footsteps, Bessie Braddock was initiated into public speaking at the age of twenty-two, when she addressed a crowd in Islington Square in 1921 during employment troubles. Braddock claimed that from then on she rarely prepared for a speech, relying instead on her intuitive skills to pitch her argument at the right level.⁴²

The evidence suggests that within the local Labour movement Braddock found the freedom to behave in a manner which, outside her circle, may have been perceived as inappropriate. Often the extent to which women's political action was accepted depended upon the local communities' understanding of gender roles, and to some extent their politics. As Daniel Weinbren has argued, 'left-wing politics is often associated with rebellion against the established order'.⁴³ Braddock stated that she was perceived as a 'rebel'.⁴⁴ Many women who spoke on labour platforms not only faced opposition to their politics but reactions to their gender. Pamela Graves has pointed out that many women activists were perceived as 'rebels in an additional sense': their appearance on public platforms challenged conceptions of how a working-class wife ought to behave. 'When they spoke in public they invariably had to deal with hecklers who told them to go home and look after their husbands.'⁴⁵

Lively or rowdy receptions to women speaking in municipal or general elections were not unusual in some areas. Hannah Mitchell, a confident speaker herself, wrote that 'woman baiting' was equivalent to 'bear-baiting and cock-fighting of an earlier generation'.⁴⁶ For some women, public political speaking could often become a test of resilience. As Martin Pugh has noted, during the early 1920s women candidates 'encountered a certain amount of heckling and rowdyism, especially in mining constituencies, but once they had given proof of their competence and spirit on the platform they usually suffered rather less than men at the hands of their opponents'.⁴⁷ While the Duke of Atholl heckled the Duchess across the dinner table in order to develop her skills, Bessie Braddock ensured that Liverpool hecklers never got the better of her by developing her talents on the street-corner.⁴⁸ *The Guardian* later commented that '[t]hey could throw paper darts, blast hooters, even sing ribald songs and she knew how to handle them. You know you cannot ruffle me, she

by Geoffrey Mitchell (London: Virago, 1977), p.196.

⁴² LRO/H920/BRA: Bessie Braddock Collection (hereafter LRO/BRA): *Illustrated News*, 10 November 1945.

⁴³ Weinbren, *Generating Socialism*, p.29.

⁴⁴ 'Young Rebel' is the title of Bessie's first section in Jack and Bessie Braddock, *The Braddocks* (London: MacDonald, 1963), pp.3, 1-17.

⁴⁵ Pamela M. Graves, *Labour Women: British Women in Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.56.

⁴⁶ Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up*, p.121.

⁴⁷ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.155.

⁴⁸ Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House', p.629. See also Edith Picton-Turbervill's comments on this: *Life is Good: An Autobiography* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), p.168.

would tell them calmly'.⁴⁹ Women like Braddock and Mary Bamber were often no strangers to unruly crowd behaviour. But other women who had some experience of public speaking were often less familiar with the nature of the political audience.

Women were further inhibited by prevailing attitudes concerning the attendance of women at public gatherings. In 1919 Elizabeth Macadam drew attention to the issue of the suitability of the public meeting for a female audience when she argued that although many WCAs had been developed it was still difficult to reach large numbers of women. 'Open air speaking has a great deal to be said in its favour', she wrote, but 'the average lower middle-class woman is a little doubtful of the respectability of gathering in the open air, and even if interested is apt to be ashamed to be seen lingering on the borders of a street corner crowd'.⁵⁰ Suffrage leaders had often organised drawing room meetings as an alternative to the street as a means to counter this problem. Political organisations often dealt with this concern by organising separate meetings for women, but Liverpool Liberals criticised this idea, suggesting that women were being treated like children by the Conservatives.⁵¹

A woman who presented herself in the public arena inspired reaction, not only to her behaviour and her activities but to her appearance, which remains a feature of politics at the turn of the twenty-first century. Linda Perham, one of the many Labour women MPs elected on 1 May 1997, recalled her experience of the so-called 'Blair Babes' photographs in the following way: 'the newspapers [were] obsessed with what we were all wearing - *The Times* described my orange blouse as "a cruel French marigold colour", and the *Daily Telegraph* commented on the brooch I was wearing'.⁵² From the time of the pioneers of the women's movement, to that of Princess Diana and beyond, women have been aware of the reaction to their appearance when seeking a public role.⁵³ In 1922 *Labour Woman* commented wearily on this obsession with women's appearance: 'Miss Agnes Macpail is the first woman MP in the Canadian House of Commons, so of course we hear all about her clothes! That's the really important thing to the male journalist. It is said that she won her campaign in a pale blue serge dress'.⁵⁴ Commentators and historians have inevitably played a role in this analysis. Men in the public domain have only received comparable attention if their attire has been perceived as remarkable: the flamboyance of Conservative Prime Minister Disraeli, and Keir Hardie's tweed hat and working suit on entering Parliament in 1892, both aroused considerable

⁴⁹ LRO/BRA: *The Guardian*, 10 September 1969.

⁵⁰ *Common Cause*, June 1919, p.128.

⁵¹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28 May 1929.

⁵² Linda Perham, 'One of the 101 Speaks!', *The Fawcett Library Newsletter*, 31 (1998), 3-5, (p.4). G. E. Maguire has also discussed the meaning of clothes for Conservative women, in *Conservative Women: A History of Women and the Conservative Party 1874-1997* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.184-201.

⁵³ Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House', p.627.

⁵⁴ *Labour Woman*, March 1922, p.45.

comment.⁵⁵ The business suit has always provided men with a fairly basic daily wardrobe, and women politicians have commonly sought equivalents. Margaret Thatcher may have believed that she had discovered the solution in adopting one basic style and colour scheme, but her approach was used by some of her inter-war predecessors. Jennie Lee chose brown when she first entered the Commons, while her colleagues Nancy Astor and Eleanor Rathbone both dressed in black and white, a custom also adopted by Margaret Beavan.⁵⁶

When Beavan was sworn in as Mayor, the *Echo* reported that 'she looked smaller and slighter than ever as she stepped up . . . and it was typical of her character that she came to receive the greatest honour the city can bestow in her simple office dress'.⁵⁷ Press fascination with her simplistic dress led the *Daily Post* to headline an article which concerned a bazaar, held at St George's Hall in 1928 in aid of the blind, as 'Miss Beavan's Frock'. On that occasion Beavan told the women that she had worn the same style of plain black dress for eight years, the only variation being the exchange of her usual chiffon collar for a lace one for evening occasions.⁵⁸ Modest dress had the added advantage of setting a good example to the public during periods of economic hardship.

Past and present commentaries on the dress of active women have commonly imposed interpretations which may not be entirely accurate. The 'battle dress' of Bessie Braddock was a jumper, skirt, jacket, and home-made hat. She once explained her practical approach to style with the characteristically straight-forward view that 'women who dressed to draw attention to themselves were deficient in other ways'.⁵⁹ Brian Harrison has suggested, with reference to Ray Strachey, that lack of interest in clothes was often a sign of rebellion at the treatment of women as playthings.⁶⁰ From the apparent untidy indifference of Eleanor Rathbone and Susan Lawrence, to the sophisticated elegance of Cynthia Mosley, the appearance and dress of women who became MPs between the wars did not conform to any one standard. The way in which women present themselves is often loaded with meaning for observers. Anecdotal evidence such as that which tells us that Bessie Braddock did not wear a corset and had a 'tied in the middle look', that Eleanor Rathbone needed Elizabeth Macadam to put her hat on straight, or even that Susan Lawrence barely looked up from her work to point at dresses picked out by her assistant, both reinforces and

⁵⁵ A recent exhibition was devoted to the importance of politicians' attire: 'Power Dressing: The Fashion of Politics': Museum of London (27 August-19 September 1999).

⁵⁶ Hollis, *Jennie Lee*, p.41; Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.192.

⁵⁷ *Liverpool Echo*, 9 November 1927.

⁵⁸ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 26 November 1926.

⁵⁹ LRO/BRA: *The Guardian*, 10 September 1969.

⁶⁰ Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.169.

feeds images we may already have of these women as single-minded.⁶¹ This is perhaps because an interest in appearance and clothes was, and often still is, understood as a feminine distraction.⁶²

Katrina Rolley has shown how dress held special significance within the context of the suffrage campaign, both in terms of the reaction which women inspired and the way in which they were often portrayed in print.⁶³ The activities of the suffrage campaigners, especially the militants, challenged gender stereotypes. As fashionable, elegant ladies suffrage women were fulfilling what was expected of them in terms of appearance, while behaving in a manner which challenged notions of acceptability and femininity. Cicely Hamilton has noted how the militants dressed elegantly and femininely on purpose, 'the outfit of a militant setting forth to smash windows probably included a picture-hat'.⁶⁴ By contrast, women who dressed in a manner which was commonly perceived as unfeminine were often subjected to ridicule. At the same time, their appearance and their actions qualified each other because both challenged norms about femininity. The war and changing employment patterns had to some extent freed women from adherence to a standardised form of feminine dress, which had been imposed until the Edwardian period. The 'flapper' or modern styles of the 1920s were neither obtainable nor desirable for all. Laura Doan has recently shown how fashionable women were experimenting freely with masculine styles during that decade.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the emphasis upon dress, and women's interest in it, remained a focal point for commentators, and a means by which women's difference could be underlined.

This is nicely illustrated by reactions to a meeting of women Mayors convened by Margaret Beavan at Liverpool Town Hall in January 1928. The meeting was reported by the *International Women's Suffrage News* as a 'great success' and a 'historic event'.⁶⁶ Eleanor Rathbone sensibly pointed out that such a gathering would not have been possible a few years earlier. But the local press was more content to trivialise. It was reported that the scene was 'rather like a children's party; everybody eyed everybody else, surreptitiously of course, but with keen interest, and immediately hats became a topic of conversation'.⁶⁷ The press emphasis upon the women's chatter about hats

⁶¹ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.49; Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, pp.100, 133.

⁶² For a contemporary view see Elaine Showalter, 'The Professor Wore Prada', *Woman's Journal*, June 1998, pp.50-54.

⁶³ Katrina Rolley, 'Fashion, Femininity and the Fight for the Vote', *Art History*, 13 (1) (1990), pp.47-72. See also the cartoons discussed in Diane Atkinson, *Funny Girls: Cartooning for Equality* (London: Penguin, 1997), esp. Chap. 1. See also Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*.

⁶⁴ See the comments on the militants' style of dress in Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1935), p.75. According to Hamilton, the 'legend of womanly gentleness and charm' associated with Mrs Pankhurst may be traced to her 'conventional feminine dress': *ibid.* p.76.

⁶⁵ Laura Doan, 'Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s', *Feminist Studies*, 24 (3) (1998), pp.663-700, argues that the sexual connotations associated with masculine dress were only ascribed *after* the Radclyffe Hall trial of 1928.

⁶⁶ *International Women's Suffrage News*, 22 (6), March 1928, p.90.

⁶⁷ LRO/MBE: *Liverpool Echo*, 19 January 1928.

was an appeal to popular understandings of female behaviour. The writer probably saw it as a light-hearted angle for the article, but it also betrays a reluctance to accord women the same respect as men when they became frontline participants and an attempt to reassure by portraying the women, as behaving in what could be understood as a comfortably predictable manner.

Reactions to women's appearance did not end with dress. Their physical appearance could also become open to comment in a way in which men's was not. While Beavan, described by the *Courier* in 1926 as 'a little intensely sincere woman with bright eyes, a voice pitched high for much speaking and a great heart', may not have been considered to be conventionally beautiful, her smallness meant that she conformed to an important stereotype of femininity. Reports and profiles were peppered with references to her size. Stanley Salvidge described her as 'one of the slightest and daintiest figures imaginable'.⁶⁸ She appears to have inspired protectiveness in a way similar to that of Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson.⁶⁹ During the November election campaigning of 1928 Salvidge told a crowd in St. Domingo ward that 'when you have a little woman like Margaret Beavan as Lord Mayor in the Council, and you have to bring in police to protect her. I call that hooliganism'.⁷⁰ Her diminutive stature was part of the key to her approval rating, possibly because it helped to make her appear more manageable. The power of her voice was also the subject of much comment, Salvidge professed wonderment at how such a 'powerful voice comes with positively startling effect from so small a frame.'⁷¹ His father went further and described her as 'the mighty atom'.⁷² The following section will show how, amongst other things, Conservative responses to the apparently considerable personal appeal of Margaret Beavan was a major factor in their choice of her to fight the Everton general election campaign for them in 1929.

III

'A very plucky fight': Margaret Beavan's Election Campaign for Everton, 1929

In the late spring of 1929 Margaret and Jessie Beavan, and Mabel Fletcher hosted a reception at the Sandon Studios, Liverpool, the purpose of which was to wish 'Godspeed' to Eleanor Rathbone, newly elected as Independent MP for the Combined English Universities. 'The result of the elections was not a sweet cup', according to Rathbone, because she had thought that 'Liverpool

⁶⁸ *Liverpool Courier*, 15 July 1926. Stanley Salvidge, 'Liverpool's Woman Lord Mayor', *Good Housekeeping*, February 1928, pp.60-61 (cutting kindly provided by Mrs Irene Penrith of the Margaret Beavan School, West Derby, Liverpool).

⁶⁹ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p.139.

⁷⁰ *Liverpool Courier*, 27 October 1928.

⁷¹ LRO/CWA: *Liverpool Echo*, 28 January 1928.

might send two women to Parliament, and two Rathbones'.⁷³ It must have been a difficult afternoon for Margaret Beavan, who following her autumn retirement from the Mayoralty was beaten at the polls the following May. The transition from social worker to Mayor had been smooth, but in 1929 she discovered that the path to national politics was more difficult. Election campaigns in Liverpool were frequently rowdy, even violent affairs, but when Beavan stood at Everton in April 1929 the stage was set for an election campaign like no other the city had witnessed. It ended with a Labour victory, despite the fact that the Conservatives had won the seat at the previous three elections. The Everton campaign epitomises the way in which women were presented in public life between the wars, and reveals much about the involvement of women in frontline politics at this time and the reactions it generated.

Towards the end of 1928, spurred on by the encouragement of Sir Archibald Salvidge, Beavan had been considering the possibility of standing for Parliament. Unsure about her chances and her resources, she sought the advice of Lord Derby, an influential Conservative and local landowner. The matter remained unresolved when, in December 1928, the sudden death of Salvidge left the Conservative Party in turmoil.⁷⁴ Salvidge was succeeded by Sir Thomas White who, early in 1929, faced the task of finding a suitable candidate for the Everton constituency. Local factors indicated the possibility that Everton might be lost to Labour at the forthcoming election. Everton's MP, Herbert Charles Woodcock, was not popular with the local party, and when he was asked to retire the Conservatives needed to find a more sympathetic character. With this in mind, White approached Beavan who was initially uncertain, but eventually agreed. Her Labour opponent was Derwent Hall Caine, an actor-turned-journalist with two unsuccessful election campaigns, at Reading in 1922 and Clitheroe in 1924, behind him. Having witnessed the supportive response to her as Lady Mayor in 1927, it seems that the Conservative party felt fairly confident that Beavan could hold Everton for them.

Beavan drew upon her national reputation as a child welfare pioneer as a foundation for her campaign. She confidently asserted that '[w]omen and children will be one of the strong points in my campaign'.⁷⁵ The *Woman's Leader* suggested approvingly that while her experience as Mayor, and her role as a member of the Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure, 'afford[s] a unique experience of public affairs for a future MP', it was her 'long record in public and social service'

⁷² Ibid.: *Evening Express*, 23 February 1931.

⁷³ LRO/ACC/3538: Liverpool Women Citizens' Association, Box 3: cutting, *Liverpool Daily Post*, n.d. c. May 1929. H. R. Rathbone, who stood as a Liberal candidate for Wavertree, was the third Rathbone.

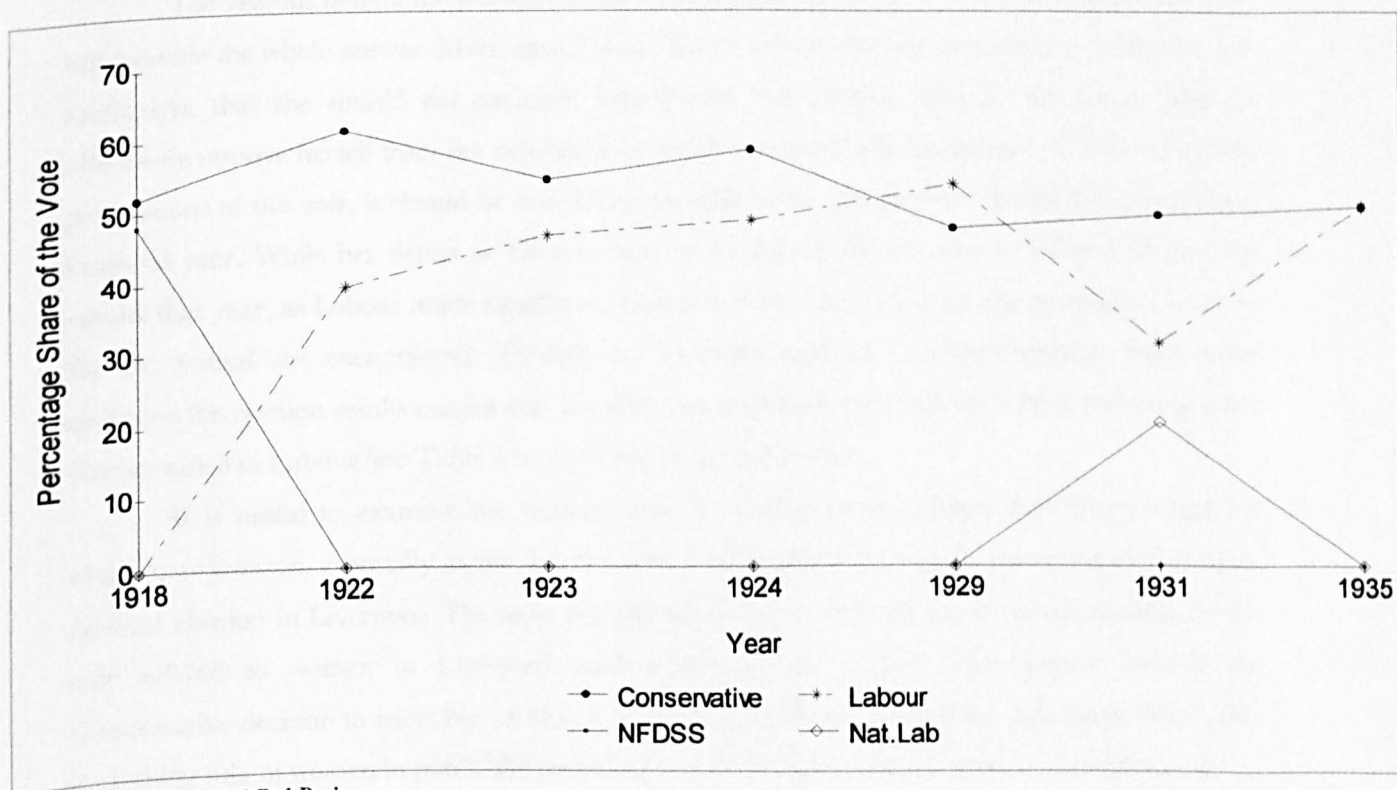
⁷⁴ For a discussion of the party's problems, see P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1981), pp.304-13.

⁷⁵ *Liverpool Courier*, 13 April 1929.

which stood her in good stead for the role.⁷⁶ Labour grew resentful at the way in which the Conservatives presented Beavan almost as non-party. Hall Caine attacked her as a ‘personality’ rather than a ‘politician’. Newspapers reported that Beavan was struggling to make her voice heard at meetings which were being hijacked by Labour rowdies. As Mayor, Beavan had been much more accustomed to people congregating to cheer her on rather than shout her down.

Before 1929 Everton had been consistently held by the Conservatives, though Labour’s share of the vote had been increasing (see Chart 6.i.). But in 1929 Labour won the seat with 53 per cent of the vote, 6 per cent more than Beavan. It was generally agreed that sectarianism had cost the Conservatives the seat. A short time before the election, the Catholic community had demanded

Chart 6.i. Share of the Vote by Party in Everton General Elections



Source: *Liverpool Red Book*

public recognition of their day schools which, though remaining independent in terms of religious issues, were to be financed by public funds. All candidates in Liverpool and parts of Lancashire were requested to complete a questionnaire to establish their position. Beavan’s answer that she would ‘seek justice in religious training’ satisfied nobody.⁷⁷ Moreover, in Beavan’s mind Longbottom, the

⁷⁶ *Woman’s Leader*, April 1929, p.82.

⁷⁷ Ivy B. Ireland, *Margaret Beavan of Liverpool: Her Character and Work* (Liverpool: Henry Young and Sons

Protestant leader, had sealed her fate by pledging his support for her on the election eve, thereby preventing the archbishop from instructing Catholics to vote for her.⁷⁸

The violence of the campaign reached its climax on election night. Beavan left the St George's Hall count to face a crowd who 'let loose their feelings in a storm of jeers and hisses obviously directed' against her. Ivy Ireland later wrote that 'to the onlookers it seemed horrible, like something they had read of in tales of the French Revolution. The men and women, with hatred for the moment written on their faces, looked as though they would have destroyed Miss Beavan with the least excuse.'⁷⁹ Why did a woman previously cherished by the public for her devotion to their children's welfare arouse so much hatred that night? Explaining this in terms of sectarianism or a momentary response, resulting from election fever, is not sufficient as she faced further hatred and abuse after the event when she found it increasingly difficult to carry on with her work.⁸⁰

The reasons behind the reaction which Beavan faced are complex. The sectarian issue does not provide the whole answer. More significant is Lord Derby's warning to her, prior to the election campaign, that she should not associate herself with one division because she would thereby effectively remove herself from her original role, which was essentially the people's friend.⁸¹ Popular perceptions of this role, it should be noted, had recently been strengthened during her triumphant mayoral year. While her defeat at Everton may be explained by the general pattern of election results that year, as Labour made significant gains across the city, this does not necessarily account for the hatred she encountered. Though she certainly inspired a violent reaction from some quarters, the election results suggest that her presence may have even helped to limit the swing from Conservative to Labour (see Table 6.ii. and Chart 6.ii.) at Everton.

It is useful to examine the reasons why the Conservatives invited Beavan to stand for election at Everton, especially as she was the only woman selected by them to contest an inter-war general election in Liverpool. The logic behind this choice is relevant to our understanding of the role offered to women in Liverpool politics between the wars.⁸² The reasons behind the Conservative decision to select her as Mayor in October 1927 may shed some light upon this.⁸³ The increasing role of women in public life presented local civic and political leaders with a dilemma.

Ltd, 1938), p.249.

⁷⁸ LRO/920/DER/(17)/6: Derby Papers, correspondence relating to politics in Liverpool (hereafter LRO/DER): letter of Margaret Beavan to Lord Derby (hereafter MB to LD or vice-versa), 6 June 1929, 11 June 1929.

⁷⁹ Ireland, *Margaret Beavan*, pp.251-52.

⁸⁰ Labour were making things particularly difficult on Council: LRO/DER: MB to LD, 12 August 1929.

⁸¹ Though she was a Conservative councillor, her local political position did not undermine this role.

⁸² There is no indication that any other women were approached.

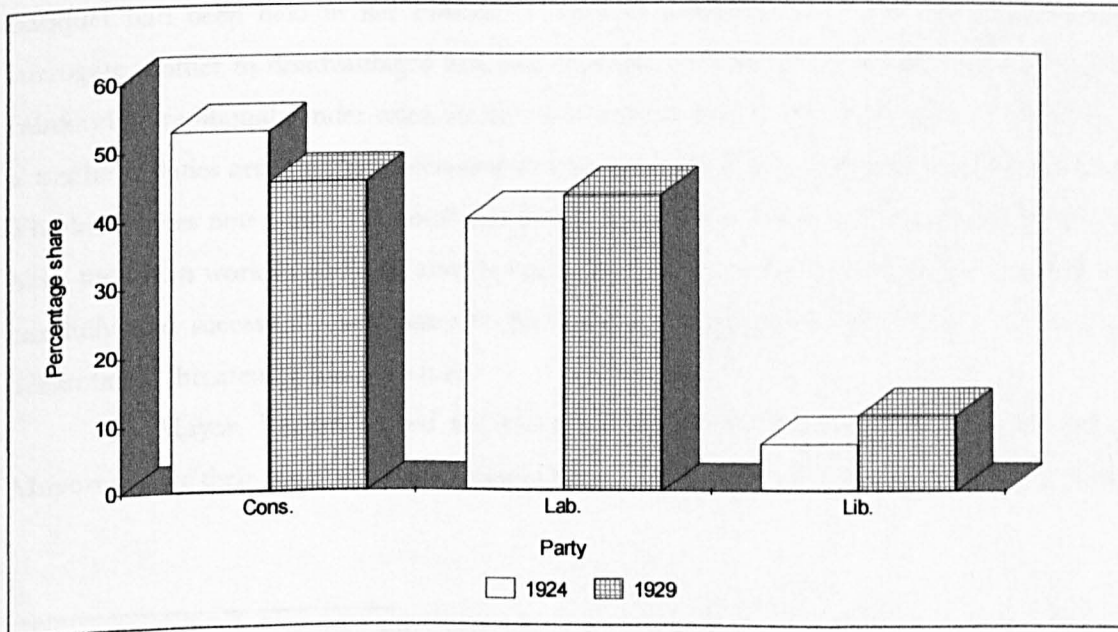
⁸³ A decision subject to Council vote.

Table 6.ii. Performance of Conservative and Labour Parties in 1924 and 1925 General Elections

Constituency	Swing from Cons. to Lab.	Seat held by: 1924	Seat held by: 1929
East Toxteth	7%	Cons.	Cons.
Edge Hill	5.50%	Lab.	Lab.
Everton	5%	Cons.	Lab.
Exchange	-	Cons. (NC)	Cons.
Fairfield	10%	Cons.	Cons.
Kirkdale	12%	Cons.	Lab.
Scotland	-	Nat.(NC)	Lab.(NC)
Walton	8.50%	Cons.	Cons.
Wavertree	5%	Cons.	Cons.
West Derby	8%	Cons.	Cons.
West Toxteth	4%	Lab.	Lab.

Source: *Liverpool Red Book*; Ivor Crewe and Anthony Fox, *British Parliamentary Constituencies: A Statistical Compendium* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

Chart 6.ii. Comparison of Share of the Vote by Party in 1924 and 1929 General Elections



Source: *Liverpool Red Book*.

They needed to appear supportive of women's progress, to ensure that they captured the female vote, while also appearing to remain sensitive to residual fears about the possible implications of equality.⁸⁴ By elevating Beavan to the position of Mayor, Archibald Salvidge had found a means by which he could present his party as supportive of women's new role in public life. As Salvidge told the press, 'what was done today was really a generous gesture on the part of men in the Conservative Party, by way of acknowledging what the women of the city have done, both in the home life and the public life to contribute to the moral and physical welfare of Liverpool'.⁸⁵

The Conservatives' apparent benevolence ran deeper. 'A surprise, a daring innovation' were some of the terms used by the press to describe Liverpool's appointment of a woman Mayor. The appointment helped the party to reinforce its image as a champion of women's progress. To make his case Salvidge pointed out that 'Women were now taking a part in public work, civic, national and imperial . . . There could be no thought of with-holding the highest honour that could be conferred . . . Liverpool would be honouring itself in honouring her.'⁸⁶ Beavan could be presented as an admirable model of women's progress in public life, and as a friend of the ordinary people. She had represented Princes Park as a councillor since 1921 and was also a magistrate. Nevertheless, her interests conformed with popular views regarding women's role in public life. She was well known, nationally and locally, for her charity and child welfare work, and a special banquet had been held in her honour in 1926 to celebrate this.⁸⁷ She presented herself as a surrogate mother to disadvantaged and sick children, and often empathised with the women, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles. As she once commented, 'I am an old spinster but I know what a mother's duties are, and how necessary it is for her to have her husband's meals ready to time'.⁸⁸ The local press noted that 'she could hardly be described as a feminist. She contends that women have their own work to perform, and that only in certain branches of endeavour can they compete carefully and successfully with men.'⁸⁹ Beavan pushed forward boundaries for women without presenting a threatening image to men.

As Mayor, Beavan served the Conservatives well.⁹⁰ The heaping of praise upon Lady Mayoresses for their good work was usual in the local press, but Beavan brought femininity and a

⁸⁴ In 1924 women accounted for 43% of the Liverpool electorate, and for 53% in 1929: Liverpool Daily Post, 29 April 1929.

⁸⁵ Liverpool Echo, 3 October 1927.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ireland, Margaret Beavan, p.177.

⁸⁸ Liverpool Courier, 13 September 1928.

⁸⁹ Liverpool Echo, 28 January 1928.

⁹⁰ Even Labour eventually agreed she was a good choice: LRO/MBE: cutting Evening Express, 24 October 1928.

new humanity to the role. She attempted to touch every class in Liverpool. Romantic imagery of the doors of the Town Hall being thrown open to children, servants, and other workers of the city dominated press features on her Mayoralty.⁹¹ Salvidge commented that never before had a Mayor 'been brought into such close contact with the people'.⁹² Beavan was usefully presented as a bringer of light in a decade of hardship and unemployment. Stanley Salvidge created a fairy tale in features for the local press: 'This is proving a memorable Mayoral year for the children of the poor on Merseyside', he wrote, because 'the Fairy Godmother is installed at the Mansion House, and every little Cinderella in Liverpool has been invited to the ball'.⁹³ Elsewhere he adopted similar imagery to make a virtue of her relatively ordinary background:

In a city rightly claiming to be businesslike and sometimes even labelling itself dull, a commercial man's daughter visualised her life's work in terms of romance, and with the slums as a setting and herself in the part of the fairy godmother, acted a fairy tale in which everyone was to live happily ever afterwards.⁹⁴

Such imagery captured and reinforced her appeal.

It is possible that in the face of the growing strength of Liverpool Labour, the promotion of a candidate as Mayor who was a woman but was also from a fairly ordinary, though certainly not poor, background played an important role in helping the Conservatives to market themselves as an egalitarian party for the modern era. Their Mayor not only had a special link with the 'ordinary' people, but she invited them to Town Hall parties, usually reserved for the privileged. Beavan had a colourful imagination herself, and the imagery would have appealed to her. On the occasion of the 1926 banquet she wrote to Mayor Bowring, informing him that, 'The arrangements of which you so kindly inform me, read like a fairy tale. I quite honestly don't know where I am. That you should have gathered such distinguished guests to propose the toast to Cinderella (for indeed I feel akin to that historic maiden) just overwhelms me.'⁹⁵ The connection made with Cinderella and the fairy-godmother may have injected a sense of magic into the proceedings that year, but it also suggested something imaginary: a fairy tale about a commercial man's daughter who, after a career healing the sick children of the slums, became Mayor. The prospect of a woman Mayor in 1927 might have presented a challenge to the social order in Liverpool, but the appointment of Beavan meant that it was relatively unproblematic. The decision to appoint her was a tribute to *her* work rather than a

⁹¹ Liverpool Echo, 4 October 1928. See also LRO/CWA: cutting Daily Mail, 7 November 1928.

⁹² Evening Express, 24 October 1928.

⁹³ LRO/CWA cutting: Liverpool Echo, 28 January 1928.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: Liverpool Daily Post, 23 February 1931.

⁹⁵ Ireland, Margaret Beavan, pp.179-80.

tribute to women's progress.⁹⁶ Even so, her assumption of a previously masculine role inevitably inspired much interest and debate.⁹⁷ She soon discovered that romantic images counted for little in the arena of national politics.

Beavan was invited by the Conservatives to contest the difficult Everton ward because they needed a special candidate who could ensure that they would not lose it to Labour. The *Echo* captured the situation neatly, when it commented that Everton had appeared for some time to have been 'slipping away' from the Conservatives, who 'believed that Miss Beavan's work and personality will serve to turn the tide by rallying the non-party women electors in numbers sufficient to overwhelm the Labour forces'.⁹⁸ Many of Everton's young mothers would be voting for the first time at this general election, and Beavan could be presented as a candidate who would appeal to their needs.

The Everton constituency's two wards (Everton and Netherfield) were populated mainly by working people. Everton election campaigns were plagued by trouble. Mary Bamber's experience in a by-election in May 1919 led Millie Toole to suggest that 'to stand as a candidate in that area required courage of a kind that is no longer an essential part of a politician's equipment'.⁹⁹ Supporter Bill Sharp was thrown from a second floor window of a school during the 1919 campaign. Everton's 'Mary Ellens' (women who sold produce in the street), often fairly combative in their daily business could become more so in response to election candidates.¹⁰⁰ In his autobiography, Labour politician Joseph Toole recalled how, following his nomination to stand for a by-election at Everton in 1922, he met 'twenty-four men standing in single file' who were introduced as the men who, for two guineas a head, would help him win. They had worked for the Tories at the last election, and Toole suggested that they continue to do so.¹⁰¹ He was later offered the services of 800 unemployed men who would smash up the Conservative meetings, and he was threatened, often with violence, not to venture into certain areas. Toole lost the election and returned home 'with a much bruised soul and the flea of a few thousand Tory majority votes in his earhole'.¹⁰² Jack Robinson who spent his childhood in Everton has recalled how '[i]ntimidating words flew fast and furious' during Labour's Harry Walker's campaigns in 1923 and 1924; "[w]e'll

⁹⁶ In 1967 Ethel Wormald, by then a widow of some years, was appointed as Mayor.

⁹⁷ A subject examined below.

⁹⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, 13 April 1929.

⁹⁹ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.56.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*.

¹⁰¹ See Joseph Toole, *Fighting Through Life* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1935), pp.139-44; and Millie Toole, *Our Old Man: A Biographical Portrait of Joseph Toole By His Daughter* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1948), pp.50-52.

¹⁰² Toole, *Our Old Man*, p.52.

come knockin' at your door!" sang the dusty bully boys. "If you don't vote for him".¹⁰³ Sir Thomas White was mistaken if he believed that the usually rowdy Everton crowds would regard the idea of attacking the 'Little Mother' as repugnant. Ivy Ireland argued that if the party had been aware of the fight which lay ahead in Everton, they would have found her another constituency where success was more or less guaranteed.¹⁰⁴ This is debatable, since it would seem that the Everton campaign was less likely an exercise to find a seat for Beavan than an attempt to save a seat for the Conservatives. The fact that the Liverpool Conservatives did not select another woman candidate between the wars, suggests that she was useful at the time; though it is possible, of course, that no other woman wished to stand.

Following her defeat, Beavan declared that she would not have stood for Everton if she had been aware of the difficulties involved. 'I honestly do not think', she commented, 'that Everton is the type of ward which a woman could contest unless she is a much stronger and more forcible woman, both mentally and physically, than I am.'¹⁰⁵ Lord Derby agreed, Everton, he stated, 'requires a man and pretty strong one at that'.¹⁰⁶ Beavan's analysis of the campaign suggests that she experienced a steep learning-curve. Before the election she claimed that her friendship with working women meant more to her than winning.¹⁰⁷ She later stated that the loss of this relationship caused her great distress, although she had begun to understand their reaction: 'It pained me to see some mothers, with whom I had been most friendly, smacking their children because they cheered me when they saw me in the streets. Some of these women threw refuse at me. Then I began to realise that with some people Labour stood for class hatred.'¹⁰⁸

The Conservative plan to meet Labour's threat with a popular candidate backfired. Their behaviour was exploitative, especially as Beavan was excited by the prospect of a political career. The party also appears to have failed to provide her with all the necessary support. There is no evidence that she ever received any coaching, which may account for the fact that during the campaign she often appeared as rather naive. Beavan's naiveté was both a Tory weapon and a focus for Labour criticism.¹⁰⁹ Her party wanted to present her as a candidate whose appeal crossed the political spectrum, but did not prepare her well for the campaign. She often expressed views that were ill-advised and short-sighted. On one occasion she told a crowd in Everton that one of the

¹⁰³ Jack Robinson, *Teardrops on My Drum* (London: GMP, 1986), p.11

¹⁰⁴ Ireland, *Margaret Beavan*, pp.252-53.

¹⁰⁵ LRO/DER: MB to LD, 10 December 1929.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: LD to MB, 11 December 1929.

¹⁰⁷ *Liverpool Courier*, 24 May 1929.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 5 June 1929.

¹⁰⁹ She admitted in a letter to Derby that she found politics a 'very perplexing game': LRO/DER: MB to LD, 17 April 1929.

'root causes' of unemployment was the General Strike.¹¹⁰ It is conceivable that comments like this played a significant part in prompting the violent opposition which she faced from the crowds. The campaign also highlights a clear divergence between the Conservatives' approach to local and national elections. The initial reluctance of Lord Derby to support Thomas White's request for her to stand suggests that the relationship between the Constitutional Association and the Party was not always as clear as it might have been.

Why did Beavan accept the request? She initially presented her decision to accept the candidature in purely altruistic terms: 'I was loath at first, for personal reasons . . . but the Everton invitation was so anxiously pressed that I felt that it was only fair to the women of Liverpool and Everton that I should try'.¹¹¹ Other evidence indicates that by the end of 1928 she was seriously considering a Parliamentary career as a future possibility. 'There is always, of course, something thrilling about the idea of serving at Westminster', she wrote to Lord Derby in December 1928.¹¹² By then she appears to have felt that she had achieved all that she could locally. Her appointment to the Mayoralty had been the pinnacle of her career; when she handed back the Mayoral chain that autumn, she could not resist kissing it.¹¹³ She faced returning to her normal duties, which may have made the prospect of moving into national politics particularly appealing. Many women regarded local government as a suitable apprenticeship for national politics. Her correspondence with Lord Derby suggests strongly that Salvidge was encouraging her in this direction, but that Derby was reluctant to give his blessing because he feared for her future position and health.

The evidence suggests that it was in early December 1928 that Beavan first requested Lord Derby's 'considered opinion' as to whether she should stand for Parliament.¹¹⁴ No one division was cited, though there were hints that she might represent one of the Toxteth constituencies.¹¹⁵ Her comments suggest not only that she was already extremely eager to go ahead but that she felt she could easily win a seat on the basis of her position as 'a friend of the people' and her public work; she not only claimed experience 'which few women have' on many questions but felt that she was the person most likely to secure an interview with Chamberlain on child welfare and maternity matters.¹¹⁶ Like many prospective candidates, Beavan's main obstacle was limited finance.¹¹⁷ Derby's promise of election expenses would have helped, but she doubted whether she could fund

¹¹⁰ Ireland, *Margaret Beavan*, p.244.

¹¹¹ LRO/CWA: cutting *Evening Express*, 11 April 1929.

¹¹² LRO/DER: MB to LD, 2 December 1928.

¹¹³ Ireland, *Margaret Beavan*.

¹¹⁴ LRO/DER: MB to LD, 2 December 1928. Salvidge was dying by this time, and clearly aware of this Beavan looked to Derby to take his place.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*; *Liverpool Courier*, 15 February 1929; Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.319.

¹¹⁶ LRO/DER: MB to LD, 2 December 1928.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*. Her annual income was between £400 and £500.

an MP's lifestyle.

Salvidge had encouraged her to believe that Derby thought she should stand.¹¹⁸ Derby's letters to Beavan indicate that he had reservations. He informed her that he had told Salvidge that it would be '*a very good thing for the party though not necessarily for her*'.¹¹⁹ He added that from the party's perspective it would be 'an admirable thing' if she stood, but that it would place 'undue strain' on her finances if she were elected. He warned her of the consequences of being identified with only one division. His main concern, if she were elected, was the prospect that she would over-exert herself.¹²⁰ Lady Derby, he continued, was also 'emphatic' that Beavan's health would be 'ruined by Parliamentary life'.¹²¹ It is unlikely that he would have referred to his wife's opinion had he been addressing a man in a similar position. Apparently undaunted by this reply, Beavan wrote to him again after Christmas, still clearly excited at the prospect of standing. 'I would be rather thrilled', she stated, 'if I could win a place at Westminster'.¹²² His response was that 'You have certainly given me one of the most difficult problems that it has ever been my lot to try and solve . . . it would be a mistake for you to stand'.¹²³ He anticipated antagonism from other parties if she identified herself with one party in the general election.¹²⁴ On 25 March 1929 White made a direct offer to her to stand for Everton. She reported to Derby that she was unable to make an immediate decision. She had heard rumours about the division, and she was aware that a loss at Everton would mean a real loss for the party.¹²⁵ Time was running out, and this time Derby did not oppose her decision. Instead he generously suggested that if she stood he would, in a strictly private arrangement, provide all the money she needed.¹²⁶ All barriers to her candidacy had thus been removed.

Beavan launched her campaign in the first weeks of April 1929. She told a largely female crowd: 'I am an intelligent woman with a university education. I have never been stumped yet, and if I don't win Everton it will be my first failure in life'.¹²⁷ Her determination shone through when she told the crowds that '[s]ome of the biggest men in Liverpool have said to me, "You haven't a chance"'; these men had told her, she continued, that she might win some women's votes. Her response to this was that she would get the men's vote. 'What I have done in Liverpool', she

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ LRO/DER: LD to MB, 4 December 1928. (My italics).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² LRO/DER: MB to LD, 12 January 1929.

¹²³ Ibid.: LD to MB, 17 January 1929.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid. MB to LD, 25 March 1929.

¹²⁶ LD to MB, 30 March 1929.

¹²⁷ Liverpool Daily Post, 17 April 1929.

asserted, 'I shall do at Westminster and more'.¹²⁸ Health Minister, Neville Chamberlain shared this view; he wrote to tell her that her experience was needed in Parliament and that he would be 'proud' to welcome her as a colleague.¹²⁹ She was fiercely proud of her reputation in her own field, believing that she would be an asset in Parliament; as she told a meeting on 22 May 1929, she knew more about maternity and child welfare than Ramsay MacDonald.¹³⁰

Liverpool Labour were aware of the Conservatives' plans at Everton. Their relationship with Beavan had been strained at times. An important source of conflict was her work, since Labour believed that responsibility for child welfare lay with the municipality. Her Italian trip during her Mayoral year, and her handshake with Mussolini had done little to endear her to Liverpool Labour.¹³¹ The last thing Labour needed in 1929 was her descending into Everton, especially at a time when it appeared to be within their grasp. *The Times* reported that 'annoyance is felt that so strong a candidate has come forward in defence of a seat which they (Labour) had hoped to capture so easily'.¹³² On a number of occasions she played into Labour's hands by behaving in a manner generally considered inappropriate for an election candidate. The first attack came when the future Labour Council leader, Luke Hogan, alerted the public to his 'astonishment and concern' that Beavan was attempting to enlist the support of CWA workers for her campaign.¹³³ He denounced her, claiming that '[n]o-one is deceived by the attempt being made to label Miss Beavan as non-political . . . Miss Beavan must regret attempting to use an institution such as the association for the purpose of gratifying her aspiration for a parliamentary career.' In response, Beavan appealed to the public as a novice.¹³⁴

On two occasions Labour demanded inquiries into Beavan's conduct. The first was after a visit to Netherfield Wash-House on 22 May. This not only caused considerable irritation within the Labour ranks, but was reported in the national press.¹³⁵ As councillor and Mayor, she had been accustomed to making similar visits, but as an election candidate her intentions were easily misconstrued; a factor which she either chose to ignore or did not realise.¹³⁶ On this occasion she was joined by a photographer, as she had always been as Mayor. She cited her friendship with the local women in her defence.¹³⁷ Six Labour candidates signed a letter to the Baths Committee

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ LRO/CWA: cutting *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 February 1931; 23 May 1929.

¹³⁰ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 May 1929.

¹³¹ *Liverpool Echo*, 4 June 1928.

¹³² *The Times*, 28 May 1929.

¹³³ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 25 April 1929. Hogan pointed out that as the CWA received money from public funds, it was supposed to be non-political.

¹³⁴ Ibid..

¹³⁵ *The Times*, 28 May 1929.

¹³⁶ Did her agent advise her?

¹³⁷ *Liverpool Courier*, 24 May 1929.

demanding an inquiry on the basis that her visit was for 'show purposes and calculated to further her political ends'.¹³⁸ Labour argued that it was inappropriate for a candidate to enter a municipal wash-house in pursuit of votes. While the incident became the subject of an inquiry, the press revelled in the fact that finally they had found a comic element in the campaign. The *Echo* layered on the imagery: 'What a picture! One could imagine, say, Mr Hall-Caine tying on an apron, making the dolly do Pavlova steps, and wiping the soap suds from a perspiring brow; perhaps guaranteeing to do more clothes in an hour than Miss Beavan could do in one and a half hours.' The conclusion that Mr Hall Caine had 'washed his hands of the affair' proved irresistible.¹³⁹ Ultimately no action was taken, which was significant for a number of reasons. Labour's scrutiny of Beavan's behaviour was indicative of their disgruntlement at her campaign, and their sensitivity to her particular appeal. They suspected that the Conservatives were exploiting her gender. As the *Echo* commented, 'bright ideas do occur to election agents and even ex-Lord Mayors are human'.¹⁴⁰ A similar complaint was made when she visited a local special school on Empire Day. Soon after, further allegations forced her to make strenuous denials that she benefited financially from the CWA. She had been aware of such criticism for some time, and she had written to Derby '[d]o you know I get £20 a week for all I do at Copperas Hill. I rather thought it was a "minus"!'¹⁴¹

Liverpool Labour's apprehension may well have been heightened by speculation as to how the women would vote at the first general election at which equal political citizenship was in place. It was the first time that they had faced a woman candidate at a general election; a candidate all the more extraordinary because her local popularity was thought to be rooted in the constituency of the underprivileged. Labour's concerns are evident in an address made to a meeting on 22 May 1929 by Mr T. C. Davidson, President of the LTCLP, during which he stated, 'I am quite certain that somebody told her that she had only to go up to Everton, where she had served up so much charity in one form or another; and the people of Everton would fall at her feet and hang garlands round her neck.'¹⁴² Labour's awareness of Beavan's appeal led them to emphasise aspects of their programme which centred on issues close to her heart. W. A. Robinson, the Labour Council leader, emphasised his party's concern for the family; Labour, he stated, prioritised children, education, health and the welfare of mothers, and supported equal political and civic rights for men and women. In a challenge to Beavan's possible non-party appeal, Robinson claimed Labour as 'the

¹³⁸ LRO/352/MIN/BAT: Baths Committee Minutes, Special Meeting, 24 May 1929; *Evening Express*, 23 May 1929.

¹³⁹ *Liverpool Echo*, 23 May 1929.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1929.

¹⁴¹ LRO/DER: MB to LD, 17 April 1929. For other public denials, see *Liverpool Courier*, 8 May 1929.

¹⁴² *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 May 1929.

children's party . . . the peace party therefore it is the women's party'.¹⁴³ Some ten days later, at a packed meeting at the Olympia in Liverpool, there was a subtle denouncement of Beavan in a letter of support from Sir Hall Caine, the father of the Labour candidate for Everton, who wanted to 'to pay public tribute' to the philanthropic work of Ishbel MacDonald (who also addressed the meeting):

She is following in the footsteps of her noble-hearted mother, who gave not only her labour but her life to work for poor women and children, thus showing that such work is not alone the proud record of ladies of Conservative opinions, but of unselfish women of all political convictions, and not least, but greatest and foremost, of women of Labour opinions.¹⁴⁴

Sir Hall Caine was joining in the attempt to destroy what Labour perceived as the Tories' main weapon in Everton: Beavan's personal appeal. The CWA tag and appeal to women of a female candidate clearly disturbed Labour. Beavan was aware of this. A short time before polling day, she declared that the 'the Socialists got in a jolly big funk when I put up because they know I possess the heart of the women'.¹⁴⁵ She was referring to an alliance based not on gender or experience, but on her understanding of, and care for, their children's needs. Hall Caine responded to her with the accusation that she talked personalities and knew little about politics. He accused her of 'weeping crocodile tears over the women and children', and dismissed her with the jibe that 'the Tory candidate in Everton has not impressed as a Tory candidate should'.¹⁴⁶ She responded to such criticism by asking why Hall Caine wanted to represent a division he knew so little about.¹⁴⁷

Following her defeat, Neville Chamberlain wrote to Beavan, to express both his appreciation for her, and his anger at the way she which had been treated, '[m]y blood boils at the accounts I have read of the way in which you were subject to insults, and even violence by the ruffians in your district'.¹⁴⁸ Issues of propriety played an important role in narratives of the Everton campaign. Labour argued that Beavan behaved in a manner which was inappropriate and the Conservatives opposed Labour's attitude to her on the same basis. On 28 May 1929 *The Times* reported that 'Miss Beavan's meetings have been much the noisiest of any candidates here, and the least reputable among her socialist opponents have made concentrated attempts to rob her of a hearing altogether'.¹⁴⁹ It is possible that the Conservatives believed that Beavan's popular appeal,

¹⁴³ *Evening Express*, 18 April 1929.

¹⁴⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 May 1929.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1929.

¹⁴⁶ *Liverpool Courier*, 18 May 1929.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 May 1929.

¹⁴⁸ *The Times*, 5 June 1929.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1929.

and her gender, would spare her the violence which normally accompanied elections in Everton, even though they had witnessed minor displays of hostility in her presence the previous year when political violence within the wards was increasing.¹⁵⁰

Beavan experienced numerous violent meetings during April and May 1929. The episode which occurred at a meeting at St. Augustine School, on Salisbury Street, was fairly typical. Yells and jeers interrupted her speech. When she stood on a chair to get attention, she was taunted with cries telling her to get down and that she did not belong in the division. She displayed a spirited response to her opponents' rendition of the Red Flag by leading the National Anthem. When she was finally escorted out to her car, her legs were kicked and bruised, and her skin was broken by numerous missiles.¹⁵¹ Liverpool Conservatives expressed indignation at her treatment at the hands of the Socialists. The violence became functional for them, in that it created a focus for their expression of contempt for Labour. The Conservatives occupied the moral high-ground, from where they appealed to women voters. Lord Birkenhead told a packed meeting at Sun Hall on 23 May 1929, 'I hope all the women of Liverpool, to whom the Conservative Party alone gave the vote, will at least use that vote in that constituency to say it has never been a Liverpool tradition that women should be insulted'.¹⁵² For her part, Beavan managed to appear rather saintly. Despite being 'puzzled and hurt' by the 'apparent ingratitude' of the people of Everton, she willingly forgave her attackers, generously attributing their behaviour to the 'heat' of the campaign.¹⁵³

Labour hit back at the poor publicity created by the violence. At a meeting in Liverpool Stadium, addressed by Oswald Mosley, on 12 May, Luke Hogan responded to the *Daily Post's* request that Labour 'repudiate' the violence. 'Labour' he asserted 'had nothing to repudiate' because it did not believe that anything had happened to Beavan. He claimed that she had a 'very stalwart body of stewards', who 'were apparently so busy keeping the rival sections apart . . . that they were not able to protect the little lady'.¹⁵⁴ It is possible that Hogan was implying that the Conservatives' excessive use of bodyguards provoked violent behaviour in which Beavan became caught. Later, Hall Caine complained to the press of the violence which was perpetrated against his supporters. He described how, during a procession along Prince Edwin Street, his supporters had been subjected to a 'fusillade of shoes, broken bottles and missiles', as well as a hostile crowd of 300. '[I]t was', he is reported to have said, 'the greatest piece of hooliganism he had ever known in any

¹⁵⁰ Sir Thomas White talked of the 'scurvy and scurrilous treatment of the Lady Mayor by Labour men': *Liverpool Courier*, 27 October 1928. For the violence, see *ibid.*: 29 October 1928; *Evening Express*, 29 October 1928; *Liverpool Echo*, 30 October 1928.

¹⁵¹ *Evening Express*, 17 May 1929.

¹⁵² *Liverpool Courier*, 24 May 1929.

¹⁵³ LRO/CWA: cutting *The News Chronicle*, 23 February 1931.

¹⁵⁴ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 13 May 1929. Other reports indicate that Miss Beavan was followed to meetings by a group of stewards: *Liverpool Courier*, 29 May 1929.

corner of the world. He had seen hooliganism in other countries, but he had never experienced such a demonstration of cowardly ruffianism as this'.¹⁵⁵ While other onlookers confirmed that it had been an ugly situation, Hall Caine was almost certainly exaggerating as a response to unfavourable reports which labelled Labour the violent party.

Though the Conservatives had been quick to portray Labour as the instigators of organised violence, the truth remains unclear. The reactions of the two parties to the campaign throws into stark relief, once again, the broad rift which existed between the Conservatives, Labour, and the electorate in terms of their understanding of, and reaction to, women's role in frontline politics. The depth of the disapproval expressed by the Conservatives suggests that they regarded Beavan's status as a woman as more significant than her position as a candidate. At times Beavan herself seemed unsure about her position. On one occasion she declared, 'when I accepted the candidature I expected to be treated as a man, but it seems some people in Everton require a candidate to be a super-man or shall I say a super-woman. Of course I do not claim to be that, and as a woman I certainly do not expect any special treatment.'¹⁵⁶ In the event she was treated according to election tradition in Everton. Questions concerning definitions of appropriate conduct for women, both as participants in, and observers of, political meetings were brought to the fore by the campaign. One of these questions was whether women deserved special treatment. The Conservatives appeared to think so. They opposed the violence in Everton because their candidate was a woman, even though they were well aware that violence was neither an exclusively male nor an exclusively Labour pursuit.

The evidence indicates that the Conservatives' fear that women could also become the unintended victims of violence was at times realistic. During the 1929 municipal election campaign, a brick thrown at local Communist Leo McGree, campaigning at Edge Hill, struck seventeen year old Mary Bolye of Eldon Street instead.¹⁵⁷ Press reports even suggested that women were not safe in their own locality. One stated that two Everton women, Mrs Cross and Mrs Edge, had been stabbed during the 1929 campaign by a group of men who were attempting to post election bills on their homes.¹⁵⁸

Women-only meetings had been adopted partly as a means to protect women from the rougher style of electioneering. Though experience in Liverpool suggested that this was often necessary, women-only meetings during Liverpool election campaigns were not always calm affairs, as women were often the perpetrators of rowdiness. The nature and extent of disorder varied from

¹⁵⁵ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 30 May 1929. Mr Clark, Margaret Beavan's agent, denied that the Conservatives had anything to do with the violence: *Evening Express*, 30 May 1929.

¹⁵⁶ LRO/352/CLE/CUT: Townclerk's Cuttings (hereafter LRO/CUT): *Liverpool Courier*, 29 May 1929.

¹⁵⁷ *Liverpool Courier*, 13 May 1929.

¹⁵⁸ *Evening Express*, 30 May 1929.

district to district. For example, Edge Hill, the first seat Labour won in 1923, had its fair share of rowdy behaviour orchestrated by women. During the 1923 municipal campaign, a meeting for the retiring Conservative, Mr D. C. Williams, was turned into 'a farce' by two women waving red flags.¹⁵⁹ On 7 May 1929 Sir Hugo Rutherford, the Conservative candidate for Edge Hill, was addressing a meeting for women at the Tunnel Road Cinema when scuffles broke out among women in the audience.¹⁶⁰ Clearly the location and direction of violence varied.

Reactions to Beavan's experience, and fears for women's safety in general, suggest that between the wars, at some levels, there was a continuing desire to protect women's bodies within the public arena; but responses to the question of women and violence in politics and the public domain were inconsistent, often varying according to the context in which the violence occurred and the class of the women involved. It may be that the Liverpool Conservatives in 1929 used the same tactics employed more widely in England by Conservatives when at the end of the nineteenth century, 'far from protecting women from the rough and tumble of political life, anti-suffrage MPs and their agents sent dames into the roughest areas, such as the East End and South Wales, knowing that their courage, style, social class, and sex would command civility rather than the customary rotten eggs'.¹⁶¹ But femininity was no guarantee against violence during political contests, as Cicely Leadley Brown discovered to her cost during the 1910 election campaign. While at Liverpool docks in her car she was 'lashed savagely in the face with a stick by a young Conservative blackguard'.¹⁶² More generally before the war, women had been involved in, and were subjected to, violent acts in the public domain as participants in the militant suffrage campaign. Militant suffrage behaviour was startling to many because it demanded that society confront the possibility that women could behave in a non-conformist manner. Referring to these acts of militancy, Brian Harrison has suggested that they 'seem rather less shocking to us, and mild by comparison with political violence since 1914, furthermore, our concept of the conduct proper to women has altered dramatically'.¹⁶³ Krista Cowman has described how members of Liverpool WSPU encountered hostile crowd behaviour, during an incident at Liscard on Wirral.¹⁶⁴ This episode, like others described in suffrage history, is an example of the often contradictory nature of the reaction to the issue of violence and women in the public domain. Instances like that at Liscard show how reactions

¹⁵⁹ *Liverpool Courier*, 25 October 1923.

¹⁶⁰ LRO/CUT: *Liverpool Daily Post*, 8 May 1929.

¹⁶¹ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.56.

¹⁶² *Liverpolitan*, November 1951, p.2.

¹⁶³ Brian Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p.27.

¹⁶⁴ Krista Cowman, "'The Stone-Throwing has been Forced Upon Us": The Function of Militancy within the Liverpool W.S.P.U., 1906-14', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 145 (1996 for 1995), 171-92 (p.182).

to violence by, and against, women were managed according to context. Suffragette women, engaged in disorder, were perceived by the authorities as posing an immediate threat to public order and a more general threat to social order as a whole.¹⁶⁵ By engaging in what was perceived as 'unwomanly' conduct suffragette women, regardless of class, were considered to have placed themselves outside of the boundary of protection which should have been theirs, as citizens, regardless of either gender or behaviour.

Election campaigns might thus lead to the suspension of 'normal' behaviour. For women, participation in election campaigns could mean having to encounter and deal with behaviour which in another context might not be tolerated or might be perceived as challenging the 'rules' which governed behaviour within society. It is possible that Liverpool Conservatives hoped that these 'rules' would still be observed during the Everton campaign in 1929, despite the traditional turbulence of elections there. It is possible that they hoped that Beavan's gender and reputation would change the usual style of electioneering in Everton. If so, they were sadly mistaken. When Beavan stepped forward as a candidate, in the eyes of her opponents she left her sex and her reputation behind her. It seems clear that notions of appropriate behaviour for women in politics, and responses to women involved in this sphere, differed according not only to party but more importantly to context, gender, and class. At Everton in 1929 the Conservatives chose to disregard the need for a sexless political citizenship. But Labour and the Everton electorate did not view gender as a candidate's defining quality. Instead they dealt with Beavan as they would any other candidate, male or female, though perhaps a little more harshly.

The events at Everton during April and May 1929 raise important questions concerning our understanding of the forces which affected women's integration into civic and political life between the wars, in spite of legislative change. The campaign highlights how expectations of, and responses to, women's role in politics differed between the parties, between different elements within the parties, between different sections of the electorate, and from individual to individual. Some Conservatives sought to exploit Beavan's femininity and social work, and some - like Derby - saw the dangers inherent within this. Some socialists objected to these tactics whilst seeking to portray their party as the true promoter of the causes and concerns dear to women like Beavan. In the light of this, it is hardly surprising that Beavan herself was unsure about her own position and the nature of her appeal. As yet, there was no consensus about whether women involved in politics were involved as citizens rather than as women.

¹⁶⁵ See Barbara Green on women's disorderly behaviour, in *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism and the Sites of Suffrage 1905-1938* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p.23.

Bessie Braddock and the Function of Non-Conformity

The following case study presents an example of the way in which an individual woman influenced the extent to which her activity was perceived as challenging. Following her election to Liverpool City Council in 1930 Bessie Braddock, daughter of Mary Bamber, played a substantial role in Labour's municipal politics as Councillor for St Anne's throughout the 1930s. Braddock was arguably the most outstanding, fiercely independent, and vocal woman politician active in Liverpool between the wars. She was, perhaps, the first woman in the city to challenge models of the active woman on a grand scale. A woman who once declared 'I can use Liverpool dockers' language if I think it justified' clearly had no intentions of conforming to any model of behaviour.¹⁶⁶ Like Beavan, Braddock also had a nick-name: the *Six-B's* or *Big-Bonny-Beautiful-Bugger-Bessie-Bamber*. The name, which was first coined by Communist MP Walton Newbold, a former fiancée of Ellen Wilkinson, was used among local socialists.¹⁶⁷

Braddock appealed directly to the working people. In her autobiography, she declared that the improvement of the conditions of Liverpool's working-class had been the objective which had guided her political life: 'It was the unemployed workers of Liverpool in 1906-7 who made me a rebel. It was their suffering that made me determined to do everything I could to alter the vast gap between the people who had nothing and the people who never went without anything.'¹⁶⁸ In Liverpool, Braddock quickly developed a reputation as a rough, tough, no-nonsense working-class woman who met the rough and tumble of local politics head on. It seems clear that when she recognised the possibilities offered by the response to her apparent non-conformity, she embellished it further for political purposes. The reputation won during her childhood for being loud and bossy remained with her throughout her political career.¹⁶⁹ In 1963, her friend and colleague, Jennie Lee, noted that Braddock had '[n]othing left of her youth except a loud voice'.¹⁷⁰ Braddock never shied away from physical confrontation, even after she graduated to Westminster in 1945 as MP for Liverpool's Exchange. When she died in 1970 'Ma Bamber's daughter' passed into political folklore, remembered not only as the first woman to be suspended by the speaker of the House of Commons, but as the only minister alleged to have danced a jig on the floor of the House and

¹⁶⁶ Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.6.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁶⁹ *The Guardian*, 10 September 1969.

¹⁷⁰ Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.152.

supposedly to have sat in Churchill's seat.¹⁷¹ Braddock saw herself as a rebel in political terms, and when measured against more compliant contemporaries like Margaret Beavan, Mabel Eills, and Christine Boyle, she had more reason to do so.

Part of the key to Braddock's popularity was her image as a member of the working-class. Her political education began in infancy; she grew up among working people who regarded her mother Mary Bamber highly. By the time she went to school, Braddock was already politically astute and keen to share her knowledge, and had developed a combative spirit. On one occasion she asked her teacher, 'what is socialism?', and recalled that when the 'teacher did not give a correct answer . . . I told her so and proceeded to explain to the class what socialism was'.¹⁷² As a child Braddock had, like many other Labour members, attended a Socialist Sunday School. At the school, which was held in the club-rooms of the British Socialist Party, she learnt socialist hymns and the ten socialist commandments. At eleven, Braddock graduated to the youth section of the ILP, where she enjoyed the strong social element. She supplemented her schooling by attending classes run by the Workers' Educational Association and the National Council of Labour.¹⁷³

It was not unusual that Braddock married within the Labour movement, since it was also her social circle. During their early married life, she and her husband Jack Braddock became involved in the local Communist movement. Jack was soon to leave Bessie in charge of the Lancashire, Cheshire, and North Wales District Communist Party; from which the couple led an exodus in 1924.¹⁷⁴ It is likely that her experiences during this period helped forge her apparently fearless attitude, as she was frequently called upon to undertake work which was usually illegal and often dangerous. This did not present a problem to Bessie who later recalled that, 'I was well-trained for this, I had learned judo and knew how to take care of myself'.¹⁷⁵ Her memories include accounts of how she was the 'late-night date for dozens of these "dangerous men"'.¹⁷⁶ In the light of such activity, it is hardly surprising that she developed a passion for boxing.¹⁷⁷

Bessie Braddock's descriptions of her early Labour years clearly suggest that she was always well aware of how to take care of herself, and the advent of her new status as Councillor did not persuade her to modify her behaviour or style. There was often a physical quality to her politics, no more evident than during her investigation into sub-letting in her ward. The way in which she handled this problem set the tone for her work as a councillor. Her approach has further

¹⁷¹ Madeleine Were, 'Ma Bamber's Daughter: An Intimate Portrait of Bessie Braddock', *Lancashire Life*, 10 (2) (1962), p.49. The truth of these stories has been debated.

¹⁷² Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.9.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10.

¹⁷⁴ The CPGB had become too autocratic, see *ibid.*, Chap. 4.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.46.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.49.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.111.

implications when considered in the light of debates concerning women's presence and the potential for violence in the political arena. The investigation was prompted by the exploits of a woman, who was living comfortably in Gerard Street and was illegally sub-letting accommodation. Appalled to discover this practice, Braddock instructed the tenants about the correct rate at which they ought to be paying. The woman was incensed at Braddock's interference and made 'lurid threats of revenge'. Braddock and the tenants organised a meeting to deal with the landlady, which she described as follows:

We held it under a lamp-post outside this woman's house in Gerard Street. We set up a chair and one of the tenants climbed up and repeated what the landlady proposed to do to me, and then invited her to come out and do it. 'Let's see whether she *can* batter Bessie to bits,' she said. This caused some amusement, for in those days I was fighting fit. However the door of the house remained closed, and that broke up her little racket.

This incident reveals much about Braddock, not least a no-nonsense attitude to business and a willingness to go into her ward, literally rolling up her sleeves, in order to do battle. Her recollection that 'these people had enough faith in me to do as I said' suggests much about Braddock's own understanding of her role as their representative.¹⁷⁸ Informality and trust were important elements for Braddock in the relationship which she developed with her ward members. It was the kind of relationship which she had begun to foster in the early 1920s, when she would refer to the women who came to listen to her as 'mine'. One woman revealed how, having heard Braddock speaking from a coal wagon, she ran home to tell her husband about 'this wonderful woman who made me realise that the future of the baby I was nursing while I listened to her lay in her hands. I had to follow her as best I could'.¹⁷⁹ Brian Harrison has shown how a similar relationship developed between Labour-convert Susan Lawrence and local supporters at Marylebone.¹⁸⁰

The activities of Braddock and her immediate family in Liverpool demonstrate the reality of physical behaviour and confrontation as a part of local working-class politics. As a child, Braddock witnessed the events of 'Bloody Sunday', 13 August 1911, when 40,000 men, who had come to listen to Tom Mann discuss the railway strike, were met with a brutal reaction from the police. The images, 'the charge of well-fed police on superb horses, the batons swinging, enough half-starved workers falling to fill every hospital in Liverpool', remained with her.¹⁸¹ Her mother and her

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.72-73.

¹⁷⁹ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, pp.72-73.

¹⁸⁰ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p.132.

¹⁸¹ Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.9.

husband both played a significant role in the events of the anniversary of 'Bloody Sunday' in 1921, when a group of socialists occupied the Walker Art Gallery.¹⁸²

From 1930 onwards the City Council became very aware of Braddock's presence. After one year, according to Millie Toole, she had produced 'so much boat rocking that some of the opposition felt sea-sick as soon as they saw her'.¹⁸³ Braddock managed to cause the local Tories intense embarrassment when they failed to invite her, on two occasions, to the opening of new housing which she had helped to push through in her ward. The first time, she upstaged the Minister of Health, Sir Kingsley Wood, as he was officiating at the opening ceremony of a new estate in the ward. Braddock arrived and, according to her recollection, was 'mobbed' by local women. On the second occasion, the Prince of Wales had been invited to open a new block of flats at Queen Anne Street. Tight security meant that Braddock had to plan her action more carefully. The night before the ceremony she stayed with the female dwellers of an old flat across the road from the site. Braddock described the scene:

The Prince had made an early morning call at the docks, then came to the new block. He had walked into the centre of the square when I came out onto the balcony. Once more there was uproar. A cheering crowd congregated beneath my balcony, ignoring the Prince. He demanded to know who I was and the furious police had to tell him that I was the elected Labour representative of the ward.¹⁸⁴

Thereafter, councillors were invited to public events; Braddock had made her point. Incidents like these, which were not uncommon during her career, suggest much about her views on political conduct. On both occasions she had refused to submit to the Tories or even to Royal protocol in her own ward. Her behaviour, motivated by the need to make an impression, suggests that she was not prepared to observe conventions of appropriate conduct, neither those expected of a woman nor those expected of a local councillor. She argued that unconventional behaviour was often a necessary tactic as a means to draw attention to issues which otherwise might be ignored. Her later writing suggests a certain pride at what the 'Six-Bs' meant, and of the view of her as a rebel.¹⁸⁵ Her activity enabled her to capture not only the public imagination but the attention of the press. Millie Toole described Braddock's dual nature:

¹⁸² For a description of these events, see *ibid.*, pp.34-37.

¹⁸³ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.100

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.74. The organisation of the meeting was discussed in Council as a result of a letter from St. Anne's Labour Association containing the complaint that the Mayor did not allow the three representatives to meet the Prince: LRO/352/COU/II: Liverpool City Council Minutes (hereafter LCCM): (26 July 1933).

In Council she is often a noisy and aggressive obstructionist, and, in plain truth, a nuisance. But down in a ward of her own selection she appears in a light much more flattering, no longer the battling Bodicea, but a beneficent mother of all the living, of all, anyhow, who come within her nebulous definition of the working-class.¹⁸⁶

Braddock labelled the Chairman of the Housing Committee a liar, which she knew was unacceptable language in Council, because she wanted to highlight a housing scandal. She was then expelled from the Chamber by the police when she refused the Mayor's request for her withdrawal.¹⁸⁷ Her performance had the desired impact when the events were reported in the press. She justified her activities by stating that '[i]f you didn't do something outrageous, nobody would take any notice of you and no one would know about what was going on in the City Council'.¹⁸⁸ However at its next meeting the Labour Council Group recorded 'its strong disapproval of the conduct of Councillors Jack and Mrs Braddock'.¹⁸⁹

Bessie Braddock stood firm beside her principles, which demanded a degree of independence for a member of Liverpool Labour Council Group. In September 1934, both she and Sydney Silverman refused to vote for a motion that Sir Thomas White, Sir Frederick Bowring and Sir James Sexton be made Freemen of the City.¹⁹⁰ The vote was part of a deal made between Luke Hogan and Thomas White; in return Labour was to nominate W. T. Richardson as the first Labour Mayor. Sam Davies notes that, '[t]his entirely understandable objection to honouring political and industrial enemies was supported by their local ward party, St Anne's. But the Labour council leadership was enraged'.¹⁹¹ The Council Group voted to suspend the whip from Braddock and Silverman. As a result, Braddock no longer needed to follow party guidelines and so was within her rights to become the Chair of the Maternity and Child Welfare Sub-Committee in 1936 and she did not resign this position when the whip was restored to her.¹⁹² This episode shows her independence of mind, confidence as a politician, and loyalty to her convictions. Braddock's assertion of independence becomes more significant when considered in the wider context of inter-

¹⁸⁵ Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.11.

¹⁸⁶ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.104.

¹⁸⁷ The City Council minutes recorded that, 'Councillor E. M. Braddock having been ruled out of order by the Lord Mayor refused to obey the repeated requests of the Lord Mayor to resume her seat, and continued to address the Council. The Lord Mayor then "named" [Braddock] . . . and in accordance with Standing Order No. 24 moved "That . . . Braddock be suspended from the day's sitting of Council": LRO/ LCCM (26 July 1933).

¹⁸⁸ Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.75.

¹⁸⁹ LRO/TRA/21/8: LTCLP City Council Group Minutes (31 August 1933).

¹⁹⁰ LRO: LCCM (24 September 1934).

¹⁹¹ Sam Davies *et al.*, *Genuinely Seeking Work: Mass Unemployment on Merseyside in the 1930s* (Birkenhead: Liver Press, 1992), p.154.

¹⁹² Labour members were not allowed to accept chairmanships of committees or sub-committees: Braddock,

war Labour politics dominated by men.

Mary Bamber had encouraged her daughter's fighting spirit, but this was no guarantee of Braddock's future role.¹⁹³ Patricia Hollis has shown that although Jennie Lee began her life in the mining community of Cowdenbeath, she grew away from the people: 'In North Lanark and later in Cannock she addressed working-class women like a man, proud of them, often sorry for them, sometimes fighting for them, but never one of them'.¹⁹⁴ Braddock's approach provides a contrast; she spoke as one of the people. Unlike Jennie Lee, she never went to college, but worked, married and remained within her home city. As a result, she had more in common with the men and women she represented. During the early years of their marriage, her husband was an insurance collector and Braddock often went on his round which gave her the opportunity to get to know the people in the district.

Driven by the over-riding objective to improve the conditions of working people, Braddock poured her energy into work connected with housing, health and hospitals.¹⁹⁵ Some of her most important work was as a member of the sub-committee of the Port, Sanitary, and Hospitals Committee which dealt with general and children's hospitals. Her work showed that she had a very keen eye for detail. At her request, Sir Thomas White found himself inspecting the poor cooking facilities at one of the children's hospitals; she insisted that the nurses at Walton needed a proper home; and she was instrumental in introducing new uniforms for hospital staff, and in sweeping away the humiliating old-fashioned dress of the elderly inmates of the people's hostel, Westminster House.¹⁹⁶ As Chairman of the Maternity and Child Welfare Sub-Committee from 1934 to 1937, Braddock inspected all clinics and services in the city. She did battle with the Medical Officer of Health, Professor Fraser, over the provision of services, and won his agreement to draft a full report detailing the inadequacies of services and the needs of both the new housing estates and the city as a whole. Braddock pushed her schemes for a re-organisation of Liverpool's Maternity Services through Council, despite their considerable expense. As a result of her work, new buildings came into use and the new estates at Everton, Dovecot, and Fazakerley were at last provided with clinics.¹⁹⁷ Braddock's work and devotion gained her the respect of women from other parties. Rosa Hoch who represented Granby for the Conservatives in 1924 commented that 'if half the Christians of this city were as Christian as Bessie, things would be well with us.' Braddock received a glowing reference from Eleanor Rathbone who commented that she would be 'worth her weight in gold

The Braddocks, p.137.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁹⁴ Hollis, *Jennie Lee*, p.39.

¹⁹⁵ Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.74.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.130-41.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.137-39.

whatever party she supported'.¹⁹⁸

Braddock's new status as Councillor in 1930 did not prevent her from keeping house for her family.¹⁹⁹ On the day after she was elected to Council, George Garrett called to congratulate her. He was surprised when he saw Braddock through the cellar window 'wearing her bloomers over her skirt and a slip at the top surrounded by steam', busily occupied with her washing.²⁰⁰ This aspect of Braddock's personality is significant for debates regarding women's self-presentation. She presented herself to the working people, the women especially, as being just like them. Though she often defied convention when she went into a political battle, Braddock did not usually challenge the gender roles familiar to those people she sought to represent; rather her home-life reinforced popular conceptions of these roles. Unlike Hannah Mitchell in Manchester, she did not foster a resentment towards the stove, instead she regularly pointed out that not only was she in charge of her own housework but actually enjoyed doing it.²⁰¹ Even important Council business was not allowed to get in the way of wash-day. In 1936, whilst serving as Chair of the Maternity and Child Welfare Sub-Committee, Braddock was in charge of finding about eighty midwives but conducted no interviews on Monday mornings, as this was her wash-day.²⁰²

Expectations of women's appropriate role meant that Braddock's behaviour may have been perceived as contradictory at times. On one hand, she presented herself as an ordinary housewife who happened to be a Councillor. By retaining this air of domesticity, Braddock reinforced rather than challenged local understandings of gender roles. Her promotion of her home-life enabled her to communicate with the people, to let them know that the Braddocks lived like they did. The fact that she seemed to conform so contentedly to prescribed forms of domesticity within the private sphere made her behaviour within the public arena the more remarkable. Braddock challenged models of women's behaviour by manipulating her identity. She often played upon the way in which she was presented, behaving in a loud, rowdy, or combative manner partly because she knew that the response it would alert, and that the resulting publicity it would attract, usually benefited her cause.

By 1918 the monopoly of middle-class women on public life was coming to an end. The growing strength of the Labour Movement had played an important role in promoting a new type of active woman. Women like Bessie Braddock in Liverpool, and Hannah Mitchell in Manchester, offered important models to other working women interested in working in the public/political

¹⁹⁸ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.110-11.

¹⁹⁹ As noted in Chapter Two.

²⁰⁰ Toole, *Bessie Braddock*, p.98

²⁰¹ Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up*, p.240. There is almost a mythical quality to these aspects of Mary Bamber's life.

²⁰² Midwives became the responsibility of the Local Authority under the 1936 Midwives Act: Braddock, *The*

domain. Responses to women like Braddock and Beavan suggest that gender remained the key category of analysis during the inter-war period, though many women probably felt that they had more in common with their male colleagues than with women in other parties.

V

Conclusion: The Public Woman

Between the wars, women were becoming increasingly active as participants in political and civic life, although the image of a woman in a position of power, in either a civic or a political capacity, did not always square with perceptions of the appropriate feminine role at the beginning of this period. The experience of women on the frontline of Liverpool politics between the wars shows some of the tensions which existed in attitudes towards the appropriate roles of men and women. During this period there appeared to be conflict between those who sought to reassert essential masculinity and femininity, in the face of an apparent loosening of gender roles prompted by the experience of war, and those who looked instead to a society in which gender roles might become less rigidly defined.

It appears that there was often a contemporary misconception of women's aims, which regarded women who sought parity of opportunity as wishing to deny their femininity and to rival men. That this was not always the case can be seen from some of the comments made by Margaret Beavan. She told the Soroptimists in 1928 that she wanted to be 'a leader of women', to work 'side by side' with men not as 'an antagonist or rival to men, but to show that women had something to contribute to civic life'.²⁰³ The perception of women as potential rivals to men is a possible explanation for some of the recurring images of femininity used by local commentators to reinforce differences. As a result of such responses, women who sought a public role were forced to negotiate what were essentially uncertain boundaries of appropriateness. Women had been participating in the political sphere in a variety of ways before 1918, but their role had nearly always been in the background, or at least within their own associations. After 1919 they had the right to register their presence in the foreground. Having finally forced their way into public life and onto the frontline, women faced the implications of responses to their gender. Commentators, colleagues, and the public insisted on resurrecting what were essentially timeworn arguments and images. Women discovered that their activity in the public domain as political or civic leaders was often encouraged, assessed, and reacted to primarily according to their gender. However, for women's self-

Braddocks, p.139.

representation, emphasis upon their femininity could often be empowering.

This was the case, to some extent, for the two women who have featured most prominently in this chapter, though for different reasons. The achievements of Beavan were tied closely to the fact that she appeared less threatening, because she conformed to a model of the acceptable *public woman*. The Conservatives promoted her to Lady Mayor because it enabled them to present themselves as champions of women's progress, while maintaining the support of those who were less enthusiastic about women's increasing public role. Beavan was encouraged to stand at Everton because they believed that she was the special candidate who would produce a landmark victory. Essentially Conservative tactics were influenced by their understanding of her brand of femininity and its appeal. Labour and the electorate displayed a different attitude to this. The actions of her socialist opponents were a response to her primarily as a Conservative candidate, rather than as a woman. They reacted angrily to the feminine basis of her appeal and to the activities she engaged in which reinforced it, as they saw this as deliberate Conservative manipulation of her gender; though it is significant that they tried to counter her appeal in more positive ways by trying to improve the image of their own party as the promoter of the causes and issues commonly valued by women engaged in politics. Responses to the violence Beavan encountered only served to underline the lack of a consensus on the appropriate response to women in public/political life.

Bessie Braddock appears initially as markedly different from Beavan. Working-class, outspoken and apparently always ready for a fight, Braddock presented herself as the opposite of the traditional model of appropriate feminine behaviour in public life. For her, non-conformity served a purpose. By behaving in a manner which appalled politicians, the press, the public and often her own party, she managed to draw attention to issues which otherwise might have received less attention. Braddock further embellished her public image by wholeheartedly embracing the traditional domestic role of women in private. The growing strength of Labour during the inter-war period made it increasingly possible for more working women like Braddock to join their middle-class sisters in frontline politics. Class, politics, and style of approach certainly divided women like Braddock and Beavan, but in many ways the responses to their political activity were similar, being influenced in both cases by entrenched attitudes concerning the appropriate role of women in public life. We need only consider the contemporary situation to see how, despite the acceptance of women as actors in public/political life, the concept of the public individual has never really managed to override the concept of the woman in public life.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ *Liverpool Courier*, 10 October 1928.

²⁰⁴ As is clear from press reactions to the recent sacking of Labour MP Fiona Jones, and the debates about the style of Cabinet Minister Mo Mowlam.

Conclusion

During the inter-war period women in Liverpool maintained and expanded their contribution to public life. A vast, rich, colourful, and dynamic women's movement helped to promote women's role in the city. Their public activity took various forms. They created, led, and enjoyed membership of non-party organisations and political associations; initiated, directed, and participated in welfare schemes; patrolled the city's streets and parks; campaigned for reform; lobbied the City Council on a range of issues; participated in municipal and general elections, as voters, campaign workers, and candidates; joined the City Council; and, in one case, held the office of Mayor. A wide variety of women (young, old, single, married, widows, mothers, workers, volunteers, rich and poor) were active in these areas. Many of them were taking their first steps in public life; others were veterans, many of them seasoned campaigners who had supported the suffrage campaign in the city. Women did not necessarily share identical views about their roles, just as they did not always choose to work together. Despite these differences, however, they shared a commitment to promoting women's role in public life.

It was not always easy, partly because there was no single objective. There were disappointments and setbacks, and many were frustrated that women were not making the most of their opportunities. Even so, in the first age of (limited) joint citizenship, women's leaders were encouraging women to explore, promote, and consolidate their position in public life alongside men on the basis of their rights as citizens. These women not only believed that women had a right to a role in public life, but argued that they had a distinctive contribution to make - in local, national, and international issues. What some of them were trying to achieve was neatly expressed by Liverpool's most prominent 'public' woman, Eleanor Rathbone, in a piece she wrote on 'Changes in Public Life' in 1936:

It may happen that among the results of the new citizenship of women . . . will be a changed attitude on the part of society towards human happiness and suffering, especially towards the happiness or suffering of its less powerful and articulate members, a more scientific study of the reactions of political and economic machinery upon well-being, more resolute dealing with unnecessary poverty, disease and ugliness, a more sustained and determined fight against cruelty in all its forms, and especially against the cruelty of war.¹

¹ Eleanor Rathbone, 'Changes in Public Life', in *Our Freedom and Its Results*, ed. by Ray Strachey

A recurrent theme of this thesis has been the way in which active Liverpool women showed their commitment not only to widening women's role in public life, but also to ensuring that citizenship was a concept relevant to all members of the community; a particularly pertinent aim in a city with marked social and religious divisions, and widespread poverty.

Between the wars, women's organisations continued to provide an important venue for women's activity. Their purpose, aims, style, and membership often varied, but several of them shared an explicit commitment to exploring women's citizenship. While many of them were concerned that women should understand the responsibilities of their new-found citizenship, the most important organisation promoting women's citizenship was undoubtedly the Women Citizens' Association (WCA), which provided in its ideas and in its leading personnel (who included Eleanor Rathbone) an important link between the Edwardian and inter-war periods. Though the WCA certainly owed much to the influence of Rathbone, who remained active within it (albeit often from a distance), in Liverpool she was surrounded by a network of equally passionate, able, and dedicated women who not only maintained that organisation throughout the period but played a leading role in Liverpool public life. Working towards the equal franchise remained an important objective for these women, but they were also concerned to welcome more women into organisational activity, to promote women's role in all areas of public life on the basis of their citizenship, and to direct this role towards the improvement of society for the benefit of all - towards the achievement, as the women themselves described it, of the 'common good'.

The interests and activities of some women's inter-war organisations, especially those of a social and domestic nature, have sometimes been criticised for their conservatism in comparison with the ideas and actions of the organisations of the suffrage era. As we have seen, however, this criticism is not entirely justified. While it is true one branch of the Liverpool Townswomen's Guilds (NUTG) held a competition in 1938 in which its members had to peel a potato whilst blindfold, even this had a political dimension. For many women the important point of such activity was that it gave them a new sense of female community and shared identity. It also brought them into contact with more explicitly political ideas. Thus the same NUTG branch which organised such amusing challenges also arranged a lecture on citizenship in the same annual programme.² For women who had never taken part in any organised activity beyond the home, the gentle approach of organisations like the NUTG and the Mothers' Union offered an ideal introduction. As members of these organisations, and of others like the WCA and the Women's Co-operative Guild, women had

(London: Hogarth Press, 1936), pp.13-76 (p.76).

² Walton and Clubmoor Guild: *The Townswoman*, November 1938, p.80.

the opportunity to make their contribution to public life at a level which felt right for them. While it may be, as some historians have argued, that this reflects a loss of energy within the women's movement, it was not without positive features. If the women's movement became less dynamic after 1918, the evidence from Liverpool indicates that it also became more diverse, offered greater possibilities for action to a wider variety of women, and had the confidence to celebrate femininity.

In some respects women's activity after 1918 contained important elements of continuity. This was so in the case of welfare work, a sphere with which women had long been associated. Between the wars its significance for women in Liverpool was far from diminished. Long after 1900 Liverpool maintained its reputation for originality in charitable and welfare endeavours. Though the Victoria Settlement was hardly a unique venture, one of its most distinguished Wardens, Elizabeth Macadam, played an important role in establishing the Department of Social Science at the University. Along with Eleanor Rathbone and other leading male and female citizens, Macadam also contributed to the creation of the Council of Voluntary Aid in 1909 and the Personal Service Society (PSS) in 1919. These welfare schemes provided essential support and services to a city in which a significant proportion of the population endured poverty and hardship, but they also offered important opportunities for women to fulfil their citizenship duties on varying levels. While a woman like Dorothy Keeling wielded considerable power in her capacity as PSS Secretary, the role of Maud Melly (a part-time PSS volunteer) should not be under-rated. This variety of activity provided her and others like her with new opportunities to experience welfare work, and gave them a sense of fulfilment and empowerment. Although this empowerment may seem small by the standards of the suffrage campaign, or those of the early twenty-first century, its significance can only properly be understood and appreciated by considering how the women who experienced it would have viewed their changed role. For many of them it was a big and daunting step to take. It is worth bearing in mind the recollections of Mrs Stapleton, a PSS visitor, who recorded that when she first attended her district committee meeting, 'when the committee room was opened, I nearly ran away. Everyone was sat round a table and looked so intent and businesslike'.³ But once she had found her feet, Mrs Stapleton and others like her had much to contribute, especially as women were still perceived as natural proponents of personal social work, well suited (because of their feminine qualities) to the task of implementing the 'new tradition' of social work (which sprang from a more humanitarian understanding of the plight of the poor) in Liverpool between the wars.

The connection between women and care-giving within the local community was also

³ LRO/M364/Liverpool Personal Service Society Collection/11/5: Mrs Stapleton, Memories of the PSS By a Visitor (Liverpool: n.p., 1930), p. 7.

a significant feature of an important campaign which united many members of the women's movement between the wars: the campaign for the appointment of women police led by the LWPPC. On a basic level this campaign was about women's right to equal employment, but it was complicated by the emotive issues which it raised about morality, the need to protect female bodies within the public space, and economic concerns regarding male employment. This campaign, more than any other, polarised opinion on women's public activity, not least because it challenged views regarding women's appropriate role and appeared to revive old fears about women's potential for militancy. One critic, at least, voiced concern that '[s]upport for this movement will, of course, come naturally from feminists, whose main object in life is to transmute women into men'.⁴ Although ultimately a failure, the campaign remains worthy of close study. It reveals the vibrancy, imagination, and determination of one element of the women's movement in Liverpool between the wars (at least until the early 1930s). This element, led by the LWPPC, played an important part in the national campaign, sought and successfully acquired a considerable body of influential (cross-party) support locally, secured the acceptance by the City Council of its main aims at a time when the Council was dominated by the Conservatives (who mostly opposed the appointment of women police), and pressurised the powerful Watch Committee chairman to make a formal written response to its arguments which can only have served to give those arguments wider publicity.

Liverpool women also pursued and publicised their aims and objectives between the wars through their participation in politics. Many of them showed an important attachment to party as they attempted to contribute to local party politics, and a few women even stood for election to Parliament (though, with the exception of Eleanor Rathbone, who stood for a seat outside Liverpool, none was successful). For the women who wanted to participate in politics, the local municipal elections provided the best opportunity, and a number seized it. Anxious to attract the female vote, political parties spoke the language of equality and encouraged some women to stand as candidates, but their idea of equality was limited and the women they supported often found themselves contesting unwinnable seats. Nonetheless some progress was made. Although the women appointed to the City Council after 1918 tended at first to be like Eleanor Rathbone, the one woman to sit on Council before the war, they were gradually joined by a number of women from less privileged backgrounds. The process by which the 'lady elect' gave way to the 'ordinary' political woman owed much to the growing strength of the Labour Party, especially after 1929, but the other main parties also played their part. Although women councillors remained a small minority on Council during the inter-war period, this minority was not as small as it had been before 1918 and now included women

⁴ LRO/365WOM: Liverpool Women Police Propaganda Committee Collection/17/1: cutting, letter from W. H. Young to local press (2 July 1927).

from a broader social range. For the majority of women who sought public activity of a political nature, however, the local political association continued to offer the greatest potential between the wars. Though these associations are easily perceived as the rosette-making support brigade for the 'main' party, their importance as venues for the politicisation of the 'ordinary' woman, and the potential they offered for women's collective action, should not be underestimated.

Between the wars women joined men in many aspects of public life, and some even competed with them for political and civic roles. The arrival of the 'public woman' in the political forum highlighted unresolved issues which continued to surround women's appropriate role after the First World War. The press, the public, commentators, politicians, and sometimes women themselves, often struggled to find a common and appropriate language to use in connection with public woman, and to adjust to the idea that roles in public life were appropriate for women. Even some of the influential figures who openly supported women's involvement in public life continued to perpetuate traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. There is no better example of this than a piece by Stanley Salvidge for *Good Housekeeping*, on the appointment of Margaret Beavan as the city's first woman Mayor in 1927. 'If all you know of Liverpool is that it is a place of great docks and tremendous business undertakings', he wrote, 'you naturally conclude that the woman who reigns as its Civic Chief must be a large, imposing, masculine type of female, with very little in common with her own sex. The truth is quite otherwise.'⁵ In an era when notions of appropriate femininity and masculinity were being debated and transformed, publicly active women like the diminutive Margaret Beavan presented a reassuring image to some observers. Indeed, as we have seen, the Conservative party attempted to exploit Beavan's popularity as a child welfare pioneer and her feminine vulnerability to try to retain control of the Everton constituency in 1929. The fact that her campaign was a disaster, however, shows that these things counted for little with her political opponents and with the majority of the Everton electorate. The emphasis placed by Beavan's Conservative supporters on her popularity, femininity, and on the need for chivalry in dealing with her, the hostility of the Labour Party to the Conservative attempts to exploit these ideas, and the violence Beavan actually encountered from sections of the voters, demonstrate that there was no consensus regarding appropriate responses to women who entered the sphere of electoral politics. In the end, despite her popularity, the 'little mother of Liverpool' was treated by her opponents as if she were an 'ordinary' candidate.

The political rough and tumble that Beavan experienced in 1929 would have been grist to Bessie Braddock's mill. In contrast to Beavan she was a politically active woman who

⁵ Stanley Salvidge, 'Liverpool's Woman Lord Mayor', *Good Housekeeping*, February 1928, pp.60-61.

refused (in some respects) to conform to traditional expectations of women's appropriate behaviour. Whereas Beavan's political career was rooted in the past and strongly coloured by an emphasis on her 'femininity' and her contribution to welfare work, Braddock's career openly challenged femininity in public. She portrayed herself as a fighter who could speak to dockers in their own language. Unlike several of her fellow women councillors, she was extremely vocal, even aggressive, during sessions of the City Council. In some ways, however, she was a conformist. She conformed, through her actions and words, to the idea that politics was a masculine domain, and, privately, she conformed to traditional notions about the domestic role of women. Together, the careers of Braddock and Margaret Beavan shed considerable light on the involvement of women in politics between the wars, and the responses which their involvement evoked.

The responses which the changing role of women inspired can also be witnessed in debates which featured in the local press at this time. Journalists and readers alike posed questions such as should married women work?; has the women's aim at a new era been a failure?; is chivalry really compatible with equal roles?; and should men push prams?⁶ There is even some evidence that active women, of whatever variety, were readily associated with suffragettes in the minds of some people. A certain Mrs Brown, a member of Liverpool WCA, remembered that during a WCA formal dinner held at 'the Bear's Paw', to which the Liverpool MPs had been invited, she overheard 'the cloakroom attendant saying "these are a lot of suffragettes"'; and this, she felt, was 'how many people regarded us'.⁷ Contrary to prejudicial views like those of the cloakroom attendant, the women who were active in public life in Liverpool between the wars, like those dining at the Bear's Paw, simply wanted to be allowed to participate in society as equal citizens. A recurrent theme of their campaigns was the emphasis they placed upon the unique role which women could play in post-war society. For them, the concepts of femininity and domesticity were not in themselves obstacles to playing an equal role in public life (though for many women the practical implications of these ideas could well be); as Sandra Stanley Holton points out, 'accepting gender differentiation is not the same as accepting the hierarchical ordering of the sexes'.⁸ The presentation of domesticity and femininity as restraining forces may stem, to some extent, from modern perceptions of them as such. In order to learn more about women's lives between the wars, it is necessary to look more closely at how these women addressed the bridging of their public and private roles. This study has shown that many of the active women of inter-war Liverpool embraced, or at least accepted, their domestic role. One of Lilian Mary Mott's friends and

⁶ *Liverpool Echo*, 13 October 1928; 11, 25 October 1928; 14 January 1930; 21, 26 July 1933.

⁷ Fawcett Library/ORG/NWC: National Women Citizens' Association Collection/5/NWC/I3/1: *National Women Citizens' Association 1918-1968* (pamphlet) (London: NWCA, n.d.), p.9.

⁸ Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain*

colleagues, Mrs Paget, recalled that Mott undertook her domestic work 'with the same concentration as if it were part of a wrangler's vocation - I can never forget her joy over a successful raised pie made at Birkenhead'.⁹ It may seem a trivial point, but it serves to remind us, as Lori Williamson has already done, that '[o]ur subjects' stories must be told in language which allows them to be placed in their historical contexts; they must not become the vehicle by which we express our own personal present-day angst'.¹⁰ Although domestic responsibilities and being feminine could, of course, impose severe limitations on the role that many women, especially poor women, could play in public life, for some of the women who had the time and money to run a home and participate in the world beyond it, domesticity and femininity were often regarded as helpful to their participation in the public arena. One of the arguments of this thesis is that some of the women who participated in public life believed and argued that women had a special contribution to make to society and 'the common good' by virtue of their distinctive identity, skills, and attributes.

Much early women's history was written during the decades immediately after the so-called second wave of feminism, and it is possible that debates at the time influenced areas of research. Suffrage emerged as one of the most important of these areas, and it is likely that many feminists felt a natural connection with their subjects. In recent years, however, as women have acquired greater freedom to juggle their public and private roles, as feminine skills and qualities have become acknowledged by some as more relevant to the public sphere, and as some prominent women have apparently even begun to celebrate and enjoy domestic roles, so historians have begun to develop new interpretations of the activities undertaken by women in the early twentieth century.¹¹ These women should be studied and assessed according to their own attitudes and goals, and within the context of their own time and lives, rather than according to modern standards and expectations. As Williamson notes, '[e]mphasising female repression ensures the perpetuation of the "them-versus-us" dialectic which has characterised much feminist scholarship in the past'.¹² The significance of a wealth of women's activity has been in danger of being overlooked simply because it may conflict with current notions of feminism. Some of this activity has been examined in this study. It

1909-1918 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.13.

⁹ Quoted by C. F. Mott, *Lilian Mary Mott: A Memoir By Her Husband* (Privately published, 1956), p.137.

¹⁰ Lori Williamson, 'Women's History and Biography', *Gender and History*, 11 (2) (1999), 379-84 (p.380).

¹¹ Witness Nigella Lawson's forthcoming book *How to be a Domestic Goddess* (Chatto and Windus). See also E. Jane Dickson, 'Playing House', *Red*, August 2000, pp.20-24; Margaret Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997); Caitriona Beaumont, 'Citizens Not Feminists: The Boundary Negotiated Between Citizenship and Feminism by Mainstream Women's organisations in England, 1928-1939', *Women's History Review*, 9 (2) (2000), 411-29.

¹² Williamson, 'Women's History', p.381.

shows that women continued to work in a variety of areas and made important progress between the wars. The intensity of this work and the degree of their success varied. At times, women's leaders expressed frustration at the barriers which women faced (as in the police campaign), at the lack of progress, and at women's own weak commitment to making progress (as in the realm of public representation); and a number of their objectives were not realised. Nevertheless, significant advances were made, and it is to be hoped that this study will contribute towards the re-assessment both of these advances and of the period in which they were made. It has argued that in the history of the women's movement the inter-war years should be regarded as a time of consolidation, exploration, and widening participation, rather than as a drab period which compares poorly with the excitement of the suffrage era.

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