

# *Women's History* **MAGAZINE**

**ISSUE 51, AUTUMN 2005**  
**ISSN 1476-6760**

*Themed issue: Caste, Class and Race*

*Priyadarshini Vijaisri on*  
*The Outcaste Sacred Prostitute in Colonial India*

*Jan Chivers on*  
*The Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital, 1816-1824*

*Isobel Reid on*  
*The Case of Women in Colonial Malawi, 1875-c 1927*



***PLUS:***

*Seven Book Reviews*

*Essay & Book Prize Awards*

*Conference Report/Notices/  
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*Steering Committee News*

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15<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Women's History Network

# **THINKING WOMEN**

## **Education, Culture and Society**

1 - 3 September 2006, Collingwood College,  
University of Durham



## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

Papers are welcomed on the following themes:

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Please submit a 200-word synopsis by 1 March (1st call) or 1 June (2nd & final call) 2006 to  
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## Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn 2005 issue of Women's History Magazine. This issue sees the addition of two new, regular features which we hope will be useful to members. As part of our initiative to work more closely with the Women's Library, we are pleased to carry our first *News from the Women's Library* column where you will find details of new collections, catalogue developments, exhibitions and other issues of importance to researchers in women's history. This has been written by Beverley Kemp, Head of Library Services, who we welcome to our steering committee to liaise between WHN and the Women's Library.

Also within these pages is a new listing of 'Publisher Discounts' available, strictly, to WHN members. We have offers available from Boydell & Brewer in this issue, but we hope to negotiate offers from other publishers too. These deals can also be accessed via the web, [www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org), from where you can organise online ordering. Keep an eye on the web - future offers will be posted there as well as appearing in the Spring magazine.

Our theme this Autumn is 'Caste, Class and Race' with three articles which, although spanning the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries and crossing three continents, share a desire to break away from stereotype and challenge existing historical narratives. Of course, Women's History was founded (in part) on finding groups of women 'hidden from history' and telling the story from their perspective — in so doing changing the plot dramatically. This issue, our contributors carry on this tradition with analytical precision and present accounts which are both moving and surprising.

In her search for the 'Outcaste Sacred Prostitute', Priyadarshini Vijaisri demonstrates the way in which certain identities are privileged by post-colonial societies seeking to reclaim their past and write their own 'history'. She relates the experiences of outcaste prostitutes — a group whose perspective has been largely ignored — and illustrates how their histories were intricately linked to Hindu religious beliefs, the feudal economic system, and the preferences of the 'Western gaze'. In her article on the Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital, Jan Chivers demonstrates again the ambivalence of prostitutes as a category, and echoes the ways in which religion and economics can conspire to thwart both the intentions of philanthropists and the women they seek to help. This latter theme is also a strong thread for our third contributor, Isobel Reid. Focusing on missionary activity in colonial Malawi, Reid recounts the parlous effects on women when religious ideas are superimposed upon an existing culture and, like Vijaisri, reveals the Western gaze to be both partial and myopic. For many women in colonial Malawi, the advent of Christianity

meant the replacement of one kind of oppression by another.

As any of you who attended our Conference in Southampton in September will know, the event was a resounding success — many thanks and congratulations to our hard-working organiser, Anne Anderson. Please read the conference report in this issue and visit the web ([www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)) for pictures and news. We are excited to announce that Conference 2006 will be held at the University of Durham with the theme 'Thinking Women: Education, Culture and Society'. The Call for Papers is opposite — our organisers Sarah Aiston, Maureen Meikle and Jean Spence are waiting to receive your abstracts. Please do not delay in making your plans — Durham is sure to prove popular (we hope!) and we may not be able to accommodate last minute delegates as we usually strive to do.

Autumn, and our AGM, is often a time of personnel changes. We are sad to lose Nicola Phillips (Nikki Pullin) from the editorial team — we wish her the best of luck and thank her for all her hard work. New to the team (although both long-standing WHN members!) are Gerry Holloway and Mary Joannou. Gerry is taking over the management of notices and advertising; Mary is taking on the role of committee liaison. Welcome both!

Gerry Holloway, Mary Joannou, Claire Jones, Jane Potter & Debbi Simonton.

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**Front cover:** depiction of the caste-Hindu myth of Renuka/Yellamma; see 'In Search of the Outcaste Sacred Prostitute in Colonial India', page 4.

# In Search of the Outcaste Sacred Prostitute in Colonial India

**Priyadarshini Vijaisri**

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In postcolonial societies history assumes a crucial role, not only in the retrieval of the past, but also in constructing the identities that are cast in the making of the nation. In India, historical enterprise encapsulates this crisis in its selective appropriation of the past and, as a result, people without 'histories' continue to be social and political outcastes.<sup>1</sup> Along with outcastes, groups of women, especially outcaste sacred prostitutes, are relegated to beyond the purview of Indian historiography. During the colonial period, the custom of sacred prostitution was a pervasive religious tradition drawing women from distinct caste and outcaste groups. In the Kannada and Telugu speaking regions in the southern part of the country, there are multiple patterns of sacred prostitution perceptible and these provide an entry point for delineating the ways in which Hindu religious systems, and the feudal economy, subject women and reproduce varied feminine identities. In this way, the custom enables an exploration of pluralistic cultural consciousness, allowing a deconstruction of the monolithic identity of the outcaste sacred prostitute which questions the stereotypical caste identities used to control outcaste sexuality.

## Invisible groups in historiography

Existing historical perspectives on women are intertwined with the social reform and anti-imperial movements that swept through Indian society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; hence the dominant historical perspectives are centered around 'upper' caste Hindu women. Outcaste women are invisible in this narrative and this reveals the crisis in Indian historiography. Challenging this historical model requires evolving new theoretical frameworks, especially since the 'choice' of the past is linked to the conflicting interests of today. Outcastes, in different historiographical traditions, are invariably scripted a dubious identity and an unworthy past. The nationalist and neo-Marxists, in a censorious note, categorize outcastes as 'parochial' and 'divisive', preferring to ignore them and invoke instead the mass identity of the 'national' movement.<sup>2</sup> As a result, outcastes are marginalized. The Cambridge school does provide a

critique against the nationalist narrative yet, paradigmatically, it perceives change from above and rarely engages with cultures at the periphery. Breaking away from this, and critiquing it as elitist, the Subaltern school provides an ideological and analytical framework with potential to recover the outcastes from being irrevocably lost to history.<sup>3</sup> However this framework, built on fixed categories of analysis and local perspectives, is yet to provide a sustained and substantial critique of the nationalist metanarrative. As a consequence of these failures, outcastes continue to be people without a legitimate historical tradition, despite the work of western historians<sup>4</sup> and sociologists,<sup>5</sup> and recent initiatives by outcastes themselves.<sup>6</sup>

This crisis in historiography reflects the anxiety of outcaste consciousness itself. As well as a lack of critical anti-caste ideology, there is apathy towards reconstructing the outcaste cultural identity and a disjunction between rural and urban outcaste politics which has contributed to this state of affairs. Reflecting on similar concerns in the African postcolonial context, Mamadou Diouf suggests:

The fundamental question faced by this generation was: which past? This question leads to a series of others that continue to haunt the historical enterprise in Africa, namely the rules and procedures of narration, the status and identity of its producers, the rule of truth that grounds the adhesion to narrative, and especially the relations between an institutionalized, national and academic history and the disparate memories of communities and individuals that are, today, the manifestations of the existence of a plural consciousness of history.<sup>7</sup>

History based on strictly archival sources provides little to recover the outcaste historical experience as, within the context of colonialism, many sources have been destroyed in accidents or lost to the interplay of personal prejudice.<sup>8</sup> Efforts at recovering outcaste experiences of colonialism and the 'national' movements have lacked serious initiative and there is a need for outcastes to explore history from their own perspectives. In this task, a cultural approach promises most in developing a 'decolonized' theory that is rooted in the objective realities of colonialism and so democratizes the historical space. The postcolonial African response to reconstructing history points to a range of sources that can be utilized to construct the history of those at the periphery. Promising sources, including memory and oral history, myths, diaries and missionary sources, so often looked upon with suspicion, are yet to be tapped.<sup>9</sup>



The nineteenth century witnessed the evolution of the idea of the native woman as exotic 'Oriental' within a culture which, involving *sutti*, female infanticide and child marriage, evoked horror. However, it was the custom of sacred prostitution that was construed as symptomatic of the sexual pathology of native inhabitants. Dispersion of knowledge about the Orient was determined by what was significant for the western gaze and this was to have implications for the emerging field of Indology and Asian Studies. The custom of dedicating girls to south Indian temples/deities, reported by the official ethnographers and missionaries, was fitted into contemporary evolutionist frameworks.<sup>10</sup> This focus can be linked to the colonial fetish for customs that could be legitimized as 'high' caste Hindu culture. The custom of sacred prostitution, as epitomized in the temple tradition, was, in colonial epistemology, the standard model that could be used politically without provoking allegations of misrepresentation. Thus the sacred prostitute, rendered simply in early accounts as 'nautch' girl, was represented as a classical model and identified with the Tamil temple tradition of southern India.<sup>11</sup> Within this discourse, evidence of 'low caste' or 'vulgar' sacred prostitutes failed to evoke interest and was seen as an aberration or subsumed as popular Hinduism.

### Caste and Outcaste Women

Studies on the temple women have generated critical discourse on the nature of the colonial state and the centrality of the feminine to the reconstruction of Hindu cultural identity and politics. However these works rarely acknowledge the patterns embedded in local memory, despite constant media reports on continued dedications and the visibility of outcaste sacred prostitutes.<sup>12</sup> Reconstructing the complex identity of the outcaste sacred prostitute remains beyond reach. However the custom of sacred prostitution is intricately linked to the construction of cultural identity and sexuality and the institution encompasses women from various cultural and religious groups. Any model for understanding the fundamental character of the custom must explain the manner in which notions of auspiciousness and sacral sexuality<sup>13</sup> are strategically attributed to distinct cultural identities in caste society. Sacred prostitution offers immense scope for broader hypothetical deductions on caste, religion, sexuality and the economy. It is fundamental to note that women, like men, are subject to hierarchy. While some women gain specific caste privileges, others at the bottom are deprived of basic rights. Caste as an ideology empowers certain women to the disadvantage of others. Thus within rigid caste and patriarchal society the caste status of women can itself be seen as substituting for the loss of autonomy or the secondary status attributed to women within the family and the community. The caste-Hindu woman wields

power over other groups lower in the hierarchy, both male and female.<sup>14</sup>

However, patriarchy is critical in that it is central to the ideology of dominance; dominant groups not only ensure rigid control of feminine sexuality but also control the sexuality of subordinate groups. Thus woman is central to the ideology of power.<sup>15</sup> Controlling the sexuality of outcaste women is strategic to consolidating the dominance of the caste Hindu order. The outcaste male is essentially rendered powerless.<sup>16</sup> This helps to explain why sexual violence is so central to conflict, as is manifested in the increasing violence against rural landless labourers by the dominant landed groups. Across the country any form of disturbance or conflict renders women of the oppressed communities vulnerable. Stripping and parading women naked, as a mark of reprobation, is the most common phenomenon next to rape. Symbolic reprisals via violations of femininity are linked with the reproduction of humiliation and powerlessness.<sup>17</sup>

The material base of patriarchy and feudal order is the caste system, which legitimizes the subordination of specific communities and the appropriation of surplus to certain privileged groups. Thus within the caste economy control of labour entails continuous surveillance of the private and the cultural space of productive communities. The outcaste household is tuned to reproduce and generate a potential exchange value surplus in the form of labour for the landlord. This is institutionalized by customs like *Paleru* (child labour) or *Vetti chakari* (bonded labour).<sup>18</sup> In this case the children (more than the women) exist as a reserve force of labour. As a consequence, the control of outcaste women's sexuality is necessary to the Hindu feudal economy. The female, male and household, are thus modeled to recreate the hegemonic identity of the caste Hindu order. This process is linked to the aggressive sexual identity of the caste Hindu male whereby the authority of the lord is judged by the number of concubines he possesses.

In this way, caste ideology fixes both sexes to specific spaces and regulates intra- and inter-caste gender relations. In caste societies the honour and prestige of the family are centered around female sexuality. Violations of caste Hindu femininity are construed as tantamount to acts of dishonour and rebellion against the Hindu patriarchy and authority. But control of bodies/sexuality serves a dual purpose. It also renders possible the creation of the ideal of the pure and chaste caste-Hindu woman, facilitating control of her sexuality and the suppression of her erotic identity.<sup>19</sup> This sanctified ideal can then be opposed to the

outcaste woman, characterized by contrast as 'loose and immoral'.

### Patterns of sacred prostitution

The impact of sacred prostitution on society during the early colonial period was considerable, especially in the Kannada speaking regions of Bombay, Mysore, the Nizams Dominions of Hyderabad, and the Telugu speaking regions of Madras (for example, the sacred prostitutes identified as the Sule, Sani, Jogati, Jogini, Basavi, Murali, Upasika and Matangi). In each case, the sacred prostitutes differed in their functions/roles, gendered spaces and modes of remuneration.

The Matangi custom was prevalent in Kurnool district<sup>20</sup> and Mysore state.<sup>21</sup> The Kalavanthulu,<sup>22</sup> Bogams<sup>23</sup> and Sanis<sup>24</sup> were interwoven with the religious tradition of the urban centers.<sup>25</sup> During the eighteenth century, the Jogati/ Basavi custom was widespread across the rural areas. According to Abbe Dubois's accounts, the distinct identity of the Basavi was that of 'priestess' - or wife of the gods in the service of Shiva or Vishnu - comprising a 'distinct class' from the 'dancing girls of the temple'. According to him, the common feature that Basavi shared with the dancing girls of the temple was 'moral depravity'.<sup>26</sup> According to popular notions, the Basavi is the feminine form of Basava, a bull, thus meaning a she-bull,<sup>27</sup> a symbol of fertility in Hinduism.<sup>28</sup> They are recognized as 'Lingayat women devotees'.<sup>29</sup> Etymologically, it is argued that the term 'Jogati' is a feminine form of 'Jogi', derived from the Yogi, a renouncer of worldly pleasures and an enlightened person/Yogini.<sup>30</sup>

However, the terms 'Basavi' and 'Jogati' are also symbolic of regional tradition. In Sanskrit, 'vrsan' (bull) is derived from the term 'vrs' (to rain or pour forth). The 'vrsan' (other than meaning a bull) also implies a 'powerful, virile and lustful man' and is applied to suggest that the woman has seed called 'vrsnyam payas', meaning literally 'bull-like or seeds-like milk'.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the Basavi was symbolic of fertility and prosperity. The influence of Shaivism in the development of the custom is suggested by this (phallic) worship, and by the use of the image of the bull, a representation which recurs in Shaiva mythology. However the terms 'Jogati' (in the Kannada speaking regions) and 'Jogini' (in the Telugu speaking regions) preclude a simplistic derivation mentioned above. The term 'Yogini' occurs predominantly in Tantric cosmology, while in Hinduism it merely appears as a semi divine being with little significance. 'Yogini' connotes a 'female force, a deity and a female shamaness' in Tantricism.<sup>32</sup> The terms 'Basavi' and 'Jogati/Jogini', embodying notions of fertility and erotic identity, suggest the infiltration of Tantric ideas into

Hinduism. The Tantric belief in the purity of the impure, Vamachara and other ritual practices, corresponds with Hindu norms of purity/pollution and serves to reinforce caste equations. The emergent ritual specialist is thus attributed a distinct identity with a marked difference from the Sule/Sani and the Matangi. The nude ritual practices and sex rites performed by these outcaste sacred prostitutes, in addition to sexual services to men, become intelligible within this framework.<sup>33</sup>

### Regional tradition and myth

The Jogati/Basavi custom illustrates the processes of cultural hegemony by caste Hindu groups, by which discrete regional outcaste groups are drawn into the larger fold. In this context, Anncharlott Eschmann's ideas on the development of regional tradition based on the Hinduisation of non-Hindu tribal beliefs and rituals, is particularly relevant.<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, increasing competition among religious sects to popularize their ideology received an impetus with the emergence of regional tradition. Perhaps this is best illustrated in the branding ceremony of the outcaste sacred prostitutes. In the princely State of Mysore, the Shaiva Basavis had the image of a phallus branded on their thighs, while those dedicated to Vishnu bore the image of the garuda on the right breast.<sup>35</sup> Branding was a popular practice and served as a means to ensure the allegiance of the outcaste prostitutes and to maximize popularity of the rival sects. The custom received an impetus with the growing popularity of Virashaivism that eventually established a dominant influence in the region. (Established around the twelfth century, Virashaivism evolved as a spiritual fraternity with a radical vision different to the orthodox religious sects; within this movement the outcaste communities were incorporated with ritual roles.)<sup>36</sup>

It is through this process of 'regional tradition' that the esoteric form of Tantricism (with significant variation) becomes directly relevant to the majority of caste and outcaste groups connecting village India to the semi-urban regions. Such customs exercised a pervasive influence in certain geographic areas and developed structures of interaction peculiar to popular regional traditions, directly integrating various communities.<sup>37</sup> A characteristic feature of the regional tradition is the Hinduisation of certain outcaste goddesses within the Hindu pantheon. This lends sanction to the religious incorporation of outcaste women within the authority of the temple structure. Consequently, the outcaste goddess Yellamma, as Renuka, becomes an acceptable Hindu goddess, so also Dymavva and Durgavva.<sup>38</sup> These goddesses assume multiple identities, though often the identity is construed as being ambivalent. Such shifts do not radically transform the religious system of the outcaste communities,<sup>39</sup> except at specific regional loci as mentioned above. Consequently, the outcastes continue to

preserve their own pantheon of goddesses, ritual practices and mythical cosmogony. This specificity enables the persistence of distinct cultural identity within the caste complex, though the values are occasionally appropriated and interpreted within the Hindu tradition. The hegemonising potential of Hinduism is thus found in this quality of 'ambiguity' - potentially an assortment of conflicting values. Thus Hinduism could be appropriated by different sectarian groups who recast it, within the hierarchical cosmogony, according to their own needs.

The most conspicuous changes are perceptible in the myths centering around the most popular outcaste goddess, Matangi or Yellamma, and in relation to the caste-Hindu divinities of lesser significance, for example Renuka and Jamadagni. Although the myths vary according to region, they invariably legitimize and sanction the custom of dedication in conformity to the dominant norms. In this context, the incorporation of the outcastes at the ideological and operational level is translated through femininity. Outcaste male identity does not undergo any transformation within the mythical cosmology. The incorporation of outcaste women, and subsequent sexual access to them, is endowed with religious sanctions at this mythic level. Narratives, such as the one recounted below, possess themes that recur throughout caste and outcaste mythology.

Princess Renuka<sup>40</sup> and Rishi Jamadagni<sup>41</sup> are married in a swayamvara<sup>42</sup> and live in a hermitage on the banks of the river Malaprabha. They beget five sons of whom the youngest is Parashuram.<sup>43</sup> Renuka renounces worldly pleasures in devout service to her husband. Due to her chastity and purity, she gains miraculous powers (shakti) which are symbolized by the unique manner in which she fetches water from the river — she has the ability to shape a pot from sand and carry it over her *cobra simbi* (a coil to balance the pot over the head). Once she sees the reflection of a gandharva couple engaging in a sensuous act and is disturbed (aroused?).<sup>44</sup> On experiencing worldly temptations, Renuka loses her *shakti* and fails to carry water to the hermitage. Jamadagni, with his power, visualizes this incident with acute displeasure. Enraged, he commands his son Parashuram to kill Renuka. Renuka has a female servant, a Matangi (here an outcaste goddess). On orders to kill his mother, Parashuram kills both this maidservant and his mother. Impressed by his son's obedience, Jamadagni offers him a reward/favour. Parashuram requests that his mother be restored to life.<sup>45</sup> Due to darkness, the heads of Renuka and Matangi are exchanged and, as a result, Matangi also becomes respected as a goddess<sup>46</sup> due to this physical interchange. In another version, Parashuram fails to locate the slain head of Renuka and brings instead the head of a Mang woman.<sup>47</sup> But Jamadagni, by his miraculous power, is able to reinstate Renuka's lost head. Parashuram places the head of the slain woman on the hill fort of Mahur and



Illustration depicting the caste-Hindu myth, commonly sold at the Renuka Yellamma Temple at Soundatti

declares that all devotees of Renuka should pay respects to Matangi also.<sup>48</sup> Similar versions of this myth prevail in other regions.

These stories provide an example of a caste-Hindu hegemonizing model in the region. The caste identity of divine actors is emphasized throughout the myth and, by seeking to assign and legitimize the status of the outcaste goddess within the cosmology of Hinduism, the myth incorporates outcaste women by symbolically appropriating the Matangi (the outcaste goddess) and endowing her status within the Hindu pantheon.<sup>49</sup> The myth is crucial for the diverse and conflicting ideas it conveys across discrete caste and outcaste groups. The first part of the myth, central to caste-Hindu mythology, deploys notions of chastity and the miraculous powers of the chaste wife, with a suppressed erotic identity, valorizing the fertile identity of the goddess who bears five sons. The idea of *pativrata dharma* (sacred law of marital fidelity) is coded within the myth and provides a model for filial values and relations. Renuka symbolizes wifely purity transcribed onto the notion of mental fidelity; transgression of which is violation of *pativrata dharma*, leading to loss of shakti and filial status within the family. However, the dichotomy is apparent, as it is this myth that is also cited in legitimization of the custom of sacred prostitution. One version of the myth has Jamadagni flying into a rage and cursing his wife to lose her bodily charms (through leucoderma or leprosy); in this way leucoderma, interpreted as a divine reproach which could be overcome by dedication to the deity, becomes a rationale for the recruitment of women into the system. These myths are exclusively centered around outcaste women. The





Contemporary images of the Jogati/Basavi

exclusion of outcaste men is explained (and explains) the undesirable role of the outcaste male.

### Initiation Rites

Ceremonies of initiation varied according to the differing functions or roles of the 'dedicated' women. The initiation ceremony of the Matangi was designed to produce feelings of awe and invest her with authority and divine powers.<sup>50</sup> The Sani/Sule was initiated in accordance with the religious ideology of the temple to which she was dedicated. The ceremony resembled a south Indian Brahminical marriage.<sup>51</sup> The initiation rites and ceremonies of women into ritual status of *Jogati* and *Basavi* vary from those of both the *Matangi* and the *Devadasi* with a dedication ceremony bereft of any brahmanical rites. The initiation ceremony varies from simple garlanding to the performance of rituals supervised by priests. In the southern Maratha country, an initiation ceremony was reported as follows:

The child is taken to the temple of these deities to the strain of music. The temple ministrant asks the child to stand on a wooden board on a heap of rice in front of the deity and puts into its hand a flat basket of bamboo, tying to its neck the image of the deity. When once this ceremony has been performed, parents abandoned their rights to such children.<sup>52</sup>

Fawcett has elaborately described the initiation ceremony of girls into Basavis and Jogins in the southern Maratha country of the Bombay presidency, the Mysore state and the Bellary district of the Madras presidency.<sup>53</sup> The ceremony at Saundatti took place in the pujaris house. The girl was to bathe and purify herself with water from the Mathangi katte (a sort of tank). While the idols of Parashuram and Renuka were

worshipped, the older Jogatis/Basavis tied beads around her neck. Then the dedicated girl was expected to perform the 'udige' — clothe herself in ritual wear/dress. The 'udige' was of three types, the 'bevina udige' (neem wear), 'vastra udige' (cloth wear) and the 'digambara udige' (nude).<sup>54</sup> However the most common procedure was simple garlanding or tying of tali in front of the village temple (or any idol) followed by a feast. What is pertinent in this context is that the girls could be dedicated to any god and goddess ranging from Hanuman, Parashuram and Vishnu, to Shiva and the goddess Renuka, Yellamma or Dyammava, along with other village goddesses.

### The sexual dimension

The term sacred prostitution, though a narrow term, is relevant as it connotes an encompassing sphere of custom characterized by intricate relationships between sex, ritual and the belief system across various regional traditions. Secondly, it implies a certain model of sexual behavior sanctioned by tradition; this sexual behaviour, beyond the marital sphere, is condoned by members of various communities within the caste complex, both from those from which women were drawn, and those having access to such women. The custom included a range of sexual relationships, from long-term ties of concubinage to temporary relationships of simply a night to a few days. One of the crucial life cycle ceremonies leading to initiation as a sacred prostitute was a puberty rite during which sexual relations with caste Hindu men were ritualized and favours given to the highest bidder or dominant landlord. While the women in the temples of the urban areas were often mistresses and concubines of the elite, in the village the outcaste sacred prostitute was sexually available to the whole community.

### Functions

The functional role of the sacred prostitute constituted an alternative sphere of activity; being embodiments of auspiciousness, they were required to perform ritual duties during private domestic ceremonies and specialized rituals within the temple. The Matangi's function was to preside at all the purificatory ceremonies and she played a central role in the religious life of the Madiga community. She embodied the primitive role of priestess and divine intermediary and no authority constrained her activities.<sup>55</sup> The functions of the women within the temple, for example the Sani, were diversified and hierarchical.<sup>56</sup> Her activities ranged from cleaning the temple to highly specialized ritualistic services.<sup>57</sup> The Jogatis and Basavis were not centrally connected to temple ritual and thus acted at the periphery of the temple tradition. The access of the Jogati and Basavis to the sacred space was greatly constrained and, usually, she was not tied to any temple.<sup>58</sup> Her sacral role borrows





'Nineteenth century Matangi (centre) and assistants', from E.R.Clough, 1899.

ritual aspects from both the Mathangi and Sule/Sani - for example, her ability to become 'possessed' and prophesy fate/natural events echoes the awesome role of the Matangi. As the Jogatis were embodiments of auspiciousness, their presence during festive gatherings was significant ritually.<sup>59</sup> During marriage ceremonies, they tied beads of the *mangalasutra* to ensure the bride a long life of *sumangali*, plus they officiated at all ritual ceremonies in the outcaste community<sup>60</sup> and danced during religious and funeral processions.<sup>61</sup> They were also expected to perform menial services like sweeping the temple premises. One of the crucial functions they performed was 'dharma prachara', preaching religious ideas by singing and dancing. Musical instruments associated with them are the *chaudiki* and the *tambura*.<sup>62</sup> Another ritual specifically performed during initiation and on festive occasions was 'Bettala Seve' (nude worship).<sup>63</sup> This took place on the Yellamma hill, which attracted thousands of pilgrims and was popular throughout the southern Maratha country.<sup>64</sup> These women frequently went on pilgrimage to seek the blessing of the goddess, they also supervised the *modus operandi* of dedication and ensured the continued recruitment of young girls — all of which points to the extremely potent role they held in the perpetuation of a regional tradition of outcaste prostitution.<sup>65</sup>

The Matangi was the supreme authority: a ritual, spiritual and ultimate intermediary between divinities and mortals. She exercised a pervading influence and power over the religious sphere as well as the temporal space. The Sule/Sani or temple women were structured within a rigid hierarchal structure, their spatial and ritualistic access to the divinity being mediated by the priest. Their status as the wives of the gods was constrained by their caste identity. The Basavi's access to the sacred space was greatly restrained too, as she was not generally connected to any temple.

## Remuneration

There is no uniformity perceptible in the way privileges were endowed. Public recognition, in the form of honours, differed with the identity of the sacred prostitutes, especially their caste identity. The Matangi received offerings from her devotees for her divine functions.<sup>66</sup> Apart from that, it is mentioned that 'there are more permanent inam (rent free) lands belonging to this shrine, and there is always a Madiga 'Vestal Virgin' known as Matangi, who is the high priestess or rather embodied representative of the Brahmin Chuckler goddess and who enjoy the fruits of the imams'.<sup>67</sup> The Sani/Sule was the most privileged category of sacred prostitute, frequently receiving different kinds of grants. The local feudatories, who comprised the dominant castes along with royalty and the merchant guilds, usually made the grants in addition to free gifts of land and money.<sup>68</sup> They were also provided with free living quarters within or adjacent to the temple establishment.<sup>69</sup> It is significant to note that these Sule, Sanis and Kalavanthulu often made generous donations to the temples themselves and undertook the reconstruction of temples and lakes.

The concept of *Udara Nirvahanagagi* encapsulates the idea of remuneration to the Jogati/Jogini and the Basvisi. According to *Udara Nirvahanagagi*, the Jogatis are to gain material assistance/beg/collect offerings solely to satiate hunger and not to accumulate.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, one of the ritual components of the initiation ceremony exhorts this idea: the *hadagali* or the *gopalam* (a basket to beg) forms an important part of the ritual paraphernalia. Fawcett notes that, during the ceremony of dedication, 'She is given by way of insignia a cane as a wand carried in the right hand and a *gopthe alam* or begging basket, which is slung on the left arm'.<sup>71</sup> The *gopalam* thus legitimized the sacrosanct women's share of offering from the devotees and villagers for the various ritual and sexual services. Thus they earned their livelihood by begging in the name of Yellamma, Amba or other gods/goddess<sup>72</sup> and begging became a main source of income with occasional offerings of alms and clothes by the patrons and the devotees.<sup>73</sup> They received offerings for officiating on ritual occasions which varied according to the economic status of the devotees.<sup>74</sup> To meet ritual expenses on certain festive days and ceremonies, outcaste prostitutes were dependent on caste Hindus. Their status as concubines ensured maintenance for a certain period.<sup>75</sup> Edgar Thurston notes that 'she usually lives faithfully with one man, who allows her a fixed sum weekly for her maintenance, and a fixed quantity of new raiment annually, and she works for her family as hard as any other women'.<sup>76</sup>

Remuneration to the Basavi or Jogati, who are 'religious beggars', can be related to local modes of paying outcasts and the traditional 'rights' of outcaste village servants who were endowed with the right of begging/offering. Begging is a traditional right of the outcaste communities on religious occasions in return for their services throughout the year.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

During the later colonial period, sacred prostitution assumed new dimensions owing to changes in social and religious practices resulting from legal measures initiated by the state to curb the custom. The immense poverty of the drought stricken regions had caused a great exodus of the Jogatis and the Basavis from rural areas to the metropolis during the 1930s and 1940s. This led to the emergence of a specific category of 'bazaar basavis' who practised prostitution in the towns.

The custom of sacred prostitution beleaguered the colonial authorities for a considerable period of time. During the late nineteenth century, the colonized subjects sought to revitalize and reconstruct nativist tradition. In reconstructing the identity of the ideal Hindu women, deviant models that had become a cultural embarrassment had to be recast. In seeking to explain the prevalence of such customs within the outcaste communities, the rationale was coded in the cultural deviance of the outcaste, the remnants of primitive practices, the nature of outcaste gender relations, and the nature of the outcaste household itself.

However the existing framework continues to obfuscate the identity of the outcaste sacred prostitutes and their historical experience. The outcaste sacred prostitutes' linkages with the cantonments areas, their exodus to the metropolis as sex workers, encounters with the colonial state, conflicts within household and community, and the reconfiguration of cultural identities, are some of the issues that await historical documentation. Historians are yet to recognize the potential of these sites in reorienting their theoretical and methodical concerns. The Orientalist imagery, the colonial/official perspective, and caste-Hindu and outcaste ideology, are yet to be interwoven to provide an alternative model of sacred prostitution. Perhaps only such a holistic perspective will be able to reveal the material reality of caste politics and nationalism in the last three decades of colonial rule.

**Acknowledgements:** The author is indebted to Professors K.N. Panikkar and S. Bhattacharya for their critical comments; thanks too to the International Institute for Asian Studies, for giving an opportunity to

rework earlier ideas during March and May 2005 in Leiden.

## Notes

1. Although the government abolished untouchability, reports reveal that as late as 1955 it continued to be practised, at least in rural parts of the country. For instance in Andhra Pradesh, out of twenty-three districts, in nine districts "untouchables" were not allowed to walk with footwear, six districts did not allow 'untouchables' to ride a bicycle in the main streets, and in four districts a 'two glass system' was practised in the coffee houses/hotels. In Karnataka, until recently, interaction between different castes was governed by caste norms of purity and pollution.
2. Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1984). See also Bipin Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence* (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989).
3. Ranajit Guha et.al, eds., *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: OUP, 1982 - 2001). For a critical reading of the subaltern studies see Shahid Amin, *Alternative Histories: A view from India* (Calcutta: Center for Studies in Social Science, 2002).
4. Eleanor Zelliot, an American historian, has been engaged since the early 1960s in reconstructing various aspects of outcaste lives and has laid a framework to construct outcaste identity within a broader context. For details see Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchables to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, (Delhi: Manohar, 1996).
5. Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (Delhi: Sage, 1994). Her works have boosted critical studies by providing a theoretical basis to perceive transitions within the colonial context in which caste is the central category of analysis.
6. Chinna Rao Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad 1900-1950* (New Delhi: Kanishka, 2003). There are a number of dissertations on local outcaste movements and leaders; however they fail to locate these thematic concerns within a broader framework and critically engage with mainstream discourse.
7. Mamadou Diouf, 'Historians and Histories: What for? African Historiography Between the State and the Communities', lecture at the Young Historians' Workshop on Social History, held at Dakar, Senegal, (3 October – 5 November, 1999). A French version of this paper, 'Des Historiens et des Histoires pourquoi faire? L'histoire Africaine entre l'Etat et les communautés', was published in *The Canadian Journal of African Studies* (34, 2, 2000).
8. The private papers and collections of renowned outcaste poet Kusuma Dharmanna were destroyed in an accidental fire.
9. Consciousness amongst outcaste women, involving a critique of patriarchy and the caste system, has emerged in recent years. See P.G. Jogdand, ed., *Dalit Women: Issues and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing, 1995).

10. James Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris* (London: Macmillan, 1907); Robert Briffault, *The Mothers: A Study of Origins of Sentiments and Institutions*, 3 Vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927).

11. J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967), 407 (first published 1914).

12. However sociologists and anthropologists have provided detailed case studies on the outcaste sacred prostitute in the contemporary context of caste dynamics and flesh trade. For details see Jogan Shankar, *Devadasi Cult: A Sociological Analysis* (Delhi: Asish Publishing, 1990); K.C. Tarachand, *Devadasi Custom: Rural Social Structure and Flesh Market* (New Delhi: Reliance Publishing, 1992); Mary Rita Rozario, *Broken Lives: Dalit Women and Girls in Prostitution* (Tumkur: Ambedkar Resource Centre, 2000).

13. The sacred prostitute embodies the religious belief of sex as symbolic auspiciousness, with spiritual unions and sexual intercourse as a means of attainment of salvation. In the abundant literary and epigraphic sources of the ancient and medieval period, these women were referred to as *Sule*, *Sani*, *Bhogam* and *Patra*, which when translated into the Indian vernacular imply a prostitute. For details see N.N. Bhattacharya, *History of Tantric Religion (A Historical, Ritualistic and Philosophical Study)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982), and Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (New Delhi: PPH, 1968).

14. Women reinforce ideas of pollution and purity in rituals and daily life; for instance, 'upper' caste Hindu women take care to avert the evil eye of the lower caste women while preparing pickles that are susceptible to pollution, such as menstrual pollution.

15. In the Indian context, the process of Aryanisation was characterized by caste and patriarchic ideology. For details on caste ideology see G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969), (first published 1932); R.S. Sharma, *Shudras in Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1958); Pauline Kolenda, 'The Ideology of Purity', in Dipankar Gupta (ed.), *Social Stratification* (Delhi: OUP, 1992); Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on Caste System* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

16. This is not to suggest male powerlessness as a deviation, but to underscore the logic of this dynamic in a rigid patriarchal and feudal structure.

17. A cursory look at any *Annual Report of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Commission* reveals increasing amounts of sexual violence against outcaste women. For instance, a dispute over land between the dominant landed castes and the landless labourers was followed by a series of massacres in which a case of mutilation was reported in 1998:

Everyone was shot in the chest. I also saw that the panties were torn. One girl was Prabha. She was fifteen years old. She was supposed to go to her husband's house two to three days later. They also cut her breast and shot her in the chest. Another was Manmatiya, also fifteen. They raped her and cut off her breast. The girls were

all naked, and their panties were ripped. They also shot them in the vagina. There were five girls in all. All five were raped. All their breasts were cut off.

For details see Human Rights Watch, *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's 'Untouchables'* (New York, 1999). For many aspects on violence against outcaste women see P.G. Jogdand, ed., *Dalit Women: Issues and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing, 1995), particularly contributions of M. Prabhavathi, Sharmila Rege and Devyani Punalekar; also Kumud Pawde, 'The Position of Dalit Women in Indian Society', and Ruth Manorama, 'Dalit Women: Downtrodden among the Downtrodden', in James Massey, ed., *Indigenous People: Dalits* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998).

18. *Vetti chakari* is bonded labour. It is different from wage labour, as it results mostly from ties of debt to the landlord. The labourer works throughout the year without any specific remuneration and is at the mercy of the landlord. For more information see Chinna Rao Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad 1900- 1950* (New Delhi, Kanishka, 2003).

19. For similar experiences in the racial context see, Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

20. *Manual of the Kurnool District*, 186; A. Madaviah, 'The Matangi', *Christian College Magazine* (XXIII /New Series Vol. V, July 1905-June 1906), 301-3.

21. For details see Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough, *While Sewing Sandals or Tales of a Telugu Pariah Tribe* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899).

22. *Kalavanthulu* is another popular term that, like the Kannada *Patra*, conveys the specific identity of a dancing woman. The *Kalavanthus* or *Kalavanthis* were prevalent in southern Maratha country, but unlike the *Patra* or the Telugu *Kalavanthulu*, these women were not necessarily dedicated although it was their hereditary occupation to dance in temples on festive occasions. For more details see D.C. Graham, *Statistical Reports on the Principality of Kolhapur* (Bombay, 1885).

23. D.F. Carmichael, ed., *Manual of the District of Vizagapatnam* (Madras: Asylum Press, 1869). *Bogam* in generic sense means enjoyment or possession. It also means a kept woman, mistress or concubine, a prostitute, or a royal concubine.

24. Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes in Southern India*, Vol. II (Madras: The Government Press, 1909), 128.

25. These sacred prostitutes can generally be identified as Devadasis. For ritual identity see Marglin Frederique Apffel Marglin, *Wives of the God-King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri* (Delhi: OUP, 1985); Saskia Kersenboom-Story, *Nityasumangali: Devadasi Tradition in South India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987).

26. Jean Antoine Dubois and Henry Beauchamp, eds, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (Simon Publications,



2001) 133.

27. Whitehead, 45; see also Dubois, 133, and Aloka Parashar and Usha Naik, 'Temple Girls of Medieval Karnataka', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (23 (1) 1986), 69.

28. C. Hayavadana Rao, ed., *Mysore Gazetteer*, Vol. 1 (Bangalore: The Government Press, 1929), 181.

29. Campbell, *Dharwar District Gazetteer*.

30. B.R. Patil, 'The Devadasi', 382. See also N.K. Kadedot, 'Yellamma Jogatiyaru Hagu Devadasi Padathi', (Jogatis of Yellamma and the Devadasi custom) (Dharwad: Karnataka University, 1983), 9-10.

31. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Sexual Metaphors and Animal Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), 20-21.

32. N.N. Bhattacharya, *History of Tantric Religion*, 110. He notes that Yogini is identified among other female forces like the Chandali, Dumbara, Savari, Nairamani and Sahajasundari.

33. Ibid., 136. All women belonging to the lower castes are regarded in the tantras as naturally initiated. See also H.H. Wilson, *Religion of the Hindus*, 256; Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (New York: CUP, 1996), 191.

34. Anncharlott Eschmann, 'Hinduisation of Tribal Deities in Orissa: The Sakta and Saiva Typology', in Anne Charlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke and Gayacharan Tripathi, eds, *The Cult of Jagannadha and Regional Tradition of Oris* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), 82-83.

35. For details see Edgar Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* (New Delhi: Cosmos, 1994); B.R. Patil, 'The Devadasis', in N.K. Kadedot, *Yellamma Devadasiyaru Hagu Devadasi Padhathi*.

36. Jan Peter Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics: On the Social Aspects of Virashaivism* (Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1991). He terms the outcaste groups influenced by Virashaivism as 'Affiliated Lingayats' (129).

37. Reports reveal lower caste groups, especially in the Marathi speaking regions of the erstwhile Bombay presidency, dedicating girls as Jogatis, Muralis and Basavis until relatively recently; this custom was abolished by the state of Karnataka in 1982 and Andhra Pradesh in 1988.

38. These goddesses are central characters in the myths of the region.

39. The *gramadevatas* and rituals connected with them remain central to their religious beliefs.

40. Renuka is referred to as princess of Kashmir, born to king Renuka on performance of a yagna. She is generally associated with shakti goddesses. See Kadedot, 1.

41. Ibid. Jamadagni was born to the sage Kutika and Satyavati, and related to Vishwamitra.

42. Swayamvara is a type of marriage in which the bride (often a princess) had the right to choose her husband from among the assembled suitors.

43. Parusharam is considered the avatar of Vishnu in caste

Hindu mythology.

44. According to another version, she sees Kartavyavira bathe in the river with his courtesans and she is sexually excited.

45. P. Thomas explains the significance of the story of Jamadagni and Renuka as an invention to emphasize the absolute authority of the father and also as a clue to matricide in the ancient period, see his *Kama Kalpa*, 49.

46. Madhav Shastri Joshi, ed., *Bharatiya Sanskrit Kosha*, Vol. 7 (Pune: Bharatiya Sanskrit Kosha Mandali, 1972), 86.

47. Mang is an outcaste leather working community, believed to be the children of Matangi.

48. R.C. Dhere, *Lajjagouri* (Pune: Shrividya Prakashan, 1978), 61. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty perceives it as a tension between chastity and sexual impulse finally resolved (although ambivalently) by the consequent split image of Renuka - i.e., chaste mind and literally polluted body. See *Sexual Metaphors and Animal Symbols in Indian Mythology*, 236. Significantly she links this to the myth of the 'goddess who on transgression of chastity or lust is cursed to lowly or abnormal status'; in the case of Renuka, this is evident in her bodily transformation wherein she is half 'untouchable' and half 'high' caste (218).

49. Arundatti is another outcaste goddess who is interwoven with the religious mythology of the caste and outcaste myths. For details see Rauschenbusch-Clough, 53-61.

50. Thurston and Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. IV, 296; Rauschenbusch-Clough, 66-71.

51. Amrit Srinivasan, 'Reform or Continuity?: Temple Prostitution and the Community in the Madras Presidency', in Bina Agarwal, ed., *Structures of Patriarchy: State, Community and Household in Modern Asia* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988). For an elaborate account of rites of initiation that transform an ordinary girl into a Devadasi, see the Saskia Kersenboom-Story. The Bogams, who are without exception prostitutes, go through a costly marriage ceremony. Sometimes a wealthy native bears the expense, makes large presents to the bride and receives her first favours, see *Manual of the North Arcot District*, as mentioned in E. Thurston and C. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes*, Vol. II, 138.

52. Enthoven, 298; also Krishna Iyer, 51.

53. F. Fawcett, 'Basivis - Women Who Through Dedication to a Deity assume Masculine Privileges', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, (II, 1892), 322-345. For details of initiation ceremonies in the Nizam's dominions see Syed Siraj Ul Hasan, 434-435.

54. N.K.Kadedot.

55. Thurston and Rangachari, Vol. IV, 125-153.

56. See Marglin Frederique; Saskia Kersenboom-Story; A.K. Prasad; and M.S. Ramachandra Rao, 'The Devadasis in Medieval Society', *Proceedings of the Andhra Pradesh History Congress* (Tenali: 1994), 62.

57. D.F. Carmichael (ed.), *Manual of the District of Vizagapatnam*; Thurston and Rangachari, Vol. II, 128.

58. Edgar Thurston observes that her duties in the temples (which are confined to their shrine of dedication) are nominal: Thurston, Vol II, 135.

59. B.R. Patil, 382.

60. For more details see N.D. Kamble, *Devadasis in Belgaum District: A Sociological Study*, Unpublished Thesis (Shivaji University, 1990).

61. P.R. Venkataswamy, *Our Struggle for Emancipation* (Secunderabad, 1955), 27.

62. B.R. Patil, 380; See also N.K. Kadedod.

63. Nude worship among the Jogatis and Basavis was also reported in Chandragutti, in the Shimoga district, until 1928, when it was removed from the *Official List of Services*. But the practise persisted until 1986, when a violent struggle between outcastes and caste Hindus resulted in a general boycott of the ritual practice. For more details see Linda J. Epp, 'Dalit Struggle, Nude Worship and the "Chandragutti Incident"', *Sociological Bulletin* (41 1/2 March-September, 1992), 145-146.

64. Jas Burges's observations of January-May 1874 were recorded in his *Antiquities of Belgaum and Kaladgi* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1971), 12.

65. For a detailed account of the ritual functions of the women see Priyadarshini Vijaisri 'Myth, Ritual and Impurity: Situating the Outcaste Sacred Prostitute in South India', paper presented at 'South Indian History Workshop' held at Madras Institute of Developmental Studies, Chennai (9-11 December 2004).

66. A. Madaviah, 304.

67. Ibid. 303. Also mentioned in Thurston and Rangachari.

68. For more details see Parasher and Naik, 70-71; A.K. Prasad, 97-121, and T. Rothfield, *Women of India* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporval, 1928), 163.

69. Besides these grants and honours they were exempted from paying certain taxes: K. Ismail, 125 and T.K.T. Viraraghavacharya, *History of Tirupati: The Tiruvengadam Temple*, Vol. I (Tirupati: Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams, 1953).

70. N.K. Kadedod.

71. Thurston and Rangachari. See also Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes*, 398.

72. Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes*, 299.

73. According to a survey conducted in the 1980s by N.D. Kamble women, either individually or in groups, begged on select days receiving food grains, alms and, on occasions, cooked food. See Kamble.

74. For continuation of these practises in the postcolonial period see Kamble, 191-2.

75. L.K.A. Iyer, "Devadasis in South Indian: Their Traditional Origin and Development", *Man in India* (VII, 1, 1927).

76. Thurston and Rangachari, 135-136.

77. I am grateful to Chinna Rao Yagati for describing the minute details of outcaste labourers in rural areas and for

## Body or Soul? The Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital, 1816-1824<sup>1</sup>

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Bath is a spa resort in South West England. The curative power of the hot water, issuing from three springs, has long been acknowledged and was enjoyed by the Romans. It was, however, during the eighteenth century that the city became *the* place to see and to be seen. The aristocracy became a vital part of the fashionable company that flocked to Bath each year for the season. Deals were struck, marriages arranged and, no doubt, some unsuitable liaisons entered into. The usual rigid rules of society were relaxed and the company took the waters for their health while, at the same time, enjoying a rich and varied social life of balls, assemblies and concerts.

During the eighteenth century the city grew both in terms of population and geographically. R.S. Neale, in his social history of Bath, estimated a population of 17,000 in 1775, while the 1801 census gives a figure of 33,000 that then rose to 51,000 by 1831.<sup>2</sup> A map dated 1694 shows that at this time Bath was still essentially a medieval walled city.<sup>3</sup> There was little development outside the walls. There was a small amount of development to the east of the city along the London road, and some beside the road leading south where the only bridge across the River Avon had been built. A later map of 1820 shows just how much Bath had grown.<sup>4</sup> The city within the city walls, now barely discernible, constituted a small part of the whole. The fashionable company had moved northwards to the new terraces and crescents where the air was no doubt pleasanter. The land to the south of the city, which is low-lying and liable to flooding, had now been covered with a warren of courts, yards and lodging houses to accommodate the immigrants from the rural hinterland. They were needed to build the new developments, and then to service the fashionable company who required a ready supply of cheap labour in the form of domestic servants as well as a plentiful supply of luxury goods for the new leisure activity of shopping. Many of the people fulfilling this need, in the form of domestic servants, laundresses, milliners and mantuamakers, were women. As Bath was a resort with a social season, this led to a surplus of female labour in the out-of-season months. Women were particularly vulnerable to seasonality as has been pointed out by Bridget Hill in *Women Alone*.<sup>5</sup> Hill suggests that women were more

vulnerable to low wages and irregular work and that single women were seen as a potential source of vice.

Undoubtedly, some women turned to prostitution when they could no longer obtain jobs as milliners, laundresses, dressmakers or domestic servants. Roy Porter in *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* wrote that prostitutes did not tend to be full-time professionals and that women went on to the streets when economic necessity forced them to.<sup>6</sup> Whether they were full or part-time, the authorities in Bath saw prostitution as a 'problem'.

In Bath, Avon Street was an area of cheap lodging houses that became notorious for both crime and prostitution. Smollett in *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* refers to 'the nymphs of Avon Street'.<sup>7</sup> Westgate Street and Walcot Street, important roads into the city, were also known for the number of prostitutes working along them. Although these areas were particularly known as 'red light' districts, the records reveal that women were taken up from a wide geographical spread around the city.<sup>8</sup> Women were stopped, among other places, in Gay Street, Marlborough Buildings, Rivers Street and The Circus – all 'good' addresses. Bath had, and still has, a north/south divide with the more affluent areas in the north of the city. Prostitutes, who lived in the southern part of the city, crossed social boundaries, at least in a geographical sense. They were, therefore, seen as posing a threat to social order in the city. Not only were social boundaries blurred, the boundaries between the uses customarily made of public and private spaces were also crossed. Prostitutes took what most people would see as a private act and brought it into the public spaces of Bath. Their presence in places such as the Abbey Church Yard, The Circus and Orange Grove did nothing to enhance the image Bath was trying to project. Much of their business was conducted in such semi-public places as doorways and dark alleys.

Attempts to clear the streets of prostitutes were on going throughout the eighteenth century. Bath Council minutes show that in 1713 it was agreed that there should be 'a Cage or Constables Prison Erected at the charge of the Chamber of this City on the South side of the Upper Conduit in the Market place...for securing Night Walkers and other disorderly persons.'<sup>9</sup> Any such nightwalkers would have been confined to the Constable's Prison as vagrants or because they were deemed to have been behaving in a disorderly way. In 1784 the parish officers of St James were praised in the *Bath Chronicle* for 'rooting out a nest of prostitutes' who had been causing a nuisance to 'the sober inhabitants' around the Cross Bath. The women were to be taken before the magistrates and those not from

Bath were to be removed to their own parishes and the remainder committed to the bridewell at Shepton Mallet. The parish officers were praised for taking a firm line and for their 'active endeavours'.<sup>10</sup> Early in the century it was clearly seen as important that the streets be kept free of anyone who might be considered a nuisance to the fashionable company as they moved from their lodgings in the upper part of the city to the more central Pump Rooms and Abbey.

By the end of the eighteenth century Bath was experiencing an economic depression. The fashionable company no longer came to the spa, preferring the newly-popular seaside resorts. Bath was, therefore, attempting to re-invent itself as a city of respectable residence.<sup>11</sup> It claimed to have healthy air, be pleasantly laid out and, above all, to be cheap with reference to provisions, poor rates and the price of labour. The city was 'marketed' to appeal to retired merchants, retired officers from both the army and the navy, and to anyone on a pension or with a fixed income. In order to attract these new 'respectable' residents it was deemed necessary to remove both beggars and prostitutes from the streets. R.S. Neale quotes the Reverend John Skinner, Vicar of Camerton, a village less than ten miles from Bath, as being 'not a little astonished, as I walked through Bath, to observe the streets so crowded with prostitutes, some of them apparently not above 14 or 15 years of age'.<sup>12</sup> The Reverend Skinner may also have been 'not a little astonished' at the number he recognised from his own parish. The Justices of the Peace made good use of the 1822 Vagrancy Act, this being the first act of parliament to mention explicitly 'common prostitutes'. In 1821 and 1822 a total of twenty-three women were recorded as having been apprehended as prostitutes but in 1823, after the implementation of the act, fifty-four women were taken up.<sup>13</sup>

Anna Clark, writing about sexual reputation in London in this period, claims that middle class evangelicals saw themselves as reformers and were particularly concerned with prostitution as this was perceived as a danger to themselves and to family life.<sup>14</sup> A group of men in Bath, several of whom were clergymen, attempted to address this perceived problem by suggesting the formation of a charity to provide 'an asylum for penitent prostitutes'.

Following a number of informal meetings, a public meeting was held on 22 November 1805 during which a proposal to found such a charity was agreed. Its stated aim was 'to provide for the welfare of the body' and the 'far more important interests of the soul'. Although the proposal indicated that the soul was to be considered as more important than the body, the charity was also to provide for the body. There was to be a committee of eighteen who were to be 'fathers and heads of families of





Bath Penitentiary in 1842. The chapel, to the left of the illustration, was rebuilt in 1845. The building is still discernible in Walcot Street. The words 'Bath Penitentiary Chapel' are incised in the wall. It now provides sheltered accommodation for the elderly.

(Illustration courtesy of Bath Reference Library).

all religious connexions (sic). A suitably 'grave, discreet and serious woman' was to be appointed as matron and a roomy house was to be found. After some dispute it was agreed that religious instruction was to be inter-denominational. This last issue was to dog the society for many years.

Donna Andrews, in *Philanthropy and Police*, argues that for charities to be successful they needed to combine elements of moral reform, public safety and economic benefit.<sup>15</sup> The Bath Penitentiary included all these elements. The list of supporters of, and subscribers to, the charity makes impressive reading, although it is doubtful that many of these people did anything other than lend their name and give a modest donation. The Patron was His Serene Highness Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. Honorary Vice Presidents included the Duke of Wellington, the Duke of Buccleuch, Earl Manvers, the Earl of Pembroke and the Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells. Among the Vice Presidents were Lord John Thynne, Sir William Cockburn, two MPs and the Mayor of Bath. The working of the charity was left to the 'middling sort' — the men who were involved in a number of other charities and some of whom made up the ruling elite of the city.<sup>16</sup>

By mid-January 1806 a house had been found, a wall and a necessary built, internal walls whitewashed and beds, coal and candles purchased. On April 8<sup>th</sup> the committee

heard that the first two women had been admitted. By June they had been joined by ten more. The manufacture of straw hats was started and later laundrywork, dressmaking, plain sewing and glove making were introduced. The women were also to be trained as domestic servants. These occupations, it will be noted, are all among the more vulnerable to seasonal variations in the leisure trades. If the women involved were to be encouraged to give up their previous lives as prostitutes, they would have needed more economically secure work than those trades that depended on the 'company' being in Bath. The committee expressed the intention, as had been hoped for the workhouse movement, that the society would become self-sufficient. The women did contribute to the finances of running the institution but it never became anything near self-sufficient.

By March 1807 it was recognised that many of the women applicants entering the house were suffering from venereal disease. Thereafter, applicants had to undergo a medical examination undertaken by the society's surgeon, and would only be admitted when they were free of disease. In the meantime they were housed in a poorhouse where they received treatment.

The Penitentiary experienced various successes — in February 1808 it was reported that Elizabeth Bell was now in service and had expressed her gratitude to the

Penitentiary. There were some less successful outcomes: Hooper was removed to her own parish 'in a state of insanity', Eliza David and Sarah Lamb died, and Sarah Cooper was found to be pregnant. But when the early existing records cease in 1811, the society would appear to have been running efficiently and meeting a need in Bath.

The Bath Penitentiary would appear to have been unusual in Bath in that women played an active role in the running of the charity. At the Casualty Hospital, for example, women were only involved as subscribers and in occasional fundraising. At the Penitentiary, however, women were directly involved in the committee that interviewed potential penitents. If two female members of the select committee thought that the applicant was worthy, she was admitted to the probationary ward.<sup>17</sup> A number of women visited on a daily basis to talk and work with the penitents. It was thought that women who were seen as respectable, and were undoubtedly drawn from the 'middling sort', made good role models for the penitents. What, sadly, we do not know is how these two groups, the penitents on the one hand and the (no doubt well meaning) female committee members on the other, regarded each other. There must, one feels, have been some interesting exchanges!

By 1816 some committee members felt that in order to save the souls of the women they must first cure their diseased bodies. To this end, they suggested the addition to the Penitentiary of a Lock Hospital. There were differences of opinion as to the propriety of such an undertaking. Some thought that curing the body was a first step to recovering the soul; others felt that, if they were to cure the women and later return them to the city, the charity could be seen as encouraging prostitution. This latter view was one that supporters of the Lock Hospital had to overcome throughout the years of its existence. As much of the original funds for the charity had been given for a Penitentiary only, it was necessary for a general meeting to be held to obtain a mandate from subscribers to add a hospital ward.

The meeting was held in the Guildhall on 12 June 1816. John Parish Esq., who took the chair, proposed the motion in terms that flattered his audience. He spoke of their liberality, sympathy, benevolence and bountiful hearts, all attributes of a 'man of feeling' and indicative of sentiment. In seconding the motion, the Reverend Hastings Elwin reassured the meeting that the Lock Hospital was not going to be a place for the idle or profligate but a workhouse open only to those whom the select committee deemed to be truly penitent. It was, therefore, to house young women and

not become a refuge for worn out prostitutes or those whose appeal was beginning to fade. It was hoped that by isolating 'diseased objects' and ensuring that they received religious education with their medical treatment, they would then be suitable for transfer to the Penitentiary. He also pointed out that such Hospitals already existed in London, Manchester and Liverpool. The inference was that a city of the importance of Bath ought to be able to sustain such an institution. The proposal was to extend the Penitentiary to accommodate twenty women and, in addition, to build a ward for 'the reception of diseased objects'. The resolution was passed.

After some discussion it was agreed that an announcement should be made to the public. This was to take the form of an announcement in each of the two main Bath papers and was couched in strong terms. The committee pointed out that many in the city received charity at some time except for:

the unfortunate girl, who, seduced but not depraved, — her health destroyed, but her mind not yet vitiated, — finds herself by the same offence, (seduction) dismissed from her service, and for ever disabled from finding another... (she then) becomes one of the most pernicious agents in the corruption of the health and morals of the sons, the relatives, the domestics, and the dependents of the inhabitants of this city

Although women are referred to as 'diseased objects' and as one of 'the most pernicious agents of corruption', the reason for their downfall was expressed, quite clearly, as seduction. In highlighting seduction as a cause of prostitution, Parish enabled his readers to feel sympathy for a wronged woman. Prostitution was not a choice but the inevitable consequence of seduction. In Sarah Lloyd's words, speaking of the London Magdalen Hospital in *History Workshop Journal*, 'Seduction and repentance were at the centre of the charity's regime'.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, women were being portrayed as helpless victims — not the impression one receives on reading the charity minute book where the women appear to be spirited and lively. An interest in these elements, seduction and repentance, points to the growth of humanitarianism and sensibility in the city.<sup>19</sup> What the public announcement failed to mention was that the agent of seduction might well have been one of those sons, relatives, domestics, or dependents whose health and morals the prostitute was now charged with corrupting. Nor was any link made between prostitution and economic necessity.

Prostitutes, it was admitted, were not the easiest group to which to extend charity or on whose behalf to seek

subscriptions and, because of lack of funds, the charity was never able to be of as much assistance as they might have wished. The meeting in the Guildhall in June 1816 agreed a list of rules and regulations by which the charity was to be organised. If thought suitable, the woman or girl would be admitted to the temporary ward. Some of the patients in the Lock Hospital were very young, the youngest recorded being nine years old and already infected with venereal disease. The charity preferred applicants to be young as they felt there was more hope of moral recovery in the young. They would also avoid the accusation that the Penitentiary was merely a refuge for ageing prostitutes.

The Penitentiary and Lock Hospital were not a 'quick fix' solution: many applicants stayed for two or three years before being returned to the world of their families and work. Confidentiality was to be guaranteed. Each penitent was also given a bible and prayer book and expected to attend divine service at least once on a Sunday. In the early days of the charity the women walked to the nearest church on Sundays. However, this blew rather a large hole in the guarantee of confidentiality. Also the women attracted a certain amount of unwanted (by the authorities anyway) attention, so a chaplain was asked to take services at the Penitentiary to avoid this situation. Family worship took place twice a day and the women were expected to cultivate habits of industry and virtue. It was hoped that the presence on a daily basis of female members of the select committee would encourage such attributes.

Throughout the years the committee responded to the issue of penitents being visible in the town by adding to the rules and regulations. Soon after the appointment of a chaplain, the women were prohibited from collecting outside the front of the house. They were then forbidden to look out of the front windows. Contact with the rest of the town was not encouraged. Following an incident when a visiting sister passed a note to a penitent (presumably from a man), only parents were allowed to visit. The women surrendered their own clothes on admittance to the house and donned a uniform. In this way individuality was discouraged and a discreet and seemingly appearance was enforced. Over the years the committee strove to make the women more and more invisible and less and less in contact with the world outside the house.

The rules suggest a degree of agreement with Donna Andrews' findings regarding the Magdalen Hospital in London.<sup>20</sup> There she found that many of the penitents were less than fourteen years of age. It was felt that prostitutes could be restored as useful members of society if their rehabilitation began when they were young. The women were thought to be in need of vocational and

moral regeneration. The discipline and skills learnt would, hopefully, prove useful in the future. When cured of disease and morally rescued, the women could be restored to their families and, eventually, become the mothers of the next generation of producers. Sarah Lloyd also pointed out that as mothers, recovered penitent prostitutes could contribute legitimately to the population growth deemed necessary to maintain economic growth and to supply the army and navy with manpower.<sup>21</sup> The regeneration of prostitutes was thought highly desirable, not only on an individual level but, as the women were seen as a threat to society, both to public order and to the spread of disease. Their existence was seen as a threat to the family, a concept that was of the utmost importance in inculcating ideas of civic and individual virtue.<sup>22</sup>

Not only was moral regeneration necessary therefore, the women needed in addition the means of earning a living to prevent them from being forced, once again, into prostitution. The charity not only hoped to recover her body and her soul but the trustees also attempted to find her respectable employment on her discharge. Women who were found places as domestic servants were paid a premium if they remained in the same situation for a year. This premium was only paid if the woman's employer was prepared to vouch for her good behaviour. Over the years a number of such premiums were paid out. In this way the charity was recognising that although prostitution was morally corrosive, it was also the result of economic conditions and that these must be changed, at least for the individual, for there to be lasting improvement. Unfortunately, as we have already seen, the skills taught led to trades that were particularly vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations.

The first Annual General Meeting of the new charity was held on 4 March 1817. The chairman reported that their list of subscribers contained 'some of the most illustrious names in the Kingdom'. He also acknowledged that there had been an increase in the demands put upon individuals at that time. The war with France had been over for a year or two and returning soldiers had put a strain on the poor rates and on society. Nonetheless, subscriptions had increased and this was attributed to the addition of the Lock Hospital. It would not be many years before an opposite view was being expressed – that the Lock Hospital was contributing to the decline in subscriptions. At the meeting at the end of the fourth year, in March 1820, a survey of the four years was produced. The survey can be summarised as follows:

Applicants	143
Admitted	83
Rejected as improper	15 (18%)



Refused for want of room	45
Of those admitted:	
Died	8
In service with good characters	12
In house and behaving well	30
Discharged	22
Left the house	3
Returned to friends	5
Returned to parish	3

There is little advantage in close analysis of these figures but it can easily be seen that thirty women were reported to be in the house at the time of compiling the survey. They were also reported as 'behaving well'. Their continued presence in the house very much depended on their good behaviour. If they flouted the rules or in some way displeased authority, in the form of the matron and the select committee, they ran the risk of being rejected as improper. As we can see, fifteen women were rejected as 'improper'. This is eighteen per cent of the total number admitted. In the 1760s, in London, forty three per cent of Magdalens were discharged for misbehaviour or as unsuitable.<sup>23</sup> In such a case there would be little alternative for a woman but to return to a life of prostitution. A few women found this possibility preferable to the disciplined life in the Penitentiary and discharged themselves and left the house.

At the meeting in 1816, when the proposal was made to add a Lock Hospital to the existing Penitentiary, the argument in favour of the proposal had been that it would 'extend medical succour to every class of outcast for whose moral regeneration only were the funds originally intended'. Again, fears were expressed about the propriety of the proposal as some saw the Lock Hospital, if curing venereal disease without the concomitant regeneration of the soul, as tantamount to condoning prostitution. These concerns arose again in March 1822 when the trustees found it necessary to reiterate to subscribers that if the Lock Hospital were to be open indiscriminately, they would be justified in their concerns, but patients were only admitted to the Lock Hospital if they were thought suitable for the Penitentiary. In this respect, the Lock Hospital could be regarded merely as an infirmary serving the Penitentiary. The arguments put forward at the meeting stifled the protest for a couple of years but by 1824 it would appear that even the supporters of the Lock Hospital had changed their minds. It may be remembered that the years 1822 to 1824 were when the Vagrancy Act was passed and implemented.

A special meeting of subscribers was held at the Guildhall on 26 April 1824. The special meeting had

been called specifically to consider 'the propriety of relinquishing the Lock Hospital and of attaching a Chapel to the Charity'. Mr Elwin, who had seconded the original motion to add a Lock Hospital, had had a change of heart and now proposed the removal of the Lock Hospital and the addition of a chapel in its place. The charity was proposing the exchange of a place to heal bodies for a place to rescue souls. The idea that the body was also important was no longer to be a strand of the charity's work. The reasons given for the change were outlined. It was stated that most parishes had workhouses where diseased women could be accommodated and provided with medical care. Given the state of many parish workhouses, there is no doubt in my mind that women with venereal disease were much better off in the Lock Hospital than in their parish workhouse. It was agreed that the Lock Hospital should close and that a chapel should be built in its place.

The addition of a Lock Hospital to the Penitentiary was an experiment in scientific philanthropy that failed from lack of support. The original supporters of the Lock Hospital lost their nerve in the face of an increased desire among subscribers for respectability and appear to have put civic pride before their desire to help individual women. The 1820s were a time of change in Bath and the city was still attempting to come to terms economically with the loss of the fashionable company. The closure of the Lock Hospital can be seen as a move to strengthen the moral life of the city and was part of both an evangelical revival and a response to the growth of radicalism in the city apparent in other aspects of charitable and civic life.<sup>24</sup>

There was a constant fear that disease, both spiritual and physical, would spread to those already 'on the road to redemption' in the Penitentiary. There was also a fear, perhaps, that disease, both spiritual and physical, could also spread to those helping with the charity, particularly the female members of the select committee, some of whom were in daily contact with the penitents. The closure of the hospital highlighted a discomfort felt by many, men in particular, around the subject of women's bodies and female sexuality. For whatever reason, the Lock Hospital was always seen by some as a blot on an otherwise respectable charity.<sup>25</sup> It was suspected that the presence of the hospital had deterred subscribers and, without its presence, it was hoped that more subscribers would be attracted to the charity. Cranshaw and Porter, in *The Hospital in History*, questioned whether hospitals were part of an elaborate system designed to keep the poor in their place and off the streets.<sup>26</sup> Certainly the Penitentiary Lock Hospital was part of a system designed to keep some of the women of Bath off the streets. There was always the fear that poor women working as prostitutes would use the hospital as a strategy to regain

their health in order to resume their former lives. Timothy Hitchcock has suggested that women used the workhouse as a 'foul ward' and it may be that Bath was afraid that this is what might happen at the hospital of the Penitentiary.<sup>27</sup>

As well as a desire for moral regeneration, civic pride and a desire to appeal to visitors were also at stake, and the thought was expressed that a Penitentiary with its own chapel would add to 'the renown of the city'. There may well have been unexpressed economic hopes vested in the plan. Sarah Lloyd wrote that the chapel attached to the London Magdalen Hospital generated a considerable amount of money with special charity sermons attracting affluent and influential congregations.<sup>28</sup> In fact, it became fashionable to attend the London Magdalen Hospital Chapel. This was not the experience in Bath and the chapel proved a constant source of dissension among subscribers. This was partly due to inter-denominational conflict among committee members. It may also have been due to an antagonism between philanthropic interests and sexual interests. Certainly the minutes reveal an understanding of the need to keep female penitents and male committee members, including the clergy, if not apart, at least strictly chaperoned. Any dichotomy in this area would be lessened by the addition of a chapel serving the soul, rather than a hospital serving the body.

Plans for the chapel were approved in June 1824 and it was opened on 27 October 1825. It seated 130 in the body of the chapel and it was hoped that income from the pews would add to the funds of the charity. There were thirty seats provided in a gallery for the women of the Penitentiary - rendering them out of sight and removed from the 'respectable' congregation.

## Notes

1. *The Collective Reports of the Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital 1816-1824*, J. Parish, chairman, is available in Bath Central Library, The Podium, Bath.
2. R. S. Neale, *Bath a Social History 1680-1850 or A Valley of Pleasure, yet a Sink of Iniquity* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 44.
3. *The City of Bath*, 1694, Joseph Gilmore, Bath Central Library.
4. City plan of Bath c.1820, in Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall, *Bath: A New History* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996) 47.
5. Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinners in England, 1660-1850* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2001) 96 and 100/101.
6. Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1982) 138.

7. Smollett, Tobias, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (first published London, 1771).

8. Much of the information about prostitutes in Bath is taken from *Information Concerning Vagrants 1820-1827*. This is available at the Bath Record Office, Guildhall, Bath. The document records the names of all those taken up as 'vagrants'. As most of these were women, it can be assumed that they were regarded as prostitutes and, in some cases, referred to as such.

9. *Bath Council Minutes*, 28 December, 1713, Bath Record Office, quoted in Trevor Fawcett, *Voices of Eighteenth Century Bath* (Bath: Ruton, 1995) 153.

10. *Bath Chronicle* 26 August 1784, quoted in Fawcett, 158.

11. Davis and Bonsall, 63.

12. Neale, 22.

13. *Information Concerning Vagrants, 1820-1827*.

14. Anna Clark, 'Whores and gossips: Sexual reputation in London, 1770-1825,' in Arina Angerman, Geerte Binnema, Annamieke Keunen, Vefie Poels & Jacqueline Zirkzee eds, *Current Issues in Women's History* (London: Routledge, 1989) 232.

15. Donna T. Andrews, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

16. For example, the Phillott family were closely involved with a number of charities in the city. Charles Phillott, who was treasurer to the Penitentiary, was a member of the corporation and was also treasurer to the Bath General Hospital. See Ann Borsay, *Medicine and Charity in Eighteenth Century Bath: A Social History of the General Infirmary, 1739-1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999) 263.

17. *The Collective Reports, Rules for Internal Management*, 25.

18. Sarah Lloyd, 'Pleasure's Golden Bait': Prostitution, Poverty and the Magdalen Hospital in Eighteenth Century London' in *History Workshop Journal* (41, Spring, 1996) 50-70.

19. For more details about the growth of humanitarianism and a culture of sensibility see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 225.

20. Andrews, 119.

21. Sarah Lloyd, *Perceptions of Poverty in England, 1680-1770*, unpublished D. Phil thesis (Oxford, 1991) 381.

22. Andrews, 187 - 197.

23. Lloyd, 'Pleasure's Golden Bait', 62.

24. In 1823 two medical charities merged to form the Bath United Hospital. As part of the negotiations, the Casualty Hospital was forced to abandon its firmly-held policy of admission on the basis of need only, in favour of the more usual subscribers' voucher system. This can be seen as

enforcing a monitoring system to ensure only the 'deserving' poor obtained help.

25. Roy Porter has argued that an 'image problem' accompanied most hospitals set up to assist foundlings and prostitutes and to cure venereal disease: 'Was there a medical enlightenment in Eighteenth century England?', *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* (5, 1982) 49-63.

26. Lindsay Granshaw and Roy Porter, *The Hospital in History* (London: Routledge, 1989) 3.

27. Timothy Hitchcock, *The English Workhouse: a Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Counties 1696-1750*, unpublished PhD Thesis (Oxford, 1985) 210.

28. Lloyd, 'Pleasure's Golden Bait', 56.

## From Slave Ship to Prison House: The Case of Women in Colonial Malawi, 1875 - c 1927

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### Introduction

David Livingstone's vision for Africa was the introduction of commerce and Christianity as an alternative to the slave trade and to a life style that was hampered (as he understood it) by superstition and the structures of African society.<sup>1</sup> Young African women who commanded the highest price in the slave market<sup>2</sup> would, arguably, stand to gain most from the proposed new Christian civil order. Bent on fulfilling the recently deceased hero's vision, in 1875-76, a Scottish Presbyterian mission to East Central Africa might well have expected that indigenous women would experience a transformation in personal human rights through dignity and equality in Christian terms.<sup>3</sup> However, I shall argue that for the majority of African women the journey, over some fifty years, was one from one form of oppression to another. I suggest that despite the abolition of slavery, mission, colonial and indigenous traditions dovetailed (albeit invisibly) to militate against increased human rights for all but a few African women of the region.

My discussion falls naturally into three elements: the impact of the Presbyterian Christian Mission on African women; the impact of British Colonial government on African women; and the continuing impact on women of African traditional culture.

### Orientation in Time and Place

On 12 October 1875 a little ship carrying representatives of the Free Church of Scotland, together with one representative of the Established Church of Scotland, entered Lake Nyasa from the confluence of the River Shire, having first negotiated the Zambezi. The advent of this group and the impact of their successors would ultimately transform the economy, living conditions and, at least to outward appearances, the spiritual orientation of the indigenous population.<sup>4</sup> Some two years later the first Scottish missionary wives and unmarried missionary women arrived. As yet perhaps unknown to the woman missionaries themselves, *they* would be the role models for future African female Christian living.

The Lakeshore region had already experienced major disruption over the previous twenty years due, in part, to inter-tribal<sup>5</sup> warfare and the depredation of Arab/Swahili slave-traders from the coast. The peaceful, 'fairly homogeneous' society observed by David Livingstone in 1859 had been harried by Yao tribes people migrating from the direction of northern Mozambique, with the indigenous Nyanja villagers periodically slaughtered, captured and enslaved. Yao chiefs bartered captive men, women and children for guns, alcohol and other desired Western goods, while male — as well as female — captives were, according to tradition, used as domestic and sexual slaves.<sup>6</sup>

Nyanja and the Yao groups each, however, also came under attack from migrant Ngoni people who, in turn, were fleeing internecine warfare between their fellow Nguni in Natal.<sup>7</sup> The Ngoni, with the advantage of military prowess and daunting social organisation, were in a position to reek havoc on vulnerable settled villages, stealing women and children virtually at will and integrating them into their clan structure.<sup>8</sup> The Ngoni continued their predatory progress northward among the Tonga people of the Lakeshore until changing circumstances (notably the impact of Scottish missionaries) facilitated a more settled and less militaristic lifestyle. In the midst of such social trauma the Christian Gospel, once rooted, could be a potential common denominator. Even today however, the Christian intention continues to struggle with ethnic and political vested interest.<sup>9</sup>

### Mission Development

After an extensive reconnoitre, the Church of Scotland mission, although slower off the mark than their Free Church colleagues, established its headquarters on an upland, well-watered area in the Shire Highlands to the south of the lake, in October 1876, naming it Blantyre, after David Livingstone's birthplace. Despite early



setbacks, the settlement around Blantyre Mission developed quickly, together with the adjacent commercial centre at Limbe, to form a trade monopoly for the area (especially after 1907 and the coming of the railway). This dominance lasted until it was supplanted by Lilongwe which became the administrative and Governmental headquarters in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Free Church missionaries, on the other hand, were not so fortunate in their choice of site. The rocky promontory which jutted into the lake, earlier named Cape Maclear by Livingstone,<sup>10</sup> was chosen as the position of the Livingstonia mission by E.D. Young (the project leader) with a seaman's eye for its excellent harbour sheltered from the prevailing southeast wind.<sup>11</sup> By the mid 1870s however, the spot had been rendered impracticable as a result of altered socio-political circumstances, although this was not immediately obvious to the new missionary group. It had been possible to envisage an 'excellent small town' initially; the 'plain fact' rapidly emerged however that Young had, in the opinion of James Stewart, placed the Mission on the edge of a barren, tsetse-infested plain unfriendly to animal life.<sup>12</sup>

Malaria, its aetiology as yet unknown,<sup>13</sup> would prove of even greater significance in the unsuitability of the site. Black Water Fever (acute fulminating malaria) rendered the Livingstonia site at Cape Maclear a virtually deserted graveyard within five years, respecting neither European nor African missionary.<sup>14</sup> Determined on the name 'Livingstonia', the early missionary group moved their headquarters, in three painful stages, up the lake shore to settle finally on a plateau raised above the malaria-infested water's edge: first at Cape Maclear (October 1875) then at Bandawe (March 1881)<sup>15</sup> and finally at Khondowe (1894).<sup>16</sup> In time Livingstonia and Blantyre Missions would consist of a matrix of satellite Christian settlements that included a church cum school building to accommodate evangelisation and education which was funded and erected by the indigenous population under missionary supervision. Gradually, as indigenous Christian village leaders emerged, or were selected, the roles of teacher and pastor were vested in one person<sup>17</sup> — always male — supervised by ordained missionaries, also exclusively male.<sup>18</sup>

Female mission staff began to arrive in 1878 — both wives of male missionaries and single women, subordinate to the all-male hierarchy, who were employed as junior teachers, nurses and supervisors of African girls. As African men began to take on leadership roles, Scotswomen were in an ambivalent position. Missionary wives, although officially unrecognised by the Mission Board in Edinburgh, established the model of

Christian family life essential to the social rooting of the new faith. Once the initial, traumatic period was over and the slave trade finished, missionary wives (particularly those under the Livingstonia umbrella) took over the mission administration when their husbands were travelling around scattered satellite Christian settlements.<sup>19</sup> Reporting to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland in 1923, Frank Ashcroft expressed astonishment that 'married ladies' were not invited to attend the Livingstonia Mission Council meetings, although in most cases they were 'doing a full day's work.'<sup>20</sup> There was no suggestion that they might receive personal remuneration or be given a separate fund for missionary wives' projects.

Unmarried missionary women, aspiring as they were to professional advancement and freedom and hindered as yet in their home-country, were nevertheless hampered by the culturally-sexist attitude of the sending authorities — including those women sent by the Women's Committee for Foreign Mission.<sup>21</sup> Scotswomen of the Livingstonia Mission, supervised and directed by the head of station Robert Laws and a number of his like-minded colleagues, were under more restriction than their Blantyre counterparts as a result of such gendered assumptions and authoritarianism:<sup>22</sup>

A missionary's wife, I have discovered, is not the same thing as a Missionary out here. The Livingstonia Mission Council in general and Dr. T. in particular are just a bit apt to think that we are here as ornamental and domestic and nothing more. It "riles" me at times, but I am determined to get my own way, and get it I will. My great comfort is that Jack sees it from my point of view.<sup>23</sup>

This is the third time within the last few months that he (Rev. Jack Martin, her husband) has had to postpone Communion services. He is very much run down and yet Dr Laws refuses to send down Mr Johnston until May. I have a good mind to write to him myself. I am just afraid I may say too much, though in a sense that would hardly be possible.<sup>24</sup>

As we shall see, missionary women's restricted opportunities for service (particularly missionary wives such as Mamie Martin) had a profound impact on corresponding opportunity for African Christian women, as would be revealed publicly in 1927. By the 1920s the impact of the First World War on the region, combined with the African brain and brawn drain to the colonial mining world of Cecil Rhodes, had placed

African women in circumstances that transcended the frustrations of missionary wives.

## Colonial Development

Although the initial proclamation of the region as a British Protectorate was performed in 1889 by ex-Blantyre missionary John Buchanan, in his role as Acting British Consul, between 1889 and 1891 negotiations between Portugal and Great Britain established national boundaries in the Lake Nyasa region. Formal proclamation of the region as a British Protectorate followed — the latest step in a British Empire in Africa that would eventually reach from The Cape to Cairo (the dream of Cecil Rhodes). The key factor in the British Government's acceptance of the missionaries' invitation to provide civic and military 'protection' for what would become Nyasaland, was the discovery of a navigable route from the mouth of the Zambezi at Chinde that had been missed by Livingstone. An international waterway, with magnificent trade potential, was thus opened up to the African interior by means of the Zambezi, the River Shire and Lake Nyasa. Equally significant for British interests was the reawakened Portuguese colonial ambition to span the eastern and western African seaboard, presenting a threat foreseen by Livingstone in 1859. Scottish missionaries of the 1880s and early 1890s were unable to perceive the potential threat posed by emergent Social Darwinism (already evident among British colonists elsewhere) to their vision of Africa for the African<sup>25</sup> and an egalitarian future shared between indigenous and immigrant Christian people.<sup>26</sup> The nation state that was ultimately formed — Nyasaland (later Malawi) — became part of a British Empire that covered one quarter of the earth's surface and included some 443,600,000 people.<sup>27</sup> The notion of 'protection' took on a tragic complexion for many women (as well as men) while the protection of British economic interests became the scarcely veiled reality.

With Protectorate status came the introduction of an alien cash economy which was superimposed upon the traditional barter system. In time African social laws would be replaced by the colonial legal system which added confusion to the already fraught problems associated with African Christian marriage. Polygamy, deemed unacceptable in Christian marriage by the missionaries, was countenanced by the colonial government within African secular society on the grounds that each polygamous wife lived in a separate hut and was therefore eligible for individual hut-tax, thus augmenting government revenue. The missionaries however, were concerned that traditional village customs associated with pre-marriage inter-family dialogue — mutual honouring and Lobola<sup>28</sup> negotiation

— should be the continuing basis of African marriage with a blessing by a Christian minister as the crowning act.

After the last stand-off and defeat of slave-traders in the region in December 1895, villagers' terror of slaughter or enslavement gradually subsided. Within fifty years however, a missionary woman, commenting on a rebellious young domestic employee, would write the following:

I have handed over to her mother her last month's wages ... I also paid her mother for carrying up a large basketful of red-skinned bananas from her own garden. For the bananas themselves she would take nothing. So now Lola's mother has her hut tax complete and will not go to prison, as she has had to do twice before.<sup>29</sup>

The task before us is to trace the chain of events leading to such a catastrophe. Of Lola and her mother we have no further evidence, but the circumstances of the mother raises a number of questions: how could the missionary vision of freedom from slavery for Africans — not least African women — result in obvious economic slavery? How could Christian African men condone such mishandling of their womenfolk and why did British officials stoop to such barbarity, incarcerating women and leaving African families bereft of mothers?

It is clear from the quotation that there is a cultural confusion afoot. The indigenous woman (Lola's mother), despite having been imprisoned twice already for non-payment of hut tax, is not willing to sell her bananas to the head of the mission station's wife at Bandawe — according to traditional custom they must be presented as a gift. Mrs. Martin, having been in the country for six years, understood the cultural nicety and paid her for carrying them!

We might observe in passing that the Western name Lola suggests that she and her family were either Christian or closely associated with the Scottish Mission — as indeed they clearly were. To be employed by the head-of-station's wife, the young girl would already have received at least a rudimentary education in English and reading at a mission school. We might also notice that the girl was not subdued and subordinate, but self-willed, strong and clearly able to challenge the authority of white missionary women. Finally, we note that the year was 1927. We shall return to the significance of this below. First let us explore briefly the place and role of women in traditional African society as compared with that of British society of the time.

## **The Place and Role of Women in Local African Tradition**

Within Western dualistic societies, where the things spiritual and physical are distinct categories, men (up to the mid-twentieth century) had sole right to ordination to Word and Sacrament, and therefore to leadership, in public Christian worship in Scotland. Women had a subordinate place in the Church, based on a limited interpretation of scripture and the concept of what constitutes 'the Church.'<sup>30</sup> This ecclesiastical male-dominated ethos was mirrored within secular society, albeit couched in rational or romantic terms. By the turn of the twentieth century the notion of 'separate spheres' was the latest euphemistic term for female subordination in church and state.<sup>31</sup>

The social place of women (and men) in a society is not static however, but varies according to time, context and changing circumstances. In fairness, such subtlety must also be accorded to African culture. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, inter-marriage and enslavement between clan groups in the region had smudged any sharp lines dividing social and cultural difference, even between the immigrant, patriarchal Ngoni and matriarchal Amaravi peoples, including the Tonga, Tumbuka, Chewa, and Nyanja. The over-arching African cosmic view held the spiritual and physical worlds as one, forming an 'unbroken circle.'<sup>32</sup>

Despite social and cultural changes introduced by migrant African groups, the over-arching African cosmic view remained in tact (albeit with individual group nuances). Traditionally, womanhood, as a symbol of life, was revered and protected, while old women, symbolising the continuity of life, as epitomised by their longevity, were objects of particular veneration and allocated specific roles in community ritual.<sup>33</sup> In traditional healing, seasonal spiritual celebrations, rain making, prophesy and ancestor veneration, women held a significant and active public role. Evidence based on acute observation by the earliest missionaries revealed the remarkably powerful position of African women, particularly in indigenous spirituality, that belied later pejorative interpretation.<sup>34</sup> Recent research has revealed that among the Tumbuka people women held a dominant role in society until the British take-over in 1891.<sup>35</sup>

British observers misinterpreted the traditional role of women in African society. African women were viewed as 'beasts of burden', perhaps because they were more skilled than men in carrying heavy loads, particularly firewood, and thus were more visible when performing the task. Duff MacDonald, while confirming the union of the spiritual and physical worlds in African society,<sup>36</sup> thought he recognised that public leadership was the

prerogative of indigenous men and that, according to local custom, women were frequently used as domestic barter goods. However MacDonald, as an outsider, did not perceive the distinction made between female domestic slaves and free women. Slaves of either sex were of little value except for their labour or as barter goods, their bodies symbolically left in the forest for the hyenas or thrown into shallow graves.<sup>37</sup> According to Silas Ncozana however, the death of a free woman among the Tumbuka was greeted with such profound distress that the bearer of the tidings might be killed unless appropriately protected.<sup>38</sup> Traditionally, men protected the village and procured food through hunting and raiding other villages, while women were, demonstrably, 'hewers of wood and drawers of water.' Farming, or food production from the soil, was the chief prerogative of women (although this also varied between clan groups).<sup>39</sup>

Marriage customs varied from clan-group to group but in general young girls were married at puberty, a factor of increasing significance with the advent of Western educational opportunity. Polygamy, a very common custom (although not exclusively observed<sup>40</sup>) became a central thorn in the flesh for aspiring African Christians, and a source of heart-searching for some missionaries as well as indigenous Christian men.<sup>41</sup> Christian rejection of the tradition rendered polygamous wives liable to forcible alienation from those husbands who aspired to baptism, advanced education and social position within the emerging Westernised order. Emotional chaos ensued for such women; they were often separated from their children and denied the possibility of legitimate sexual intercourse and therefore the possibility of honourable motherhood. Respect for their wives within the polygamous custom prevented certain potential Christian leaders from presenting themselves for baptism, and caused many to lapse temporarily or (for a few) to reject missionary Christianity and establish African indigenous churches.<sup>42</sup>

## **The Impact of Continuing Local Tradition on African Women**

Initially, the advent of Scottish missionaries made remarkably little impact on African traditional customs except in the matter of dress for those immediately employed by the mission.<sup>43</sup> Indigenous people delayed requesting baptism until the early 1890s when increasing numbers of white settlers, plus government by British agents, began to shift the social and economic balance, making the advantage afforded by a mission education starkly evident. As individuals began to attend classes in Bible study and Christian ethics, many customs natural to local people were revealed as



'sinful' in Christian terms. Dancing and drumming were considered particularly sinful by most — though not all — missionary leaders,<sup>44</sup> associated as they were with forbidden practices. Initiation rites for boys and girls were associated with 'filthy dancing' in the missionary view, with echoes of 'woman as temptress' informing the Christian attitude. The role and place of women in African society was therefore suspect as intransigently 'pagan.' Such traditional practices continued in secret, out of sight of Westerners. Women continued overtly as hewers of wood and drawers of water, while fulfilling the maternal role essential to African female identity. Despite concerted efforts by early missionaries (particularly missionary women) educational opportunity for girls was greatly reduced as compared to their male counterparts. Young female Christians were disempowered through separation from the traditional culture but were not provided with an adequately powerful alternative rite.

Conversely, indigenous leaders had a vested interest in placing their sons within reach of Western education and social customs to equip them for participation in the emerging political and social milieux. The academic education and industrial training afforded by mission schools ultimately eroded traditional customs, including leadership selection processes and, in the main, precluded young indigenous women from seizing the relatively meagre education on offer by Livingstonia and Blantyre. Traditional polygamy was, however, the most crucial, painful and debasing element for African women in the Tradition / Christianity juxtaposition. Whether polygamous women were more debased within the traditional culture or as a result of Christian abolitionist intervention is a question answerable only by African women.

### Impact of Colonial Status on African Women

African people were among those generally thought of by contemporary British sentiment as 'child' races.<sup>45</sup> Social Darwinism affected the attitude of increasing numbers of British entrepreneurs acquiring land for exploitation after the Protectorate was officially proclaimed in 1891. Ultimately, although Scots missionaries had been instrumental in persuading the British Government to claim the region as a Protectorate,<sup>46</sup> they would be castigated as the enemy of British interest in the region through their support of indigenous land rights<sup>47</sup> and their 'subversive' education of 'natives.'

Together with Protectorate status came increasing usurpation of indigenous farmland ('white settler land-grab') and the introduction of a cash economy. Apart

from the initial breaking of the ground at the onset of the rains when men and women worked together, woman's role was the production of food and potential barter-crops. With the advent of Protectorate taxation to pay for roads, railways and telecommunication, taxation became a matter of legitimate police coercion; tax-defaulter hunting, emerging to replace the old slave raids in villages, was carried out by African men as agents of the Protectorate government. Ironically, as we have seen, the Lakeshore region had already been disrupted by recurrent slave-raids and predation from migrant, warring Ngoni people from the South. Local tribal chiefs sold enemy captives and other expendable individuals to Arab traders and Swahili men of mixed race from the coast, as well as young unattached women, commanded the highest price. By the 1920s even married African women whose husbands were absent and young widows were victims of rape by tax collectors and other predatory males.<sup>48</sup> Already in 1919 T. Cullen Young was anticipating an understandable backlash:

No country will stand forever what the villager natives of this territory are being called upon to stand. ... It (Government policy) is fostering a native class of official whose justice to his fellows, whose method of oppression and whose flagrant breaches of law are steadily adding to the account which we shall be asked to pay. In the villages we are already feeling a growing estrangement and a dawning suspicion where once we imagined there existed something approaching friendship.

Then with candid horror he recounted:

In every district violence is done to women whose husbands are absent at work or who are young widows ... In every district women are held hostage for defaulting relatives (in the matter of taxes) and **not withstanding the fact that the woman so seized has paid her own hut tax.** Queues of these hostages follow the Government captaos from village to village, rain or sun, with young children trailing after them.<sup>49</sup>

African men, ultimately forced by economic circumstance to travel to the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia to earn cash, found themselves in an invidious position that had a direct impact on their women left at home. Up to the early 1920s, when the Wenela Witwatersrand (NLA) was established, there was no established system for sending money home. Farm labourers in particular, including those men from the

north who migrated south to the cash-crop estates of the Shire Highlands, were not paid enough to subsist on and have money left to send home. In a traditional barter system the notion of sending money home was alien and economic accounting was therefore completely foreign to even those with rudimentary literacy. The men found themselves, therefore, in a wage-cost of living trap far from home that lasted for several years at a stretch. (A term was coined for such men who never made it home — ‘the Machona’ or ‘lost ones’). In a culture which was still largely polygamous, the obvious response (even for Christian men) was to establish a new relationship and start a second family, thus using up the hard-earned hut-tax money. Their wives, thus left husbandless — but without the decency of being honourably widowed and therefore automatically under the protection of her husband’s oldest brother, usually as his polygamous wife<sup>50</sup> — were open to multiple abuses. The painful irony was that African Christian men also invested their financial resources in the building and maintenance of Christian church buildings in the Colonial South.<sup>51</sup> Similarly men migrating from the Northern Nyasaland to work on the estates of the Shire Highlands had no established system for sending money home.

### **The Impact of the Scottish Missions**

At Blantyre in particular, Hetherwick, building on the foundation laid by David Clement Scott (the preceding Head of Station), was determined on ‘one Church for all’ with an educated African leadership (albeit all male) as the ultimate goal. Initially this dream was thwarted by racism and Social Darwinism, but it became realised gradually after 1959. Individuals in the Livingstonia Mission, notably Donald Fraser, had a similar vision, which would be similarly realised as the twentieth century progressed. A parallel secular concept of ‘Africa for the African’ was the driving force for education and the development of Western manual and intellectual skills. In general the Colonial and Continental Committee of the United Free Church and of the Church of Scotland had a consciously egalitarian attitude to the evangelisation of African men and women on the basis that preaching of the Word was free and available to all, yet a second glance reveals a rather more complicated reality.

Major academic research has already been published on the place of women within Scottish Presbyterianism<sup>52</sup> (which need not be detailed here). Suffice to note that gender bias was inherent in the ecclesiastical structure of the two evangelising denominations. The three-tier hierarchy of Church courts created an all-male network of ecclesiastical authority and social discipline. At congregational level, a group of elders and the parish minister comprised the Kirk Session while a nation-wide

network of Presbyteries constituted the second layer of power and control. Finally, the General Assembly of ministers and representative elders that met annually in Edinburgh — all exclusively male — was the final arbiter of thorny theological and disciplinary issues. Imagined egalitarianism lay in the constitutional necessity of referring major decisions for discussion at the congregational level. Within the congregation Christian women might voice their views to their husbands, brothers or fathers (in the case of unmarried women) at home; they had no public voice in church governance however. The fact that women were not admitted to the office of elder within the Church of Scotland until 1966, and that only in 1968 were they permitted to be ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments, removes any doubt concerning the subordination of women purely on gender grounds. Unquestioningly, the structure (with modifications in the early period) was superimposed upon the embryo Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), although enlightened ministers, such as Donald Fraser, instigated a breach in the male hegemony by creating an order of women deaconesses.<sup>53</sup> In the CCAP African women are paying the price to this day with a dearth of women ministers and apparent amnesia regarding the traditional role of African women as spiritual leaders.<sup>54</sup>

Within the doctrine of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ however, Presbyterian women have always been free to come before the Throne of Grace, in the knowledge of the Holy Spirit’s call within them and the model set by Christ.<sup>55</sup> By the 1870s, hundreds of British and American women (to name but two nationalities) had already dedicated their lives to active Christian service in home and foreign mission.<sup>56</sup> Those who risked their lives equally with men by joining foreign missions did so in the hope that they might be allowed to express their Christian dedication more fully than was currently possible at home. The bitterness and frustration of such women<sup>57</sup> was succinctly expressed by Mamie Martin M.A, wife of Rev Jack Martin, head of Station at Bandawe in the 1920s.

I am the only MA with teacher training in all the Mission. Miss Irvine as an old fashioned L.L.A. and Miss Petrie has no degree. Mind you, I’m not saying they are no good, especially Miss I. But I don’t see what is the use of me if I sit on a chair and sew a fine seam all day long, an occupation I dislike, and for which I have neither talent nor training.<sup>58</sup>

Male artisan missionaries and educated African men similarly discriminated against by Livingstonia Mission Council expressed parallel frustration, which predisposed (among other factors) to the development of African nationalism.<sup>59</sup> D.C. Scott likewise established a personal autocracy at Blantyre (albeit more benign than the Laws regime at Livingstonia).<sup>60</sup> Under external pressure, Scott ordained seven African men who formed the first Kirk Session, going over the heads of fellow European clergy, male artisan and female missionaries alike. Viewed with hindsight, a remarkable gender-blindness was endemic in the missionary Scotsman's social attitude although missionary women manifested obvious signs and symptoms of distress<sup>61</sup> while others survived by conforming to the stereotypical image of the submissive 'lady missionary.'<sup>62</sup>

### **The Impact of Mission Education on African Women**

The vested interests of indigenous leaders and the early missionaries dovetailed to focus predominantly on the education of young men - for valid reasons. Missionaries needed to prepare future civil and religious leaders, therefore literary and academic education was essential. Within the ethos of the period such leadership was synonymous with masculinity. Translation of scripture, carried out in the main by the early clergy, was disseminated through printed material produced locally at the earliest opportunity, using mission-trained, indigenous male printers. Trained men were also needed to build the physical body (as it were) of the emerging world; thus the second educational intention was to provide industrial education in a wide variety of construction trades including carpentry. Missionaries were also aware of the emerging needs of the expanding British Empire, especially to the east and south of the region, for men with specific training in cash associated occupations including shopkeeping and accountancy. Women were viewed as either domestic support for families or as cheap physical labour. Until 1927 the importance of educating women had not been fully recognised, except as Christian spouses for Christian men. In the first instance, when the first hallmark of civilisation was European-style clothing, skills in sewing and laundry were of prime importance in the education of women; house cleaning and childcare completed the picture. These skills fitted young women solely to be menial domestic servants in the limited number of homes of Europeans.

For all groups however, whether young or old, male or female, ability to read the Gospel was a prerequisite for baptism, therefore the development of literacy for all (echoing the Scottish Reformation) was of paramount

importance. Nevertheless, the historic attitude of the male mission hierarchy to the education and development of African women became a public issue in 1927. At a conference in Dunblane, Scotland, in a paper entitled 'The Neglected Problem of the Women', Dr. Agnes Fraser proclaimed:

Men are travelling far afield to earn money. Village after village can be visited where scarcely an able-bodied man is to be found... The natural leaders of social life are lacking. More responsibility is coming on the shoulders of women. ... Again and again evangelists came across villages where, in the absence of any male leader, Sunday services are being conducted by women.

She goes on:

By the time doctrines reach the women they are imparted with no special application to their lives and circumstances. Their teachers, with one or two fine exceptions, do not hold any extravagant, glowing ideals of womanhood. In many cases they have but a poor opinion of them and their capacities. ... The women as a whole are so left to themselves, sharing but little of the mental outlook of their menfolks, that they get very little chance of hearing new ideas discussed, and are left at a lower level of intelligence and aspiration than we can afford to leave them at, without detriment to the cause of the Kingdom.

(Ironically, a similar comment might have been made of her sister missionaries.) Fraser's final comment reveals the sense of entrapment of her missionary colleagues and their empathy with African women. By implication missionary women's intellectual stimulation and dynamic missionary action were being restricted simply because they were women. For example, however educated a missionary woman might be she could not be ordained as a minister of the Gospel.

Awaken the women's dormant powers of thought; not dictate to them what they must and must not do ... All this is terribly obvious to anyone who knows anything of village and tribal life; so obvious that I know no woman in our mission who has not longed to be free



to devote herself to this task.<sup>63</sup>

Against this picture of despair and aspiration for African women, Mamie Martin's successful vision for a boarding school for girls at Bandawe<sup>64</sup> stood as a beacon, although her missionary career was cut short.<sup>65</sup> Angrily, she had written:

'Men say "Raise the women and you will raise the men" and "The status of a people is the status of its womenhood" — and other platitudes. Words, mere empty words. One thing I am glad of — there is a woman on the new committee (of the Livingstonia Mission Council - 1924) for arranging about the next Conference (two years hence), just fancy never having had a woman before! And then boast about our British sex equality — such a contrast to the poor downtrodden African women.'<sup>66</sup>

Mamie Martin demonstrated the capacity for religious leadership (including ordination), latent within African women, as early as 1925 when (with her husband's blessing) she invited the young widow, Jeni nyaMwase, who was matron of her boarding school, to preach at a post-Communion service, attended by African men as well as women. Glorifying in the woman's achievement she wrote home to Scotland:

Yesterday at Bandawe Jeni nyaMwase gave a magnificent post Communion service address. The oratory was perfectly amazing; but it was not mere oratory; there was a great deal of solid matter behind it. The elders were filled with admiration and the women could not get over it at all that one of their own sex should be able to talk like that. Poor Jeni was quite overcome by all the congratulations she received and drew her 'saru'<sup>67</sup> over her face to hide it.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

As demonstrated above, women of Nyasaland/Malawi rose to the specific challenges of the 1920s. The source of their courage, however, arose from a female tradition that had sustained them through transportation in slave-ships, tribal upheaval, rape, and house-burning legalised by British Protectorate officers, carried out by their indigenous male representatives. Female regeneration was born of a spirit of continuing self-respect despite oppression — alternatively, in Christian terms, 'born of

the Holy Spirit' rather than through emancipation at the hands of mission, colonial or indigenous patriarchy.

The village power vacuum of the 1920s, described by Dr Agnes Fraser, reflected a multiplicity of negative influences, yet despite the opportunity for increased female participation, African women educated by Scottish Presbyterian Mission schools were not academically equipped to respond fully. Traditional village leadership-structures had been depleted by the economic power of men returning from the mines in surrounding states as well as by complex local responses to the introduction of a cash-crop economy. The ideal of village cash-crop production with British aid in marketing had been lost in an avaricious land-grab that left the notion of 'Africa for the African' as a pejorative pipe dream. Arguably, wholesale usurpation of land for white-settler estates and annexation by the British Crown perpetrated a more generalised iniquity upon the African people (not least African women) than periodic slave raids. The former permanently replaced a concept of shared custodianship of the land with one of private, mostly greed-inspired ownership.

Livingstone's well intentioned vision of replacing the slave trade with commerce (global capitalism in embryo) became a parody of increased human rights for Africans. Cash-crop production on land that had once been village farmland left the people with no means of food production and resulted in women's role as 'breadwinner' being usurped. Similarly, lack of training in intellectual and cash-earning manual skills left women increasingly vulnerable within the new cash economy, especially when widowed or otherwise left husbandless. Evidence from Alexander Hetherwick and subsequent missionaries suggests that the British Protectorate Government turned a blind eye to the economic and sexual exploitation of African women in their determination to collect the hut-tax.

By the 1920s there is clear evidence that African leaders in the Presbyterian Church had adopted an attitude of collusion in the Scottish Presbyterian exclusion of women from leadership of public worship, despite the traditional role of women in indigenous public spiritual rites. Male-specific concepts of public leadership in church and state, which were endemic to British culture, were grafted onto the similarly (although less exclusively) biased African tradition. Missionary women, not least by their subordinate role in Christian society, provided an example for African women to follow.

By 1927 the slave-ship was history, but the British Protectorate prison-house, although much more than a building with four walls, could not contain the spirit of

African women. They too would rise in the struggle for independence in the 1950s and 1960s, although their contribution is as yet virtually invisible.<sup>69</sup> Certain Malawian Christian women, as part of the emerging 'in group', had educational, social and economic advantages (if they could embrace them), but for the vast majority of non-Christian Malawian women of the 1920s suffering was chronic and by that time endemic. Change had been wrought by the impact of all the incomers to the region. However, from their foundations, Livingstonia and Blantyre Missions had stood as catalysts of the positive development. As we have seen, their positive Christian intentions occasionally had a shadow side that could not, perhaps, have been anticipated, and likewise their conviction that Christianity had the answer to the inequality of women within society. Unwittingly they carried the bug of female social inequality as part of their baggage.

## Notes

1. A.C. Ross, *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi* (Blantyre, Malawi: CLAIM, 1996), 16
2. To understand the complexity of the domestic slave market and usage within African society, see research recorded by the first Scottish Presbyterian missionary minister to Blantyre, *Duff MacDonald: Duff MacDonald, Africana; or The Heart of Heathen Africa* (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1882; reprint New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 100-180
3. J.N. Ogilvie, *Our Empire's Debt to Missions: The Duff Missionary Lectures*, 1923 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924)
4. In his major work *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi*, Andrew Ross comments: 'Their (the early missionaries') vision of "Christianity and commerce" has to a remarkable extent been fulfilled as a great modern city has grown up around the Mission. ... The Mission has also been a major force in education and today there are cabinet ministers, diplomats and many other civic leaders who owe their education to Blantyre Mission.' Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 13. A similar comment might as easily be said about the educational impact of Livingstonia Mission – among others.
5. The term 'tribal' may be considered politically incorrect. I shall use the term 'clan' where appropriate without pejorative connotation either way.
6. It is worthy of note that, according to Duff MacDonald's research, free Africa tribes-women were at liberty to own male slaves for labour and sexual services, only being obliged to get rid of the subordinate sexual partner when she married a free man. MacDonald, *Africana*, 141. Variation between tribal groups associated with slave-usage is further discussed by Jack Thompson: Thomas John Thompson, *Fraser and The Agoni: A Study in the Growth of Christianity Among the Ngoni of Northern Malawi 1878-1933, With Special Reference to the Work of Donald Fraser*, Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1980), 29-35
7. Jack Thompson argues that the progress of the Ngoni should not be understood simply in militaristic terms, but as part of a more complex matrix of rapid population growth and consequent land-shortage, together with famine that affected the whole southern African area at the time. Thompson, *Fraser and The Agoni*, 10
8. Thompson further argues that the Ngoni should not be perceived simplistically as 'a horde of wild savages' as described by early European writers, but must be understood in terms of the 'harrowing yet dynamic process known as Mfecane'; *ibid.*, 2
9. See for instance Kenneth R. Ross, *Gospel Ferment in Malawi: Theological Essays* (Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1995) and Kenneth R. Ross, ed., *God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective* (Malawi: CLAIM, 1996)
10. J. Listowel, *The Other Livingstone* (Sussex: Friedman, 1974), 176
11. James Stewart, *Livingstonia: Its Origin* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1894), 61-2
12. J. McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1977), 37
13. M. and E. King, *The Story of Medicine and Disease in Malawi: The 130 Years since Livingstone* (Malawi: Arco, 1992), 17-22 and 30
14. James Stewart, *Africa Papers* (Edinburgh: Foreign Mission Committee, 1878), 46-53. See also Jack T. Thompson, *Touching the Heart: Xhosa Missionaries to Malawi, 1876-1888* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2000), 41-42
15. Bandawe was an interim lake-shore stage but is significant herein as the origin of the Martin Letters used in an MTh Dissertation. I. E. Reid, *Myth and Reality of the Missionary Family*, Unpublished MTh Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 1999)
16. Reid, *Myth and Reality*, 10-17
17. Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 183-4
18. See for instance *The Church of Scotland Home and Foreign Mission Record*, Vol. XIX, January 1893-December 1894 (Publication Offices of the Church of Scotland Edinburgh), 659-60
19. Reid, *Myth and Reality*, 43-44
20. 'Report on Our Central Africa Fields' in *Report on Foreign Missions for 1923, Submitted to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland* (October, 1923)
21. In 1894 two missionary women, Miss Bell and Miss Werner, with the blessing of the Blantyre head of station D. C. Scott, proceeded to work with an African pastor Harry Matecheta in a peripheral pioneer venture among the Ngoni people at Panthumbi. On hearing the news, the Foreign Mission Committee ordered that the women should only serve under an ordained or medical missionary, while the Women's

Committee for Foreign Mission were not happy at the prospect of their employed women serving under Scottish artisan missionaries, never to speak of the unexpressed danger of working under male African leadership. Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 150-1

22. Reid, *Myth and Reality*, 40 and 21-22. See also S. M. Brock, *James Stewart and Lovedale: A Reappraisal of Missionary Attitudes and African Response in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, 1874-1905*, Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1974) 71-73; H. McIntosh, *Robert Laws: Servant of Africa* (Glasgows: Handsel, 1993), 62-64 and Sheila Brock, 'A Broad Strong Life' in J. Daiches, ed., *The Enterprising Scot* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 1986), 76-87

23. Letter of Mamie Martin (hereinafter MEM) wife of Rev. Jack Martin, head of station at Bandawe, to her parents-in-law, 3. 5. 1922 quoted in Reid, *Myth and Reality*, 40. See also Margaret Sinclair, *Salt and Light: The Letters of Jack and Mamie Martin (MEM) 1921-2* (Malawi: CLAIM, 2003)

24. MEM 3.3.1925

25. Joseph Booth was not unique in his vision. See H. Langworthy, 'Africa for the African': *The Life of Joseph Booth* (Malawi: CLAIM, 1996)

26. Of all the missionary leaders, David Clement Scott had the clearest vision of African equality, based on his view of African Christianity - 'one Catholic and Apostolick Church' and 'The all important communion of native and European in one worship before God will elevate all who take part': Ross *Blantyre Mission*, 146

27. Ogilvie, *Our Empire's Debt to Missions*, 3

28. Lobola has been roughly translated as 'bride-price' giving a pejorative connotation to what was in fact material evidence of esteem and future security for the bride.

29. MEM, to her parents-in-law, 16.5.27

30. Mary Levison, *Wrestling With The Church: One Woman's Experience* (London: Arthur James, 1992), passim, but especially 53-79

31. L.O. MacDonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission: Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland, 1830-1930* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 2000), 132-133

32. Silas S. Ncozana, *The Spirit Dimension in African Christianity: A Pastoral Study Among the Tumbuka People of Northern Malawi* (Malawi: CLAIM, 2002), 15. See also J. V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London: SCM, 1963)

33. For example, in burial customs old women washed the body of the deceased and prepared it for burial, *ibid.*, 77. Mature women traditionally had a similar role in British society.

34. MacDonald, *Africana*, Vol. I, passim

35. Ncozana, *The Spiritual Dimension*, 83-84

36. MacDonald, *Africana*, Vol. 1, 69

37. Ncozana, *The Spiritual Dimension*, 77

38. *Ibid.*, 77

39. In Tumbuka tradition men, for instance, were also farmers. *Ibid.*, 58

40. The Tumbuka accepted monogamy and polygamy, *ibid.*

41. Many men of the mission hierarchy were rigid in their prohibition of polygamy for aspiring communicants, but men such as Donald Fraser had a more merciful attitude.

42. Thompson, *Fraser and the Agoni*, 230-40

43. 'At first I was a good deal overcome by the terribly nude condition of the people ...if it weren't for trade, how much nicer it would be to have all natives ...with clean well-oiled bodies ... instead of being swathed in filthy smelly calico', Jane Moir, *A Lady's Letters from Central Africa: A Journey from Mandala, Shire Highlands to Ujiji, Lake Tanganyika and Back* (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1891), 49

44. Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 153 and 185

45. Norman MacLean, *Africa in Transition*, (London: J. Nisbet, 1943); Ogilvie, 'Our Empire's Debt to Missions', in Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 192

46. Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 85- 104. The first step was taken by ex-missionary, Acting Consul John Buchanan, on 21 September 1889; however, the official proclamation was made by Consul Johnston in July 1891. Further developments of colonial status took place in 1904 and 1907: Hetherwick, *The Romance of Blantyre*, 62, 69-71, 133 and 157

47. Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 191

48. *Ibid.*, 149 and 192

49. Letter from Cullen Young to Alexander Hetherwick, 14 January 1919, Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 192

50. Although anathema to most missionaries, the relationship afforded automatic protection for a widow and her children. On the acceptance or rejection of this custom, Donald Fraser (with the majority of ordained Africans on the Livingstonia Mission Council) and Robert Laws (and like-minded colleagues) were sharply divided. See Thompson, *Fraser and the Agoni*, 219

51. Letter MME to her parents-in-law, 19.7.1926

52. Macdonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission*, passim

53. T. J. Thompson, *Christianity in Northern Malawi: Donald Fraser's Missionary Methods & Ngoni Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 161-3. I think it is likely that Fraser was influenced by his wife, Agnes Fraser MB ChB.

54. Isobel Apawo Phiri, 'Marching, Suspended and Stoned: Christian Women in Malawi 1995' in Kenneth Ross, ed., *God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective* (Malawi: CLAIM, 1996), 63-107

55. Levison, *Wrestling With The Church*, 1- 4

56. Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought* (Georgia: Mercer U.P., 1997, reprint 1998)

57. It is evident that a number of women were happy to accept the place and role allotted to them by the mission



hierarchy, sublimating any feeling of subordination by prayer and increased dedication.

58. Ibid.

59. Thompson, *Fraser and the Agoni*, 219-20 and 230-40,

60. Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 152, 165, 172

61. Reid, *Myth and Reality*, 30-32, 37, 40-45

62. Letter of MME, 25.7. 22, quoted in Reid, *Myth and Reality*, 41

63. Mrs. Agnes Fraser, 'The Neglected Problem of the Women', *Other Lands* (VI, January 1927), 53-55

64. It would be wrong to imply here that there were no boarding schools elsewhere. Residential education for girls had been established with varying success in Blantyre and Livingstonia as early as it was deemed feasible.

65. The boarding school for girls was established with support and funding from her mother and mother-in-law in Scotland; however she died of Malaria (Black Water Fever) in 1928. Reid, *Myth and Reality*, 50-53

66. MME letter, 28.9.24, *ibid.* 50

67. A saru is a piece of cloth usually wound around the lower body, or extending from chest to ankles. Malawian women usually wear several such lengths of cloth at once.

68. MME letter, 30.3.25, quoted in Reid, *Myth and Reality*, 49

69. Andrew Ross recounts, from personal experience the 1000 men and three women imprisoned in September 1959 for threatening the authority of the Protectorate Government and the Government of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. 700 of the men, and two of the three women, were members of the Church of Central African Presbyterian: Ross, *Blantyre Mission*, 11



## OBITUARY

### Eva Kolinsky (1940-2005)

Eva Kolinsky, academic, writer, mother, grandmother, wife, colleague and friend, died on 8 August 2005 of ovarian cancer.

Born Eva Haeckel in June 1940 in Thuringia, Germany, she grew up experiencing at first hand the trauma that she was later to write about so eloquently. At the end of the war, when the Soviet Union took over responsibility for Eastern Germany, young Eva's family fled to the West to live in Bavaria. From there they moved to Frankfurt where she studied at the gymnasium and then at Frankfurt University before transferring to the Free University of Berlin. Here she gained a PhD with a thesis on German expressionist journals.

Eva's first research award brought her to the University of Birmingham where she met and married Martin Kolinsky, the twentieth century European historian. From this time, Eva Kolinsky made Birmingham her home, taking a job as lecturer in German studies at Aston University, a chair of German at Bath, a chair of Modern German Studies at Keele University and, finally, a professorial fellowship at the University of Wolverhampton.

Eva Kolinsky's arrival at Wolverhampton brought it much-needed intellectual distinction and research direction. Her outstanding intellect, modulated by humanity and compassion, was used not just to further her own career but to help other less experienced colleagues. Among many other initiatives to support emerging researchers, Eva Kolinsky co-founded a Women's History Research Unit which aimed to encourage and develop women's research careers. Her appointment at Wolverhampton coincided with a time of turbulence and low staff morale but Eva's quiet, professional, intelligent and wise counsel helped colleagues withstand much of management's perceived inadequacies.

At a time of increased pressure on academics to secure external research funding, Eva Kolinsky's research brilliance brought her many awards. In her career, she received funding from the British Academy, the Nuffield Foundation, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Georg Eckert Institute, the AHRB, the ESRC, the German Academic Exchange

Service and the Anglo-German Foundation, as well as various sponsored visits to several American and German conferences. From 1995-2002, Eva Kolinsky directed an ESRC-funded Anglo-German programme of research into the post-communist transformation of eastern Germany and edited/co-edited several books arising from this work. At the time of her death she was collaborating on a major AHRB-funded research programme on the position of former foreign workers in the GDR and since unification in eastern Germany.

Eva Kolinsky's unselfish approach to research and her willingness to share her brilliance with others led to many collaborative efforts. She was academic mentor to so many of us. One of her co-edited books, *Reinventing Gender: Women in Eastern Germany since Unification* (Frank Cass, 2003) focuses on the consequences for women after the collapse of the Berlin wall and subsequent re-unification. In the GDR, unlike the Federal Republic where it was a major political issue, gender was not perceived to be a problem. On the contrary, the state endorsed female emancipation, enacted laws to ensure one of the highest female employment rates in Europe and provided child-care facilities and other support for working mothers, so women did not see life as a battle between the sexes. Of course, the hidden reality was that women's economic, social and political life lagged behind that of the men's. In the post-communist world gender emerged as a new divide and this collection of essays concentrates on the situations and experiences of women since the fall of the Berlin wall. Predictably, as Eva Kolinsky and others argue, women have had fewer employment opportunities, lower job security and less child-care support since unification. But Eva Kolinsky does not 'victimise' women, rather she shows them fighting hard to develop new strategies to retain their place in the newly competitive labour market of re-united Germany.

There have been migrations of unprecedented scale in the twentieth century as wars, revolutions, decolonisation and economic dislocation have uprooted and displaced millions of people. Eva Kolinsky, sympathetic to the plight of refugees, co-edited *Turkish Culture in German Society Today* which deals with the plight of an immigrant group fleeing from one form of economic and political hardship to another. In this book, Eva Kolinsky shows how two million Turkish people, many of whom are second and third generation immigrants, suffer from low acceptance, poor career opportunities and requests by the state to conform to majority cultural norms.

But it is in her solely authored books that Eva Kolinsky demonstrates the special power of her intellectual genius. Her last book, *After the Holocaust* (Pimlico, 2004) is dedicated to her grandchildren, Zoë and Noah, 'who are

too young to know about the past, but young enough to shape the future'. The book is based on interviews, memoirs, letters and contemporary reports and contains the experiences of survivors from Nazi Germany, liberators, government officials, aid workers and others. It is a moving account of what it was like for Jewish people to live in post-war Germany. 'The normalisation of Jewish life after 1945 amounted to abandonment', Eva Kolinsky argues. After suffering from and surviving Nazi persecution, German Jews were classified as Germans by the new authorities and were thus not entitled to additional food rations or other support. Non-Jewish Germans, on the other hand, busied themselves with their own reconstruction of Germany leaving Jews to depend on military and Jewish aid agencies. 'For most survivors', Eva Kolinsky comments 'liberation occurred inside Germany where many had to remain, as in an unloved waiting room because they had nowhere else to go'. Sadly, Eva Kolinsky will no longer be able to write the sequel she was planning to this book, but her published record will ensure that her grandchildren can find out about the past, proud that their grandmother helped create its history.

Undoubtedly, Eva Kolinsky's published work embodies a whole new field of historical enquiry with influence that will shape the future of historical writing. By the time of her death she had published six books, several edited collections and numerous learned articles. These publications did much to define the field of post-war German history. No less influential was her work on the London Executive of the Leo Baeck Institute and as founding editor and past chair of the Association for the Study of German Politics.

But Eva Kolinsky was more than the sum of her academic success. She shared with her husband Martin the bringing up of her children, the shopping, the house-keeping, the gardening and she was enjoying her new role as grandmother to her adored Zoë and Noah. She was also a great cook. Eva Kolinsky was not just a brilliant intellectual but a caring, warm-hearted, considerate woman who shared her many gifts generously with family, friends and colleagues.

Paula Bartley  
Pécs, Hungary

## Book Reviews

Susan Pedersen

*Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*

**New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2004  
£25.00, ISBN 0-300-10245-3 (hardback), pp. xv + 479**

Reviewed by Pat Starkey

*School of History, University of Liverpool*

Eleanor Rathbone was a remarkable feminist whose achievements have too easily been forgotten. As suffragist, social worker, social scientist and Member of Parliament, she kept the concerns of women at the forefront of her work. She is justly associated with the long battle for what she called family endowment and was eventually to be metamorphosed, albeit in modified form, into family allowances and to form part of the welfare reforms introduced by the Labour government at the end of the Second World War. Her campaign for financial support for mothers was prompted by her research into the pay and conditions of Liverpool dock workers and her realisation that casual labour systems had a seriously damaging impact on the wives of workers, who had to try to feed and clothe their families when wages were both irregular and, often, inadequate. In 1909 she produced a report that sowed the seeds for radical proposals, eventually published in 1924 as *The Disinherited Family*, and which argued for an allowance to be paid to women to enable them to fulfil their role as mothers. It took more than twenty years for her ideas to receive official approval and partial implementation.

But important though that was, Eleanor's campaigns and achievements were more wide-ranging. As a young and idealistic graduate of Somerville College, Oxford, she ran up against the disadvantages attached to being a woman. She and her talented contemporaries found that there were few opportunities for them to exercise their abilities: they could not influence policy by standing for Parliament, nor were many professions anxious to recruit women in the mid-1890s. But the class of 1893 possessed vigour and determination and Eleanor and others threw themselves with energy into the task of working to open doors both for themselves and for other women. Eleanor joined a Liverpool branch of the Women's Industrial Society, became the honorary secretary of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society and a member of the National Executive of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. In 1902, she was recruited by Elizabeth Macadam and Emily Jones to work with them at the Victoria

Settlement in Liverpool and immediately took responsibility for its social investigations. Together the three women transformed the Settlement and, as a result of their experiences there, helped to found the School of Social Science and Training for Social Work at the University of Liverpool in 1905.

Eleanor the social scientist was also Eleanor the politician. As a suffragist she was active both in Liverpool and throughout the country in promoting constitutional means to achieve the vote for women and in stressing the important part that women's participation could play in social reform. When, in 1909, women ratepayers were for the first time allowed to stand for election to local authorities, Eleanor, as an Independent, successfully contested a seat in Granby Ward in Liverpool, representing it without a break until 1935. In 1929, when full suffrage was granted to women, she was elected as an Independent Member of Parliament for the Combined English Universities, a seat she retained until her death in 1946. Although she used it to argue for unemployment benefits that reflected the cost of feeding a family and other 'women's issues', she was also prepared to speak about international affairs; to deplore British policy towards Abyssinia in 1935; to urge rearmament in 1936; to castigate the government for its policy of non-intervention during the Spanish Civil War; and to mount a sustained attack on the policy of appeasement. Few other MPs could have been more active — and none would have had the double Parliamentary disadvantage of being both female and an Independent. She engaged in activities on behalf of all refugees but particularly Jews fleeing Europe with the help of the 'Parliamentary Committee on Refugees'. Although this rejoiced in an official-sounding title, it was in fact an unofficial organisation, financed by Eleanor and operating from the London flat she shared with Elizabeth Macadam.

Why, then, are so few of us aware of her contribution? Pedersen's biography has introduced us to a shy, reticent, and sometimes prickly person. It has also demonstrated the self-effacing manner which allowed Eleanor to work through others, to brief well-connected allies and to set up cross-party committees that achieved her ends while allowing her to avoid personal publicity. As the university department that Eleanor founded, and in which she taught, celebrates a century of training men and women to support families in need, Susan Pedersen's excellent biography is a timely reminder of notable achievement.



Omma Velada  
*The Mackerby Scandal*

**UKA Press, 2004.**  
**£7.99, ISBN 1-904781-10-1 (paperback), pp. 183**

Reviewed by Margaret Grant  
York

Anyone who thinks that the lives of well brought-up young ladies in the early 1800s must have been as restrictive as the Prince Regent's stays — and wondered what the servants might have said had they had a voice in society — should read this novel.

*The Mackerby Scandal* is set in England in the first half of the nineteenth century. Ostensibly, the story revolves around the mannered, fashionable lives of a small group of genteel households in Hampshire and London as they socialise, gossip, and look for marriage partners. But this polite façade is challenged by the progressive ideas that were beginning to impinge on people at that time and which are to have a particularly striking impact upon the life of the novel's heroine, Catherine.

Catherine is a young girl of marriageable age from a good family. She attracts the attention of Mr Larkin, the new, rich tenant of Ellis Park, the ancestral home of the Mackerby family. He quickly proposes and, swayed by his suitability and her father's staunch approval of the match, she accepts. But her happiest moments come not with her critical, rather supercilious fiancé but out riding with his groom, James. Through him she comes to see that the position held by members of her own class in society is only possible through the degradation of the 'lower orders'. Ultimately she is able to form a true estimate of the respective worth of her two suitors, based on their characters rather than their social status, and rejects Mr Larkin's overbearing deviousness for James' manly integrity.

It is perhaps a little hard to credit that a lady could really marry a servant at that time. The eponymous scandal concerns a separate incident in which a young lady was cast off by her family for running away with a servant, later dying alone in miserable squalor. The characters are aware of the horror of this, alluding to it infrequently and only very reluctantly. In a key conversation which encapsulates the theme of the novel, Catherine's close friend Elizabeth is adamant that: 'a servant and a lady simply cannot be friends' (p. 142). Wise advice — but then, Catherine is no ordinary lady. Brought up without a mother's guiding hand in a rural household she lacks the polished refinement of London, something that grates upon Mr Larkin. Similarly, James Hunter, though a groom, is a well educated, ambitious man of ideas.

Neither of them quite fit their allotted place in their world and thus they are attracted to each other.

The conversations that the two have whilst on horseback seem much more real than the rather formal, stylised sentences and behaviour of the genteel characters. Catherine's behaviour is also more natural here, as she relaxes and indulges in her passion for riding, even discarding her petticoats for the much more comfortable breeches. The sense of freedom and movement in the riding passages is one of the novel's great strengths, acting as a metaphor for the heroine's journey away from the suffocating restraints imposed upon her by both class and sex, towards the confidence and security of true self-knowledge.

*The Mackerby Scandal's* minor characters provide considerable interest. Sarah's letter to Catherine (pp. 152-153) announcing her own future marriage and her openly mercenary attitude towards it sums her up very nicely, whilst Colonel Whitehill, with his deep tan and exciting tales of military life, is very much of his era. On a darker note, the suffering endured by the poorer inhabitants of Farringdon, especially Agnes' family — and Mr Larkin's callous attitude to it — do much to open Catherine's eyes. And it can be possible to find sincerity and lasting love from within the ranks of gentry, as Catherine's brother Charles and friend Elizabeth show in their quiet but devoted attachment to each other.

As well as being a highly modern take on the Georgian master-servant relationship, *The Mackerby Scandal* is a very visual book, packed full of images of life just before the Industrial Revolution. Reading it is rather like standing in the gallery of an English country house and looking at the pictures on the walls. There are the dances, the picnic, the dramatic storm-set rescue and the carriage-thronged streets of London. But centre place is given to the equestrian portrait. In the foreground are a lady and her groom, riding two elegant hunters in a perfectly landscaped park. Behind them in the distance, are the Palladian mansion and then the smaller whitewashed lodge where they will live. Beyond that again the landscape sweeps away into a distant vista of hills and sky, symbolising the harmony of their future lives together.

**Book Reviewers Sought**

**Please see notice on p. 45**

Krista Cowman

*"Mrs. Brown is a Man and a Brother!" Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations 1890-1920*

**Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004.**

**£18.50, ISBN 0-85323-748-4 (paperback), pp. 196**

Reviewed by Jessica Thurlow

*University of Michigan*

Krista Cowman's text on Merseyside's women's politics between 1890 and 1920 is both well researched and wonderfully readable, and illustrates the necessity of local studies to our understanding of women's political activity. Taking on a broad sweep of time inclusive of such cataclysmic change as the birth of the Labour Party, the growth of New Unionism, the First World War and the enfranchisement of women, Cowman details the numerous political opportunities available to women in Merseyside from women's unions to political party organizations to suffrage organizations (she studies only those groups in which formal membership was required). The main thrust of her book is to argue that narratives of national movements often focus heavily upon the personalities and agendas of individual leaders and overlook the intricate networks and decision-making processes of local organizations, their leaders and members. The actions of local organizations, as Cowman states, 'demonstrate that political activism is rarely as simple as studies of national movements would have us believe' (p. 121), even while she concedes that many local groups were 'tied to the fortunes' (p. 95) of national bodies.

Chapter by chapter, Cowman takes her reader on both a chronological and thematically arranged journey through Merseyside's women's politics. Such an arrangement enables her to scrutinize and introduce her readers to a vast number of organizations (well over 40) creating, for example, a chapter devoted to the numerous organizations which cropped up during the First World War (e.g. Home Service Corps). Certainly one of the key strengths of Cowman's text is her decision to consider the enormous breadth of political work available to women in a specific region rather than focusing on a single, or one type of, organization. Thus, her research provides a fascinating catalogue of the important achievements of a multitude of often lesser-known organizations, the richness and variety of women's political activity in Merseyside, and the ways in which loyalties to such things as gender, class, political party, friends, work and religion influenced women's activism. Although Cowman spends a good deal of time discussing organizational policy, the reader is also introduced to an array of determined local

organizers such as Jeannie Mole, Nessie Stewart-Brown and Dr Alice Ker, putting a personal face on this work and leaving the reader wishing for more information of this type.

Suffrage organizations receive the greatest attention in Cowman's book given their crucially important place in the politicization of Merseyside women. She argues that they acted as a 'catalyst' (p. 96) for women's political education, and, in contrast to other groups, drew 'unprecedented numbers of women into the public political sphere' (p. 119). The Liverpool WSPU in particular, with its focus on political unity around securing the vote, was, according to Cowman, the most successful 'in opening up the world of public political campaigning to more local women than any other organisation had managed to do' (p. 95). Suffrage was, of course, a divisive issue for many women forcing them to reconsider other loyalties, a topic which Cowman explores well in Chapter Seven's examination of party politics from 1905-14.

One of the major contributions of Cowman's text is her careful attention to the ideologies of the political organizations she considers, fitting her groups broadly into one of three models: 'separate spheres', 'socialist' and 'sex-class'. These models assist Cowman in illustrating why women chose to work in particular organizations, and, also why some organizations were more successful than others. Proponents of the 'separate spheres model' (seen, for example, in the work of local Conservative women) believed in an 'essential biological difference' (p. 7) between women and men, and, thus, a need for women's influence within the public sphere. The 'socialist model' emphasized class as a primary component of political identity, stressing the interconnectedness of class and women's oppression and portraying feminism as beneficial primarily to middle-class women. Finally, the 'sex-class model', which was pervasive within the WSPU, was primarily characterized by positing women as a common class in opposition to men and women organizing with women. Cowman concludes that the 'sex-class model' was the most successful at bringing together large numbers of women from diverse backgrounds on a single-issue campaign (the vote), while 'separate spheres' enjoyed the greatest 'longevity' of the three models, however, neither fared particularly well after 1918. Interestingly, the 'socialist model', in which women's work was often relegated to women's sections of male-dominated organizations, had marked achievements in providing women with access to politics, leading Cowman to conclude that this model 'delivered more over the long term' (p. 169).

Cowman's text has numerous strengths and provides a compelling argument for further local studies, at the same

time that it offers its own significant contribution to the historiography on women's political activity. Historians of suffrage, labour, party politics, religion and the First World War will find it immensely useful.

Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (eds.)

*Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags*

Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004.

£20, ISBN 0-7165-2767-7 (paperback), pp. 239

Reviewed by Dr. Myrtle Hill

*Centre for Women's Studies, Queen's University, Belfast*

Much has been written on the subject of Irish nationalism, but this new volume, edited by Margaret Ward and Louise Ryan, provides fresh insights into the long struggle for an independent Ireland. Putting women centre-stage not only fills important gaps in political and feminist historiography, but facilitates a more complex analysis of some of the most dramatic and critical events of Ireland's past.

The long time-span — from the Rising of 1641 to the still fresh 'Troubles' of the north — reveals significant changes and continuities, both in the contributions made by women and in the ways in which they were portrayed by their peers and opponents. The shifting perspectives afforded by an interdisciplinary approach embracing literature, cultural studies, oral and feminist history, reflect the diversity of female experiences as prisoners, combatants, writers, community activists and politicians, and the multi-layered nature of the work is reinforced by the collaboration between academics and activists which brought it to fruition.

The first section of the book, in which women's historical participation in anti-colonial movements is explored, opens with a chapter by Andrea Knox, who points to the power of at least a minority of women in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Ireland to influence events, and traces the development of national as well as gender identities in this process. Jan Cannavan argues that the revolutionary women of 1798 and 1848, while challenging British rule, also took the first tentative steps in the struggle for women's rights, thus helping to 'set the stage for later Irish Republican feminists to make further demands' (43). Knox, in particular, makes good use of manuscript sources, and both essays help bring women into the revolutionary framework, in sometimes unexpected ways.

The focus of the essays in the second section is on the representation of women through a range of cultural

mediums. Louise Ryan considers how women activists were constructed in the writings of republican men in the conflicts of 1919-1923, while Karen Steele's assessment of the writings of Constance Markievicz argues that her 'politics of memory' makes a positive and previously underestimated contribution to nationalist discourse. Danae O'Regan takes the novel as her subject and, in her comparison of the works of two nationalist women, demonstrates how a careful analysis of literature can provide insight both into the aims and mindset of the author, and the actual events of the past. Jayne Steele moves to the visual arena, and in a fascinating essay, analyses the various utilizations of gendered iconographic images and their impact on popular culture, on the lives of women, and on nationalist politics.

The third and final section is concerned with more recent events, particularly in the north of Ireland, and the voices of female republican prisoners pervade Mary Corcoran's opening essay, prompting 'productive insights into the influences that gendered and other forms of difference have on the direction of prison resistance' (130). Rhiannon Talbot follows this with a discussion of the role of women as combatants in the IRA, and the somewhat patchy development of a feminist perspective amongst republican women. Her piece ends with a series of questions around the relationship between republicanism and feminism which, while comprehensively addressed throughout this volume, still evade definitive answers. Female community activism, clearly acknowledged as one of the greatest strengths of the Northern Ireland situation, provides the focus for essays by Claire Hackett and Callie Persic. Hackett presents narratives of activism in west Belfast which suggest that 'women can create autonomy in their lives through confronting power structures in a variety of ways and through creating networks of support and solidarity' (166). In similar vein, Persic discusses how engagement in community work facilitated the emergence of a strong gender consciousness amongst a group of local women who, while often resisting a 'feminist' identity, nonetheless positively renegotiated their position in their locality.

One of the book's major aims is to explore the tensions between feminism and nationalism, and Ward's own contribution tackles this head-on by comparing 'times of transition' in 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland and by stressing the importance of women's full engagement in the current 'peace process' — an issue whose urgency is reinforced by the recent removal from the political scene of the Women's Coalition, to whom she refers. That things can change so swiftly renders the challenge to prevent a 'return to the margins' of immediate significance. However, a personal quibble, which has



more to do with the broader historical and political landscape of the north, is that nationalism itself is somewhat vaguely defined throughout the book and, more importantly, there is no reference at all to protestant/unionist versions of national identity. However, this does not detract from my positive response to a book, which — in addition to being a very good read — makes a welcome contribution to both Irish and women's history.

Jo Eadie (ed.)

*Sexuality: The Essential Glossary*

**London: Arnold, 2004.**

**£19.99, ISBN 0-340-80675-3 (paperback), pp. 286**

Reviewed by Arlene Searle

*Aberdeen*

A glossary of sexuality without the word 'fuck' in it. That's the least surprising element to Jo Eadie's latest addition to the Essential Glossary series. The book presents four hundred key terms in the rapidly expanding field of sexuality studies, concisely, provocatively and in most cases clearly explained by fifty expert contributors. If at first terms like '*sexual stratification*', '*normalization*' and '*lesbian continuum*' seem impenetrable persevere, because this book grows on you.

At the heart of the project is a genuine attempt to bring under the one roof the seemingly unending range of disciplines called upon to explain sexual individuality in the 21st century. From ethnography, legal studies and linguistics, to health education and psychoanalysis, Eadie's multi-discipline approach presents the widest possible backdrop to the full range of human desire and sexual experience.

Being a glossary the book offers summarized debate rather than pure definition, allowing it to stride intelligently from slang to ethics. There are outlines of practices like '*circle-jerking*', '*rainbow kissing*' and the full range of watersports including, '*golden showers*' and '*catheter sex*' alongside probing questions in territory like incest and abortion. According to the editor, himself a campaigner in the bisexual community, incest is a heterosexualised debate in Western Society, as it centres entirely around pregnancy and marriage. But Eadie asks, what of incest in a gay context, where gay men often describe sex with their brothers as an important starting point in defining their own identities? Similarly on abortion arresting fact and well trodden argument sit comfortably side by side. The Pro-Life debate is

counterbalanced by discourse on the ethics of termination of fetuses with disability, and the brutal statistic that over a quarter of countries worldwide outlaw abortion, causing over 500 deaths of women daily as a result of unsafe termination. Overall, definition and discussion is so unbiased that practices otherwise often classified under deviance, when presented in black and white, seem to lose their otherness. Terminology like '*coprophilia*' and '*SCAT*', the use of faeces during sexual intercourse, is complemented by a list of good practice, safer sex messages.

For light relief from the weightier issues though, head to entries like V for '*vagina dentata*' for a cultural history of the mythological toothed vagina that symbolizes male fear of the female body or V for '*vibrator*'. Seemingly what started out as a cure for hysteria became a device for the kitchen, complete with attachments for whisking and churning no less. For luddites confused by virtual sex T for '*Teledildonics*' is helpful, offering a complete rundown of the hopes and limitations of computer-mediated eroticism.

On the whole the book does offer A-Z clarity in a field Eadie rightly calls a 'war of ideas' but unfortunately probably won't attract a readership beyond the specialist audience. This is a shame because it does have the strength to make you question your own skin, which is, by the way, 'the problematic seat of race, bearer of religious and spiritual inscription and the site of piercing, assault and mutilation'. *Sexuality* is a challenging read preferably not dipped into on the train and probably best not brought out in the illustrated edition.

Angela Brabin

*The Black Widows of Liverpool*

**Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2003.**

**£8.00, ISBN 0-8741-8121-7 (paperback), pp 153.**

Reviewed by Tracey Icton

*Brisbane, Australia*

Brabin's book, despite the rather sensational sub-title, 'A chilling account of cold-blooded murder in Victorian Liverpool,' is a serious and thoroughly researched examination of the intricate and intriguing story of the arrest trail and execution for murder of sisters Catherine Flanagan and Margaret Higgins in Liverpool in 1884.

The book details how the two sisters, living in a deprived predominantly Catholic Liverpool slum in the late Victorian period, cunningly insured the lives of several close relatives and friends before mercilessly poisoning them to claim the benefits of the policies secured on

them. The women, hanged for the murder of Thomas Higgins, Margaret's husband, were suspected at the time of their trial of more than the one murder for which they were convicted. Drawing on a variety of sources including legal documents, medical reports, local press reports from the time of the murder and correspondence from the then Home Secretary in the aftermath of their conviction, Brabin presents a strong case that these women were indeed serial murderers and further, that they were not the only persons with whom responsibility for their crimes rested.

Brabin's research leads her to the revelations that make this book a truly interesting account of women's roles in criminal activities in the Victorian period. A world away from the previously presented image of women who murdered during this time being isolated figures who worked alone and were shunned by the wider community, Flanagan and Higgins are not only supported by their neighbours and friends but actively worked with them, effectively forming a syndicate of, at the very least, insurance fraud and in some cases possibly murder.

The story of the crimes perpetrated by Flanagan and Higgins is a complex one with many ravelling threads. The crime for which they were hanged was certainly the last in a long line of poisonings. Thomas Higgins, their final victim, died on 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, 1883. The cause of death was initially noted as dysentery. But suspicions were raised by Patrick Higgins, Thomas's brother. On re-examining the body of Thomas Higgins, at the request of the coroner and with the urging of Patrick Higgins, Dr Whitford, who had originally inaccurately stated the cause of death, now identified that death was due to arsenic poisoning.

While the story of the tragic and callous murder of seventeen potential victims, one as young as ten and many members of Flanagan's or Higgins's immediate family, is engrossing, the real focus of this book is the involvement and culpability of the wider community who should, Brabin successfully argues, share some of the responsibility for these deaths. She reveals medical examiners with better things to do than minister to the poor and who would rather accept the symptoms described by family members prior to an individual's death and pronounce accordingly than actually examine the body of the deceased. Insurance agents, hungry for their commission, were happy to insure the life of a person without that person being present to sign the proposal forms. In rare cases where these companies were more scrupulous the sisters had sufficient cunning to enable them to obtain the policy sought, in one case by presenting a man who impersonated Thomas Higgins and in others by lying or falsifying signatures. Chemists from whom poisonous materials were readily and cheaply

available showed little interest in the reasons behind such purchases. And finally, the community of well educated males in authority who refused to believe that women of such a humble background and with so little education could so thoroughly deceive them all, something that Flanagan and Higgins had been doing for at least three years at the time of their arrest.

*The Black Widows of Liverpool* offers a fresh perspective on Victorian women's involvement with serious crime. These two women clearly did not work alone and relied on the wider acceptance or ignorance and even collusion of society towards their actions to make a successful career from murder and fraud. One of the most shocking facts uncovered by Brabin during her extensive research is the amount of money gained from their crimes. On policies for just three of the victims the total paid out exceeds £150, a staggering amount when considering that the average weekly wage for men of such families was a mere sixteen shillings. Although this book does raise more questions than it would ever be possible to answer with certainty it is worthy of a read by anyone interested, either academically or personally, in the crimes of women during this period with particular emphasis to the role of society in enabling such horrific killings to take place, not once or twice but on multiple occasions.

Clare Gibson

*Symbols of the Goddess: Universal Signs of the Divine Female*

**Scotland: Saraband, 2004.**

**£9.99, ISBN 1-887354-20-4 (hardback), pp. 112**

Reviewed by A.Eylem Atakav

*Southampton Solent University*

"I am nature, the universal mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead... Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names, propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me." (Lucius Apuleius, from *The Golden Ass*)

Just after Morny Joy, referring to Luce Irigaray, reminded us at the *Woman and the Divine Conference* last June that a woman has to become self aware to become divine and that divinity lives and breeds in us, this book assumed much more significance for it manipulates the reader to experience a widespread awakening to the 'need' to embrace the qualities of

love, harmony, beauty, justice and compassion — the qualities embodied in the divine female.

'The Goddess' is the most ancient manifestation of the deeply rooted human urge to project its inner sense of the sacred onto a supreme deity. It is hardly surprising that such a powerful creator/protector should have been universally as female. Her supreme status is, in fact, perfectly logical as women's 'apparently awesome powers over life' — of spontaneously generating children, sustaining their offspring with breast milk, and surviving the menstrual blood loss which should surely have killed them — were regarded as supernatural, whereas the masculine role in procreation was unknown and men seemed virtually impotent, for it was not even suspected that they played a part in the conception and reproduction of human life. Moreover, attributes from the natural world became primary symbols of the Goddess.

However, over the past two millennia, patriarchal models have gradually become firmly established around the world, supplanting positive perceptions of womanhood with the idea of 'natural' masculine superiority, and equating femininity with physical and moral weakness whilst heralding the downfall of the Goddess. As a corollary, previously matriarchal societies became subject to the dominance of patriarchies, and the supreme status of the Goddess gradually became subordinated to that of a male deity.

Gibson's approach to the collapse of the divine female concurs with Irigaray's words, '...the earth is a resource; we need its minerals, metals, plants, hydrogen, oxygen. It gives us what we need to breathe, to eat, to live. The patriarchal order does not appreciate the real value of the world we have and draws up its often bankrupt blueprints on the basis of hypothetical worlds' (Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference* [1993]).

Clare Gibson's meticulous research illuminates a long-lost spiritual dimension. The symbols sacred to the Goddess since ancient times are explored and their importance to the collective human psyche revealed. The book presents a representative selection of some of the most significant manifestations of the Goddess, roughly categorized by date and by geographical and/or cultural areas. As Gibson explains, through the multitude of symbols outlined, which are given meaning within the context of their culture, readers may gain a comprehensive introduction to the complex characteristics and powers of the Goddess, and perhaps be inspired to learn more about this most ancient, universal and remarkable supreme deity.

Indeed, although this volume cannot be considered very academic in the sense that it is not theoretical enough, it is certainly a fascinating book specifically for scholars who are concerned with religious and women's studies, or for those who are feminist theologians.

Gibson successfully answers the key questions — which she asks in her introduction — of 'why the Goddess alone fulfils an overwhelming spiritual need; why despite the treatment to which she has been subjected, has this deity survived against the odds; and why is the Goddess such a powerful and universal symbolic entity across the collective spectrum of humanity's sacred beliefs?'

Illustrated with a wealth of photographs, fine art and powerful icons from around the world, this 'celebration' of the divine female is as visually rich as it is stimulating to those who seek a greater awareness of self, sexuality and human society.

To conclude, it is apposite to note that this volume is particularly strong in putting a big brick on to the giant building of the revolution of becoming self aware in order to become divine as in the words of Irigaray:

...it is impossible for each individual to recreate the whole of History. But...any individual, a woman or a man, can and must recreate her or his personal and collective history. For this to be accomplished...everyone should be able to be aware of her or his obligations, to judge of her or his own decisions. No one ought to believe.

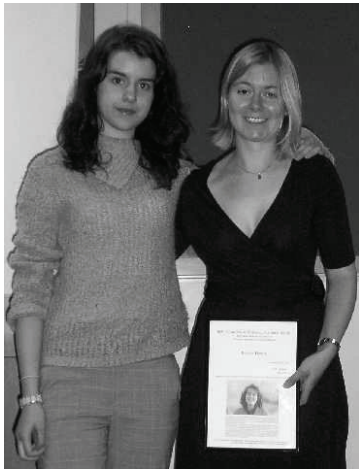
## Prizes Awarded

### Report on the Clare Evans Prize 2005

The winner of the Clare Evans prize for 2005 was Kirsten Fenton, a post-doctoral student at the University of Liverpool, for a fascinating essay on the construction of masculinity in the writings of William of Malmesbury, the twelfth-century English chronicler. This discussed different styles of acceptable masculinity in a fascinating and subtle fashion and also offered insights into representations of womanhood in medieval England. Kirsten is completing a monograph entitled *Gender, nation and conquest in the works of William of Malmesbury* and working on a project on 'Gender, war, conquest and nation' in Anglo-Norman writings at Liverpool. The prize was presented to Kirsten by Clare's daughter Merlin at the Southampton conference with one of the judges, Elaine Chalus, presiding.

This year there were only seven entries only for the prize, mostly from postgraduate students with a few from





Kirsten Fenton (right) with Clare's daughter, Merlin

independent scholars. The essays were all lively and addressed important topics. They ranged widely in period (from the eleventh to the twentieth century), place (Britain, the USA and Germany) and topic. There were essays on female mountaineers, on spies, belly-dancers and air-line pilots. Specific feedback was given to all entrants.

The judges, June Hannam, Ann Hughes, Liz Harvey, and Elaine Chalus will be carrying on for 2006, and a member of the Women's History Network Steering Committee will be joining us. We will be working to improve publicity for the prize and urge all members of the network to draw it to the attention of possible entrants. It has proved immensely rewarding for the winners in offering validation for their work and a publication at the start of their careers as historians.

The closing date for the 2006 prize is 31 May 2006 and entries should be sent to Ann Hughes, School of Humanities (History), Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire ST5 5BG. Candidates must be

- a) a woman who has not yet had a publication in a major academic journal,
- b) not in a permanent academic position,
- c) normally resident in the UK.

The article should be in English, of 6,000 to 8,000 words in length including footnotes.

We welcome submissions from any area of women's history or gender and history. It is anticipated that the winning essay will be published in the Women's History Review (subject to the normal refereeing criteria). Please check eligibility with Ann Hughes in advance (email: hia21@keele.ac.uk).

Ann Hughes  
(see also p. 44)

## WHN New Book Prize 2005

The Women's History Network (UK) £1000 Book Prize for 2005, awarded for an author's first book which makes a significant contribution to women's history or gender history and is written in an accessible style that is rewarding to the general reader of history, has been awarded jointly to Joanna Laynesmith *The Last Medieval Queens* (2004) and to Elizabeth Buettner *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (2004). *The Last Medieval Queens* explores, in fascinating ways, the lives and queenship of four very different women — Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Woodville, Anne Neville and Elizabeth of York. The book is not a traditional biography but a thematic study of the ideology and practice of queenship. *Empire Families* focuses on the childrearing patterns and family experiences of growing up in the Raj, as well as on British soil, and draws upon an impressive range of sources to document the class, racial and cultural dimensions of the colonial community between the late nineteenth century and decolonization in 1947.

The Panel of judges was impressed with the quality of the entries this year, the first year that the Prize has been awarded, and would like to encourage people to think about entries for 2006. Candidates for the 2006 Prize must apply by 15 March 2006, sending a formal letter to me and enclosing a copy of their book.

On behalf of the Women's History Network (UK), the Panel warmly congratulates the winners of this year's Prize and look forward to many more to come.

Professor June Purvis  
School of Social, Historical and Literary Studies  
University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth PO1 3AS  
United Kingdom  
june.purvis@port.ac.uk



June Purvis with one of the winning books at the AGM

## Conference Report

### Women's History Network 14th Annual Conference — Women, Art and Culture: Historical Perspectives

Southampton Solent University, 2- 4 September 2005

This year's conference, 2 - 4 September, was held in Southampton at what was formerly the Southampton Institute, recently redesignated as Solent University. The conference theme, *Women, Art and Culture: Historical Perspectives*, reflected the history of the Southampton Institute as a centre for art education and the event was not only the first to be organised by the new university, but also coincided with the 150th anniversary of the Southampton School and College of Art. In recognition of the significance of the occasion, conference delegates were invited to a Reception, held in Southampton City Art Gallery, for the opening of a celebratory exhibition on the Saturday evening. This event added an extra dimension to the feast of images which were enjoyed throughout the weekend as an integral aspect of the presentations.

WHN committee member Anne Anderson, who teaches at Solent, took the principal responsibility for organising and co-ordinating the conference. She was well aided in this effort not only by the staff of the University, who made everyone feel very welcome, but also by members of her family. The Southampton people worked hard throughout the event to ensure that all delegates were able to make the most of the weekend and there was little to complain about. The usual hitches with technology were addressed systematically and with good humour, the administrative, catering and halls of residence staff were only too pleased to help and the atmosphere was excellent throughout the weekend. This ambience was aided by sunshine and the walk through the park from Kimber Hall, where we stayed, to the Sir James Matthews Conference Centre, where the conference was held.

The conference was a truly international occasion. It attracted around 120 delegates from across the globe. In my own strand, *Arts and Crafts/Textiles*, I was privileged to hear papers which revealed the influence of arts and crafts work on women in Abramtsevo and learned about the Russian arts and crafts movement in the early years of the twentieth century. We moved from this to modernism in Western Australia in the post war period — all entirely new information for me. These papers were hindered somewhat by temperamental technology but this did not ultimately detract from their interest.

A memorable series of slides from nearer home



Anne Anderson, our conference organiser, with her daughter

illustrated the use of arts and crafts style and techniques by women artists associated with the British suffrage movement. The beautiful artworks and artefacts represented on these slides are currently on display in an exhibition entitled 'New Dawn Women' at the Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey, which continues until November.

I was particularly enthused by papers in this stream which considered the everyday 'crafts' which have always been part of the substance of women's lives throughout the world, including of course, needlework. The discussion of quilt-making in the USA, followed by a history of needlework samplers and then by a paper about the production of more mundane, kit-based craft work, extended the discussion beyond the visual arts, into the realm of the aural, spatial and tactile. These related very powerfully to the tensions between craft as creation, as art; craft as limitation, oppression; craft as productive; and craft as a strategy for creating personal space.

The plenary sessions at the conference which I attended were also absorbing. The tone and pace of the first session, *A Room of One's Own: Women Artists*, was accessible and just right for Friday evening — something with which everyone could engage and find relevant. Saturday's plenary session took us into hitherto uncharted waters, considering *Fashion for Philanthropy in Late-nineteenth century Britain and Ireland*. This illustrated how well-connected and powerful women in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century who had an interest in philanthropic activity linked this to the pursuit of particular 'fashions' which reflected and communicated their social and political interests. Unfortunately, I had to leave on Sunday and was therefore unable to hear the last selection of papers; however according to the many who were able to stay, Marina Vaizey's final plenary, *Twentieth Century Women Collectors*, was both informative and funny — an ideal combination for nearing the close of a conference.



Textile artist Ann Dingsdale displays her work at conference 2005

This conference was my first as a member of the committee and I was afforded a more intimate insight into the amount of work and attention to detail which goes into its organisation. That it went so well and so smoothly, despite a couple of last minute withdrawals of speakers, the inevitable hiccoughs with technology, and the reluctance of the new University to provide delegates with soap which bore the old name 'Southampton Institute', speaks volumes for the amount of work and effort which Anne, all those who helped her before and throughout the weekend, and the committee members responsible for preparing the AGM, put into the occasion. Consequently, the conference was not only a stimulating intellectual event, but a friendly and relaxed weekend. I heard more than one person saying that the WHN annual conference was an event that they looked forward to every year. I don't think they would have been disappointed this year and I look forward to seeing them all and others next year in Durham.

Jean Spence

## Conference Notices & Calls for Papers

### Call for Papers

#### West of England and South Wales Women's History Network

12th Annual Conference  
Sat 24 June 2006 University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

#### Single Women in History: 1000-2000

#### Plenary Speakers

**Amy Froide, University of Maryland-Baltimore County**  
The Spinster and the Old Maid: Representations of Never-Married Women in Early Modern England

**Katherine Holden, University of the West of England**  
The Shadow of Marriage: Defining the single in twentieth century Britain

The links between gender and marital status have been insufficiently explored or theorised within women's history. This conference will bring new perspectives to a neglected area of research by examining the lives of single women during the last millennium in any period and any country. Speakers may focus on different categories of female singleness including spinsters, lone mothers, widows and divorcees, and discuss single women's involvement in areas such as health and welfare, politics, work, religion, culture, family, friendships, partnerships and networks.

Papers that offer new conceptual or theoretical approaches to singleness or compare the experience of single women and single men are also welcome. All papers must have some historical content.

The original inspiration for this conference came through discussions in April 2004 at Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis during the course of their project: 'Gendered Passages in Historical Perspective: Single Women'. Ex-fellows from the Rutgers project have now joined with the West of England and South Wales Women's History Network in the UK to host a conference which we hope will attract international interest and offer important new insights into this area of research.

**Please send abstracts by 31 January 2006 to Kath Holden**  
**email: [Katherine.Holden@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Katherine.Holden@uwe.ac.uk)**

### Call for Papers

#### Women's Studies Group 1558-1837 2005-2006 Programme

The Women's Studies Group: 1558-1837 is a small, informal multi-disciplinary group formed to promote women's studies in the early modern period and the long eighteenth century. We are currently seeking papers for our 2005-2006 programme.

We are quite informal and we give good feedback. Papers on ANY aspect of women's studies within this chronological period, in ANY field of scholarly or critical enquiry are welcome. You do NOT need to be a woman, OR a member, to deliver a paper to our group. Moreover, we welcome work in progress and papers that have been given at another venue. The group meets from 2.00 to 5.00 on Saturdays at the Senate House of the University of London, on Malet Street, W1. Paper length is quite flexible - anything from 20-50 minutes is fine!

One paper is needed for Saturday 20th May 2006; also for September and November 2006 (dates to be confirmed).

Please send your proposal to [loisneil@themutual.net](mailto:loisneil@themutual.net)

For further information about our group please visit our website at [www.womensstudiesgroup.org.uk](http://www.womensstudiesgroup.org.uk)



## Exhibition

### War, Women and Survival

Exhibition at the *Weston Gallery, D H Lawrence Pavilion, Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham*. Friday 16th September - 15th December 2005. Monday - Friday 11:00 - 16:00; Saturday, Sundays and Bank Holidays 12:00 noon - 16:00. Admission free.

The new Weston exhibition highlights the role of women in wars in the past and, in particular, the plight of women in modern conflicts. Jointly arranged by the University of Nottingham's Manuscripts and Special Collections, and Soroptimist International Midlands East Region, *War, Women and Survival* illustrates the many and varied roles played by women in wars throughout history. The exhibition draws on material from the historical collections held at the University, from private sources in the East Midlands, and from conflicts in Rwanda, Bosnia and Afghanistan through the work of Project Independence (a four year rehabilitation programme jointly run by Soroptimist International and Women for Women International).

For further information please contact Alison Hargreaves, email: [alison.hargreaves@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:alison.hargreaves@nottingham.ac.uk)

## Conference

### Nursing History: Profession and Practice

**Mandec Conference Centre, University of Manchester  
November 18th 2005**

The UK Centre for the History of Nursing and Midwifery (UKCHNM) and the History of Nursing Society of the Royal College of Nursing will be delighted to invite anyone to the one-day conference 'Nursing History: Profession and Practice'.

**Strands include:** Education; Character and characterization; Biography; Rural and remote areas; Nursing practice; Public health nursing; Recruitment; Politics and the political; Nursing in war time. **Keynote speakers:** Professor Patricia D'Antonio, University of Pennsylvania; Professor Celia Davies, Open University.

For more details and registration please contact Mrs Mary Delaney, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, Coupland 3 Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL. Email: [Mary.Delaney@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Mary.Delaney@manchester.ac.uk) Please note that registration is on a first-come-first-served basis.

## Conference

### Gender and Built Space

**Sixteenth Annual Workshop of the Women's Committee  
of the Economic History Society**

*18-19 November 2005 at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, Malet Street, London.* Supported by the

Economic History Society and the Design History Society, the event has been organized by the Gender and Built Space Research Group at the University of Brighton.

Friday evening begins with 'Animating Gender', a selection of films chosen from the collections of the South East Film and Video Archive (SEFVA) at the University of Brighton, followed by discussion.

Saturday presentations:

Jan Whittle, University of Exeter, 'The housewife and the home in early modern rural England'; Donna Loftus, Open University, 'Self-made men and the civic: Histories of people and places in the late nineteenth century'; Eileen Yeo, University of Strathclyde, 'Tea for two in the second city of the Empire'; Viv Groskop, Independent Scholar, 'A woman's place? The communalisation of the kitchen and changing gender identities in early Soviet Russia'; Shirley Teresa Wajda, Kent State University, Ohio, 'The Fennells' build their dream home: Furnishing family in 1930s America'; Freddie Floré, University of Ghent, 'Promoting catholic family values and modern domesticity in Belgium, 1945-1957'.

For further information please contact Gill Scott on [g.a.scott@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:g.a.scott@brighton.ac.uk)

## Call for Papers

### Lesbian Lives XIII - Historicising the Lesbian

**Friday 10 - Sunday 12 February 2006**

A 3-day international, interdisciplinary conference to be held at the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC), University College Dublin, Ireland.

Confirmed speakers: Lillian Faderman, Joan Nestle, Helena Whitbread, Emma Donoghue, Anne Maguire.

*Call for papers:* Proposals are welcomed on (though by no means limited to) the following: Lesbian histories; Biographies; Historical literature; Lesbian and Gay liberation movements; Community and social activism; Histories of sexualities; Queer readings of history.

The conference organisers welcome proposals for (A) individual papers, (B) sessions, (C) round table discussions and (D) workshops.

**A: Individual papers** should last 20 minutes (c. 2,400 words). Individuals should submit paper title, abstract (c. 100 words), biography (c. 100-150 words), institutional affiliation and address, and audio visual requirements.

**B. Sessions:** Panels of academic papers should include 3 speakers and 1 moderator. Each paper should last for 20 minutes (c. 2,400 words), with a further 30 minutes for discussion. Proposers should submit session title, paper titles, abstracts for each paper (c. 100 words), biography for each participant (c. 100-150 words), institutional affiliation and address for each participant, and audio visual requirements.



**C. Round Table Discussions:** Round table discussions should include 6 speakers and 1 moderator. Each paper should last for 10 minutes (c. 1,200 words), with a further 30 minutes for discussion. Proposals should submit round table title, rationale for round table (c. 100 words), biography for each participant (c. 100-150 words), institutional affiliation and address for each participant, and audio visual requirements.

**D. Workshops:** Workshops last 90 minutes. Proposers should submit workshop title, rationale for workshop (c. 100 words), biography (c. 100-150 words), institutional affiliation and address (if relevant), audio visual requirements.

Email proposals to [lesbian.lives@ucd.ie](mailto:lesbian.lives@ucd.ie) or post them to: Lesbian Lives XIII: Historicising the Lesbian, Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC), Arts Annex Building, University College, Dublin 4, Ireland.

Closing date for submission of proposals is **Friday 4 November 2005**. Visit <http://www.ucd.ie/werrc/events/> for conference updates.

### Conference

Women's History Network Southern Region  
**Women, Gender, War and Peace**  
Saturday 18 February 2006 - Portsmouth

The Women's History Network Southern Region will hold a Conference on **Women, Gender, War and Peace** at the Park Building (close to the railway station), University of Portsmouth, on Saturday 18 February 2006, 10 -3. Speakers so far include Lucy Noakes, Katherine Storr, Krisztina Robert, Sue Bruley and June Purvis. At this one day event we need to think about a theme for next year's conference, so please come prepared with ideas.

For further details, including offers of papers, please contact either Maureen Wright ([mwright@fish.co.uk](mailto:mwright@fish.co.uk)) or Professor June Purvis ([june.purvis@port.ac.uk](mailto:june.purvis@port.ac.uk)). School of Social, Historical and Literary Studies, Milldam, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth PO6 2AQ.

### Announcement

#### **2005 SHARP Delong book prize winner: Dr Simone Murray**

Dr Simone Murray, a lecturer in Communications and Media at Monash University, Australia, received the award for her scholarly analysis of the history and politics of feminist publishing over the past 35 years.

The prize was awarded in July by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP), an international association established in 1991 for scholars and researchers of print culture, from medieval manuscripts to the Internet. The Society received 60 entries for this year's prize.

Dr Murray's book, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics* (Pluto, London, 2004) is adapted from her PhD thesis, completed at University College London in



1999, which analysed feminist book publishing in Britain across the last century. Publishers featured include Virago Press, Pandora Press, The Women's Press, Sheba Feminist Publishers and Silver Moon Books.

### MEMBER DISCOUNT ON BOOKS

Boydell & Brewer is offering WHN members a 25% discount on the following books (offer valid until 1 January 2006):

**Ann Allsop**, *The Education and Employment of Girls in Luton, 1874-1924: Widening Opportunities and Lost Freedoms*

An accessibly written study of female education and employment in Luton, an area where women had much economic independence from an early age.

**Offer price: £18.75/US\$37.46 + postage. Quote reference 05192.**

**Nicola Phillips**, *Women in Business, 1700-1850*

A reappraisal of the business enterprises of women in the 'long' eighteenth century, showing them to be more flourishing than previously thought.

**Offer price: £37.50/US\$67.50 + postage. Quote reference 05192.**

More details about these books are available at [www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)

Postage: Please add £2.00 UK, £5.00 rest of world, US\$4.00 North America. Postage charge is per order rather than per book.

### HOW TO ORDER

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## CLARE EVANS PRIZE

for a new essay in the field of  
**GENDER AND HISTORY**

In memory of Dr Clare Evans, a national prize worth £250 is awarded annually for an original essay in the field of women's history or gender and history. The essays will be considered by a panel of judges set up by the Women's History Network and the Trustees of the Clare Evans Memorial Fund. The closing date is 31 May 2006 and the prize will be presented by Clare's daughter at the Women's History Network Annual Conference at Durham in September.



Clare Evans was an outstanding woman who tragically died of cervical cancer on 30 November 1997, aged 37. Born in Bath, she read history at the University of Manchester, graduating in 1982. She continued her studies, registering for a PhD at the University whilst preparing and delivering seminars on feminist history, creating the first feminist historiography course in collaboration with Kersten England and Ann Hughes. By examining census material gathered by Quakers, Clare saw how the changing attitudes to women's participation in the workplace were revealed through the responses to major subsistence crises in the early to mid-nineteenth century. As part of this work, Clare showed how men were constructed as sole wage-earners yet women offered sewing schools to create a new Victorian model following mass unemployment in the cotton mills (a result of the American Civil War). Focusing on textile workers in the Nelson and Colne districts of Lancashire, she uncovered the reality of women's lives to free them from contemporary ideas as dependents within family wage ideology. Clare would have approved of an award which helped women to publish for the first time, giving them the confidence to further develop their ideas.

To be eligible for the award, the candidate must be

- a) a woman who has not yet had a publication in a major academic journal,
- b) not in a permanent academic position,
- c) normally resident in the UK.

The article should be in English, of 6,000 to 8,000 words in length including footnotes.

We welcome submissions from any area of women's history or gender and history. It is anticipated that the winning essay will be published in the Women's History Review (subject to the normal refereeing criteria).

Those wishing to apply for the prize, should first e-mail, or write for further details to Ann Hughes (hia21@keele.ac.uk; School of Humanities, University of Keele, Keele, Staffs, ST5 5BG).

### Women's History Network (UK) **£1000 BOOK PRIZE** 2006 Competition

The WHN £1000 Book Prize is awarded for an author's first book which makes a significant contribution to women's history or gender history and is written in an accessible style that is rewarding to the general reader of history. The book must be written in English and be published the year prior to the award being made.

The prize will be presented at the Women's History Network Annual Conference in Durham in September 2006. Books to be considered for this competition should have been published during the year from **1st January 2005 to 31st December 2005**.

To be eligible for the award, the candidate should be a member of the Women's History Network (UK) and be normally resident in the UK. We welcome submissions from any area of women's history or gender and history. The books will be considered by a panel of judges set up by the Women's History Network.

Candidates for the 2006 Prize must apply by **15 March 2006**, sending a formal letter to June Purvis, chair of the panel of judges, enclosing a copy of the book: Professor June Purvis, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth PO1 3AS, UK. Email: [june.purvis@port.ac.uk](mailto:june.purvis@port.ac.uk)

## BOOKS RECEIVED AND CALL FOR REVIEWERS

**The under noted books have been received by the Book Reviews Editor.**

If you would like to review any of the books below--or if you would like to add your name to the list of reviewers for future reference--please send your details, including area(s) of expertise/interest to Jane Potter:

[bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org)

*Childbirth and the Display of Authorship in Early Modern France* by Lianne McTavish (Ashgate)

*Fond Hopes Destroyed: Breach of Promise Cases in Shetland*, by Mary Prior (The Shetland Times)

*The Indomitable Beatie: Charles Hoare, C.B. Fry and the Captain's Lady* by Ronald Morris (Sutton)

*Railway Women: Exploitation, Betrayal and Triumph in the Workplace* by Helena Wojtczak (The Hastings Press)

*Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in the American Civil War* by Jane E. Schultz (University of North Carolina Press)

*Women, Gender & the Enlightenment*, Sarah Knott & Barbara Taylor, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan)

*The Wooden Doctor* by Margiad Evans (Honno Classics) [novel]

## Women's Library News

### News from The Women's Library

The Women's Library is delighted to be working more closely with the Women's History Network and to have this opportunity to report regular news to members. We plan to use this column to tell you about our forthcoming events, as well as giving you information about new acquisitions, catalogues, finding aids, projects and collaborations which we hope will be of interest to you and inform your research.

### New website launch

The Women's Library launched a new website in September 2005 providing the latest information about our events, activities, collections and services. We hope that you find it both informative and easy to navigate. We plan to develop the site over the coming months and you can access it at [www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk](http://www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk)

### Archive and museum catalogue online

As part of the launch of our new website users can now search large parts of The Women's Library's museum and archive catalogue online for the first time. In a major step forward for increasing access, the collection level descriptions for our archive and museum collections will be searchable over the Internet or from the Reading Room itself. The online archive and museum catalogue is the culmination of a major project for The Women's Library team and can be accessed via <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/searchthecollections/>. In its first phase descriptions for the following archive and museum collections are available electronically: Female Emigration Societies, Women's Suffrage Societies, Societies for the Abolition of State Regulation of Prostitution, Societies for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons, Autograph Letter

Collection, Scrapbooks and Posters. The catalogues of archives of a number of campaigning organisations, including the National Federation of Women's Institutes and the National Council for One Parent Families, are also available online.

Collection descriptions indicate how large an archive is, which period it covers and what sort of material survives. These descriptions also identify which archives remain uncatalogued and therefore unavailable for research. Retrospective conversion of paper handlists to online catalogues will continue over the next few months and we will report progress of this project in future newsletters.

### Biographical press cuttings index

The Women's Library holds an extensive collection of biographical press cuttings dating from the 1920's to the present day. Drawn largely from obituaries, they are a particularly good source for finding information about lesser-known women, or tracing how reputations change. The name index to this collection is now available on our website at <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/searchthecollections/> and the cuttings themselves can be consulted in The Women's Library Reading Room.

### Source notes

We have recently developed a series of source notes to introduce new readers to the range of material at The Women's Library by subject. There are currently 20 guides available on our website at [http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/aboutthecollections/source-notes/sources\\_homepage.cfm](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/aboutthecollections/source-notes/sources_homepage.cfm), ranging from sources for biography to women and travel. Each guide includes information on relevant printed, archive and museum collections as well directing users to useful electronic resources.

### Poster collection available

The Women's Library collection of approximately 960 late nineteenth and twentieth century posters has recently been made available for consultation in the Reading Room. Readers can now view a detailed catalogue entry for each poster online. The catalogue entries are organised thematically and topics covered include women and health, women and war, equality in the workplace, reproduction, abortion and birth, women and publishing, and peace campaigning, among others.

The earliest posters in the collection result from suffrage activities and include advertisements for meetings and events, cartoons and illustrations designed to highlight inequalities or reasons why women should be granted the vote, and news-bills. The rest of the collection represents a mixture of campaigning posters to promote equality and advertise women-centred events, opportunities and publications. The work of The Equal Opportunities Commission is particularly well represented in this collection as a result of a large donation of their obsolete posters during the 1990s.

Readers can access the catalogue via the website or in the Reading Room. It is necessary to make an appointment to view posters so adequate space can be reserved. Further information is available from the Enquiry Desk staff at [enquirydesk@thewomenslibrary.ac.uk](mailto:enquirydesk@thewomenslibrary.ac.uk)

### New exhibition opens 6 October 2005

#### What Women Want: Stories from The Women's Library

What is it that women want? Equal rights. Fun. Money.

Peace. Beauty. These are the issues that are tackled this autumn in *What Women Want*, a new exhibition supported by an extensive event programme.

The Library's collections are jam-packed with stories of how women individually and collectively have tried to make their desires a reality, and in the process reshaped their worlds. Organised around seven themes – A Voice, Pleasure, Home Life, Freedom and Independence, Safety and Security, Beauty, and Equality at Work - the exhibition explores the issues that appear to be most persistent and unresolved in women's lives. The Women's Library has drawn on its unique collections, including banners carried by suffragettes, books and magazines, slogan t-shirts, posters, zines and badges, and will be showing a whole range of historic material alongside new artworks reflecting the desires and wishes of women today. New material was developed through a series of collaborations, with staff and students of London Metropolitan University and local community organisations contributing to the exhibition and their work forming part of the display. However, the display is just the starting point, and central to the exhibition concept is an attempt to engage the audience directly in a discussion of the issues raised. There are plenty of opportunities for you to make a comment, so come along and join the debate!

#### Events for Autumn 2005

Our events programme this autumn extends the themes and ideas raised in the exhibition *What Women Want*, and promises to be a thought-provoking season. Biographer Lori Williamson will talk about Victorian writer and activist Francis Power Cobbe, and Lyndall Gordon will tackle the 'true nature of woman' in writings from Mary Wollstonecraft to Virginia Woolf. A season of rarely screened feminist films is intended to spark discussion, and includes Elizabeth Crawford introducing newsreel and feature films about the suffrage campaigns. A debate 'Fear of Sex is Essential for Civilisation', is being presented in conjunction with the Family Planning Association. Biographer and editor Lynn Knight returns with a reading course on the 1920s and 30s, a study day with London's Transport Museum looks at women's work during two world wars, and a creative writing workshop delves into the Library's collections on women's quests for adventure and travel. Full details are available online at [www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk](http://www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk), and in our events programme, available from the Library or by calling 020 7320 2222.

### Committee News

The annual general meeting of the Women's History Network, organised by Anne Anderson at Southampton Solent University on 03 September 2005, completed a very productive and enjoyable year for the committee. A record number (four) of its members, Fiona Reid, Claire Jones, Carmen Mangion and Siobhan Tolland, all successfully completed their PhDs. The Treasurer, Carmen Mangion, reported a healthy state of finances which had enabled the committee to support a number of worthwhile initiatives for which requests for

financial help had been received. These included a donation to the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley to support their work in women's labour history, a contribution to the International Federation of Research into Women's History (IFRWH) bursary fund, and help towards the costs of a researcher in oral history for Women against Pit Closures ([www.wapc.org.uk](http://www.wapc.org.uk)). The winners of the first WHN Book Prize for a new work in Women's History were announced at the conference. The prize went jointly to Elizabeth Beuttneur for *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* and J.L. Laynesmith for *The Last Medieval Queens*.

The committee was sorry to say goodbye to Fiona Reid, Carmen Mangion, Sue Johnson and Krista Cowman, who finished their terms of office and were presented with book tokens. We were pleased to welcome our new committee members: Karen Atkinson, a postgraduate student at the University of Newcastle, Beverley Kemp of the Women's Library, Jane McDermid, senior lecturer at the University of Southampton and Zilan Wang, a postgraduate student in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. The committee has established an excellent working relationship with the Women's Library in London and Beverley, who works at the library as a professional librarian, will represent the Women's Library on the WHN steering committee. Elizabeth Foyster becomes the new Treasurer and Moira Martin the new membership secretary.

Minutes of the 2005 AGM are included with this issue of Women's History Magazine. Brief details of all current members of the steering committee can be found at [www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)

All WHN members are welcome at meetings of the national steering committee. The next meeting is scheduled for noon on Saturday November 12 at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1. If you intend to join us, please email [enquiries@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:enquiries@womenshistorynetwork.org) first - just to ensure that there have been no last minute changes of plan.



### What is the Women's History Network?

The WHN was founded in July 1991. It is a national association concerned with promoting women's history and encouraging women interested in history. WHN business is carried out by the National Steering Committee, which is elected by the membership and meets regularly several times each year. It organises the annual conference, manages the finance and membership, and co-ordinates activities in pursuit of the aims of the WHN.

### Aims of the WHN

1. To encourage contact between all people interested in women's history — in education, the media or in private research
2. To collect and publish information relating to women's history
3. To identify and comment upon all issues relating to women's history
4. To promote research into all areas of women's history

### What does the WHN do?

#### Annual Conference

Each year the WHN holds a national conference for WHN members and others. The conference provides everyone interested in women's history with a chance to meet and it has become an exciting forum where new research can be aired and recent developments in the field can be shared. The Annual General Meeting of the Network takes place at the conference. The AGM discusses issues of policy and elects the National Steering Committee.

#### WHN Publications

WHN members receive three copies per year of the *Women's History Magazine*, which contains: articles discussing research, sources and applications of women's history; reviews of books, conferences, meetings and exhibitions; and information on calls for papers, prizes and competitions, and publication opportunities.

### Joining the WHN

#### Annual Membership Rates

Student/unwaged	£10	Overseas minimum	£30
Low income (*under £16,000 pa)	£15	UK Institutions	£35
High income	£30	Institutions overseas	£40

Membership application/renewal, Gift Aid Declaration and Banker's Order forms are available on the back cover.

## WHN CONTACTS

To submit articles or news for the *Women's History Magazine*, please contact any of the editors at the addresses below:

**Deborah Simonton**, Department of English and Danish, University of Southern Denmark, Engstein 1, 6000 Kolding, Denmark. Email: [magazine@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:magazine@womenshistorynetwork.org)

**Claire Jones**, 7 Penkett Road, Wallasey, Merseyside, CH45 7QE.  
Email: [enquiries@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:enquiries@womenshistorynetwork.org)

For book reviews, please contact **Jane Potter**, Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies, The Richard Hamilton Building, Headington Hill Campus, Oxford, OX3 0BP.  
Email: [bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org)

**To update contact details, or for any membership inquiries (including subscriptions), please contact Dr. Moira Martin, at the following address: HLSS, University of the West of England, Bristol, BS16 2JP. Email: [membership@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:membership@womenshistorynetwork.org)**

## Membership Application

I would like to \*join / renew my subscription to the Women's History Network. I \*/ enclose a cheque payable to Women's History Network / have filled out & returned to my bank the Banker's Order Form / for £ \_\_\_\_\_. (\* delete as applicable)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel (work): \_\_\_\_\_

Tick this box if you DO NOT want your name made available to publishers/conference organisers for publicity: ☐

Detach and return this form with, if applicable, your cheque to **Dr Moira Martin, HLSS, University of the West of England, Bristol, BS16 2JP. Email: [membership@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:membership@womenshistorynetwork.org)**

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Gift aid declaration

Name of Charity: **Women's History Network**

Name : .....

Address: .....

.....

..... Post Code: .....

I am a UK taxpayer and I want the charity to treat all donations (including membership subscriptions) I have made since 6 April 2000, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as **Gift Aid donations**.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date ...../...../.....

Notes

1. If your declaration covers donations you may make in the future:
  - Please notify the charity if you change your name or address while the declaration is still in force
  - You can cancel the declaration at any time by notifying the charity – it will then not apply to donations you make on or after the date of cancellation or such later date as you specify.
2. You must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity reclaims on your donations in the tax year (currently 28p for each £1 you give).
3. If in the future your circumstances change and you no longer pay tax on your income and capital gains equal to the tax that the charity reclaims, you can cancel your declaration (see note 1).
4. If you pay tax at the higher rate you can claim further tax relief in your Self Assessment tax return.
5. If you are unsure whether your donations qualify for Gift Aid tax relief, ask the charity. Or you can ask your local tax office for leaflet IR113 Gift Aid.

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Banker's Order

To (bank) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Account no.: \_\_\_\_\_

Pay to the account of the Women's History Network, Account No. 91325692 at the National Westminster Bank, Stuckeys Branch, Bath (sort code 60-02-05), on \_\_\_\_\_200\_, and annually thereafter, on 1 September, the sum of

(in figures) £ \_\_\_\_\_ (in words) \_\_\_\_\_.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_