

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



*Issue 71*  
*Spring 2013*  
*Issn 1476-6760*

**Jaci Eisenberg** *on*  
American women in  
international Geneva, 1919-  
1939: a prosopography

**Phillida Bunkle** *on* Feminist  
input into the development of  
patient-centred healthcare in  
New Zealand

**Jackie Gulland** *on*  
Extraordinary housework:  
women and sickness benefit in  
the early-twentieth century

**John Ault** *on* The other  
Rathbone: Beatrice, the trans-  
Atlantic envoy

*Plus*

Six book reviews  
WHN Book Prize  
Clare Evans Essay Prize  
Committee News

[www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)

*women's*  
**HISTORY**  
**NETWORK**





## CALL FOR PAPERS

### ***Women's Histories: the Local and the Global***

In 2013 the Women's History Network is combining its 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference with the international conference of the International Federation for Research in Women's History. This will be a wonderful opportunity for us to make connections with scholars of women's history from around the world. Over 200 proposals have already been received following the first call for papers.

Our conference will explore the history of women worldwide, from archaic to contemporary periods. Engaging with the recent global and transnational turns in historical scholarship, it will examine the ways in which histories of women can draw on and reshape these approaches to understanding the past. It will explore the interplay between the 'local' and the 'global' in histories of women, and discuss the relationship between nation-based traditions of women's history writing and transnational approaches which highlight connections and comparisons between women's lives in different localities.

Key questions the conference will address are:

- How can women's histories reshape our understanding of the relationship between the 'local' and the 'global'?
- What implications does a transnational framework of analysis have for nation-based traditions of writing women's history?

Please note that your own research does not have to be transnational in approach: we have included a comparative history strand to enable us to group together papers on similar themes relating to different localities.

For details of strand themes and online submission of paper proposals see the conference website:  
[www.ifrwh2013conf.org.uk](http://www.ifrwh2013conf.org.uk)

The online proposal form will go live in early February – submission deadline: **15<sup>th</sup> April 2013**



# Editorial

As the days start to get longer, and the weather warmer, we welcome you to the Spring 2013 issue of *Women's History Magazine*.

The old year closed with news that the Women's Library had found a new home. Although it is very sad to say goodbye to the Old Castle Street building, at least its future has been secured. By the time you read this, the Library should have closed in preparation for its move the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), but we will all look forward with anticipation to the opening of the new 'Women's Library@LSE', scheduled for July 2013. In a significant development, plans are afoot to digitise the 'Women's Library@LSE' collection, providing access to it through the LSE Digital Library, and thus enabling greater access these unique collections.

And so to this issue of *Women's History Magazine* which brings together a diverse collection of articles. All four share an imaginative use of primary materials to construct new knowledge of their topics. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in Phillida Bunkle's use of records from an inquiry into medical malpractice in New Zealand in the 1960s and 1970s. Phillida, with fellow feminists, presented evidence to the Inquiry (held in the late 1980s) into what became labelled the 'Unfortunate Experiment', in which women were unknowingly included in research to determine the significance (or otherwise) of precancerous cells in cervical smear tests. Phillida defends her own role in the Inquiry and presents the evidence which convinced her and fellow feminists within the Women's Health Movement of the need to keep patients' rights at the forefront of the mind when dealing with health and healthcare.

Also digging into the detailed reports of legal inquiries, Jackie Gulland has produced a fascinating insight into the way women workers were viewed in the first two decades of the twentieth century. She has mined the records of a 1914 inquiry into claims made for sickness benefit in the early years of the UK's first national health insurance scheme. Through detailed analysis of these records, she has discovered how the status of insured women as 'workers' was questioned by the friendly societies which insured them, and how their claims to ill health were doubted. Gendered assumptions were rife in the decision-making processes, and while it was assumed that men found enforced idleness through sickness 'irksome', women were assumed to use sick leave as an opportunity to get on top of their housework!

The third article uses a prosopographical approach to reconstruct a community of American women working in the League of Nations in Geneva in the interwar period. Jaci Eisenberg found that, although large numbers of women were employed, they do not feature in most histories of the international community in Geneva. Determined to discover who these women were, she started with basic employment records and began to trace the women back to their roots, eventually consulting fourteen different archives in two countries. What she found surprised her, revealing that many of the women did not arrive in Geneva by pure happenstance, but through the existence of active networks.

Our final article makes use of an oral history interview with a long-forgotten woman MP from the war years, Beatrice Rathbone. Using the interview as one of his main sources, backed by reports in the local press and her second husband's biography, John Ault has constructed a fascinating glimpse into the life of this American woman who became conservative MP for Bodmin in Cornwall. Ault's article raises questions he has been unable to address in full (this being a small diversion from a doctoral project on Cornish Studies), and opens up opportunities for further research into a young woman, with a promising political career, whose potential was never fully exploited.

As usual the Magazine also brings you a bountiful collection of book reviews and news from the Network. Do not forget, this is your magazine and we welcome articles, both long and short, which explore women's history in any of its guises: send submissions to the **editor@womenshistorynetwork.org**. You can contribute in other ways as well, via our Blog or the Newsletter, details of which can be found on the Network's website ([www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)).

Editorial Team: Katie Barclay, Sue Hawkins, Ann Kettle, Anne Logan, Kate Murphy and Emma Robertson.

## Contents

American women in international Geneva, 1919-1939: a prosopography .....	4
Feminist input into the development of patient-centred health care in New Zealand.....	12
Extraordinary housework: women and claims for sickness benefit in the early twentieth century ...	23
The other Rathbone: Beatrice: the trans-Atlantic envoy .....	31
Book Reviews.....	39
Committee News .....	46



**Cover:** March 12, 1941: Beatrice Rathbone stops to chat with a House of Commons policeman as she arrives in London to take her seat in the house as the new MP for Bodmin, Cornwall. AP/Press Association Images

# American women in international Geneva, 1919-1939: a prosopography

Jaci Eisenberg<sup>1</sup>

*The Graduate Institute, Geneva*

## Introduction

The approaching centenary of the founding of the League of Nations (the 'League') and its labour entity, the International Labour Organisation and Office ('ILO'), has sparked renewed interest in researching what was the best hope in the post-World War I era for wide scale international cooperation.<sup>2</sup> Existing scholarship draws on such current themes in historical research as gender, human rights and transnationalism,<sup>3</sup> but it has not yet examined in depth the specific role played by American women. This article derives from a study aiming to do just that. Why focus at all on American women in this period and setting? Examining interwar international Geneva through the lens of American women offers a heretofore unexamined perch from which to observe the functioning of the League system; one that contrasts with the nation-state or single influential actor-paradigms which dominate the history of international organisations.<sup>4</sup>

In interwar international Geneva, American women held a special position as 'double outsiders', first as women, and, second, as Americans. As the US was not a member state of the League of Nations, the US Senate denied American accession in March 1920 – American women were excluded from official channels for action in the League, in particular long-term employment at any level (a bar lifted in regards to the ILO once the US acceded to that organisation in 1934). Though Americans, men and women alike, had been hired by the League in 1919 with the anticipation of US accession, when this fell through most were ousted when deemed convenient through non-renewal of contracts.<sup>5</sup> As nationals of a non-member state, standard avenues to action – delegation and committee membership, and internal policy persuasion as members of secretariat sections were, by and large, barred. Nevertheless given the US's vaunted position in international affairs, Americans were still sought out by League entities. Membership on certain committees was reserved for Americans, and when the US government sent delegations to League Conferences, for example to the Hague Conference for Codification of International Law in 1930 or the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva from 1932-1934, they were welcomed with open arms. Exceptions did exist.

Most secondary sources containing information about both American women and interwar international Geneva focus on instances where American women may have played a small role in a specific event or campaign, or on the various pursuits (domestic and global) of the prominent American women in question. None has yet attempted to catalogue all identifiable American women active in interwar international Geneva, to reconstruct this historical community, and employ that as a point of departure for discovering areas of activism. The larger study from which this article is derived takes this approach.

I have consulted a number of sources to identify the maximum number of American women active in interwar international Geneva, and to determine their areas of activity. Secondary sources include journal articles, monographs, edited volumes, websites and databases; primary sources are historical archives, official documents, and verbatim records. Most relevant are the League Archive, housed at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland, and the ILO archives, also in Geneva. Personnel listings, both contemporary and after-the-fact surveys, provide a systematic guide to personnel records of American women at both institutions. Scouring official records of proceedings and internal administration files has unearthed even more names. These sources provided clues that have led to research at fourteen different archives in two countries, with others consulted via email. Beyond cataloguing, I have resorted to prosopography to make sense of a myriad of data points.

## Prosopography

Prosopographical analysis, sometimes vulgarized as a 'collective biography', is a tool of historical analysis which casts off the standard historical dictum that people, institutions and contexts are all specific. It allows for the examination of data points across several figures with one or more group characteristics. The ultimate result of this inquiry is the creation of a composite profile of a particular group. The composite portrait provides a baseline from which to examine notable differences, sometimes regarding political action, other times related to social mobility.<sup>6</sup> In order to formulate this all-important portrait, however, the researcher must first gather data for every subject in their collective biography: the collection of the specific permits an informed generalisation from which to make comparisons.

Traditionally prosopographical analysis has been employed by researchers focusing on cohesive groups, such as elites, who are likely to have somewhat homogenous characteristics.<sup>7</sup> Prosopographies, though not necessarily so labelled, are not uncommon in the field of women's history: related to American women's activism are Janet Zollinger Giele's *Two Paths to Equality* and Susan Ware's *Beyond Suffrage*.<sup>8</sup> The prosopographical method is very appropriate for the study of American women active in interwar international Geneva. As numerous studies on women in the League of Nations have attested over the years, women were typically stenographers, secretaries and supernumeraries. In general, the amount of information available on international civil servants in the official League and ILO archives is directly proportional to their length of service, a truism for any bureaucratic entity. As women were more often than not employed as support staff, posts more transient than professional-

grade ones, there is a dearth of information, sometimes even on expected points for inclusion in administrative records such as date of termination. Given these lacunae, the prosopographical method is a useful way to make use of the paltry information, which might be the only information available, on these heretofore uncovered American women. If very little is known about these women as individuals, in the very least it is possible to discover how far they deviate from the norm comprised by their colleagues.

By 'researching around' the official files of these women, and writing and publishing on them, these figures have a chance to become part of the mainstream narrative of the history of international organisations.<sup>9</sup> It is here that prosopography can provide an avenue for synergy between women's history and the history of international organisations. Histories of international organisations are often institutional studies; they look at the structure of these entities and sometimes focus on a few high-level figures who happen to be, due to the dynamics of such organisations, predominantly male. Conducting a prosopography with the liberal-feminist<sup>10</sup> approach to the study of gender and history will in turn enrich the history of international organisations. Focusing on individual women, even if for a composite portrait in the end, serves as a needed corrective to the history of international organisations. As Francesca Miller wrote, '[t]here is perhaps no area of historical literature where women, other than monarchs and Mata Haris have been less visible than in the literature of international relations'.<sup>11</sup> By placing women's activism and organisations in a broader, international context, rather than focusing on one person or organisation in isolation, women's histories can be proven valuable to populations ignorant of the role of women, major or minor, in the functioning of these organisations.

A standard survey of data points was developed based on the guidelines provided by Koenraad Verboeven *et al.*, and a separate survey form was populated for each American woman discovered to be active in interwar international Geneva, in as much as the information was available.<sup>12</sup> Sources for information were noted after

each data point for convenient reference. These surveys provided the data from which to conduct analyses. In my opinion, the group of women most in need of prosopographical analysis was the 'insiders' employed by the main international organisations covered by this study. The 'outsiders', who lobbied for change in these organisations from the outside, tended to have a penchant for self-promotion and record-keeping, prerequisite to advancing their cause. Their records include tracts on their points of view, impassioned pleas for action, sometimes even hagiographic origin stories. Such artefacts have often made their way into archives and have not infrequently provided the basis of secondary accounts of the time.<sup>13</sup> The 'insiders' were workaday employees: save for the occasional journal or prolific letter-writer, their chief primary sources are surviving personnel records and their actual work-day outputs. In contrast to the 'outsiders', the 'insiders' are largely as yet an unanalysed bunch.

Parallel analyses were conducted on League and ILO 'insiders', with the initial analysis comprised of the following queries: age at entry into employment in international Geneva, birthplace, situation of recruitment (appointed / by examination / seconded / internship), highest educational level attained, educational institution(s) attended, marital status (also if it modulated over the course of employment), type of position and division hosting the job in question, and duration of employment. What became clear in answering these eight questions in regards to the two aforementioned cohorts was that available data provided answers to a broader, unasked question: how did the ILO 'insiders' actually end up as ILO 'insiders'? That is, what were the forces at work in one organisation's recruitment of American women in interwar international Geneva? The answer I found was that a majority of those whose personnel files were available for consultation would attribute their employment to the influence of John Gilbert Winant, the highest ranking American in the ILO before the outbreak of World War II, and his entourage. (See Box for brief biography of Winant.)

A total of forty-six American women were identified (using the methods described above) as having worked for the ILO in the interwar period. Of these, only twenty-

### John Gilbert Winant, 1889-1947

John Gilbert Winant was born in Concord, New Hampshire. He attended St. Paul's School (Episcopalian) and then advanced to Princeton University, where he worked towards, but did not complete, a Bachelor's degree. He returned to St. Paul's School to teach in 1913, and joined the New Hampshire House of Representatives in 1916, as a Republican representative. When the US joined World War I, he became a captain in the Army Air Service. Winant was twice Governor of New Hampshire, first from 1925 to 1927 and then from 1931 to 1935. In 1935, he became the highest-ranking American in the International Labour Office (ILO) when he took up a post as Assistant Director (one of several). He soon left at the request of President Roosevelt to become Chairman of the Social Security Board, a nascent entity Roosevelt hoped would reach Cabinet status. With Cabinet dreams dashed, Winant returned to the ILO in 1937 and in 1939 he became its third Director. In 1941, Winant left the ILO to become US Ambassador to the United Kingdom during World War II. After Roosevelt's death, President Truman appointed him US representative to UNESCO. Winant retired and returned to Concord where he wrote his memoirs, *Letter from Grosvenor Square*. On the day his book was published, Winant committed suicide. Winant was survived by his wife and three children.

two have personnel files consultable in the ILO archives, all of whom appear to have had a stint at the main ILO headquarters in Geneva, hence why the files were created. A further seven were employed seemingly solely at the Washington Office, and have unnumbered administrative files nested in ILO archives file P 14/4/2 (J1). The seventeen without any sort of personnel file were (by and large and with only one exception) employed at the Washington Correspondent's Office of the ILO, an anomaly in the League system. In May 1920, two months after the US Senate had roundly rejected the Treaty of Versailles, and thus US accession to the League (and the ILO), the ILO established an office in Washington, D.C. It was an investment for the ILO: it would be an outlet for information on the US for Geneva and a haven for official links with the American government, American employers and American workers.<sup>15</sup> While some Washington Correspondent's Office operational files are available in the ILO archives (and, indeed, it is in these files that many of the seventeen women without personnel files are named) there are no proper Washington Office personnel files. This explains why, while some information is available for the seventeen women without files, except in one case (Margaret O'Leary), it is difficult to verify how these women came to work at the ILO. Of the twenty-two with proper personnel files, thirteen had connections to John Gilbert Winant and his entourage (fourteen if Margaret O'Leary is included). In reality, this figure could be higher, if more was known about the twenty-four women without proper personnel files.

## The Winant Connection

The link between Winant and his entourage and the American women employed at the ILO merits examination on two levels: as a recurrent prosopographical commonality between these American women, and because Winant's 'favouritism' is the subject of one controversial reminiscence. Walter Crocker, an Australian (considered British by the international organisation) employed at the ILO, worked alongside Winant for some time. Based in the Agricultural Service from October 1934, he became Winant's personal assistant in February 1938. Not long before his centenary, Crocker sat down with Geoffrey Partington (an Australian academic) to impart his reminiscences of Winant. Partington notes Crocker wished to do so earlier, but waited until later in life as he 'sought to save Winant's children from unnecessary pain'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Crocker's memoir painted a very unflattering portrait of his former boss. Relevant to his recruitment of American women, Crocker asserted Winant was quite the inept politician and instead 'felt safe only with the dog-like devotion of impressionable women, or of a few simpleton men'.<sup>17</sup>

Crocker's assessment, though sexist and unflattering, cannot be overlooked – nor, however, can it be given too much weight. From an interview with one of these women, it is known Winant tended to surround himself with young employees, ones he could shape and train as he preferred, as opposed to inheriting staff with

established work habits.<sup>18</sup> In this light, 'impressionable' and 'simpleton' could be poorly chosen synonyms for 'malleable'. Yet, it is likely Crocker believed every word he recounted to Partington: the scores he wished to settle with his long-departed boss included non-repayment of personal loans extended to Winant and keeping secrets about one 'Miss Potter', an American woman Winant had enticed to Geneva without any post available. Crocker continued by completing the portraits of some of these women, and, unverifiably, charging Winant with causing several attempted and successful suicides. In Crocker's view, it was not he who was being unfair to women, it was Winant who had exposed American women in interwar international Geneva to 'subjection' and 'subjugation'.<sup>19</sup>

Though the US did not join the ILO until 1934, there was a continual effort by the ILO to bring the US on-side. As the home for international labour standards (conventions and recommendations), the Directorship of the ILO was acutely aware of the importance of the US to its organisation. As a major industrial power, the US would be an important test case for working conditions and legislation. With this in mind, the ILO opened a Correspondent's Office in Washington, D.C., in May 1920,<sup>20</sup> which was the one pre-accession haven in the ILO for Americans; the road for American women into the Geneva Secretariat did not open up in earnest until the US joined the ILO. On 22 June 1934, the Selection Committee sitting at the 18<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organisation unanimously invited the US to join the ILO.<sup>21</sup> The decision became official on 20 August 1934, when US Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, wired notice to Geneva of American acceptance of the invitation.<sup>22</sup> Once a member, the US sought to integrate itself into the office, and the best way to do so was to ensure Americans were represented among ILO staff at Geneva headquarters. US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt put forward the name of Winant, a liberal Republican and Governor of New Hampshire, for the highest-level professional post open to an American – Assistant Director of the ILO. Crocker hints this may have been a calculated move: Winant was seen as a possible challenger for the Presidency in 1936.<sup>23</sup>

Scheduled to take up his duties at Geneva headquarters on 15 May 1935, Winant was in close contact with ILO Director Harold Butler prior to his appointment. One frequent topic of communication was the composition of his eventual support team at the ILO; this initial group is the first cohort of American women tied to Winant and recruited for the ILO. Aiding in the diplomatic ballet that was installing Winant in his post, James Shotwell (Professor at Columbia, member of President Woodrow Wilson's Inquiry, and head of the American Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations) wrote to Butler that Winant insisted on having Shotwell's research assistant at the American Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, Carol Riegelman, with him in Geneva. As Shotwell wrote, 'I must confess that in making it possible for Miss Riegelman to go I have the self-righteous sense of making a major contribution to the ILO'.<sup>24</sup>

Riegelman was not the only member of Assistant



Director Winant's team imported directly from the US. As Winant cabled to Butler in early April 1935:

... believe riegelman's job as secretary should be equal [sic] with secretaries other assistant directors as to salary rank etc stop request opportunity to take on three other persons Washington office couple economist ex-assistant professor Yale reorganized state labor department Connecticut while servicing as assistant director at present working Ottawa develop [sic] legislative program salary five thousand miss Johnson able executive outstanding authority on minimum wages salary four thousand [sic] also personal stenographer miss Rollins completing doctors degree Yale good linguist trained for foreign service salary fifteen hundred [sic] could pay part my self if necessary stop ...<sup>25</sup>

Addie Adaline Rollins' connection to Winant is not explicitly stated in her personnel file, but it is not difficult to find – her resume noted previous experience as Secretary to the New Hampshire State Treasurer.<sup>26</sup> Winant, as Governor of New Hampshire, would have likely encountered her in a professional capacity. Ethel McLean Johnson, a distinguished expert on minimum wages, would certainly have been familiar to Winant in her capacity as the Director of the Minimum Wage for New Hampshire from 1933-1935.<sup>27</sup>

Not long after taking office, Winant provided Butler with a chart accounting for all instances of his hand in the recruitment of US personnel in the ILO. It noted that Rollins was replaced by 'Miss Mary Healy, Mr. Winant's secretary', on 20 August 1935.<sup>28</sup> Healy's connection to Winant was the most explicit of those discussed thus far – on her personal notice (a standardised curriculum vitae applicants to the ILO were required to complete) she listed her previous experience as 'Secretary to Honorable John G. Winant since May 1932'.<sup>29</sup> Healy, 21 years old when she joined the ILO, was less of an international civil servant than a personal assistant. When Winant returned to the US in early autumn 1935 for consultations with US workers' groups, she was engaged as his secretary on behalf of the ILO in the US.<sup>30</sup>

Related to the archival extracts above, Crocker noted to Partington that '[Winant] brought with him as personal staff his American Private Secretary, Mary Healey, and three young American women graduates'.<sup>31</sup> This statement demonstrates how Crocker's memories of the era have been condensed and solidified with the passing of time, not always in line with reality. Four American women were hired by the ILO in 1935: Healy, Johnson, Riegelman and Rollins. The 'three young American women graduates' brought over by Winant in 1935 seem to include all, save Healy. Rollins was Healy's fill-in while she finished her job training at a Harvard summer school;<sup>32</sup> her inclusion is erroneous as she shared a post with Healy. Suspending reality and including Rollins, however, fits in Crocker's reconstruction: she was just days shy of 26 when she began working at the ILO. Riegelman was 25 when she

started working at the ILO. The third spot is for Johnson, but as she was already 53 upon joining the ILO, she could hardly be counted young by any stretch.

Crocker's statements are worth verifying against archival material because his critical view of Winant, though valid, is based on memory, not fact. After mentioning Healy and the 'three young American women graduates', Crocker criticizes Winant: '[t]he other three Assistant Directors managed with one or two personal staff'.<sup>33</sup> Looking at the one ILO staff list by nationality from Winant's initial tenure as Assistant Director, dated 31 May 1935 (at which point Riegelman and Rollins were on staff but not yet Johnson and Healy), Winant is not exceptional. For four Assistant Directors – Edward J. Phelan (Irish), Guglielmo di Palma Castiglione (Italian), Fernand Maruette (French) and Winant (USA) – there were five direct support staff: Riegelman and Rollins (for Winant), and one British and two French women. Winant had only one extra personal staff, rather than the legions asserted by Crocker.<sup>34</sup>

Knowing that Rollins was replaced by Healy, the number of American women Winant seems to have brought to Geneva as employees at the outset of his career was no more than three. It would seem what attracted Crocker's attention was either the fact that several women joined the staff in a short period of time (May to August 1935), or that Winant relied on them so much they appeared to be ubiquitous. On the first point, the ILO, though an international organisation, was still inextricably tied to national identity via its staffing trends. Though there was no official policy which dictated budgetary contributions should be proportional to staffing distribution, countries tended to lobby for this. Indeed it was observed once the League was dissolved that there was a 'parallelism' between budgetary contribution and staffing which made it seem a *de facto* policy.<sup>35</sup> American representation on ILO staff was limited to the Washington Office until US accession. The French and British and other Assistant Directors may have only had one or two direct support staff, but they had legions of compatriots in the other sections – from the typing pool to the research division.<sup>36</sup> In Geneva, Winant was building up the American contingent from scratch. On the latter point, Mary Healy (then Healy Harley) noted in her interview with Bernard Bellush, author of a biography of Winant, that Winant was a very tense personality and she was perhaps the only person who could relax him.<sup>37</sup> Beyond moral support, Healy was Winant's guide through the many pieces of correspondence he received: she summarised the day's incoming mail in telegraphic fashion, and always signed off with the encouraging 'GOOD LUCK!'<sup>38</sup>

Winant's initial tenure as Assistant Director was short-lived; in early autumn 1935 he was appointed by Roosevelt as the first head of the newly created Social Security Board, and thus left the ILO. While this abrupt departure proved to be a bump in US-ILO relations, friends of the ILO realised having an ally prominent in American politics was quite positive. James Shotwell wrote as much to Director Harold Butler: 'He ought to be in the running [for President] in six years' time. Then it would mean

everything to have had him in the ILO. He's 100% pro League even now when friends of the League are dropping away. He would be better than Roosevelt many times over'.<sup>39</sup> This affinity meant Winant still had some say in the role played by his American women in the ILO. Winant arranged for Ethel McLean Johnson to join the staff of the Washington Correspondent's Office on 1 January 1936,<sup>40</sup> where she remained for the rest of her ILO career,<sup>41</sup> while Mary Healy stayed attached to Winant as his personal secretary at the Social Security Board<sup>42</sup> and later upon his return to the ILO. Carol Riegelman was less dependent on Winant than Crocker's categorisation permits. While it is true Riegelman joined the ILO at Winant's insistence, she remained there after his departure to the Social Security Board, and several documents in her personnel file highlight her independent efforts to obtain promotion based on her qualifications alone.<sup>43</sup>

Winant's enduring influence at the ILO leads to the second group of women – those who had favourable contact with him or with members of his entourage who forwarded requests on to him. During his Assistant Directorship, Geneviève Gehres was recommended to Winant through US Secretary of Labour Frances Perkins,<sup>44</sup> who, in turn, had received the request for such a post from Gehres' brother-in-law, George L. Berry, President of the International Pressmen and Assistants' Union of North America.<sup>45</sup> Gehres was eventually engaged by the ILO, but almost a full year after initial mention of her had been made to Winant, at which point he was with the Social Security Board.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Winant intervened in her favour, cabling to Butler from Washington, D.C., in early 1936, that 'it would clear situation here if I could get definite approval gehres appointment'.<sup>47</sup>

In 1936, Katherine Sargent, employed by the High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany in London, was searching for further employment in light of that office's imminent liquidation. She wrote to Winant's assistant, Carol Riegelman, searching for work.<sup>48</sup> Sargent was eventually engaged on temporary contracts beginning eight months later<sup>49</sup> – she was not eligible for a permanent post, being over the age of 38.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Louise Ombrette Long forwarded three references to Winant – one, notably, from the then-retired first American judge on the Permanent Court of International Justice (or World Court), John Basset Moore<sup>51</sup> which could not have hurt his decision to take her on, in this case, remarkably, only two weeks after she had sent the letters.<sup>52</sup>

Winant's favouritism is most exemplified by how he found or created openings in the ILO for those in his personal sphere, the third group of women discussed here. First the case of Edith Prescott Drury: while her personnel file is, on the surface, devoid of any connection to Winant, her personal notice speaks loud and clear. Her parents are listed as next of kin: 'Rev'd & Mrs. S.S. Drury, St. Paul's School, Concord, NH, USA'.<sup>53</sup> Before his political career, Winant taught at St. Paul's School, and, in lulls in his political career, he returned there to teach. His teaching career overlapped with Reverend Drury's Rectorship.<sup>54</sup> Such a familial link was crucial for Edith Drury's career: further on in her personal notice she lists previous work experience as 'United States Dep't of Labour, Employment

Service – Winter 1936; Social Security Board, Temporary appointment – November-March 1937 [sic]'. Drury's work history perfectly mirrored Winant's postings for 1936-7.<sup>55</sup>

Elizabeth Miller worked at the Department of Labour just prior to joining the ILO.<sup>56</sup> Yet, despite letters of reference from eminent men including Carter Goodrich (a professor at Columbia University, and later wartime president of the ILO Governing Body) and Edward F. McGrady, (of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA)),<sup>57</sup> and although Miller wrote to Winant directly,<sup>58</sup> she was not hired until spring 1939.<sup>59</sup> Miller is included here as a woman with connections to Winant because her personnel file is a good fit for Crocker's distressing profile of 'Miss Potter', a woman Winant brought to Geneva without an available post, and consequently had to live clandestinely for several months until Winant could find employment for her.<sup>60</sup>

Jane Braucher and her Bryn Mawr classmate Eleanor Kellogg Taft had a direct line to Winant through Braucher's father, Howard, who was close enough to Winant to address him in letters as 'Gil'. All it took was one letter reminding Winant of his offer to host his daughter at the ILO to seal the deal.<sup>61</sup> Braucher and Taft were even permitted to announce their start dates at their leisure, so as not to conflict with their school schedules.<sup>62</sup> Favoured treatment also extended to those familiar to members of the Winant family: Doris Hopkins, for instance, long knew Mrs Winant from YWCA activities. This piece of evidence comes from the John Winant papers at the FDR Presidential Library, not the ILO archives, and serves as a reminder that other connections to Winant may not be easy to discern from the files of organisations alone.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Margaret O'Leary was one such American woman employee of the ILO obscured almost entirely from the ILO archives. O'Leary is mentioned only twice in ILO archival files relevant to American women on staff, and neither provides clear clues as to her nationality.<sup>64</sup> Only by reading sources at the FDR Presidential Library is it clear she was American and, indeed, an acquaintance of Mary Healy, who pushed for her appointment.<sup>65</sup>

Of the American women with connections to Winant, the most complicated to piece together is the case of Ruth Elizabeth Aylsworth. Aylsworth, a graduate of Berkeley, came to Geneva as Secretary of the Students' International Union. She soon became a temporary employee of the League of Nations. Frustrated with the instability of short (conference-length) contracts, she sought something more stable. The League archives mention her missing work for half a day on 17 July 1936 to take an employment exam at the ILO, and her association with the League then ends leaving the impression she was hired on more favourable terms elsewhere.<sup>66</sup> Her ILO personnel file tells a different story: she was employed by the ILO between her stints of employment at the League, prior to her ILO employment exam, which she failed.<sup>67</sup> Though she had made a good impression working at the ILO, her technical expertise during the exam 'was clearly below the standard we require for our competitions and seven-year contracts'.<sup>68</sup> As a result, the ILO hired Aylsworth on a succession of temporary contracts rather than on a permanent seven-year contract.<sup>69</sup> More interesting than her cross-organisation



path is her application for employment, where she listed John Winant as a reference.<sup>70</sup> Aylsworth's personnel files do not indicate how she knew Winant, though the tenor of correspondence available in the FDR library indicates they were longstanding acquaintances.<sup>71</sup> There is no indication whether her acquaintance with Winant helped secure her job at the League, though this is a possibility, as she only started there in January 1936. What is clear, however, is she was not one of the impressionable American women Crocker mentions as glued to Winant. Her file indicates that, between her application in October 1935 and being hired by the League in April 1936, she worked for several private entities based in Geneva; beyond the Students' International Union, she worked for the Geneva College for Women at Céligny, a programme affiliated with Mount Holyoke College.<sup>72</sup> Aylsworth had ambition and, to her, Winant was one possible connection to further it.

## Conclusion

The many connections to Winant which were uncovered highlight a truth of international organisations: though these organisations seek a cooperative, supranational status, investment in issues of national interest and the 'parallelism' between budget contributions and staffing means the category of 'the national' retains importance. The clear lesson, in this case, is one could not reasonably expect Americans, men or women, to be hired by the ILO until the US acceded to this organisation. The significant number of women with discernible connections to Winant also highlights one trend of recruitment in international organisations. Competence alone does not necessarily lead to engagement: sometimes a well-connected person agitating in your favour is more effective.

The path from the simple question of 'who were these women?', to the discovery of the extraordinary impact of Winant, would have been difficult to uncover without prosopographical analysis. Prosopography and the tools necessary to complete it are valuable in that they neatly allow for the insertion of heretofore neglected groups, such as American women, into the mainstream narrative of the history of international organisations, a field which tends to be limited to explanations of 'national interest' or the impact of a few select high-level employees. By asking questions of and studying these very specific groups, they become part of the historical legacy of international organisations. In analysing the advocates attempting to influence international organisations, and those few insiders or outsiders with whom international organisations chose to interact, the prosopographical method sheds light on their programmes, intent, and biases, aspects not always disclosed in public or official records.

## Notes

1. The author is a former employee of the International Labour Office archives. A draft of this article was first presented at the Women's History Network Conference in London, 2011, as 'Towards a prosopography of American women in international Geneva, 1919-1939'. The author

would like to acknowledge the generous grants provided by the Roosevelt and Radcliffe Institutes, which permitted the author to complete research at the FDR Presidential Library and Archives in Hyde Park, New York (hereafter abbreviated as FDRA), and the Schlesinger Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts, respectively. Thanks for useful comments on restructuring from the blind reviewer for *Women's History Magazine*, Andre Liebich, Bernhard Blumenau, and James Cohen.

2. The conference 'Towards a New History of the League of Nations' (August 2011, the Graduate Institute, Geneva, Switzerland) was one such scholarly acknowledgement of this trend.

3. See for example: (Gender) Katarina Leppänen, 'The Conflicting Interests of Women's Organizations and the League of Nations on the Question of Married Women's Nationality in the 1930s', *NORA*, 17/4 (2009), 240-55; (Human Rights) Luis Rodríguez-Piñero, *Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law: The ILO Regime (1919-1989)* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006); (Transnationalism) Thomas Richard Davies, *The Possibilities of Transnational Activism: The Campaign for Disarmament Between the Two World Wars* (Leiden, Brill, 2007).

4. Interwar international Geneva refers to the League of Nations, its many subsections and bodies (including the ILO), and the organisations based in Geneva attempting to influence the League, from 1919-1939.

5. One of the ousted, and of keen interest for women's historians, is the case of (Mary) Florence Wilson, League librarian and the highest ranking American woman ever in the employ of the League of Nations. She was forced out in 1926, at her seven-year review (a standard review period in the League), in favour of a German man, much to the chagrin of women's activist groups. Doris Cruger Dale, 'An American in Geneva: Florence Wilson and the League of Nations Library', *Journal of Library History*, 7/2 (April 1972), 109-129.

6. Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', *Daedalus* 100/1 (1971), 46. For a discussion of the differences between prosopography and other biographical traditions (individual biographies, genealogy, etc.), see Katherine S.B. Keats-Rohan, 'Progress or Perversion? Current Issues in Prosopography: An Introduction' (2003), [users.ox.ac.uk/~prosop/progress-or-perversion.pdf, accessed 3 Oct. 2009].

7. For example: Lewis John Brooke Namier, *The House of Commons, 1754-1790*, 3 volumes (London, History of Parliament Trust/Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964); Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345-1547* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987).

8. Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York, Twayne, 1995) and Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge, MA / London, Harvard University Press, 1981).

9. 'Researching around' is a term employed by Antoinette Burton and others in the *Journal of Women's History* to denote in-depth information searching for archive-less women. Antoinette Burton, 'Finding Women in the Archive:

- Introduction', *Journal of Women's History*, 20/1 (2008), 149-50.
10. The liberal-feminist approach to history asserts that only by illuminating the place or role of women in historical studies can value be given to their roles.
11. Francesca Miller, 'The International Relations of Women of the Americas, 1890-1928', *The Americas* 43/2 (October 1986), 171.
12. Koenraad Verboeven, Myriam Carlier and Jan Dumolyn, 'A Short Manual to the Art of Prosopography', in *A Guide to the Principles and Practice of Prosopography. Prosopographica et Genealogica*, vol. 13. *Occasional Publications of the Unit for Prosopographical Research*, ed. Katherine S.B. Keats-Rohan (Oxford, Linacre College, 2007), 35-70.
13. Related to women's international activism, two key examples are Arnold Whittick, *Woman into citizen: the world movement towards the emancipation of women in the twentieth century with accounts of the contributions of the International Alliance of Women, the League of Nations and the relevant organizations of the United Nations* (London, Athenaeum, 1979) and Susan D. Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars* (Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1982).
14. Bernard Bellush, *He Walked Alone: A Biography of John Gilbert Winant* (The Hague, Mouton, 1968); James O. Freedman, 'Vita: John Gilbert Winant, brief life of an exemplary public servant: 1889-1947', *Harvard Magazine* (November/December 2000), [harvardmagazine.com/2000/11/john-gilbert-winant.html, accessed 16 July 2012].
15. International Labour Office Archives, Geneva, Switzerland (hereafter, ILOA), C 200/0, *Memorandum: Work of the Washington Branch*, from the Director of the Washington Branch (Leifur Magnusson) to the Director of the International Labour Office (Albert Thomas), no. 1122, 23 January 1930, 5-9.
16. [www.nationalobserver.net/2003\\_spring\\_110.htm](http://www.nationalobserver.net/2003_spring_110.htm), accessed 13 January 2013.
17. See Crocker's personnel file, ILOA, P.2832, for more details. His reminiscences of this period are included in Geoffrey Partington, 'John Gilbert Winant at Geneva: the Testimony of Sir Walter Crocker', *National Observer*, 58 (Spring 2003), [www.nationalobserver.net/2003\_spring\_110.htm, accessed 13 April 2011].
18. FDRA, Bernard Bellush Papers, Box 2; Mary Healy Harley, transcript of Bernard Bellush's tape-recorded interview with Mary Healy Harley, 13 June 1951, at Manchester, NH, 2.
19. Partington, 'Winant at Geneva'.
20. ILOA, C 200/0, *Memorandum: Work of the Washington Branch*, from the Director of the Washington Branch (Leifur Magnusson) to the Director of the International Labour Office (Albert Thomas), no. 1122, 23 January 1930, 1.
21. Edward J. Phelan, *Edward Phelan and the ILO: The Life and Views of an International Social Actor* (Geneva, ILO, 2009), 238-9.
22. John B. Tipton, *Participation of the United States in the International Labor Organization* (Illinois, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Illinois, 1959), 46.
23. Partington, 'Winant at Geneva'.
24. Underline in the original. ILOA, XO 2/31/1, personal letter of James T. Shotwell to ILO Director Harold Butler, 23 March 1935, 2-3.
25. ILOA, XO 2/31/1, telegram of Governor John Winant to Butler, 7 April 1935.
26. ILOA, P.3053 Rollins, personal notice, 17 June 1935(?).
27. ILOA, P.3074 Johnson, personal notice, 21 August 1935.
28. ILOA, XO 2/31/1 chart attached to letter of Winant (ILO) to Butler (Director ILO), 26 August 1935.
29. ILOA, P.3075 Healy Harley, personal notice, 26 August 1935.
30. ILOA, XO 2/31/1, personal letter of Butler to Winant, 27 August 1935, 2.
31. Crocker's/Partington's spelling, Healey, is a variant seen in some of the files. The name refers to the same person.
32. Schlesinger Library, 79-M209, carton 1, folder 4, 'Miss Johnson Joins Geneva Labor Bureau: Former Minimum Wage Office Chief to Work With Winant', *Concord Daily Monitor*, 3 August 1935.
33. Partington, 'Winant at Geneva'.
34. ILOA, *Staff List of the International Labour Office showing Nationalities and Salaries for 1935*, League of Nations document C.215(a).M.111(a).1935, 31 May 1935, 1-2.
35. Egon Ferdinand Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945), 353-4.
36. Of the ILO officials recruited in 1920, 30% were British, 25% were French, and 30% were Swiss. Véronique Plata, 'Le Recrutement des fonctionnaires du Bureau international du travail en 1920: une approche prosopographique', (Unpublished Master's thesis, UNIGE, 2009), 22. Such an initial distribution set the tone for how staffing was repartitioned in 1935.
37. FDRA, Bernard Bellush Papers, Box 2, Mary Healy Harley, notes from Bernard Bellush's interview with Mary Healy Harley, 13 June. 1951, at Manchester, NH, 2.
38. FDRA, John Gilbert Winant Papers, International Labor Organization: Geneva, 1935, 1937-1939, Box 173, Mary Healy, Memo of Healy to Winant, 21 February 1939, for example.
39. ILOA, XO 2/31/1, personal letter of Shotwell to Butler, 23 March 1935, 4.
40. ILOA, XO 2/31/1, confidential cable of Winant (Social Security Board) to Butler, received in Geneva 2 November 1935.
41. Through 1943. ILOA, P.3074 Johnson.
42. ILOA, P.3075 Healy Harley, Mary Cornelia Harley, *Rapport (Art. 26 du Statut) sur les six premiers mois de stage*, 1 July 1937 to 31 December 1937.
43. ILOA, P.2993 Lubin (Docket no. 1 to end of 1945), communications of 1 October 1935 and 14 March 1936, among others.
44. ILOA, P.3112 Gehres, letter of Frances Perkins (Secretary of Labor) to Winant (Assistant Director ILO), 29 May 1935.

45. ILOA, P.3112 Gehres, copy of letter of George L. Berry to Frances Perkins, 28 May 1935, 1.
46. ILOA, P.3112 Gehres, contract of temporary engagement, 16 April 1936.
47. ILOA, P.3112 Gehres, cable of John Winant (Washington) to Harold Butler (Geneva), 4 March 1936.
48. ILOA, P.3147 Carlton, letter of Katherine Sargent (London) to Carol Riegelman, 26 September 1935.
49. ILOA, P.3147 Carlton, letter of the Chief of the Staff Branch of the ILO to Katherine Sargent, 27 May 1936.
50. ILOA, P.3147 Carlton, letter of the Chief of the Staff Branch of the ILO to Katherine Sargent, 16 April 1936.
51. ILOA, P.3451 Long, letter of J.B. Moore to Winant, 16 September 1938.
52. Long forwarded the three references to Winant on 5 October 1938, and her first (temporary) contract began on 17 October 1938. See letters in ILOA, P.3451 Long.
53. ILOA, P.3314 Drury, personal notice, 24 August 1937.
54. Reverend Drury was Rector from 1911-38. Ohrstrom Library Digital Archives, St. Paul's School, Concord, NH, 'The Rectors of St. Paul's School' [www.ohrstromblog.com/spsarchives/archives/category/rectors\_exhibit\_01, accessed 11 Jul. 2012].
55. ILOA, P.3314 Drury, personal notice, 24 August 1937.
56. ILOA, P.3459 Miller, personnel record, undated (likely Spring 1938).
57. *Ibid.*
58. ILOA, P.3459 Miller, letter of Elizabeth Miller (New York City) to John Winant (ILO, Geneva), 20 September 1938.
59. ILOA, P.3459 Miller, contract of temporary engagement, 7 February 1939.
60. Partington, 'Winant at Geneva'. Her first work review speaks to her unsuitability for the post found by Winant – not all of Winant's manoeuvring was for the best. ILOA, P.3459 Miller, *Rapport (Art. 26 du Statut) sur les six premiers mois de service*, 1 February 1939 to 31 July 1939.
61. ILOA, P.3513 Braucher, letter of Howard Braucher to Winant, 19 January 1939.
62. ILOA, P.3513 Braucher, letter of Howard Braucher to Mary Healey [sic], 12 April 1939.
63. FDRA, John Gilbert Winant Papers, Early Papers, Box 3, Miss E.R. [sic] Hopkins, letter of Doris E. Hopkins to Constance Rivington Russell Winant, 29 July 1930.
64. ILOA, Z 9/61/1, copy of letter of Winant (Geneva) to Ethel Johnson (WO), 16 January 1939; ILOA, C 201/100/18, no. 7106 from the Washington Office (E.M. Johnson) to the Director of the International Labour Office, Geneva, 15 March 1939.
65. FDRA, John Gilbert Winant Papers, International Labour Organization: Geneva, 1935, 1937-1939, Box 173, Mary Healy, Cable of Healy (WO) to Ethel Johnson (Women's City Club, D.C.), 8 August 1938.
66. League of Nations Archives, Geneva, Switzerland, S707, 132 Aylsworth, *passim*.
67. ILOA, P.3119 Aylsworth, *passim*.
68. ILOA, P.3119 Aylsworth. '[était] nettement au-dessous du standard que nous exigeons pour nos concours et nos contrats de sept ans'.
69. ILOA, P.3119 Aylsworth, *engagement temporaire*

*prolongation*, 27 October 1936.

70. ILOA, P.3119 Aylsworth, application form, 3 October 1935.

71. FDRA, John Gilbert Winant Papers, International Labour Organization: Washington, 1935-1936, Box 170, Personnel (ILO), sub-folder Ruth Aylsworth, *passim*.

72. ILOA, P.3119 Aylsworth, letter of Ruth E. Aylsworth to M.M. de Salis, 22 June 1936.

## Membership Announcements

You can now manage your WHN membership, update your details, pay your subscription, add your research interests/books and make a donation by logging into the **Members' Area** at **[www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)**

### Do you pay your subscription by standing order?

If so, can you check that the payment details reflect the 2013 rates. Don't forget, we have different rates to reflect different personal circumstances, so it is worth checking that you are paying the correct rate for you. Details of the 2013 rates for all categories of members can be found on the inside back cover of the magazine or by logging in to your account at **[www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)**.

**Why not switch to standing order for your subscription?** It could reduce the cost of your membership fee and certainly helps the Network, by reducing administrative overheads. Please be sure to ask your bank to use your *WHN reference number*, which can be found by logging in to your account at **[www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)**.

**Has your email address changed?** If we don't have your current details, you may not receive the monthly e-newsletter, included in your membership fee. If you have changed email addresses since joining, or recently acquired a new email address, please update your details by logging into your account at **[www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)** OR by emailing the membership secretary.

**All information (or queries) about membership, including requests to set up a payment by standing order and changes to personal details, can be arranged by logging in to your account at [womenshistorynetwork.org](http://womenshistorynetwork.org) OR by emailing [membership@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:membership@womenshistorynetwork.org) OR by mail to Imaobong Umoren, St Cross College, St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LZ.**

# Feminist input into the development of patient-centred health care in New Zealand

Phillida Bunkle

*King's College, London*

## Introduction

Community-based women's health groups emerged from the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in North America and Australasia.<sup>1</sup> They were the second wave of 'recurring episodes of multi-issue women's health activism' in what has been called the 'mega-wave' of the Women's Health Movement (WHM).<sup>2</sup> The WHM greatly influenced subsequent medical reform, its feminist principles leading to a transformation of the relationship between patients and health providers. However, two arguments seek to minimise the contribution of the WHM.

On the one hand, revisionists, hostile to feminism, argued that feminist criticism of the failings of the medical profession during the 1960s and 1970s was factually wrong, and that the extreme views expressed by feminists detracted from changes that were already underway. On the other hand, medical defenders of reform also minimised the contributions of feminists and suggested that alienation of the medical profession by feminists impeded change from within. This paper attempts to correct recent historical scholarship, and contrary to both views, I argue, that the WHM was remarkably successful in achieving institutional reform and more effective patient-centred care.<sup>3</sup>

I substantiate my argument by considering the Cartwright Inquiry, which took place in New Zealand in 1987-8, and the subsequent Report.<sup>4</sup> Using this material, I show that feminists not only were correct in the conclusions they drew at the time but also authored a comprehensive plan that became the blueprint for subsequent legislative reform. I argue that this plan for reforming the relationship between patients and the health service arose explicitly from feminists' experiences in, and addressed needs identified through, the activities of the WHM.

## The WHM in New Zealand: health activism 1970-2000

In June 1987, New Zealand women's health activists Phillida Bunkle and Sandra Coney published an article, 'An Unfortunate Experiment at National Women's Hospital', in the Auckland magazine, *Metro*.<sup>5</sup> The authors had met in 1973 at the First United Women's Convention of which Coney was a convener and Bunkle a speaker.<sup>6</sup> Both were active feminists (Coney edited *Broadsheet*, New Zealand's feminist magazine) and throughout the 1970s and 1980s they participated in campaigns around sexual health, reproductive rights and maternity services.<sup>7</sup> In 1984, they founded Fertility Action, which evolved into Women's Health Action, becoming part of a loose grassroots network, which was spreading in 'dozens of small towns and large cities' across North America and Australasia.<sup>8</sup>

These groups asked questions unrecognised by medical institutions.<sup>9</sup> Fertility Action's first campaign was for chlamydia testing and treatment. Huge resources were being devoted to the development of IVF but none to preventing the infections which were the major cause of tubal infertility. The control of reproduction was publicly contested between the Religious Right and Family Planning Association, which prioritised population control.<sup>10</sup> Fertility Action argued that the 'choice' to conceive and the 'choice' not to were equally valid and should be determined by women themselves.<sup>11</sup> The protection of patient autonomy and physical safety were both essential values in health provision.<sup>12</sup>

Coney and Bunkle are criticised for inconsistent attitudes towards intrusive medical interventions. It is alleged that these inconsistencies show that they cynically selected issues to pursue a wider feminist agenda.<sup>13</sup> However, the information Fertility Action disseminated on issues such as contraceptive safety, STD prevention, hormonal medications or surgery was based neither on a blanket opposition to medical intervention nor advocacy of naturalistic therapies but on pragmatic assessments of harm or benefit.

Like their American counterparts, Bunkle and Coney's organisation aimed at institutional, attitudinal and policy change; like most women's health groups, they relied entirely upon voluntary activity and limited community resources.<sup>14</sup> This guaranteed their independence but created institutional weaknesses characteristic of much of the second wave of WHM.<sup>15</sup>

Commentators suggest that internationally the WHM contracted during the 1990s in a climate of 'vociferous pressure' to depoliticise advocacy in response to changes in health ownership structures and the corporatisation of the state. Corporatised health-care adopted the 'language of empowered consumers [as] part of the neoliberal agenda ... contribut[ing] to a depoliticisation of health care advocacy'; it commodified women's health, translating the power discourse into the language of the market place.<sup>16</sup> In the 2000s, commercialised marketing saw women's health transformed from a movement for collective political change into individualised fitness and lifestyle programmes.<sup>17</sup>

With the passage of the State Services Act in 1987, New Zealand introduced New Public Management (NPM) to the developed world and, through the 1990s, it provided the proving ground for the neo-liberal policy agenda. Coney and Bunkle consistently criticised the neo-liberal political economy which was driving health policy, and which saw most state health expenditure distributed via privately-owned, for-profit, GP businesses.<sup>18</sup> The success of this policy in overcoming doctor resistance to privatisation means that it is now being vigorously pursued in Britain.<sup>19</sup>

By the 2000s, Women's Health Action was

'producing health information, running an information line and supporting health consumer's rights; it lobbied health officials and advocated institutional changes'.<sup>20</sup> Like other groups, while still nominally independent, the organisation had adapted to corporatisation and contracting out.<sup>21</sup> However, by this time, Bunkle and Coney had moved on to wider political engagement opposing neo-liberal health politics in general.<sup>22</sup>

## **The WHM in New Zealand: institutional background**

The WHM of 1970s and 1980s should be understood in the context of the institutional structure of medicine at the time, which reflected the dominance of university teaching hospitals in the production of medical knowledge.<sup>23</sup> From the late 1930s, and greatly accelerating post-World War II, medical knowledge-making resulted from a conjunction of clinical research, laboratory science and applied technology.<sup>24</sup> The post-graduate departments of university teaching hospitals brought together a supply of 'clinical material' and advanced research laboratories. Technical progress was rapid and widely assumed to justify the application of experimental treatments. Hospitals also provided a ready supply of 'teaching material' to facilitate the dissemination of these new and powerful technologies among the profession. They were hierarchical institutions dominated by consultant-professors. Access to treatment was largely determined by clinicians, supported by the doctrine of 'clinical freedom' which protected the autonomy of senior clinicians. The few managers had little influence over clinical priorities.

Auckland's National Women's Hospital was a typical post-war, specialist hospital, state-funded and dominated by Auckland University's Post-Graduate School of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Within the hospital-based system of knowledge production, prestige was determined by the research record of all powerful consultant-professors. The head of National Women's was Professor Dennis Bonham, who chaired both the Hospital Medical Committee and the Ethics Committee. Bonham was recruited from Britain where he played a key role in research which justified bringing all births into the domain of hospital specialists.<sup>25</sup> In New Zealand, he led the argument against independent midwives and midwife-led maternity hospitals.<sup>26</sup>

It was no surprise that a hospital primarily concerned with reproduction became the flash-point for challenges to medical power: women bore the brunt of the sexual revolution yet predominantly male doctors determined access to fertility control, while a generation of young women whose expectations of autonomy were shaped by their access to secondary and tertiary education became disempowered patients when giving birth. Both Coney and Bunkle, with many of their contemporaries, shared their appalled reaction to patronising treatment during childbirth.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, patients who questioned, or attempted to refuse, treatment were regarded as irrational and could legally be denied further intervention. Auckland Hospital Board by-law 4.5 stated, 'Unreasonable refusal to comply with treatment programmes shall render a patient

liable to discharge from hospital', 'unreasonable' being defined solely by the consultants. Some patients feared that they could be denied future care.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1970-80s, in reaction to the hegemony of doctors, patients' rights issues were brought into public debate largely by the WHM. Feminists analysing the connection between personal experience and social reality concluded that the sharing of experiences as patients created a strong validation of a common reality.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, in medical knowledge, personal experience was seen as contaminating truth. Patients' experiences were not part of official medical knowledge and were dismissed as private and irrelevant.<sup>30</sup> The WHM warned that such objectification of patients could lead to inhuman and sometimes unethical treatment.<sup>31</sup>

## **The road to Cartwright: the 'Unfortunate Experiment' article**

Bunkle and Coney's 'Unfortunate Experiment' article, written in 1987, described unethical research conducted at Auckland University's Post-Graduate School of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.<sup>32</sup> They had been alerted to the experiment when a supporter drew their attention to a 1984 medical article providing a retrospective analysis of cases.<sup>33</sup> The 'Unfortunate Experiment' article explained that some women with precancerous carcinoma in situ of the cervix (CIS) or genital tract, now known as CIN 111, had, without their knowledge, received only repeated diagnostic biopsies and cervical smears. They had been left untreated or undertreated in order to study the extent to which they developed invasive cancer. Some women had dozens of surgical procedures not directed at eliminating disease. Many developed invasive cancer and some died. The article revolved around the experiences and case notes of patient Clare Matheson who developed invasive cancer after initially having only diagnostic biopsies.<sup>34</sup>

The article provided evidence that, in 1966, the study of CIS had been formalised into a research programme. By the early 1970s, although deaths had occurred and the dangers of developing invasive cancer had become apparent, National Women's Hospital did not formerly end the research or act to save the remaining patients. Instead, it marginalised critics of the programme, even among senior staff. The Hospital Board, senior clinicians and professors of Auckland University, particularly Bonham, were implicated in responsibility for the research and its consequences.

The New Zealand government responded to the Bunkle and Coney article by setting up a judicial inquiry entitled 'The Committee of Inquiry into Allegations Concerning the Treatment of Cervical Cancer at National Women's Hospital and into Other Related Matters'. Headed by District Court Judge Silvia Cartwright, it became known as the Cartwright Inquiry. The processes and evidential rules of a judicial inquiry are those of a court of law, but with additional powers of independent investigation. Significant Parties retained senior counsel and vigorously cross-examined witnesses. Unlike similar inquiries in Britain, such as the Ledward Inquiry, parties representing consumer interests participated throughout.<sup>35</sup> Matheson,

Coney and Bunkle were represented at public expense by noted civil rights lawyer, Dr Rodney Harrison QC, and the women maintained a constant presence through the six months of the Inquiry, supported by public donations.

The Inquiry developed an independent evidence base from analysis of the clinical records of hundreds of women. These records were available to all parties and were the basis of rigorous cross-examination, particularly of international medical experts. The findings and recommendations of the Inquiry were published by the New Zealand Government in August 1988, in what has become known as the *Cartwright Report*.<sup>36</sup> The Report found that the allegations made by Bunkle and Coney in the original 'Unfortunate Experiment' article were largely correct, and the New Zealand Government accepted the findings, agreeing to implement its full recommendations.

## **The road to Cartwright: Cartwright's recommendations**

The major recommendation from the Inquiry was that the health system should be run in the interests of patients rather than professional interest groups.<sup>37</sup> The Cartwright reforms were based on five related innovations:

- a human rights approach to patients' rights;
- an understanding of 'treatment' which extended beyond medical procedures to respect for patients' dignity, including their right to effective communication and informed consent;
- the development of a legislated Code of Patients' Rights;
- an independent Health Commissioner, external to the medical professions, charged with adjudicating medical providers conformity to the Code, enforcing its provisions and compensating victims;
- the employment of independent patient advocates.

The Cartwright recommendations also included the establishment of independent ethics committees, composed of half consumer representatives, half professional scientists and a lay chair. The focus of the committees should be to protect patients.

This New Zealand system of patients' rights which eventually became enshrined in law and external to the medical profession remains unique. Despite this, it is widely regarded as a model for reform. The move toward a patient-centred health system also led to the participation of consumer representatives, including Maori and Pacific Islands women, at many levels of health policy decision-making, particularly in the development of the recommended national cervical cancer screening programme.

## **Feminist submissions to the inquiry: the First Submission**

Community and women's health groups made submissions to the Inquiry urging the case for reform.

Coney and Bunkle made three submissions. This paper considers these in detail because they were the source of important Cartwright recommendations and accurately record the feminists' conceptual and analytic input into the Inquiry and its outcomes.

The *First Submission of Evidence*, written by Coney, Bunkle and medical doctor, Forbes Williams, and delivered by Coney early in the Inquiry, brought the patients' experience to the centre of proceedings.<sup>38</sup> It documented numerous examples of cervical smears 'suggestive' or 'conclusive for malignancy' and other pathological findings which had been ignored or merely followed by further diagnosis.<sup>39</sup> The primary impact of this evidence was not to enumerate failings but to articulate patients' experiences. This submission implied that objectification of patients was linked to their inhuman treatment: one consequence was to expand the definition of 'treatment' and focus the Inquiry on patient welfare rather than upon narrowly-defined 'medical facts'.

The *First Submission* aimed to embed the patient point of view at the centre of the Inquiry by bringing the submerged reality 'of this experience ... before this committee of inquiry'.<sup>40</sup> Patients ceased to be an abstraction: until then, their 'personal' stories had remained in the unofficial world of anecdote; now they became the touchstone of judgements about the adequacy of the medical system. The effect of this submission was to reverse the assumed order of reality and it was this shift which was to be the most momentous outcome of the Inquiry. It originated in the feminist analysis of 'personal' life shaped through the structures of power and was a concrete example of the WHM perspective in action.<sup>41</sup>

The *First Submission* argued that the first Term of Reference of the Inquiry on the adequacy of treatment of CIS:

... is too narrowly drawn. The question isn't whether CIS was adequately treated, but whether women were adequately treated. A doctor may cure a patient's condition while mistreating the patient ... clinical management ... is not the only question. The concern of the Committee should be on how women were treated, not on how a certain collection of cervical cells were treated.

... Informed consent is integral to adequate treatment. Adequate treatment concerns both what the women experienced, and what they knew ... it involves the whole pattern of interaction between the hospital and the women ... An adequately treated person is not left impotent, vulnerable, nervously wondering what had been done to her, or anxiously, even desperately wondering how to find out.<sup>42</sup>

Telling women's experiences emphasised what medical case histories usually filtered out; the practical realities of money, gender and race came into view. The vulnerability of patients uninformed about their condition and unable to



protect themselves became clear. The *First Submission* established that the invisibility of patients was a safety issue.

The effects of this ignorance were widespread and on-going, and many victims only came to light because of the publicity surrounding the Inquiry.<sup>43</sup> Barbara, for example, only discovered after reading the original Bunkle and Coney article that she had been treated for CIS: 'I was stunned, I was so shocked to find out that I had been treated for something that I did not know I had ... I feel betrayed'.<sup>44</sup>

The *Submission* argued that when patients are not given information,

... it renders them powerless and thus ensures acquiescent behaviour, but passivity is ensured at great cost. It means that they have no basis on which to make decisions; they cannot make choices. It violates their autonomy and their basic right to the integrity and control of their own body. It places them at grave risk.<sup>45</sup>

Nor were the risks confined to the development of invasive cancer. Pauline, for example, first attended the hospital the year the Inquiry began for what she understood was 'a simple follow up for a routine smear'. She was 'flabbergasted' when a professor took biopsies: 'I knew nothing of what they were doing'.<sup>46</sup> The consultant ordered cryotherapy, 'I did not know what it was ... they would give me no information'.<sup>47</sup> Pauline's notes showed she had been trying to conceive but she was not asked about possible pregnancy. She later miscarried but when she asked the house surgeon if the treatment she had received could be the cause, he 'looked uncomfortable and said he could not tell her ... the doctor who finally came was off-hand and down-right rude'.<sup>48</sup> Despite repeated requests, her questions remained unanswered until she accessed her case notes through the Inquiry. She said there was 'no one I could talk to about all this. The Inquiry has given me a voice'.<sup>49</sup>

The follow-up involved in the CIS research placed enormous stress on many women. Ignorant of their condition, they had no motive to repeatedly attend the hospital. For example, Mrs W., a Maori mother of sixteen children, first attended in 1970 with a smear 'conclusive for malignancy' and suggestive symptoms. A cone biopsy, known to be incomplete, showed 'fairly extensive CIS with microinvasion'. She was in severe jeopardy but did not know it.<sup>50</sup> Mrs W. became pregnant with her seventeenth child; a tubal ligation was carried out, but not a hysterectomy and her smears continued to be 'strongly suggestive' or 'conclusive of malignancy'.<sup>51</sup> She began missing appointments, '... owing to financial difficulties', but the only letter to her GP gave no reason to alert him to the danger his patient was in.<sup>52</sup> There is no further record of Mrs W. until 1981 when the hospital notes state she has 'obvious carcinoma of the cervix'. She was finally treated with radiation but by 1982 the notes record that 'she looks and feels exhausted ... looking after three teenaged children ... [is] ... now beyond her. Clearly she has considerable metastatic disease'. She died four days

later. Associate Professor Herbert Green, the principal researcher, noted that after 1973, 'she could not be got back to the clinic', effectively blaming her for her disease and death.<sup>53</sup>

The *First Submission* ended with a detailed account of the treatment of Joyce, a thirty-nine year old widow, written by Dr Forbes Williams.<sup>54</sup> Joyce had received a tubal ligation following the birth of her third child. In 1961, she was admitted for a cone biopsy following smears 'conclusive for malignancy'. The pathology report showed incomplete removal of the lesion with 'undifferentiated carcinoma of the cervix' and possible 'early micro-invasion'. In other words, like Mrs W., she certainly had CIS and possibly invasive cancer. In the following nine years, Joyce made twenty-two hospital visits and was treated for many neurologic symptoms, including pain and a 'neurogenic' bladder. By 1972, she was in 'great distress and pain ... she even talks of suicide the pain at night is so bad'.<sup>55</sup> Her long journeys to the clinic resulted in more surgical biopsies, while smears 'strongly suggestive' or 'conclusive for malignancy' continued. By the mid-1970s, Joyce was on Valium, sleeping pills and antidepressants, but the abnormal tissue had still not been definitively removed. In 1978, after seventeen years of investigation, Joyce probably became aware for the first time that she had invasive cancer. She endured radium treatment, but a year later cancer had invaded her bowel, and in 1982, during her sixty-fifth visit to the hospital and after twenty-one years of almost continuous investigation, more than fifty vaginal exams and twenty-four major procedures, she died, but with her uterus still intact.<sup>56</sup> When Coney finished reading Joyce's story, counsel were visibly shaken. From now on the Inquiry was about the women.

## **Feminist submissions to the inquiry: the *Second Submission***

Having established the extent of the problem and the primacy of the patient interest, the task of the *Second Submission of Evidence* was to analyse how and why the institution had been unable to right itself. The *Second Submission*, written by Coney, Bunkle and Williams and edited and compiled by Bunkle, analysed the failure of medical accountability and recommended comprehensive reform.<sup>57</sup> It began with an analysis of the hospital power structure and its disempowering impact on patients and medical students.

Analysis of the socialisation of medical students, contributed by Williams, used the idea of the 'hidden curriculum', familiar to feminist educational circles at the time, to underline the significance of teaching vaginal examinations and IUD insertions on anaesthetised, non-consenting patients.<sup>58</sup> This curriculum teaches 'a one sided mode of interaction [in which] the patient is irrelevant [and] the doctor's interests take priority ... the conscious presence of the patient is threatening or a nuisance. Students "learn" to act as if it would be preferable that the woman was not there'. Further, it advises students to construct 'a separation of the sentient, thinking person from their body, especially from "down there"'. Students are given the impression of being 'initiated into a secret', a

secret withheld from the patient.<sup>59</sup>

The *Submission* described the experiences of one woman having a colposcopy examination where the patient was especially exposed and vulnerable. She declined to have students present. However, when some students arrived she found herself, 'being scrutinized by a number of pairs of eyes'. When she objected to this, instead of the students leaving she was 'offered a cloth to put over her face'.<sup>60</sup> As the *Submission* noted: 'It is her response which is questionable, not the doctor's presence. [The doctors] approximate to the situation where she is anaesthetized, rather than by seeking her consent or giving her some control of the situation'.<sup>61</sup>

The *Second Submission* located the problem in the ubiquitous power of a profession used to making policy-decisions unilaterally, across the whole of healthcare, including the rights of patients. Doctors claim to have their patients' best interests at heart, but it is they who decide what those interests are, and this, the *Submission* claimed, 'renders us passive and infantile. We are not judged to be adult enough to make out own decisions and understand information about our own health'.<sup>62</sup> The *Submission* concluded that the autonomy of the medical profession should be dismantled, with accountability determined not by 'paternal goodwill' but as 'a fundamental requirement of legitimate action'.

Drawing on Carolyn Faulder's book, *Whose Body is it?*, the *Second Submission* went on to consider informed consent as 'a first step towards protecting patients'.<sup>63</sup> It identified the features of consent common to treatment, teaching and research, arguing it was of first importance to a patient to know where to turn for information and to understand who it is who makes the decisions. The patients:

... may be told repeatedly that the people they ask are not allowed to give them the information they seek, but they may not be told who can, or they may have no access to them. This bewilderment creates quite unnecessary anxiety ... and a sense of being entirely deprived of the most basic rights to understanding and self-determination which can be very frightening and makes the patient unnecessarily vulnerable.<sup>64</sup>

Informed consent, the *Submission* determined, should also incorporate the right of a patient to terminate treatment without jeopardy; the right to ask questions and demand disclosure of the practitioner's personal bias; the legal right to access medical records; and the provision of mechanisms for facilitating understanding, including translation for those, such as Maori and Pacific Island people, whose language is not the dominant one. Most importantly, in all circumstances, consent should include 'a statement of the legal rights of the subject including the right to compensation for injury'.<sup>65</sup> This analysis of consent moved logically to advocate the need for a non-voluntary Bill of Rights, enforceable in law, providing adequate means of redress and backed by patient advocates independently employed to support them.<sup>66</sup>

The *Second Submission* also provided a detailed

examination of failures to gain consent from research subjects. The Minutes of the National Women's Ethics Committee had become available through the Inquiry and clearly showed that in-house ethics committees were haphazard and ineffective.<sup>67</sup> Their structure and function needed radical overhaul including the introduction of effective mechanisms, a common national framework and legislated powers. By the time the *Second Submission* was presented to the Inquiry, public opinion had already been mobilised by the revelation that the principal researcher, Herbert Green, had taken cervical smears from 2,200 girl babies born at the hospital without parental knowledge. He had also collected cervixes from still born and dead neonates without parental consent. The claim by some hospital staff that patients entering a teaching hospital gave 'implied consent' to anything that was done to them only served to reinforce public concern.

The *Second Submission* focused on formulating achievable and effective policies to reform common practice.<sup>68</sup> It proposed a two tier process of ethical oversight of research. The first stage of scientific assessment by experts would ensure the scientific validity of research; the second stage, evaluating both treatment and research, would lie with Ethics Committees which had a clear focus on patient protection and a majority of lay representatives, 'preferably chosen by the people they represent and definitely accountable to them'.<sup>69</sup>

The *Submission* discussed the deficiencies of the various mechanisms said to ensure professional accountability: there were two possible avenues within the hospital system, a peer review process and the Hospital and Hospital Board complaints procedures. The *Submission* provided evidence of the inadequacy of both. There were also two possible avenues for complaint external to the hospital system. The first was the Medical Practitioners Disciplinary system, for complaints about individual practitioners. Clare Matheson's experience showed that this was costly, legalistic, dominated by professional self-interest and unlikely to result in systemic improvement or public acknowledgment of error and provided no compensation for patients.<sup>70</sup>

The second route for medically-injured patients was a claim to New Zealand's unique no-fault Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). While ACC could award compensation, the grounds were limited and the sums likely to be miserly and paid after considerable delay. The ACC system removed the possibility of civil action for compensation through suit for negligence. The *Second Submission* argued that subjects of the 'Unfortunate' or other experiments were afforded no real protection. Medical practitioners were effectively protected from the consequences of injurious treatment of patients. There was urgent need for comprehensive reform providing substantial redress for medical injury and realistic compensation.<sup>71</sup>

## **Feminist submissions to the inquiry: the third *Closing Submission***

The challenge to devise an innovative structure which plausibly remedied the failings identified in

the *Second Submission* was met in the third *Closing Submission*. It was prepared and presented by counsel, Dr Rodney Harrison.<sup>72</sup> The *Closing Submission* spelled out innovative proposals for a human rights approach to patient protection independent of and external to medical professional bodies. No other jurisdiction at the time provided an alternative model to professional self-regulation or incorporated legally enforceable rights for patients.

The *Closing Submission* made a case for comprehensive legislation as a 'matter for the national interest' rather than internal reform of particular institutions.<sup>73</sup> Legislation in respect of medical research should, '... be coupled with legislation dealing with "Patient Rights", and [with] ... informed consent to treatment, and ... the use of patients for teaching purposes ... A corollary of reform should include ... the establishment of Patients Advocates and provision ... of full-time interpreters to assist those patients who have language difficulty'.<sup>74</sup>

A number of agencies endorsed the need for legislation.<sup>75</sup> The Ministry of Women's Affairs proposed a statutory code of patients' rights but suggested no particular model of legislation.<sup>76</sup> The *Closing Submission* suggested a system based on the Human Rights Commission and drafted, in some detail, a 'proposal for a Patients' Rights and Medical Research Procedures Act'.<sup>77</sup>

The framing of patients' rights as human rights grew logically from the feminists' analysis in the *First Submission* and from their experience of the Human Rights Act in promoting women's rights. The mechanism of the Human Rights Commission had advantages for disempowered patients; it was free to users and the onus for the investigation of complaints fell upon the Commission. For the injured patient, this seemed preferable to legal action facing, unassisted, the entrenched power of professional bodies and their insurers. The proposed system provided extensive capability for the Commission to investigate complaints and seek redress, including compensation. The *Submission* argued that enforcement powers should include breaches being 'punishable by a substantial fine', not precluding 'high court damages for breaches' as a back-up. Furthermore, by providing a one-stop-shop for complaints, the Human Rights Commission would simplify the system for the complainant and simplify the bewildering parallel systems, each with different obstacles to overcome.

The *Closing Submission* called for extensive community consultation and representation of consumers in developing and implementing the new act.<sup>78</sup> In particular, it stressed that,

... given the failure of the medical profession to consult with interested parties and indeed the general public in key areas such as professional discipline ... [the Inquiry] should make a separate clear recommendation concerning ... a consultation process over details for reform in all areas ... [including] ... the Ministry of Women's Affairs, women's health community groups and other consumer organisations.<sup>79</sup>

The *Closing Submission* ended with an appendix containing draft legislation for a Patient's Bill of Rights and for reform of medical research procedures, including ethics committees with investigative powers and representation of women and minority racial groups.<sup>80</sup>

The proposals put forward in the *Closing Submission* became the blueprint for reform. Legislation was eventually enacted as the Health and Disability Commissioner Act 1994, becoming operative in 1996. It adopted the model of the Human Rights Commission but established a separate Health Commission charged with the development and enforcement of a Code of Health and Disability Consumers Rights. Prosecutions for breaches of the Code would be heard before the Human Rights Review Tribunal.<sup>81</sup> The *Third Submission* is obscured by recent academic controversy: a discussion of the New Zealand Code of Patients' Rights ignores the feminist argument and suggested that it originated in Judge Cartwright's personal experience.<sup>82</sup>

## Were the feminists wrong?

In 2008, the original medical facts of the 'Unfortunate Experiment' were reconfirmed in an article in *The Lancet Oncology*, which re-examined cases of CIS in National Women's Hospital from 1955-1976.<sup>83</sup> The study confirmed that women whose lesions were not eradicated faced higher risks compared to those whose lesions were removed and followed up to ensure elimination. Thirty years after diagnosis, in women who initially had their lesions fully removed, disease progression was negligible (0.7 per cent); while those who only experienced diagnostic procedures had a disease progression rate of 31.3 per cent. Of these latter women, the rate of invasion of cancer cells, in those who also had evidence of continuing abnormalities two years after diagnosis, was 50.3 per cent. Delays in treatment of curative intent were confirmed to be dangerous.

Despite this confirmation, after publication of the 2008 article, challenges to the Inquiry findings were reinvigorated. Linda Bryder reopened the case in her 2009 book, *A history of the 'Unfortunate Experiment' at National Women's Hospital* which questions the reality of the 'experiment' and the findings of the Cartwright Inquiry.<sup>84</sup> Bryder argued that the women received standard care and experienced few adverse effects. She concluded that Cartwright merely reinforced reforms in medical ethics and patients' rights which were already underway internationally.

Bryder's thesis was not based on the clinical case histories which formed the foundation of the Inquiry's findings and which remain the crucial primary sources. Two case histories were, however, published in full the *Cartwright Report*.<sup>85</sup> Bryder analysed one of the cases, for her book, that of Clare Matheson, but importantly failed to understand its full medical implications. She reports that Clare was discharged after successive 'clear' smears but does not acknowledge the Inquiry evidence that this occurred because her cervix was so scarred that it could no longer yield appropriate epithelial cells for a smear. More seriously, Bryder ignores the histology report which

included 'fragments of carcinoma devoid of underlying stroma', which established beyond doubt that she was known to have CIS at the point at which she was discharged from hospital follow-up and the research project.<sup>86</sup>

In 2010, McCredie, Paul and Jones entered the dispute, claiming that analysis of case notes, coupled with an independent review of the original slides and smears, showed that Green was not, as he claimed, saving women from invasive surgery.<sup>87</sup> The women who initially had diagnostic biopsies actually experienced far more surgical procedures than those whose lesions were initially fully removed. The paper showed that, 'women initially managed by punch or wedge biopsies alone had a cancer risk ten times higher than women initially treated with curative intent'.<sup>88</sup> It might have been expected that the publication of this medical evidence would have shown that Bryder's thesis was incorrect. However, controversy continues, most recently in the publications of the British Royal Society, prompting serious criticism of the feminists involved.<sup>89</sup>

Bryder criticised the feminist initiators of the Inquiry, particularly Coney, who, she argued, had co-opted the judge and the machinery of the Inquiry to advance the feminist cause. Bryder implies that feminist involvement discredits both the process and findings of the Inquiry and its associated reforms. The Inquiry's significance did not, however, lie only in the treatment of a disease. Its lasting influence is over the relationship of patients to the medical system. Professor Sir David Skegg has written, 'The most important legacy of the Inquiry related not to medical research but to the whole delivery of health care'.<sup>90</sup> The unique contribution of feminism to the Inquiry was to establish patient interests as the centre of concern; patients' experience became the yardstick for the effectiveness of the health service. This was a profound change in perspective. Crucially, feminists also established a blueprint which prevented the medical profession from acting as judge and jury in adjudicating patients' complaints.

Without feminist input the Inquiry could have become a legalistic exercise pitting teams of doctors and lawyers in hair-splitting combat but ultimately leaving the autonomy of the profession intact.<sup>91</sup> The Cartwright Inquiry contrasts with similar inquiries in Britain such as the Bristol Inquiry, where there was no sustained organised consumer presence and which had little impact on the structure or process of patients' rights.<sup>92</sup> The complaints procedures in Britain were overhauled in 1993 when legislation created the post of Health Commissioner for England.<sup>93</sup> Without legally enforceable rights for patients, though, this initiative remains an adjunct of self-regulation by the English profession rather than a means of patient empowerment as it did in New Zealand. The crucial difference between England and New Zealand lies in the concerted and consistent input of feminists in the latter.

## **The Cartwright legacy: were feminist arguments irrelevant?**

Some medical critics have argued that feminists made little contribution to the Cartwright legacy because their hostility to doctors' authority impeded the momentum of health reform already in train at the time of the Cartwright

Inquiry, or that they uncomprehendingly pursued the recommendations of the *Report* as 'holy writ'.<sup>94</sup> In truth, examination of feminist submissions shows that their primary concern was to turn public outrage into effective, comprehensive reform of the health system rather than seeking retribution from individual persons or named institutions. The *Cartwright Report* reinvigorated the WHM. Many organisations and individuals campaigned publicly and lobbied Government for implementation of the proposals set out in the submissions and outlined in the *Cartwright Report*. Implementation was long and sometimes tedious, albeit eventually, largely successful because many aspects of the reforms concerning patients' rights and ethics were adopted.

There were, however, two significant differences in the final *Report* from feminists' original proposal. Firstly, the WHM lobbied for the Office of the Health Commissioner to be the single entry point to the medical complaints system. The intention was that a unified route would provide comprehensive monitoring of the performance of individuals, institutions and the health system as a whole. Advocates did not foresee that the single gateway could also become an entry barrier controlled by a single gatekeeper. Although there were genuine benefits for patients when the Commissioner took on the burden of acting for the patient, it also meant that patients could not act independently for themselves. Furthermore, patients were given no independent right of appeal.

Secondly, feminists argued that the autonomy of the profession was a critical problem. Their proposal intended to limit professional self-regulation and to create a separate arena for the judgement of complaints, independent of medical control. However, organisations representing professional interests strenuously, and often successfully, opposed the loss of self-regulation and the erosion of medical autonomy.

## **Professional resistance to reform**

Unsurprisingly the proposals were highly political.<sup>95</sup> The medical profession, especially the New Zealand Medical Association, lobbied the National (conservative) Government against the Bill.<sup>96</sup> In 1993, Health Minister Birch proposed changes to the Bill, which would meet the minimal requirements of the *Cartwright Report* but omitted key features of the feminist blueprint.<sup>97</sup> By this time, there was a serious media backlash against Cartwright.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, in the face of an impending election, strong support from nurses' organisations, the YWCA, WHM and effective co-operation by Labour MPs, the conservative Government dropped its proposal.<sup>99</sup> Had this lobbying been unsuccessful, the system of dealing with patient complaints in New Zealand would now be similar to that which persists in England, where the law provides only weak protection of patients' rights.

Nevertheless, the well-funded professional fight back against the loss of autonomy succeeded in limiting reform. Retaining influential Wellington lobbyists, the medical profession and Ministry of Health developed a second Bill without any public consultation. Before the Health and Disability Commissioner Act 1994

became operative in 1996, the Medical Practitioners Act 1995 became law, catching the WHM unprepared.<sup>100</sup> It established another parallel tribunal, the Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, with a majority of members drawn from the medical professionals and a judicial chair. The stated intention was merely to judge fitness to practice and registration. This Act however, also provided for Complaints Assessment Committees (CACs), a majority of whose members were doctors chosen by the Medical Council. Although intended to play a minor role weeding out vexatious complaints, these committees developed into a parallel system as effective gatekeepers for and de-facto judges of complaints.

The CACs ran in parallel to the Commissioner and re-investigated and re-heard evidence and came to conclusions about doctors' performance sometimes at odds with the Commissioner or the ACC. For example, the ACC had found that, in Northland, six female patients of one doctor had sustained 'medical error', equivalent to negligence in other jurisdictions, but only one of these cases (in which the patient died) led to partial de-registration of the doctor.<sup>101</sup>

Elevating the role of the CACs had the effect of reasserting professional control. The 1995 Act provided nothing 'to stop the professionals running the complainant out of energy and money through endless delays. One Northland woman was stuck in a CAC for five years before she finally got a hearing before the Tribunal, which she won'.<sup>102</sup> The line between professional self-regulation and self-protection seemed indistinct; but, in extending the power of these in-house Committees, the profession overplayed its hand and eventually prompted further legislation limiting their jurisdiction. Thanks to the determination of the Northland women, the most obvious injustices of this system were partially ameliorated by the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003. While the new Act retained the complexity of the three parallel systems (ACC, professional discipline and Health and Disability Commissioner), it required prompt referral of all complaints to the Commissioner, enabling charges to be laid directly before the Professional Disciplinary Tribunal.

The problem of patients obtaining adequate compensation for medical injuries remained unresolved. This lack of compensation, which the feminist initiators had tried consistently to address, was further compounded as successive Health Commissioners resiled from using their full powers, preferring to pursue a policy they called 'Learning not Lynching', rather than seek substantial penalties or compensation for breaches of the Code of Patients' Rights.

## Conclusion

The original feminist reform plan was far from irrelevant. No other group put forward concrete and comprehensive suggestions for change. While previously there had been only two routes through which patients could hold professionals to account, there is now a third way, which is dedicated to patients' rights. As envisaged by feminists, the jurisdiction of the Code covers all health

professionals, while the Commissioner has extensive powers to investigate individual practitioners, management incompetence and systemic failure. This is of increasing importance as health service restructuring, inspired by neo-liberal political economy, increases the scope of managerial decision making in medicine.

The development of the Code and appointment of the Health and Disability Commissioner were powerful steps towards achieving patient-centred health delivery. The Code established in law the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and implants the principle of informed consent across all aspects of the health system including teaching, research and treatment. Observation of the Code and patients' rights are supported by independent advocates contracted by the office of the Commissioner from private providers in all regions.

The ethical evaluation of research is separate from, but parallel to the system of patient rights. A network of regional Research Ethics Committees was established, each with a 'lay' chair. Half of the committee members must be people who are not health professionals but who, while not accountable representatives of community organisations, do have a clear patient protection focus.<sup>103</sup>

The most fundamental result of the WHM, in general, and the feminist contribution to the *Cartwright Report*, in particular, has been the widespread acceptance of the principle that all medical interventions must be judged through the prism of patient experience.<sup>104</sup>

In England, the Health Services Commissioners Act 1993 established a Health Services Commissioner, to handle patient complaints, with wide investigative powers and an ability to negotiate financial settlements with health providers. However, with neither a legislated Code of Patients' Rights nor a legal enforcement mechanism, remedial action is largely limited to persuasion. In most jurisdictions, including Great Britain, the enforcement of patients' rights still relies on professional disciplinary bodies, or in the case of severe physical injury, court action. Without adjudication external to the profession it can be used to reinforce professional solidarity rather than protect patients' rights.

The relative success of the New Zealand system, which is accountable to patients and external to the medical profession, raises the question of why these innovations have not been enacted elsewhere. In England for example, inquiries into gynaecology at Ashford, breast screening in Exeter, cervical screening in Canterbury, deaths associated with Dr Shipley in Yorkshire, excess deaths in mid-Staffordshire, the treatment of children at Bristol Children's Hospital or more recently, cases of deficient or unnecessary breast surgery, have resulted in the censure of individuals and institutions, but did not lead to independent arbitration of patient complaints.<sup>105</sup> Although health re-structuring in England embraces patient empowerment rhetoric, the independent Ombudsman's powers are not backed by enforcement processes through which this empowerment could be realised; and the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) accords less priority to upholding patients' rights than to customer relations.

In 1987, in New Zealand, there were two momentous events. The hearings of the Cartwright Inquiry got underway

with great fanfare while the State Services Act was passed almost unremarked. Cartwright brought a new patient-centred approach to the design and management of health systems and to medical ethics. The State Services Act introduced New Public Management (NPM) to the developed world. Over the intervening twenty-five years, consideration of patients has been increasingly eroded by the precepts of NPM and the demand for rationing, except perhaps in the minds of patients and constituents. Internationally, the new managerialism, not the *Cartwright Report*, exercises increasing influence over the development of medical ethics and clinical practice.<sup>106</sup>

## Notes

1. Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: the Women's Health Movement in the United States, 1969-1990* (New Brunswick; London, Rutgers University Press, 2002); Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: a History of New Zealand Women since They Won the Vote* (Auckland, Viking, 1993); Sandra Coney, 'Health Organisations', in *Women Together: a History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand/Nga Ropu Wahine O Te Mot*, ed. Ann Else (Wellington, Daphne Brassell Associates, 1993); Australian Women's Health Network, [http://www.awhn.org.au]; Women's Health Victoria, [www.whv.org.au].
2. Carol Weisman, *Women's Health Care: Activist Traditions and Institutional Change* (Baltimore; London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 29.
3. The main challenge to the feminists came from Linda Bryder in her book *A History of the 'Unfortunate Experiment' at National Women's Hospital* (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2009). This was published in the UK under the title, *Women's Bodies and Medical Science: an Inquiry into Cervical Cancer* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
4. The submissions to the Cartwright Inquiry used in this article are in form of a collection of manuscripts held in a private collection, thus the pagination used in references differs from the official transcripts of the Inquiry which are publicly available at National Archives, Auckland, and the Archives Room, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. The Bunkle and Coney *Metro* article and the Cartwright Report can be accessed at the website of Women's Health Action, at [www.womens-health.org.nz/cartwright.html], along with many other original documents used the preparation of this article. Sylvia Cartwright, *The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Allegations Concerning the Treatment of Cervical Cancer at National Women's Hospital* (Auckland, Government Printing Office, 1988), hereafter, *Cartwright Report*.
5. Phillida Bunkle and Sandra Coney, 'An Unfortunate Experiment at National Women's Hospital', *Metro*, (June 1987), 47-65. [www.womens-health.org.nz/cartwright.html, accessed 8 January 2013].
6. Sandra Coney and Ann Parson, *The United Women's Convention* (Auckland, United Women's Convention Book Committee, 1973).
7. Wendy Harrex, *Broadsheet: Twenty Years of Broadsheet Magazine* (Auckland, New Women's Press, 1992); Phillida Bunkle, *Second Opinion: The Politics of Women's Health in New Zealand* (Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1988).
8. Coney, 'Health Organisations'; [www.womenshealthcouncil.org.nz](http://www.womenshealthcouncil.org.nz), accessed 12 December 2012; Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands*, 235; [www.awhn.org.au](http://www.awhn.org.au); [www.whv.org.au](http://www.whv.org.au), accessed 12 December 2012. Such movements were less numerous in Britain, where feminist activity appears to have been centred largely on maternity services.
9. Nancy Tuana, 'The Speculum of Ignorance: the Women's Health Movement and Epistemologies of Ignorance,' *Hypatia* 21/3, (2006), 1-19..
10. Linda Gordon, 'The Politics of Birth Control, 1920-1940: The Impact of Professionals', *International Journal of Health Services*, 5/2 (1975), 253-78.
11. Phillida Bunkle, 'Women, Health and Politics: Divisions and Connections', in *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa New Zealand: Connections and Differences*, ed. Rosemary du Plessis and Alice Lynne (Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1998); Phillida Bunkle, 'Becoming Knowers: Feminism, Science and Medicine', in *Feminist Voices, A Women's Studies Text for Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary Du Plessey et al. (Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1992), 59-73.
12. Susan Sherwin, 'A Relational Approach to Autonomy and Health Care', in *The Politics of Women's Health: Exploring Agency and Autonomy*, ed. Susan Sherwin (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1998), 19-47.
13. Bryder, *A History of the 'Unfortunate Experiment'*.
14. The HealthRight Collective, 'The Women's Health Movement: Where Are We Now?', in *Seizing Our Bodies: The Politics of Women's Health*, ed. Claudia Dreifus (New York, Vintage Books, 1977), 271-8; Helen Marieskind 'The Women's Health Movement', *International Journal of Health Services*, 5/2 (1975), 217-23.
15. Sheryl Ruzek, *The Women's Health Movement: Feminist Alternatives to Medical Control* (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1978).
16. Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands*, 235
17. Linda Hancock, 'How Will Women's Health Fare in the Latest Round of Market State Reforms?', *Health Issues*, 55 (June 1998), 26-9.
18. Sandra Coney, *Into the Fire: Writings on Women, Politics and New Zealand in the Era of the New Right* (Auckland, Tandem Press, 1997); Phillida Bunkle and Jo Lynch, 'What's Wrong with the New Right?', in *Superwoman Where Are You? Social Policy and Women's Experience*, ed. Celia Briar, Robyn Munford and Mary Nash (Palmerston North, Dunmore Press, 1992), 67-40; Phillida Bunkle, 'Structural Reform, Economism, and the Abuse of Scientific Authority', *Women's Studies Journal*, 11/1-2 (August 1995), 141-59.
19. Felicity Lawrence, 'No Gain From Pain: Private Care Firms Walk Away From Loss-Making GP Surgeries', *The Guardian*, 20 December 2012, 15; [www.guardian.co.uk/datablog].
20. Te Ara [www.teara.govt.nz/en/health-advocacy-and-self-help/2, accessed 12 December 2012].
21. Sheryl Ruzek and Julie Becker, 'The Women's Health Movement in the United States: From Grass-Roots Activism to Professional Agendas', *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association (JAMWA)*, 54/1 (1999), 4-8, 40.



22. Phillida Bunkle, 'The New Right and the Marginalisation Of Women', *Social Work Review*, 4/2-3 (1991), 4-13; Phillida Bunkle, 'How Can We Change the System?', *The Fourth International Congress of Women's Health Issues: New Zealand Papers* (Palmerston North, Massey University, 1991), 11-14.
23. Carol Weisman, *Women's Health Care: Activist Traditions and Institutional Change* (Baltimore; London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 29.
24. James Le Fanu, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Medicine* (London, Abacus, 1999), 196-205.
25. Neville Butler and Dennis Bonham, *First Report of the British Perinatal Mortality Survey* (Edinburgh, 1963).
26. Dennis Bonham, 'Perinatal Mortality', *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 5/3 (August 1965), 183-5.
27. Phillida Bunkle, Sandra Coney, and Forbes Williams, *First Submission to the Committee of Inquiry into Allegations Concerning the Treatment of Cervical Cancer at National Women's Hospital and into Other Related Matters* (1987), hereafter *First Submission*; Bunkle, *Second Opinion*.
28. *First Submission*, 18.
29. Carol Hanisch, 'The Personal is Political', in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York, Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 1970); Helen Mariesskind, 'Gynaecological Services: Their Historical Relationship to the Women's Movement with Recent Experience of Self-Help Clinics and Other Delivery Modes' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1976), 140-8.
30. Margret Lock, 'Situating Women in the Politics of Health', in *The Politics of Women's Health: Exploring Agency and Autonomy*, ed. Susan Sherwin (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1998), 48-63.
31. Kathryn Pauly Morgan, 'Contested Bodies, Contested Knowledges: Women, Health and the Politics of Medicalization', in Sherwin, ed., *Politics of Women's Health*, 83-121.
32. Bunkle and Coney, 'An Unfortunate Experiment'.
33. William McIndoe, Malcolm McLean, Ron Jones and Peter Mullins, 'The Invasive Potential of Carcinoma *In Situ* of the Cervix', *Obstetrics and Gynaecology: Journal of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists*, 64 (1984), 451-8.
34. Clare Matheson, *Fate Cries Enough: A Survivor of the Cervical Cancer Experiment at National Women's Hospital* (Auckland, Sceptre, 1989).
35. Rodney Ledward was a British gynaecologist who was struck off the medical register for serious professional misconduct in 1998. Nearly 200 complaints had been made against him, including, in one case, the removal of a woman's ovaries without her consent. Jean Ritchie, *An Inquiry into Quality and Practice within The National Health Service Arising From the Actions of Rodney Ledward* (London, The Stationary Office, 1 June 2000).
36. *Cartwright Report*.
37. *Cartwright Report*, 176; Ron Paterson, 'The Cartwright Legacy: Shifting the Focus of Attention from the Doctor to the Patients', *The New Zealand Medical Journal*, 123/1319 (July 2010), 6-10.
38. *First Submission*.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, section 9, 1.
41. Hanisch, 'The Personal is Political'; Susan J. Carroll, 'The Personal is Political', *Women & Politics*, 9/2 (1989); Carol Dreyfus, *Seizing Our Bodies* (New York, Vintage Books, 1977).
42. *First Submission*, section 5, 14.
43. *First Submission*, 15.
44. *Ibid.*, 16.
45. *Ibid.*, section 5, 15.
46. *Ibid.*, 17.
47. *Ibid.*, 18.
48. *Ibid.*, 19.
49. *Ibid.*, 20.
50. *Ibid.*, section 6, 4.
51. *Ibid.*, 5.
52. *Ibid.* GP visits are expensive in New Zealand, but the research subjects were given no financial assistance.
53. *Ibid.*, 6.
54. *Ibid.*, 1-25.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*, 24.
57. Phillida Bunkle, Sandra Coney and Forbes Williams, *Submission from Fertility Action to the Committee of Inquiry into Allegations Concerning the Treatment of Cervical Cancer at National Women's Hospital* (1987), hereafter *Second Submission*.
58. *Ibid.*, 2-9.
59. *Ibid.*, 10-11.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, 11-12.
62. *Ibid.*, 2.
63. Carolyn Faulder, *Whose Body Is It? The Troubling Issue of Informed Consent* (London, Virago Press, 1985); *Second Submission*, 17.
64. *Second Submission*, 17.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*, 23.
67. *Ibid.*, 29, 41, 43, 50.
68. *Ibid.*, 56, 61.
69. *Ibid.*, 58.
70. Matheson, *Fate Cries Enough*.
71. *Second Submission*, 62.
72. Rodney Harrison, *Closing Submissions of Counsel for Sandra Coney And Phillida Bunkle, Fertility Action and 'Ruth' to Committee of Inquiry into Treatment of Cervical Cancer at National Women's Hospital and Related Matters* (1987), hereafter cited as *Closing Submission*.
73. *Ibid.*, 29
74. *Ibid.*
75. Peter Davis, *Submission to the Cartwright Inquiry*; Glenfield Women's Community Health Co-operative, *Submission to the Cartwright Inquiry*.
76. Ministry of Women's Affairs, *Submission to the Committee of Inquiry into Allegations Concerning the Treatment of Cervical Cancer at National Women's Hospital and into Other Related Matters. Part 1* (Prepared by the policy unit of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, August 1987).
77. *Closing Submission*, 'Proposed Patients' Rights and

Medical Research Procedures Legislation', 36-40.

78. *Ibid.*, 26.

79. *Ibid.*, 20.

80. *Ibid.*, 39.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Joanna Manning and Ron Paterson, 'New Zealand's Code of Patients' Rights', in *The Cartwright Papers: Essays on the Cervical Cancer Inquiry 1987-88*, ed. Joanna Manning (Wellington, Bridget Williams Books, 2009), 150.

83. Margret McCredie, Charlotte Paul and Keith Sharples, 'The Natural History Of Cervical Neoplasia and Risk of Invasive Cancer in Women with Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia 3: A Retrospective Cohort Study', *Lancet Oncology*, 9 (May 2008), 425-34.

84. Bryder, *A History of the 'Unfortunate Experiment'*.

85. *Cartwright Report*, 267-85.

86. *Ibid.*, 283.

87. Margret McCredie, Charlotte Paul, *et al.*, 'Consequences in Women of Participating in a Study of the Natural History of Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia 3', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, (2000), 1-8.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Ron Jones, 'Why Did So Many Women Develop Cancer?', *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 123/13 (2009), 89-90; and 'Why Did So Many Women Get Cancer?', *New Zealand Doctor*, 2 December (2009); Robin Carrell, 'Trial by Media', *Notes & Records of the Royal Society*, 66/3 (2012), 301-6.

90. David Skegg, 'Forward: the Cartwright Inquiry and its Legacy', in Manning, ed., *The Cartwright Papers*, 8.

91. Sandra Coney, 'An Unfortunate History', in Manning, ed., *The Cartwright Papers*, 146-7.

92. *Learning from Bristol: The Report of the Public Inquiry into Children's Heart Surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, 1984-1995*, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Health by Command of Her Majesty, July 2001, CM 5207 (London, Department of Health, 2002). [[www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4002859](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4002859), accessed 8 January 2012].

93. Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman, *Moving Forward: Annual Report 2011-12* (London, The Stationary Office, July 2012). [[www.ombudsman.org.uk/about-us/publications/annual-reports](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/about-us/publications/annual-reports)]. Health is a devolved power in the UK. This legislation concerned England only; arrangements in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are different.

94. Charlotte Paul, 'Education and Debate: Internal and External Morality of Medicine: Lessons from New Zealand', *British Medical Journal*, 320/7233 (19 February 2000), 499-503; Charlotte Paul, 'Medicine in Context' (118); and 'Cervical Cancer Study' (89-98), in Manning, ed., *The Cartwright Papers*; Bryder, *A History of the 'Unfortunate Experiment'*, 190; Skegg, 'Forward: the Cartwright Inquiry', 9.

95. Phillida Bunkle, 'Side-stepping Cartwright', in *Unfinished Business: What Happened to the Cartwright Report?*, ed. Sandra Coney (Women's Health Action, Auckland, 1993), 169-86.

96. Sandra Coney, 'The Role of the Health Commissioner', paper to the National Medico-Legal Conference, Wellington, August 1992, [[www.womens-health.org.nz/complaints.commissioner.htm](http://www.womens-health.org.nz/complaints.commissioner.htm)].

97. Women's Health Action, 'Health Commissioner Bill, June 1994', [[www.womens-health.org.nz/complaints.commissioner.htm](http://www.womens-health.org.nz/complaints.commissioner.htm)].

98. Jan Corbett, 'Have You Been Burned at the Stake Yet?', *Metro*, (October 1990), 156-65; Jan Corbett, 'Second Thoughts on the "Unfortunate Experiment" at National Women's', *Metro*, (July 1990), 54-73 and (November 1990), 134-8; Erich Geiringer, 'Trial in Error', *New Zealand Listener*, (November 1988), 18-19, 44-46.

99. Women's Health Action [[www.womens-health.org.nz/complaints/commissioner.htm](http://www.womens-health.org.nz/complaints/commissioner.htm)]

100. John Adams, Chair New Zealand Medical Association, 'Address to Conference on The Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Bill', Wellington, September 2008.

101. Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, decision no: 187/01/80C, Wellington; Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, Precis 00/62D, [[www.mpdtd.org.nz/decisionsorder/precis/0062d.asp](http://www.mpdtd.org.nz/decisionsorder/precis/0062d.asp)].

102. Phillida Bunkle, 'Back to the Bad Old Days, the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Bill', *Women's Health Watch*, (September 2002) [[www.womens-health.org.nz/back-to-the-bad-old-days-of-the-medical-protection-racket.html](http://www.womens-health.org.nz/back-to-the-bad-old-days-of-the-medical-protection-racket.html)]; Phillida Bunkle, 'The New Health Professionals' Competency Assurance Bill', Legal transcript, Keynote Speech to 10th Annual Medico-Legal Forum, Wellington, 18 February 2002.

103. Sandra Coney, *Effective Consumer Voice and Participation for New Zealand* (Wellington, New Zealand Guidelines Group, 2004); Phillida Bunkle, 'The Representation of Consumer Interests in Medical Research', in *Women and Health Research*, ed. Nicola Gavey (Auckland, Medical Research Council, 1989).

104. Ruth Laugesen, 'Medicine's Awful Errors', *The New Zealand Listener*, (6 March 2010); Peter Davis, *Adverse Events in New Zealand Public Hospitals: Principle Findings from a National Survey* (Wellington, Ministry of Health, Occasional Paper #3, 2001).

105. *Learning from Bristol; Safeguarding Patients: The Government's Response to the Recommendations of the Shipman Inquiry's Fifth Report and to the Recommendation of the Ayling, Neale and Kerr/ Haslam Inquiries*, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Health, February 2007 (London, The Stationary Office, 2007), [[www.bmj.com/content/330/7505/1449.1](http://www.bmj.com/content/330/7505/1449.1) accessed 8 January 2013].

106. Ron Paterson, 'Rationing Health Care and Human Rights: The Northland Case', *New Zealand Law Review*, 571 (1998), 504; Colin Feck, *et al.* 'Experience with Rationing Health Care in New Zealand'. *British Medical Journal*, 348 (15 May 1999).

# Extraordinary housework: women and claims for sickness benefit in the early twentieth century

Jackie Gulland

*University of Edinburgh*

## Introduction

In the case of men, enforced idleness often becomes irksome and leads to a return to work, whereas the possibility of doing ordinary housework, or, at appropriate seasons, extraordinary housework, may induce women to stay on the funds for longer.<sup>1</sup>

This statement comes from a 1914 inquiry into 'excessive' claims for sickness benefit in the very early years of the first UK national health insurance scheme. The inquiry was set up to investigate why claims for the benefit were so much higher than had been anticipated and, in particular, why claims by women were so high. The statement encapsulates some of the thinking at the time: that, although the sickness benefit scheme was intended for both men and women, women were unusual cases and their claims for benefit were to be treated with suspicion. Mistrust of claimants of sickness and incapacity benefits continued throughout the twentieth century and up to the present day. Recent government policy on incapacity benefits in the UK has concentrated on increasing the intensity of mechanisms to establish whether or not people are genuinely incapable of work. The introduction of Employment and Support Allowance in 2008 narrowed the eligibility rules and introduced new tough tests so that large proportions of claimants are found to be fit for work. This has been accompanied, on the one hand, by government rhetoric that people should be 'saved' from the dependency of claiming incapacity benefits and, on the other, by a flood of media allegations that unsuccessful claimants are workshy scroungers. At the same time critics have argued that the mechanisms for assessing claimants are unfair.<sup>2</sup> Employment and Support Allowance is based on a combination of insurance based and means-tested benefits but its historical roots lie in the national insurance scheme devised by William Beveridge and implemented in the National Insurance Act of 1946. In turn, Beveridge's system of national insurance was built on the first UK national health insurance scheme, introduced in 1911. Although there were many changes in the structure and governance of the 1946 scheme, the principle that people should qualify for sickness benefits on the basis of a GP certificate of 'incapacity for work' was established in 1911.

The principle of national insurance benefits was to insure against a loss of earnings by waged workers. It was assumed that these workers were usually adult males, while children and married women were normally dependent on the male wage. Welfare state analysts have highlighted the weaknesses of this 'male breadwinner model' in social insurance schemes, which disadvantage people with disrupted patterns of earned income, usually women.<sup>3</sup> Critics argue that this model took for granted

married women's role as unpaid carers, leading to their dependence on men, to poverty and recourse to means-tested benefits in times of financial difficulty. While recognising the disproportionate effect of such schemes on many women, there is often little discussion in the welfare state literature of the role of social insurance in protecting the income of women as workers in their own right. Gender and labour historians, on the other hand, have looked in more detail at women's participation in the paid labour market in the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> In 1911, although many women were dependent on men, others, particularly working-class women, also participated in the paid labour market and, with the introduction of national health insurance, became eligible for benefits in their own right. Women's employment in the early twentieth century was higher than some commentators might expect: in 1911, for instance, around 37 per cent of women of working age were in employment, constituting around 30 per cent of the workforce.<sup>5</sup> These figures disguise a considerable variation between unmarried and married women and between women at different stages of the lifecourse: 74 per cent of eighteen to nineteen year old women were in work, while only 23 per cent of forty-five to fifty-four year olds were.<sup>6</sup> The data are also problematic, as figures are based on occupation information in the census returns, which conceal a considerable amount of casual, informal and seasonal work.<sup>7</sup> Such work was, nevertheless, crucial to the household budget.<sup>8</sup>

The 1911 national insurance scheme was clearly based on a male breadwinner model, reflecting societal norms at the time, namely that the male breadwinning family was a 'symbol of working class respectability'.<sup>9</sup> In practice, though, for many households this was 'an ideal rather than a reality'.<sup>10</sup> Although the male breadwinner model was a powerful symbol, the problems associated with using it as a basis of welfare provision were recognised in comments on some of the provisions of the 1911 Act at the time.<sup>11</sup> While much of the writing about the weaknesses of the 1911 scheme has focussed on the way in which it excluded women,<sup>12</sup> it is those women workers who were included in the scheme that are the focus of this article.

The article uses two sources of contemporary debate about the scheme to consider the way in which insured women were treated in their claims for benefit, both in relation to whether their status as 'workers' was questioned and to whether their claims to ill health were doubted. In an attempt to move beyond the political debate about the scheme and to look instead at its day-to-day implementation, the analysis is based on evidence presented to an inquiry into the scheme in 1914 and a series of reports of appeals regarding disputes about sickness benefits between 1914 and 1920.<sup>13</sup> Before moving on to an analysis of this material, the article

provides a brief outline of the 1911 Act and these sources.

## The 1911 National Insurance Act

The health insurance scheme introduced by the National Insurance Act 1911 was a compulsory scheme, whereby those aged between sixteen and seventy, earning less than £160 a year, were required to make weekly contributions, supplemented by contributions by their employers and the state. In return they would receive sickness benefit for up to twenty-six weeks of certified sickness, followed by a less generous 'disablement benefit' if their sickness continued beyond twenty-six weeks. A lump sum maternity payment was also made to insured women and the wives of insured men. The scheme provided members with the right to treatment by a 'panel' doctor who was also responsible for providing the initial medical certification for sickness benefits. In most cases the scheme did not include hospital treatment. Although it was a state scheme, the day-to-day administration was carried out by 'approved societies': friendly societies, trade unions and industrial societies, which were also able to provide additional benefits if they chose to do so. In 1914, 2,608 societies had been approved to run the scheme, with memberships ranging from under a hundred to hundreds of thousands.<sup>14</sup> When the scheme began in 1912, there were estimated to be 11.5 million members, of which 3.68 million were women.<sup>15</sup>

The National Insurance Act explicitly applied to 'all persons of either sex',<sup>16</sup> however it contained rules which excluded many married women from the scheme. Married women were only entitled to be full members of the scheme if they could prove that they had worked before marriage and continued to work afterwards.<sup>17</sup> Other married women could be 'voluntary contributors' and were entitled to lower rates of benefit. Following a male breadwinner model of social insurance, the assumption, therefore, was that married women were dependents of their husbands unless they could prove otherwise. Recognition of married women's roles as workers was restricted to certain specific cases and they had to meet added conditions to prove their status. The rule about evidence of work before and after marriage is likely to have been particularly harsh for women whose employment was irregular or seasonal. Single women, on the other hand, were treated in the same way as men, although they paid lower contributions and thus were entitled to lower rates of benefit.

## The 1914 report

Within a year of the implementation of the 1911 Act, concern was growing regarding the number of claims for sickness benefit, particularly those by women, which were proving to far exceed those predicted by the architects of the scheme. A committee was set up to investigate these 'excessive claims'. The committee consisted of representatives of the Insurance Commission, medical professionals, approved societies and trade unions. It met for seven months, hearing oral evidence from ninety-four witnesses and considering 1,500 pages of written evidence, from representatives of approved societies, the

medical profession, local insurance committees and other experts. Its remit was to consider: 'whether the claims made upon the [insurance] funds ... were in excess of the claims, which under a proper system of administration, should have been made upon and allowed by them'.<sup>18</sup>

The concern with excessive claims was based on the actuarial assumptions underpinning the scheme, which had been made on the basis of claims, mainly by men, to the Manchester Unity during the late 1890s.<sup>19</sup> The committee was aware that these assumptions may have been misplaced given the wide range of approved societies operating the new scheme and the considerable variation between these societies based on their members and the types of occupations involved. While some societies were 'representative' of the insured population, others were associated with particular industries, or geographic areas, or had religious or temperance affiliations, while still others: 'appear to have had a peculiar attraction for persons of a particular occupation or habit of mind'.<sup>20</sup>

The report recognised that this variation led to different definitions of 'incapable of work': for example, 'in relation to a man engaged in strenuous and exacting work such as coal mining on the one hand and an ordinary member of a society largely composed of sedentary workers on the other'.<sup>21</sup> It noted the discretion which societies had in making these decisions, although bound by law, as long as they were not 'capriciously' accepting or rejecting claims. However, the committee was also concerned with the 'proper administration of the scheme' and sought to investigate whether recommendations could be made to improve it by cutting out possible fraud or ineffectiveness in its day-to-day administration. The committee had a particular concern with claims by women and queried whether these were being settled appropriately. Its report provided detailed recommendations, including the creation of a better definition of the meaning of 'incapacity for work', clarity about payments in cases of pregnancy, improved monitoring of sickness certificates, improved procedures for sick visitors and the introduction of a system of medical referees to consider cases of alleged incapacity.<sup>22</sup> A dissenting memorandum was included in the report, added by Mary Macarthur, a trade unionist activist who had pursued women workers' rights in a range of settings, and who represented the Women's Trade Union League on the committee.<sup>23</sup> Mary Macarthur strongly opposed any aspect of the conclusions which doubted women's claims or their ability to understand the insurance principle. Her view was that any 'excess' claims by women were entirely the result of women's poor health, poverty and difficult employment conditions. Mary Macarthur's perspective stressed the structural mechanisms behind women's claims for sickness benefits and her view of women as workers is useful in providing a contrast to some other views in the report. The value of using the report and its appendices as a source for investigating the attitudes to the scheme at the time is that it provides a wealth of detail from a range of stakeholders at this early stage of its implementation.

## Appeals to the Insurance Commissioners

The second source of material for this article is a collection of reports of decisions by the Insurance Commissioners on appeals relating to sickness benefits. The 1911 National Insurance Act stated that any dispute between members and approved societies should be dealt with internally according to the rules of the society, but that appeals could be made (by either party) to the Insurance Commissioners.<sup>24</sup> Over the first ten years or so of the scheme, 142 appeal cases reached the Commissioners and details of these cases were reported in full.<sup>25</sup> After 1920, responsibility for appeals was passed to the newly formed Ministry of Health in England and Wales and the Board of Health in Scotland. Information about claimants in the reports is patchy: it is usually possible to determine their gender (70 per cent were men while 30 per cent were women) but not always possible to identify their age, occupation, health problem or marital status. There is a gender difference in the proportion of appeals about incapacity for work: 51 per cent of women's disputes were about incapacity for work, while only 34 per cent of men's were, with an equal proportion of men's cases concerning technical matters (for example, payment of benefit while a member was in hospital or disputes about contribution records). It is difficult to make any wider claims about the meaning of these figures, given the low total numbers of appeals and the unknown intervening issues which would lead to (or prevent) a case ending up at the Commissioners.

It is clear, from their small number, that these cases were a tiny proportion of the total number of disputes about sickness benefit in this period. The format of the first level internal appeal procedures varied considerably from one approved society to another but usually involved some form of review of the case by 'umpires' or 'adjudicators'. The diversity of appeal procedures and the difficulties of navigating through them was commented on in the 1914 report and also emphasised by Mary Macarthur in her dissenting memorandum.<sup>26</sup> Those claimants who had the tenacity to continue with their appeals as far as the Commissioners were clearly in the minority. This is not to suggest that the cases heard by the Commissioners were necessarily the most difficult, the most convincing, or the most desperate. More recent research on access to justice suggests that the mechanisms that enable some people and not others to engage in dispute mechanisms are complex but that information and legal advice makes a difference.<sup>27</sup> One striking aspect of the cases that did reach the Commissioners was that most appellants had legal representation of some kind. It is not clear how this was funded but it is probable that representation was provided either through trade unions or on a voluntary basis through 'poor man's lawyers'.<sup>28</sup> We know little of the routes that led these individual sickness benefit claimants to this legal advice, although it is apparent from some cases that they had been assisted by their doctors, family members or employers. So, while we must recognise that these cases cannot be representative of the wider body of decisions about sickness benefit, the diversity of the cases, both in terms of their content and their protagonists (insofar as this information is available) suggests that they were not systematically atypical.

The views of the claimants are largely absent

from these reports. The narratives of their experiences were moulded by the appeal process, firstly through the legal representatives whose role was to present their case within a legalistic framework and secondly, through the minds of the Commissioners whose reports contain the versions of the evidence which they regarded as important.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless the cases have the advantage of providing considerable detail of the background to the appeals and, for the purposes of this article, an insight into the thinking of the decision makers at various levels.

## Women as workers

The whole tenor of the 1914 report was that women were different from men. The report's remit, which was to look at 'excessive claims', was shaped by the concern that too many women were claiming sickness benefits. The main focus of the report was on excessive claims, rather than on claimants' status as workers, accepting therefore that anyone who was a member of the scheme was a 'worker' in the full sense of the term. Some of the discussion of women's 'excessive claims' showed gendered assumptions about women's role in the labour market. Although the committee tried hard to avoid generalisations, it distinguished between 'a man in good regular employment', from 'a woman in low-paid employment who has never thought about sickness insurance'.<sup>30</sup> The committee believed that the principle of insurance was more likely to be new to women, and therefore they would be tempted to claim in order to get back the money that they had paid in. Despite this, the committee found little evidence to support claims of a high level of 'fraud' in the system, but more likely a temptation to maximise benefits by over-claiming, particularly by extending the amount of time on sickness benefit. The report noted that payments of sickness benefit were higher in proportion to many women's wages than men's payments as a proportion of their wages (although it failed to note that women also paid disproportionately higher contributions).<sup>31</sup> Thus it was implied that it was financially more worthwhile for women to claim to be sick. The Report also noted that men were more likely to have dependents relying on their wages while women 'especially domestic servants of the poorer classes' had only themselves to support.<sup>32</sup> This view failed to take account of the crucial contribution of young women workers' wages to wider family finances, and undermined their status as genuine workers.<sup>33</sup>

Mary Macarthur's dissenting memorandum dismissed these assumptions, arguing instead that the early experience of the Act '[revealed] the condition of the mass of working women, and the effect which their low wages have upon their health – questions which, up until now, have been almost totally neglected ... the Act has shown the country what poverty really means'.<sup>34</sup> Here Mary Macarthur emphasised women's low wages and poor working conditions, representing a view of women as workers with an important contribution to make to the household income.

In the reports of appeals there are several cases which called into question a woman's status as a worker,

perhaps reflecting distrust of working women by the approved societies. Some of these concerned married women, while others concerned single women and their role as contributors to the household income. Married women were only entitled to be members of the scheme if they could establish their status as workers.

The complexity of this rule is illustrated by Case 49 which eventually went to the court of appeal.<sup>35</sup> This case, which concerned whether or not a married woman was 'employed', included considerable debate by the appeal court judges as to the meaning and interpretation of the legislation. In the final decision (which went against the claimant) the judges expressed 'regret' that the Act was worded in such a way as to distinguish between a married woman who had a contract of employment and a married woman who was 'ordinarily employed' but not actually in work at the time of a claim, thus requiring married women to jump through an additional hoop to establish their status as workers. This suggests that the Commissioners and judges in this case were at pains to assume that women, who were clearly working by any common sense understanding of that term, should be treated as 'workers', but that they were constrained by the wording of the legislation.

Other cases in the appeal papers made reference to women's status as workers. Case 5 concerned a forty-five year old woman who was married but separated from her husband.<sup>36</sup> According to the case record, it appears that she did not have a history of paid employment but had recently started working after her husband's desertion. The decision by the society to refuse her benefit was based upon several grounds: that she had 'wilfully' misstated the facts of her case (ie that her husband had left her); that she had been observed carrying out household duties; that she had been found fit for work; and that her 'right to be insured was very doubtful'.<sup>37</sup> The Commissioners decided that different matters were under question, focusing solely on her capacity for work and her alleged failure to inform the society of her existing medical condition. The question of her marital status and her alleged fraud in relation to her work history appeared by this time to have been settled between the claimant's solicitor and the society. The case is interesting because it shows that the approved society made several assumptions about the claimant's status as a worker, implying that her whole case was fraudulent in its desire to refuse her benefit. It was only when the Commissioners insisted on testing the relevant legal arguments that her alleged marital status, her apparent fraudulent work status and the question of housework were removed from the equation. By the time of the appeal, the claimant had a solicitor representing her. Although we know nothing of the solicitor's role in the case, we can surmise that he enabled her to focus her case on the relevant legal arguments. The case appears to provide insight into the decision making process at the time, that approved societies may have been making assumptions about the working status of married women and perhaps especially that of 'deserted' women. The 1911 Act did include special provisions for deserted women, treating them effectively in the same way as widows.<sup>38</sup> However, Case 5 seems to indicate that the attitude of the approved

societies to such women was influenced by the negativity with which they were sometimes viewed in society, and an expectation that it was her husband's responsibility to maintain her.<sup>39</sup>

Case 84 concerned the rule against married women being entitled to benefit unless they were in work.<sup>40</sup> In this case the woman was a worker and a member in her own right but, at the time of her marriage, was unable to work because of health problems. She was disqualified from benefit because she was not in work at the time of her marriage. The Commissioners held that this was a legally correct decision, based on the case law established by the Court of Appeal case, discussed above. However, it regretted the formation of the rule which was to prevent benefit from being paid to 'a person whose normal occupation was employment and who was temporarily prevented from continuing to be employed after marriage solely by reason her state of health'.<sup>41</sup> This case illustrates the Commissioners' support of the principle of a working married woman, but, as with the Court of Appeal case, they were constrained by the legislation.

Case 23 was another one where the approved society appeared to have decided at an early stage that the claimant was a malingerer and therefore assumed that every aspect of her case was fraudulent.<sup>42</sup> The claimant in this case was an unmarried woman, who lived with her mother and whose earnings were meagre and irregular. These aspects of her claim were not alluded to again but may well have formed the background to the society's view of her primarily as not in the paid labour market. The case concentrated instead on the evidence supporting her claim to incapacity and the society's view that the claimant was a malingerer and suffering, if anything, from hysteria: 'Our opinion is that this is an hysterical subject and, like the suffragettes, she is going to get what she wants'.<sup>43</sup> The Commissioners based their decision solely upon the medical evidence provided by each side, and, in the end they came down on the side of the claimant, whose 'lamentable condition of health must have been obvious to any person who saw her'.<sup>44</sup> It is not clear why the society felt the need to refer to the suffragettes in its statement, but this comment was made in February 1914 when the militant suffragette campaign was still in full flow. One interpretation could be that the society was hostile to the suffragettes' cause (or means) and to women's position in the public sphere in general, and saw efforts by women to improve their position in society as a sign of trouble making.

Case 51 also brought into question a woman's status as a worker.<sup>45</sup> In this case a single woman was in hospital and the question concerned whether her parents could be considered to be her dependents and thus entitled to her benefits. There are several such cases, illustrating the importance of young women's wages to the household income, another role for women's work which has often been overlooked.<sup>46</sup> Case 86 concerned a widow whose daughter was in an asylum: could the mother be considered to be a dependent and therefore entitled to her daughter's sickness benefit?<sup>47</sup> The Commissioners decided that she could. Another concerned a single woman who lived with friends and argued that her



earnings contributed to the household income, as her relationship was similar to that of an adopted daughter. In this case the Commissioners agreed that her host family were 'dependents' and so entitled to benefit (Case 75).<sup>48</sup> In these and other cases like them, the Commissioners emphasised that the relationship of dependency was a 'question of fact' which had to be considered in every case, rather than any assumed relationship between parents and their adult children.

These cases suggest that the Commissioners, in their quasi-legal role as arbiters in disputed claims, treated women's claims for benefit in gender-neutral terms, treating women as workers in their own right and were concerned only with discovering the 'facts' of the case. However the detail in some of the disputed cases also suggests that societies did not always do this, relying instead on assumptions about women and using a range of types of hearsay evidence to make decisions about their status. The way in which this evidence was used can also be found more clearly in the disputes about women's [in]capacity for work and in the difficult question of how this could best be established.

## **Women's claims and the definition of incapacity for work**

All sickness and incapacity benefits require some of definition of 'incapacity' or 'work limitation' and mechanisms to assess claims. Even today different countries do this in different ways: some use a medical model of disability and assess claimants according to their level of impairment, while others consider wider social elements which take account of the real-world barriers that people with disabilities and health problems face, reflecting a social model of disability.<sup>49</sup> The history of sickness benefits in the UK shows frequent attempts by policy makers to find better and more 'objective' methods of assessment. The problem of how to define incapacity for work was highlighted in the 1914 report and it considered at length the difficulty of deciding whether the test of incapacity should be based on the claimant's 'usual' occupation or whether people should be expected to consider alternative work.<sup>50</sup> The report was particularly concerned with how to assess women's capacity for work but concluded that the main reason for the excess claims by women was that usually they were genuinely ill and that it was only the introduction of the insurance scheme that had brought the levels of this illness to light. Mary Macarthur's dissenting memorandum stressed that this was the only matter to be considered seriously. Noting that many low waged women had not been voluntary members of sickness schemes before 1911, she explained:

What was the use of a doctor telling a woman that she was incapable of work, and ought to stay at home, when he knew that she was uninsured and had to earn her children's bread from day to day? Now the doctor feels free to certify that the woman must in the public interest, as well as in the interest of her own recovery, regard herself as incapable of work.<sup>51</sup>

Macarthur was arguing that there had been no variation in the prevalence or severity of women's illnesses or an increase in malingering since the introduction of the scheme, but that for the first time these women could afford to be ill. A major concern of the main report was how to deal with women whose doctors had certified them as incapable of work but who were suspected of continuing to carry out housework, as the quotation at the start of this article illustrates. This concern that women would be tempted to claim sickness benefit in order to get on with other domestic tasks can be seen in the appendices to the 1914 report. Mr Sanderson of the Amalgamated Association of Card, Blowing and Ring Room Operatives, described how he saw the problem:

There is an impression among women that if they are incapable of work in the mill they are entitled to benefit. They seem to have the opinion that although they can do work in the home – say where there are four or five children and there is considerable work to be done – they are still entitled to benefit.<sup>52</sup>

When questioned later about his view of the meaning of incapacity for work, Mr Sanderson argued that the definition ought to be 'incapable of doing usual occupation' and that this would apply to men as well as women. However, he believed that there should be a special form for women which should also state that she was incapable of doing housework.<sup>53</sup> This view clearly takes a gendered approach, where men were to be assessed on their capacity for paid work, while women were subject to a tougher test which recognised what later feminists came to label as 'the second shift'.<sup>54</sup> Mary Macarthur had already identified this phenomenon in 1914, as 'the treble strain', adding child-bearing to the 'strains' of 'wage earning and household drudgery'.<sup>55</sup> The main 1914 report recognised the difficulties of using housework as evidence of capacity for work but concluded that societies 'should educate their women members to appreciate the necessity of abstaining from prohibited housework' not only because it will aid their recovery but also 'to have a deterrent effect [on claiming benefit]'.<sup>56</sup> It did not provide any advice on who would do the housework instead.

The appeals cases provide examples of the use by societies of ability to perform housework as evidence of capacity for work. The Commissioners believed that the questions which they had to address were ones of evidence and 'fact': ie whether or not the claimants were incapable of work for the relevant period. The legislation itself is neutral in this sense. There is nothing in the 1911 Act to say that the question of 'incapacity for work' should be dealt with differently according to gender. However, by reading the cases more closely, we can see that there were unwritten assumptions about the different expectations of men and women. Case 5 referred to the woman being observed 'crushing salt', while Case 2 concerned a woman observed 'carrying coals'.<sup>57</sup> In Case 39, the society's decision to refuse benefit was based on evidence by a sick visitor who had visited the claimant's home and 'raised a suspicion in [the superintendent's] mind that [she] was doing housework'.<sup>58</sup> The Commissioners upheld

the claimant's case on the grounds that, 'even if she had been engaged in housework (of which there really was no evidence whatsoever) ... it does not follow that she was not incapable of work'.<sup>59</sup> The Commissioners' scepticism of sick visitors' evidence is also apparent in Case 110.<sup>60</sup> This case concerned a woman who had claimed sickness benefit and then disablement benefit. Her benefit was stopped after a sick visitor observed that she was 'doing her own shopping and light household duties'.<sup>61</sup> The Commissioners were critical of the use of the sick visitor's evidence, preferring the evidence of the GP and the report by the medical referee and allowed the appeal:

We do not wish to be understood as suggesting that the conclusions of a sick visitor necessarily require confirmatory medical evidence in all cases. There may be cases in which the evidence of capacity obtained by a sick visitor is so strong as to justify a Society in ignoring a medical certificate. In the present case however the evidence of the sick visitor is so slight that in itself no conclusion can be based on it.<sup>62</sup>

These cases do not in themselves constitute an argument that the performance of household duties was routinely used to invalidate women's claims for sickness benefit. However, they do suggest that it was common for approved societies to use the evidence of sick visitors to question women's claims. In the 'housework' cases the Commissioners did not doubt the societies' right to consider evidence of inappropriate household activities but they often questioned the status of that evidence. The Commissioners tended to prefer the evidence of 'medical men', with a strong emphasis on societies' requirement to weigh up medical evidence from the family doctors against any conflicting evidence from sick visitors or medical referees. This can be illustrated by Case 122 where it was the claimant who attempted to use her inability to carry out household duties to support her claim, providing evidence from a niece who helped her with the housework.<sup>63</sup> In this case the Commissioners dismissed this evidence in favour of 'medical' evidence which supported the society's view that she was fit for work.

The Commissioners were not entirely gender neutral. Other decisions show that a claimant's gender was relevant to the Commissioners' view of what kind of work they might be expected to do. So, in considering whether a claimant might be able to do 'light work', in the case of women, they refer frequently to 'light housework' (as a paid occupation), while with men, this is more likely to be work as a tailor, caretaker or messenger (Case 74), the work of a 'general man in a grocer's shop' or clerical work (Case 140).<sup>64,65</sup> These different expectations of women and men probably reflected their view of gendered opportunities in the labour market at the time. While this may well have been a realistic observation, it nevertheless shows that considerations of 'capacity for work' took account of social differences which were wider than a simple medical assessment of impairment.

Although it is difficult to make direct comparisons between cases, it is useful to look at Case 82, which

concerned a fifty-six year old male former miner who had 'lumbago and rheumatism'.<sup>66</sup> The society and the Commissioners agreed that he was severely restricted in the work that he could do and would only be able to do 'light work' from home. Since the Commissioners could not envisage what work this might be, they concluded that he was incapable of work. On the other hand, in Case 129, which concerned a sixty-eight year old woman who was unable to continue in her former work as a nurse because of 'rheumatoid arthritis', the Commissioners felt that she 'could do various forms of remunerative work such as light housework, a little cooking or as a needlewoman'.<sup>67</sup> Although the medical circumstances of these two claimants may not be comparable, it is notable that the Commissioners did not consider light housework as an option for the man.

While the issue of housework was only raised in women's cases, similar types of evidence might be used to prevent men from successfully claiming. The 1914 report gave the example of a man who 'beguiled the tedium of his leisure by tending his pigs' while claiming benefit, the implication being that 'tending pigs' was evidence of capacity for work<sup>68</sup> and in an appeal case (Case 17) a society attempted to use evidence of 'walking about' against a man's claim of incapacity.<sup>69</sup> However, as we can see from the quotation at the start of this article, women were considered to be particularly susceptible to the joys of housework.

## Conclusion

The evidence from these two documentary sources on the early development of the 1911 sickness insurance scheme suggests that, despite the apparently gender-neutral status of the scheme, approved societies made gendered assumptions about women's relationship to the labour market (particularly in the case of married women) and used assumptions about women's domestic responsibilities in their search for evidence about capacity for work. The appeals cases, although hardly representative of the much wider claiming environment, provide a useful lens on the day-to-day workings of the scheme. They show us that, despite cumbersome mechanisms available to them, some of the poorest and most disadvantaged people managed to challenge decisions, bringing along with them legal representation and medical evidence to support their cases.

The details in these cases give us information about some of the practices of societies' decision-making processes and confirm the findings of more recent work on social security, which show that decision-makers used their own informal assumptions about claimants, including assessments of deservingness, to come to conclusions about benefit entitlement.<sup>70</sup> These street-level decisions were likely to be affected by gendered beliefs about the role of women and work and the underlying suspicion of married women workers as deviant. At the appeal level, those hearing the cases tried to make objective assessments of the evidence in front of them, dismissing hearsay evidence and tangential arguments and doing their best to stick to the legal requirements of the scheme.

Again this confirms findings from research on more recent versions of social security appeals, which show appeal bodies making efforts to legalise decision-making and favouring more formal types of evidence.<sup>71</sup> As Mashaw argues, this is not to suggest that those hearing appeals make better decisions, rather it reflects their different role in the adjudication process, including their access to more detailed evidence and the different values inherent in a legalised process. Bureaucrats, on the other hand, are required to make many more decisions in an efficient and cost-effective manner.<sup>72</sup>

In this sense, the difference in approach between the frontline decision makers and the appeals process is unsurprising. The approved societies had a financial interest in not paying out more benefits than necessary, which could have emphasised unsympathetic decision making. However they also had an interest in retaining members in their scheme, which, as noted in the 1914 report, could also have led to over-generous decision making.<sup>73</sup> While the decision makers at the appeal level did not have a direct financial interest in minimising benefits payments, they did have an interest in ensuring that the sickness benefit system was not abused, and regarded their role as providing advice to approved societies:

societies will welcome a series of Reports which may serve as precedents for their guidance in the future, and may at the same time illustrate the principles and procedure which should govern the decision of disputes between societies and their members.<sup>74</sup>

What these sources reveal is that, although the legislation was gender-neutral (except in regard to married women), it is likely that day-to-day decision making involved more complex ideas about the roles of men and women in the labour market. It is also likely that questions of 'incapacity for work' involved gendered assumptions about what men and women could be expected to do. In particular the obsession with women's household responsibilities appears to have been important in some decisions about women's capacity for work.

The question of women and housework continued throughout the early twentieth century and into the 1970s. Whiteside argues that the issue became particularly dominant during the 1930s, citing the popular press describing married women as the worst 'benefit spongers'.<sup>75</sup> Later variations of sickness benefits included the notorious 'household duties test' (mirroring Sanderson's suggestion from 1914) in the Housewives Non-contributory Invalidity Pension. This short-lived benefit was introduced in 1975 but was consigned to history by a European equalities directive in 1984. Since then benefits have been technically gender-neutral, although recent debate on incapacity benefits has dwelt on the increasing claims by women, especially lone parents, and has been described as 'the feminisation of incapacity benefit'.<sup>76</sup>

The appeals papers and the appendices to the 1914 report give us an insight into the day-to-day decision making processes which cannot be found in the legislation alone or in the political debates about the national insurance scheme. Although the voices of the

claimants are still largely absent, it is clear that there were at least some people who did not accept negative decisions submissively, but who were willing and able to put considerable time and possibly financial resources into defending their claims. Further research might unearth archives which would give us more background to these everyday experiences.

## Notes

1. National Health Insurance Joint Committee, *National Health Insurance: Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims under the National Insurance Act. Cd. 7687* (London, HMSO, 1914), 14.
2. Jackie Gulland, 'Ticking Boxes: Understanding Decision Making in Employment and Support Allowance', *Journal of Social Security Law*, 18/2 (2011), 69-86.
3. E.g. Mary Daly and Katherine Rake, *Gender and the Welfare State* (Oxford, Polity, 2003); Ruth Lister, 'She Has Other Duties', *Women, Citizenship and Social Security* in *Social Security and Social Change: New Challenges to the Beveridge Model*, ed. Sally Baldwin and Jane Falkingham (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994); Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993); Diane Sainsbury, *Gender, Equality and Welfare States* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); Pat Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State*, (London, Longman, 2nd ed. 1996).
4. E.g. Angelique Janssens, 'The Rise and Decline of the Male Breadwinner Family: An Overview of the Debate', *International Review of Social History*, 42, Supplement S5 (1997), 1-23.
5. Gisela Bock and Pat Thane, eds, *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States 1880s-1950s* (London, Routledge, 1991), 16.
6. Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State*, 37.
7. *Ibid.*, 39.
8. Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1984), 136; Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918-1950* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005).
9. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'The Origins and Expansion of the Male Breadwinner Family: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Britain', *International Review of Social History*, 42, Supplement S5 (1997), 51.
10. Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family*, 226.
11. Pat Thane, 'Visions of Gender in the Making of the British Welfare State: The Case of Women in the British Labour Party and Social Policy 1906-1945', in *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States 1880s-1950s*, ed. Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (London, Routledge, 1991), 98.
12. E.g. Pat Thane, 'The Making of National Insurance, 1911', *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 19/3 (2011), 211-19.
13. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness*

*Benefit Claims*; National Health Insurance Commission (England), *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications under Section 67 of the National Insurance Act 1911 and Section 27 of the National Insurance Act 1913 Cd. 7810* (London, HMSO, 1915) [cases 1-24].

——— *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications under Section 67 of the National Insurance Act 1911 and Section 27 of the National Insurance Act 1913 Part II Cd. 8040* (London, HMSO, 1915) [cases 25-48].

——— *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications under Section 67 of the National Insurance Act 1911 and Section 27 of the National Insurance Act 1913 Part III Cd. 8239* (London, HMSO, 1916.) [cases 49-72].

——— *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications under Section 67 of the National Insurance Act 1911 and Section 27 of the National Insurance Act 1913 Part IV Cd. 8474* (London, HMSO, 1917) [cases 73-102].

——— *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications under Section 67 of the National Insurance Act 1911 and Section 27 of the National Insurance Act 1913 Part V Cmd. 134* (London, HMSO, 1919). [cases 103-142]. Hereafter references to the cases from these volumes will be referred to by case number alone.

14. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims*, 5.

15. Sir William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, Cmd 6404 (London, HMSO, 1942), 25.

16. *National Insurance Act 1911*, s2.

17. *Ibid.*, s44.

18. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims*, 2.

19. *Ibid.*, 32.

20. *Ibid.*, 5.

21. *Ibid.*, 6.

22. Sick visitors were employed by societies to visit and monitor claimants, or as Whiteside describes, to 'spy' on them. Noel Whiteside, 'Private Agencies for Public Purposes: Some New Perspectives on Policy Making in Health Insurance between the Wars', *Journal of Social Policy*, 12/ 2 (1983), 177.

23. *Ibid.*, 78. For further information on Mary Macarthur, see Angela John, 'Macarthur, Mary Reid (1880-1921)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

24. *National Insurance Act 1911*, s67.

25. National Health Insurance Commission (England), *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications Parts I-V*.

26. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims*, 56 and 85.

27. E.g. John Baldwin, Nicholas Wikeley and Richard Young, *Judging Social Security* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992); Hazel Genn, *Paths to Justice: What People Think and Do About Going to Law* (Oxford, Hart, 1999).

28. Tamara Goriely, 'Gratuitous Assistance to the 'Well-Dressed': Debating Civil Legal Aid in England and Wales from 1914 to 1939', *International Journal of the Legal Profession*, 13/1 (2006), 41-67.

29. John Conley and William O'Barr, *Just Words: Law, Language and Power* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1998).

30. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims*, 10.

31. See Thane, *The Making of National Insurance*.

32. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims*, 48.

33. Selina Todd, 'Breadwinners and Dependents: Young Working-Class People in England, 1918-55', *International Review of Social History*, 52/1 (2007), 57-87.

34. *Ibid.*, 86.

35. *Davidson v New Tabernacle (Old Street Congregational) Approved Society* [1916] 2 K.B. 80.

36. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part I*.

37. *Ibid.*, 13.

38. *National Insurance Act 1911*, S44(14).

39. Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'From 'Relief' to 'Justice and Protection': the Maintenance of Deserted Wives, British Masculinity and Imperial Citizenship, 1870-1920', *Gender and History*, 22/2 (2010), 302-21.

40. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part IV*.

41. *Ibid.*, 220.

42. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part I*.

43. *Ibid.*, 63.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part III*.

46. Todd, 'Breadwinners and Dependents'.

47. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part IV*.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers. A Synthesis of Findings across OECD Countries* (Paris, OECD, 2010).

50. For further discussion of this, see Jackie Gulland, "'Fitting Themselves to Become Wage-Earners": Conditionality and Incapacity for Work in the Early 20th Century', *Journal of Social Security Law*, 119/2 (2012), 51-70.

51. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims, Appendix*, 320.

52. *Ibid.*, 2.

53. *Ibid.*, 13.

54. Arlie Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (London, Piatkus, 1989).

55. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims*, 79.

56. *Ibid.*, 73.

57. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part I*.

58. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part II*, 108-109.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part V*.

61. *Ibid.*, 265.

62. *Ibid.*, 266.

63. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part V*.

# The other Rathbone: Beatrice: the trans-Atlantic envoy

John Ault

University of Exeter

## Introduction

Women politicians were few and far between in the 1940s and I recently re-discovered Beatrice Rathbone, Member of Parliament for Bodmin from 1941-45, whilst researching an article on the inter-war by-elections in Cornwall. She was not entirely unknown to me but her short term in office and her more famous namesake, Eleanor, have perhaps led to her being somewhat overlooked by history. This article was originally presented to a conference at Sheffield University in 2011 on 'The Aftermath of Suffrage' and even amongst academics working in the field of women's political history she seemed to be almost completely unknown. Although the article leans, to an extent, on the recorded interview she gave to the Imperial War Museum towards the end of her life, the original paper was essentially based on documentary evidence from the period as well as her second husband's autobiography. I discovered the recorded interview after that paper was originally presented and it has helped to fill in many of the gaps that my original sources left vacant. At times, perhaps unsurprisingly, Beatrice's memory of specific events has faded but other sources from the period have made it possible to construct this article without being too dependent on the interview alone. The article attempts to rediscover this woman, forgotten by history, and it is hoped that it might stimulate further research into Beatrice, the politician. Her career, though short, shows a combative and inspired young female parliamentarian who left an important mark despite the brevity of her parliamentary career.

## Beatrice Rathbone MP

Making her maiden speech to the House of Commons in the debate on the successful German airborne invasion of British-held Crete, in 1941, might have seemed daunting

enough. However, for the youngest woman MP at the time (she was 30) to consider making such a speech, following on from Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Leader of the Official Opposition Hastings Lees-Smith, Nancy Astor, Leslie Hore-Belisha and Aneurin Bevan, would seem brave indeed for a novice parliamentarian. Yet, Beatrice Rathbone delivered a maiden speech 'full of knowledge, common sense and understanding', a speech seen as 'a breath of fresh air from America across the moors of Devonshire [Hon. Members: "Cornwall."].<sup>1</sup> Despite women MPs being relatively rare (there were only twelve female MPs at the outbreak of war), Beatrice Rathbone was elected following an unopposed by-election in Bodmin.<sup>2</sup> Her parliamentary career, although short, should be remembered for her constituency work and for the cause of women politicians in general. She was a trailblazer for women's acceptance in Parliament and was the first MP to give birth whilst serving in Parliament. Being 'elected' as a Unionist member, one might have expected a more traditional outlook on campaign issues in Parliament. However, like her husband's step great-aunt, Eleanor Rathbone, Beatrice became a champion for women's issues as well as for her Cornish constituents, even becoming a leading spokesperson for the war effort as an official envoy to the United States government tasked with attempting to convince them to enter the Second World War.

Beatrice Rathbone's arrival in Parliament was by no means planned as part of her own career. Her husband, John Rathbone, was elected for the Cornish constituency of Bodmin in the 1935 general election, defeating the incumbent Liberal MP, Isaac Foot, leading voice of West Country Liberalism. On John Rathbone's death, in late 1940, Beatrice was nominated to succeed him, making her the second American-born woman elected to Parliament, following Nancy Astor. Her success in being selected, as Vallance suggests of other early women candidates, was not linked to her gender, '[it] was more important that [she was] admired and accepted in the constituency'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed

---

64. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part IV.*

65. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part V.*

66. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part IV.*

67. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part V.*

68. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims*, 9.

69. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part I.*

70. E.g. Evelyn Brodtkin and Malay Majmunder, 'Administrative Exclusion: Organizations and the Hidden Costs of Welfare Claiming', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 20/4 (2010), 827-

48; Sharon Wright, 'The Street-Level Implementation of Unemployment Policy' in *Understanding Social Security*, ed. Jane Miller (Bristol, Policy Press, 2003).

71. E.g. Baldwin *et al*, *Judging Social Security*; Jerry Mashaw, *Bureaucratic Justice: Managing Social Security Disability Claims* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983).

72. Mashaw, *Bureaucratic Justice*.

73. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Sickness Benefit Claims*, 26.

74. *Reports of Decisions on Appeals and Applications, Part I*, piii.

75. Whiteside, 'Private Agencies for Public Purposes', 175.

76. Peter Kemp and Jacqueline Davidson, 'Gender Differences Amongst New Claimants for Incapacity Benefit', *Journal of Social Policy*, 38/4 (2009), 589-606.

this is reflected in *The Cornish Times* which, at the time, wrote 'the new member... has won the esteem of the constituency by her wide knowledge of political affairs'.<sup>4</sup>

Beatrice, an MP for just four years during the Second World War, is by no means the most famous or influential female politician from this era: her relative, Eleanor Rathbone, an independent MP, was much more prominent and feared in the corridors of power than Beatrice. Neither was she the only woman to gain her seat by virtue of her husband's political activities. Hilda Runciman, elected as Liberal member for St. Ives in 1928, 'to keep a more attractive seat warm for [her] husband ...', was actually Cornwall's first woman Member of Parliament.<sup>5</sup> Ruth Dalton, also filling the 'warming pan' role in 1928, was selected to stand for a seat in Bishop Auckland for the Labour party, which she won and held until her husband could extricate himself from a less safe seat in the south.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless Beatrice Rathbone's parliamentary career was to prove extraordinary in helping cement trans-Atlantic co-operation before and during American involvement in the War.

She was born Beatrice Clough, in 1910, in New Haven, Connecticut, to Bostonian New Englanders who could trace their origins far back to East Anglia.<sup>7</sup> Beatrice was aware that her family had been hoping for a boy, and she claims to have been a great disappointment to them when she arrived.<sup>8</sup> Her mother was 'Victorian in outlook and puritan in manner',<sup>9</sup> leading Beatrice Rathbone's second husband, Paul Wright, to wonder how she 'had ever managed to get herself born, let alone conceived'.<sup>10</sup> Her father made his career in international banking which took him, and his family, to the Far East, where Beatrice learned new languages, customs and knowledge of different cultures. She completed her freshman year at Radcliffe College, the women's section of Harvard,<sup>11</sup> and then moved to Oxford where she 'combined studying English Literature under Neville [sic] Coghill with meeting her (first) husband', John Rankin Rathbone.<sup>12</sup> Fresh from university, Rathbone, step great-nephew of the Independent MP for the Combined Universities, Eleanor Rathbone, was eager to follow in his great-aunt's footsteps and establish a political career of his own.

By 1933, the National Government had lost most of the free trade Liberals to the Opposition benches, Isaac Foot, then MP for Bodmin, amongst them. Foot had spoken out from the government front bench against the Import Duties Bill, the culmination of the Ottawa conference which championed trade protectionism within the British Empire.<sup>13</sup> Consequently parliamentary seats which had previously been uncontested by the convention of the National Government became open to contest at the next general election. The South East Cornwall Unionist Association recorded its support for the Ottawa Agreement, castigating Foot for failing to support the National Government in a vital aspect of its policy, and stated that he 'no longer represent[ed the] views of Conservatives of this constituency, who, therefore, withdr[ew] their support from him ...'.<sup>14</sup> Within two months of this rejection of Foot, the local Conservatives had identified a potential new candidate and came together 'to

hear the views of John Rankin Rathbone ... for adoption as the Prospective Conservative and Unionist Candidate ...[confirming] it was Mr and Mrs Rathbone's intention to come and reside in the Division and devote their whole time to its interests'.<sup>15</sup> Despite Beatrice Rathbone, 'being old family friends with Nancy Astor' and a fellow American, Astor refused to help the Rathbones as Foot, a fellow teetotaler 'was one of [her] best supports in the House of Commons and she didn't want to lose him ... she hoped [the Rathbones] would lose'.<sup>16</sup> Foot was still a formidable opponent, even at this low ebb of Liberal party fortunes, and it 'was one of the surprises of the election'<sup>17</sup> that Foot lost the seat to John Rathbone in 1935 being elected 'the youngest successful candidate at that election'.<sup>18</sup>

The victory was seen to be based on two key factors Beatrice's keen sense for improving party organisation and the development of bonds with National Liberals in Cornwall. As a result of this relationship, John Rathbone received the backing of Sir Walter Runciman, Liberal National MP for St. Ives and President of the Board of Trade. At the same time, Beatrice had taken control of the local Conservative and Unionist Association, arranging for fund-raising fetes and announcing the appointment of a woman organiser.<sup>19</sup> She also attempted to focus the activities of the local Junior Imperial League, latterly the Young Conservatives, albeit with less success.<sup>20</sup> Even at this stage, Beatrice was described as 'a considerable natural force'<sup>21</sup> in her husband's campaign, playing a full role in his election in 1935; not merely as a candidate's wife, but helping 'to nurse the [seat] for two years ... canvassing the entire constituency'.<sup>22</sup> John Rathbone, knowing that the constituency was extremely non-conformist, was the only candidate to campaign to end the process of tithes which required Methodists to contribute to Church of England schools, competing with Foot a leading Methodist for his natural supporters. Foot, perhaps attempting to appeal to non-Methodists, did not support the abolition of the tithes completely. Following his election in 1935 John Rathbone served as a Member of Parliament for just five years before his untimely death.

Rathbone demonstrated interests beyond his own constituency. He became chair of a committee that visited Germany to assess the possibility of building motorways in Britain, similar to the autobahn in Hitler's Germany. John, who was a fluent German speaker, was appalled at the political direction that Nazi Germany was taking, and, despite the policy of appeasement being pursued by the Baldwin and Chamberlain government, spoke out and was, as a consequence, described by political enemies as a warmonger.<sup>23</sup> His opposition to the government's policy of appeasement led him to register for the RAF reserve and when war broke out he volunteered for service and was allocated to a bomber squadron. At the beginning of the war, after her husband had joined the RAF, Beatrice gave her services to the Ministry of Information and became involved in the programme to send British children to America to escape the ravages of war.<sup>24</sup>

Tragically, John Rathbone was 'lost in his very first raid in a Blenheim bomber...brought down over Antwerp'.<sup>25</sup> When reporting his death *The Cornish Times* gave support



to the view that Beatrice had been an integral part of the campaign to elect her husband commenting,

the years have sped so fast that it [did] not seem so long ago as 1932 that Sir Frederick Poole issued an invitation to a tea-party ... to meet informally 'two young people who may have quite a lot to do with South-East Cornwall in the future'. Around the fire they chatted with a tall, rather quiet young man and his vivacious American wife.<sup>26</sup>

According to Paul Wright, Beatrice was a natural choice to succeed her husband in Parliament: 'her presence at his side in the constituency was so effective that when he was killed in 1940 ... she was asked by all Parties to take his place'.<sup>27</sup>

Not everyone in the constituency was happy with this proposition, a sentiment given voice in *The Cornish Times*: 'the idea that when a member dies his widow should succeed him is bad, not good at all. It establishes an hereditary principle in the Lower Chamber ... we must for the future seek out those who have greater claims upon our suffrage than the simple one of family connection'.<sup>28</sup> This 'claim upon our suffrage' was a clear reference to Isaac Foot, but despite this suggestion of opposition, and in accordance with the principles of the war-time party truce, the Bodmin Liberals unanimously decided not to contest the nomination of Mrs Rathbone.<sup>29</sup> The Liberal party's acceptance of Beatrice might have also been influenced by Foot's unavailability. In 1940 he was appointed by Winston Churchill to be the Liberal party's representative on the Security Executive, a committee established to coordinate the work of the security services.<sup>30</sup> As a consequence of this, Foot was already busy in London. Being the youngest woman in Parliament and being American seemed to present no barrier to Beatrice's election. In Cornwall, according to Beatrice herself, 'they looked no more sideways at [her] being American than they would being English, because [they] were all foreigners ... in a way they almost treated [her] more as a native than they did [her] English husband'.<sup>31</sup>

On the day of her nomination her trans-Atlantic ties were clearly illustrated. Instead of being in Saltash (where nominations for her constituency were received) to discover if she had been elected unopposed, she returned to London to speak to her children via a BBC radio link. As she explained to *The Cornish Times*, 'I realise full well the responsibility that is being placed on my shoulders and I hope and pray that I may acquit myself satisfactorily, [but] my two children are broadcasting from America tonight'.<sup>32</sup> Her children had been sent to the USA as part of the official Government scheme to evacuate children to America, and as if to reassure her constituents that her family was committed to the war effort not in receipt of privileged treatment, she stated, 'It was not until thousands of other children had been sent that John and Pauline were allowed to go to my family. Immediately after their departure I was glad to be able to help in sending over 1000 children to the USA'.<sup>33</sup>

Thus Beatrice Rathbone became the second

American-born woman in history to be a Member of Parliament, forfeiting her American citizenship by taking the oath of allegiance to the UK, and dramatically entering parliament wearing black, adorned with her husband's RAF wings.<sup>34</sup> Her introduction to the House was an occasion she described herself as 'very daunting ... [because] Mr Churchill was sitting on the front bench when I had to go past him to sign the book and he hated women Members of Parliament...he didn't smile ... and just looked as much as to say why did you have to come in here?!'<sup>35</sup> Despite her tragic and surprising ascent to Parliament, Beatrice did not spend time waiting on the back benches to learn the political ropes. Even before she addressed the Commons for the first time, Dingle Foot, Liberal MP for Dundee and eldest son of Isaac, said: 'We all know already she is playing a very energetic part [in the House of Commons] and we are all looking forward to her maiden speech'.<sup>36</sup> She was to defy parliamentary convention even in that.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Beatrice Rathbone's maiden speech, in the debate on the airborne invasion of Crete, in June 1941, was preceded by contributions from several senior politicians. Leslie Hore-Belisha, former Secretary for War and MP for a neighbouring (Plymouth) seat, emphasised the significance of the debate, on the first occasion in history when an island had been captured by airborne attack.<sup>37</sup> This fact was not lost on politicians from an island race, whose territory was under attack during the Blitz and perceived to be under the constant threat of German invasion. Beatrice took up this theme in her maiden speech and suggested that there was too much '1066 thinking going on in the country', implying that Britain was not the island fortress it often thought it was.<sup>38</sup> Traditionally maiden speeches are based on local issues in the new member's constituency and touch upon the member's predecessor, but Beatrice dismissed convention, by stating that she had 'been forced to [her] feet',<sup>39</sup> to deliver what was afterwards was described by the local constituency newspaper as a striking critique of the government's handling of the war.<sup>40</sup> She argued that it was 'universally agreed that recriminations are futile and are a complete waste of time unless we learn very definite lessons from those past experiences, such as Crete'. She continued, 'the people of this country, who have been so willing to accept explanations in the past, are not feeling so ready to accept them to-day'.<sup>41</sup> She did, however, back Prime Minister Winston Churchill, if not the efficiency of the government, stating that he had

led this country vigorously, unitedly and with singleness of purpose and directness of approach; I wish his method and spirit were as contagious as the measles. We might not be capable in this country of Nazi ruthlessness and tyranny, but we can and we must be capable of ruthless efficiency.<sup>42</sup>

Beatrice's maiden speech made an immediate national and international impact, *The New Yorker* stating that in Britain 'most of the picture papers [carried] as their sole adornment to the text of the debate a photograph of the new American MP'.<sup>43</sup> The 'breath of fresh air' speech

was well reported in Cornwall, where *The Cornish Times* stated that, in spite of 'the greatness of the occasion for it was one of those full dress debates that occur only occasionally in each Session, [it] did not overawe her and those who were her listeners will not leave the House when she catches the Speaker's eye on future occasions'.<sup>44</sup> Making seventy speeches in her four years in Parliament, compared to her husband's fourteen over a longer period, shows Beatrice's passion for the parliamentary process. Identifying issues that chimed with women, families and her Cornish constituency, Beatrice pursued them with a passion, often to the increasing chagrin and even annoyance of the government, emulating the effective style of her neighbouring female MP, Nancy Astor, and Eleanor Rathbone.

Despite her focus on domestic affairs in Parliament, Beatrice was dispatched to convince her home nation to join the war effort by making a speaking tour of the United States. Indeed, she 'came reluctantly to the conclusion that in accepting this opportunity for personal contact with the American people at this critical time [she] was perhaps after all best serving the ultimate interests of [her] constituents'.<sup>45</sup> Another draw for Beatrice must have been the opportunity the tour provided to see her two children, who, as already discussed, had been evacuated to her family in Boston.<sup>46</sup> The speaking tour was organised by Edward Murrow, head of the Columbia Broadcasting System in London, whose daily *This is London* and news of Britain at war had become required listening in many thousands of American homes.<sup>47</sup> Reports of Beatrice's speaking tour reached Cornwall following a speech to her old school in Simsbury, Connecticut. The talk was described as 'so interesting that [the students] were spellbound [and] afterwards they were wildly enthusiastic'.<sup>48</sup>

Beatrice's speaking tour was curtailed following Japan's pre-emptive attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. As she admitted herself, 'the job [of urging American intervention] had been done better by somebody else'.<sup>49</sup> Despite this unforeseen and early end to her campaign, the Cornish press were clearly impressed by the actions of their MP. *The Cornish Times* reported that:

true to her flair for being in the place where momentous happenings are taking place the Member for South East Cornwall was in America on Sunday December 7th when Japan attacked in the Pacific and was on the spot to hear the British Prime Minister speak in the Senate ... In three weeks she delivered 25 lectures and five broadcasts under the auspices of CBS. Originally she planned to tell the States about the war effort in Britain, especially of the women but before she left she was hearing of the war effort in the United States.<sup>50</sup>

When writing to her constituents of her attendance at the Senate and hearing Churchill speak, Beatrice conceded (perhaps uncharacteristically) 'that it was in the back row and in the darkest corner for [she] was a little shy of sitting in another "House of Commons"'.<sup>51</sup> In that

speech, possibly in an unintentional reference to Beatrice, Churchill said, 'I cannot help reflecting that if my father had been American and my mother British, instead of the other way round, I might have got here on my own'.<sup>52</sup> One member of his audience (Beatrice) had achieved that honour in the British Parliament, despite both her parents being American. Following the change in her speaking plans, Beatrice used her time to meet influential Congressmen and Senators, amongst these the very active female members of Congress. She was invited to a 'quiet lunch with Mrs Roosevelt', who was keen to understand how British 'Civil Defence worked and exact details of how our women played such a valuable part in the war effort'.<sup>53</sup>

On the day after her return from the United States, Beatrice became 'the first woman MP to register for National Service ... although she was exempt from compulsory service'.<sup>54</sup> It was now that she began working with Lord Halifax, the former pre-war Foreign Secretary but then British ambassador in Washington, to assist children who had been evacuated to the United States with a financial allowance, as many 'were in great difficulties because they weren't allowed to take a penny out with them to America'.<sup>55</sup> Eventually, she secured for them an allowance of ten pounds per month. Her strong links with New England also brought her into contact with Ed Murrow's wife, Janet Brewster, who was the Executive Director of the 'Bundles for Britain' campaign, with whom Beatrice worked closely.<sup>56</sup> Brewster occupied a corner of Beatrice's house in Dean's Yard, Westminster, whilst the latter conducted her parliamentary business from the same room. By 1941, the campaign, which had been founded by Natalie Wales Latham in New York, had raised '\$3,000,000 and sent abroad some 500,000 used garments, 6,000 air raid shelter cots, 60,000 pairs of shoes, 50,000 sweaters, 50,000 pairs of socks, 24 ambulances, 59 mobile canteens, 21 X-ray machines and thousands of miscellaneous items of clothing, knitted goods and medical equipment'.<sup>57</sup> The first of the fifty-nine mobile canteens was presented by Beatrice herself, on behalf of 'Bundles for Britain', to the people of St. Austell, in Cornwall; it was not only 'useful, but also a symbol of the extreme unity of purposes that combined the USA and Britain'.<sup>58</sup>

Showing signs of being a rising parliamentary star and a useful trans-Atlantic envoy, another side of Beatrice's political philosophy began to emerge. On her return from America, she wrote, '[the] equality of sacrifice [between men and women and the combatant and the civilian] seems to come ever nearer and I am proud once again to be able to play a small part with the brave unfaltering women of this country'.<sup>59</sup> A study of the speeches that Beatrice made in Parliament, together with communications with her constituency, show her return to domestic social issues (particularly those affecting women's lives, children and welfare) leaving behind her activities as a 'trans-Atlantic' envoy. Perhaps to make up for the fact that female MPs were very thin on the ground, Beatrice spoke prolifically on issues considered to be 'women's issues', particularly in the so-called Women's Day debates, a concept that she



*June 22, 1941:  
Pauline, 6, and  
John Rathbone, 8,  
talk to their mother  
Beatrice Rathbone,  
American-born  
member of  
Parliament, by  
radio from New  
York, 22 June  
1941. AP/Press  
Association  
Images*

was personally opposed to.<sup>60</sup> She campaigned in favour of war nurseries, stating there were 'enormous benefits to be had in the way of education and discipline, which the mothers could not give in war-time'.<sup>61</sup> She also demanded to know what had happened to the government's promise to investigate minimum wage rates of female agricultural workers not employed in the women's Land Army.<sup>62</sup> It was during this period that Beatrice was remarried, to future diplomat, Paul Wright, taking his name in parliament.<sup>63</sup> This name change put her (and Thelma Cazalet, who also changed her name through marriage) 'in very bad odour' with the Speaker, who appeared to find the bother of remembering new names the final straw, what with 'the war, the Doodles, the V1s and the V2s'.<sup>64</sup>

The Wrights' first child was born in April 1943, the first child to be born to a *sitting* Member of Parliament, a formulation Beatrice objected to strongly, 'owing to the gynaecological implications'.<sup>65</sup> However, she was back in the House of Commons within a fortnight, with the baby 'whom she would wheel to the Commons and leave with a policeman while she voted'.<sup>66</sup> This gave her the opportunity to question the President of the Board of Trade as to 'whether new perambulators now being made [were] more strongly constructed and better balanced than the utility perambulators built to date,' bringing the House of Commons to laughter.<sup>67</sup> At this time, Beatrice focused more on constituency matters including issues affecting business and agriculture in Cornwall. Her capacity to ridicule government bureaucracy became well-known; on one occasion she demanded to know, 'the reason for carrying through [a defence order preventing] small children in rowing boats' playing off Looe harbour, as they

could, according to The Admiralty 'set out for the continent of Europe'.<sup>68</sup>

As Beatrice recalled in her 1991 interview, as well as performing her parliamentary duties in Westminster she was also keen to uphold her role as a constituency Member of Parliament.<sup>69</sup> This often required her travel to Cornwall, sitting for four or five hours on a suitcase on the train to Bodmin, giving way to military personnel. She then drove 'in the blackout ... from village to village down little country lanes ... to find four men and an oil stove ... because these people had terrible problems'.<sup>70</sup> She took particular interest in Cornwall's water supplies, which in her interview in 1991 she described as totally inadequate, with 'hundreds of villages with no piped water supply' at this time.<sup>71</sup> Local schools were also an issue: the buildings were sub-standard, '...many with no wooden floor, just the earth, no inside plumbing' and the teaching was, in her words, 'half-hearted'.<sup>72</sup> Her concern about the poor educational provision in the area prompted Beatrice to bring Florence Horsburgh, then Minister for Health, to the constituency to talk 'to all the people concerned'.<sup>73</sup>

Although conscientious about working for her constituents, Beatrice later admitted that wartime 'really wasn't a time when we could be ... very nagging we could only just possibly nudge ... because there was so much at stake that was more important than water in Polruan or a school in St. Cleer that [we] felt you must be very controlled in your criticism of the government at the time'.<sup>74</sup>

Beatrice's American origins came in useful again, this time working with United States forces based in Cornwall, in the months preceding the allied invasion of Normandy in 1944. According to Beatrice, the presence of

black regiments was causing particular concern in the local communities in which they were based, especially after a number of young women fell pregnant to the American visitors. In an attempt to facilitate an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding she encouraged the troops to participate in conversation with the local communities and to learn something of their traditions and culture; at the same time encouraging the local communities to extend a welcome to their visitors. But the appearance of 'khaki babies' (as Beatrice referred to the children born to black troops and local women) caused significant levels of stress in the community, stigmatising the young mothers. Beatrice recalls raising the issue with the commanding officer of the US regiment as well as Clare Luce, US Congresswoman for Connecticut, whilst she was making a visit to London.<sup>75</sup> Luce, to Beatrice's mind, offhandedly dismissed her concerns as an inevitable consequence of comparatively wealthy troops with nylons and chocolate to treat the local young women in wartime.<sup>76</sup>

Another of Beatrice's passions was the campaign for family allowances. Within parliament, she had chaired a committee to set up home helps and nursery schools in the days of post-war reconstruction, and in 1941 she was one of the original seventy-nine MPs who petitioned the government for family allowances.<sup>77</sup> She remembered how she 'wheeled [Eleanor] Rathbone to the bar of the Commons'<sup>78</sup>, when the latter 'wanted to attend the third reading of her Family Allowances Bill, for which she had campaigned for years'.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Beatrice recalled in 1991, that she was delegated by her female colleagues in Parliament to try to convince Eleanor to 'take some sort of recognition for her work ... [but Eleanor being] a straight forward human being ... said "no" because she had achieved what she has set out to do'.<sup>80</sup>

In 1944 Beatrice was asked in a newspaper interview 'how she coped as an MP and mother' and responded with,

a crisp rundown of her day, sounding as if she had the makings of the first woman Prime Minister. The day began at 6.30 when she rose to cook breakfast for herself and her husband, whose war service then permitted him to live at home. She then tackled housework before going to the Commons at 11 am. On returning home she cooked dinner, then dealt with up to 40 letters each night. Every weekend she travelled to Bodmin a journey lasting between seven and nine hours often standing for much of the time.<sup>81</sup>

Beatrice was at the centre of British politics and her networks brought her into contact with key figures at an historic moment in time. Through Paul Wright's role as one of the architects of Operation Overlord, she had close contacts with Anthony Eden, the foreign secretary, and her network extended to include close relationships with leading American figures in London during the war, including Ed and Janet (Brewster) Murrow, her uncle, Paul Hammond (President Roosevelt's naval envoy in London) and the US ambassador, John Gilbert Winant.<sup>82</sup> Being part of an influential anglophile group of American ex-patriots

made her a part of 'the special relationship' of these two allies. With the importance of post-war planning growing, she played a part in forging the consensus on policies such as nurseries, though she, in her own analysis, claimed that much of this planning 'was just to keep [MPs] busy'.<sup>83</sup>

According to the Cornish Conservatives, 'it was Mrs Wright [Beatrice] who had succeeded in allaying the terror which Ministers of the Crown once felt at the idea of crossing the Saltash Bridge into Cornwall', the visit by Horsburgh to discuss Cornish schools in 1944 mentioned above being a case in point. Beatrice had, in effect, put South East Cornwall on the map, something that would almost certainly be contested by prominent Cornish Liberal politicians.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, in January 1945, it was 'a surprise to most of her friends ... having many of the virtues and none of the vices of a good Parliamentarian, [being] a formidable candidate, being extremely popular',<sup>85</sup> when she announced her intention to retire, at the age of 34 'on the advice of her doctor'.<sup>86</sup> Beatrice's reasons far from clear, but she seemed concerned about her ability to 'indefinitely and adequately be a MP and a successful mother to young children',<sup>87</sup> adding that she 'was returned unopposed and that [her] nomination paper was signed by people of all political parties in the constituency, and that [she had] taken no part in party politics in this constituency since [she] became [the] Member of Parliament'.<sup>88</sup> The editor of *The Cornish Times* wrote, 'reading between the lines of Mrs Wright's letter, one cannot help expressing the personal view that having been elected unopposed with the consent of all parties, she feels a natural reluctance to fight on party lines'.<sup>89</sup> In fact, in her 1991 interview she admitted that she would have preferred the wartime coalition to have continued following the war to deliver the plans of reconstruction that she had worked on. According to Paul Wright, what she found more difficult to come to terms with was his adoption of the Liberal party, the party she had fought long and hard against by her first husband's side in Cornwall.<sup>90</sup> Paul Wright, who contested, but failed to win, Bethnel Green in 1945 believed that the Liberals 'seemed to represent the kind of England for which we imagined we had been fighting',<sup>91</sup> so there may well have been some truth to the editor's suspicion, that the inevitably complicated political relationship between a Liberal and an unopposed Unionist MP (elected with the support of Liberals) was probably involved in Beatrice's decision. Certainly, unlike her commitment to her first husband's election campaigns, Beatrice took no part in Wright's, besides writing out envelopes.<sup>92</sup>

In a valedictory piece, *The Cornish Times* concluded it was rather proud of its American female MP, who had proved her allegiance by 'putting the British case in no apologetic terms' to her American countrymen, and championing the condition of womanhood in the House of Commons.<sup>93</sup>

Beatrice's reluctance to stand for re-election as a parliamentary candidate, which eventually ended her career as an MP, was ostensibly driven by her perceived conflict between parliament and the necessities of family life; she was only able to pursue this brief political career in the first place because her two young children from the Rathbone marriage had been evacuated to the United

States for most of the war. This seems to concur with Lowndes' argument that, women 'are more likely than men [to try to balance] the competing demands of home and work and protecting their own and the families' health and well-being'.<sup>94</sup> Beatrice's retirement from Parliament was portrayed as 'a brave decision made in the interests of her family, for she loved political life and had been a successful and popular MP'.<sup>95</sup> But, as mentioned above, there may have been other considerations, not least the political career and affiliation of her new husband.

Beatrice Wright died in 2003, having served as a Vice-President of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and also having founded the charity Hearing Dogs for the Deaf, being its first President. The charity's training centre in East Yorkshire is still named after her. When her husband was knighted for his work in the diplomatic corps<sup>96</sup> and for his service as secretary to Queen Elizabeth II's silver jubilee, in 1977, Beatrice became Lady Wright. She was also awarded the Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), in 1995.

Beatrice was unquestionably a forceful champion of Cornwall and womanhood, although, in her interview, she denied any attempts to label her a feminist. She seems most accurately to be described as an impressive young female MP; but having served only four years in Parliament, she has never been considered a major figure in women's political history, as some of her long-serving or wartime contemporaries (such as Nancy Astor, Eleanor Rathbone, or even Florence Horsburgh) are. Despite her brief term in parliament, it is difficult to imagine that a young female politician could have made a bigger impact in such short period. Speaking the unspeakable in her maiden speech to Parliament, campaigning for better conditions for women and arguing the case for Britain to her home country; these were impressive achievements for a young MP who served for so short a time. These accomplishments, combined with being the first Member of Parliament to become a mother whilst *sitting*, together suggest that she deserves more than a footnote in women's political history and that of her adopted political home in Cornwall. If she had continued in Parliament, seeking re-election in 1945 rather than retiring, it is open to speculation what further contribution she could have made to the nation and to Cornwall, as the Conservatives held the Bodmin constituency until 1964. Such a term as MP would have taken her only into her fifties.

There can be little doubt she was a capable and popular Member of Parliament for Bodmin, and an impressive trans-Atlantic envoy urging American intervention in the war, working for the 'special relationship' on the 'Bundles for Britain' campaign and the evacuation plan for British children to the United States. She was also perhaps, however, both a reluctant and unexpected Member of Parliament from Cornwall whose wartime service should be more widely remembered.

## Notes

1. Harris was corrected by his colleagues: Beatrice Rathbone was the newly elected MP for Bodmin which

is in Cornwall and not Devonshire. Sir Percy Harris, 'The Defence of Crete', *Hansard*, vol 372, 10 June (1941), cc63-164.

2. Sarah Childs, 'Introduction', *Women and British Party Politics* (London, Routledge, 2008), xxiii.

3. Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House: a Study of Women Members of Parliament* (London, Athlone, 1979), 28.

4. *The Cornish Times*, 14 March 1941.

5. Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster* (London, Peter Davies, 1967), 65.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Paul Wright, *A Brittle Glory* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 25.

8. Beatrice Wright Interview, Imperial War Museum audio interview (hereafter IWM) 12030, 25 May 1991.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Wright, *Brittle Glory*, 25.

11. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.

12. Wright, *Brittle Glory*, 26.

13. Michael Foot & Alison Highet, *Isaac Foot, A Westcountry Boy – Apostle of England* (London, Politico's, 2006), 154.

14. Bodmin Conservative and Unionist Association (hereafter Bodmin Conservatives) Papers DDX 385/1 Executive Meeting South East Cornwall Conservative Association, 7 January 1933.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.

17. *The Cornish Guardian*, 2 January 1941.

18. Wright, *Brittle Glory*, 26.

19. Bodmin Conservatives, 3 June 1933.

20. Bodmin Conservatives, 4 December 1935.

21. Wright, *Brittle Glory*, 26.

22. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *The Cornish Times*, 3 January 1941.

25. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.

26. *The Cornish Times*, 3 January 1941.

27. Wright, *Brittle Glory*, 26.

28. *The Cornish Times*, 10 January 1941.

29. *The Cornish Times*, 7 February 1941.

30. Foot & Highet, *Isaac Foot*, 229.

31. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.

32. The children were participating in a broadcast organised by Ed Murrow of CBS, in which they described their experience of being trans-Atlantic evacuees. *The Cornish Times*, 14 March 1941.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Wright, *Brittle Glory*, 26.

35. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.

36. *The Cornish Times*, 16 May 1941.

37. Leslie Hore-Belisha, 'The Defence of Crete', *Hansard*, vol 372, 10 June (1941), cc63-164.

38. *The New Yorker*, 21 June 1941.

39. Beatrice Rathbone, 'The Defence of Crete', *Hansard*, vol 372, 10 June (1941), cc63-164.

40. *The Cornish Guardian*, 12 June 1941.

41. Beatrice Rathbone, 'The Defence of Crete'

42. *Ibid.*

43. *The New Yorker*, 21 June 1941.
44. *The Cornish Times*, 20 June 1941.
45. *The Cornish Times*, 3 October 1941.
46. *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 2003.
47. Letter to *The Cornish Times* from Beatrice Rathbone, *The Cornish Times*, 12 December 1941 (sent 4 December before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour whilst in transit to the United States).
48. *The Cornish Times*, 9 January 1942.
49. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
50. *The Cornish Times*, 16 January 1942.
51. *The Cornish Times*, 23 January 1942.
52. Speech to the United States Congress by Winston Churchill, 26 December 1941.
53. *The Cornish Times*, 23 January 1942; Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
54. *The Western Morning News*, 14 January 1942.
55. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
56. *The Western Morning News*, 24 April 1941.
57. 'Life calls on Mrs Natalie Wales Latham', *Life Magazine*, 19 May 1941.
58. *The Western Morning News*, 28 February 1942.
59. *The Cornish Times*, 23 January 1942.
60. Wright, *Brittle Glory*, 27.
61. Beatrice Rathbone, 'Woman Power', *Hansard*, vol 378, 5 March (1942), cc817-900.
62. Beatrice Wright, 'Women Workers (Wages)', *Hansard*, vol 381, 7 July (1942), cc632-3.
63. Letter, *The Cornish Times*, 29 May 1942.
64. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
65. Wright, *Brittle Glory*, 26.
66. *The Times*, 18 April 2003.
67. Beatrice Wright, 'Question on Perambulators', *Hansard*, vol 391, 13 July (1943), cc39-40W.
68. Beatrice Wright, 'Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1939 (Continuance)', *Hansard*, vol 391, 15 July (1943), cc425-536.
69. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*
75. Clare Luce was later to be US ambassador to Italy and Brazil in the Eisenhower administration.
76. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
77. *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 April 1941.
78. Susan Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (London, Yale University Press, 2004).
79. *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 2003.
80. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
81. *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 2003. Paul Wright was a member of Montgomery's staff, planning Operation Overlord. Wright, *A Brittle Glory*, 27.
82. By coincidence this issue of *Women's History Magazine* also carries an article in which Winant plays a key role, see Jaci Eisenberg's article, 'American women in international Geneva, 1919-1939: a prosopography'.
83. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
84. Bodmin Conservatives, 6 January 1945.
85. *The Cornish Times*, 12 January 1945.
86. Bodmin Conservatives, 6 January 1945.
87. *The Cornish Times*, 12 January 1945.
88. *The Cornish Guardian*, 11 January 1945.
89. *The Cornish Times*, 12 January 1945.
90. Wright, *A Brittle Glory*, 29.
91. *Ibid.*
92. Wright Interview, IWM, 1991.
93. *The Cornish Times*, 12 January 1945, 2-3.
94. Vivien Lowndes, 'It's Not What You've Got But What You Do With It', *Gender and Social Capital*, ed. Brenda O'Neill and Elisabeth Gidengil (New York, Routledge, 2006), 233-234.
95. Wright, *A Brittle Glory*, 29.
96. After failing to gain a parliamentary seat, Paul Wright eventually joined the Foreign Office and Beatrice accompanied him in his diplomatic career around the world to Paris, The Hague and even to the United Nations, where he worked with another member of the Foot dynasty, Hugh Foot. Later in his career Paul Wright served as British ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Lebanon. Her son, John Rathbone, known as Tim, was Conservative MP for Lewes from February 1974 to 1997.

## Remember the WHN in your Will

**D**o please consider leaving a gift to the Women's History Network in your will. Many people who give to charities also choose to leave something in their wills to a particular cause. Not only is this a fitting way to ensure that your commitment to the WHN continues in the longer term, legacies often constitute a very important income stream for smaller charities, passing on some excellent tax advantages not only for us, but also for you! Leaving a legacy to the WHN, for example, could save on inheritance tax, as the value of your donation, no matter how large or small, is normally deducted from the value of your estate prior to inheritance tax being worked out. There are several forms of legacies of which a Pecuniary Legacy (a fixed sum) or Residuary Legacy (part or all of your estate once all your other gifts have been deducted) are two of the most common.

If you are interested in finding out more about how to go about naming the WHN as a beneficiary of your will please contact the HM Revenue and Customs website which has some helpful basic information [www.hmrc.gov.uk/charities/donors/legacies](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/charities/donors/legacies) or consult your own solicitor.

If you would like to discuss legacies, and the ways in which they could be deployed by the WHN, please contact our Charity representative, Sue Morgan, email [charityrep@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:charityrep@womenshistorynetwork.org)

No matter how small, your gift will make a difference.



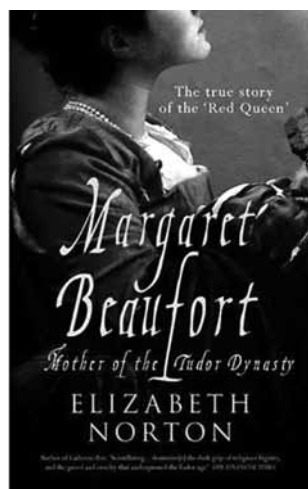
## Book Reviews

### Elizabeth Norton, *Margaret Beaufort, Mother of the Tudor Dynasty*

Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011. £9.99,  
ISBN 9781445605784 (paperback), pp. 255

Reviewed by Ruth E. Richardson

*Independent Scholar*



**M**argaret Beaufort, born 1443, was pivotal in linking the Plantagenet and Tudor dynasties. Without Margaret's persistence - and the author makes a good case for this - it is probable that her son, Henry, would not have acquired the English throne. Others, notably George, Earl of Warwick and Richard III, had superior claims. The author suggests that Margaret, aware of this, was the instigator of the final negotiations for Henry to marry Edward IV's

eldest daughter, Elizabeth of York. Henry won his throne through battle, but marriage with Elizabeth consolidated his position.

Through her father, John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, Margaret was descended from Edward III via John of Gaunt through his liaison with Katherine Swynford whom Gaunt later married. Their children were declared legitimate but a question remained whether this allowed claims to the throne. Margaret's father died before she was a year old. As one of the greatest heiresses in England, her wardship, a valuable asset for Henry VI, was granted to William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. Margaret, who was allowed to remain with her mother, was well educated for the time, becoming proficient in French. She was contracted in marriage to Suffolk's son but this was dissolved.

On Suffolk's downfall, the wardship was reassigned to the king's half-brothers. The elder of these, Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, aged twenty-four, married Margaret, aged twelve. Edmund died before their son was born the following year. A difficult birth, combined with her small stature, nearly proved fatal and left Margaret unable to bear more children. Nevertheless, her proximity to the throne and her wealth still made her a desirable match and she was married a third time to Henry Stafford, son of the Duke of Buckingham, and yet again to Thomas Lord Stanley, later Earl of Derby. Throughout her marriages and subsequent times of widowhood Margaret continued to use her title Countess of Richmond. It allowed her to sign her name *Margaret R*, which could be mistaken for signifying that she was queen, but perhaps that was her intention! She certainly passed her claim to the throne to her son and she worked tirelessly to achieve his succession, managing to negotiate the dire pitfalls of the politics of the time.

Margaret outlived her son who died on 21 April 1509. As Henry VIII was two months short of his legal majority, Margaret, as the only adult member of the immediate royal family living in England acted as Regent for the interim. She was her son's executor and arranged his funeral. She selected the members of her grandson's first Council, ensuring it was headed by churchmen and was balanced between scholars and soldiers. She lived to see Henry VIII's first marriage and attended his coronation. Margaret died, aged sixty-six years, on 29 June, the day after Henry's eighteenth birthday. She had taken a full part in the life of the new royal family and played a significant role in the lives of her grandchildren. In particular, she had made known her views concerning a too-early marriage for her eldest grand-daughter, suggesting she retained painful memories of the early consummation of her second marriage.

Although Margaret was known to be acquisitive, she also had a reputation for piety. Constant kneeling caused her great pain in later life and she wore penitential hair shirts and girdles under her clothes. After years of marriage, Margaret, with the permission of her fourth husband, took a vow of chastity, though she and Stanley seem to have remained on good terms. She used some of her wealth for charitable works and was a patroness of learning. This included the founding of lectureships in theology at both Oxford and Cambridge. She trusted, and was influenced by, (Saint) John Fisher. As a result, she favoured Cambridge, founding Christ's College and facilitating the foundation of St. John's College.

Elizabeth Norton has written a very readable and interesting biography that brings clarity to the convoluted politics of the period. Of necessity, she focuses on the main story, as relationships were so intertwined that anything else would have become a real complication. One problem with this book is the arrangement of the footnotes. These are very difficult to use as they are, unfortunately, placed in continuous paragraphs. Conversely, the list of illustrations, which has additional notes, actually functions as footnotes. The book has an extensive bibliography and a reasonably full index though, again unfortunately, it is separated from the rest of the book by advertisements. This makes for a curious format. The book also has three family trees, which would have been more helpful if the print was larger and dates had been added to the names. The extensive quotations would have benefited by transcription into modern English. However, two interesting points do arise from having original spellings. Firstly, Edward IV's daughter, named 'Cecill' or 'Cecyll' has her name modernised to Cecily, but perhaps her name really was Cecille and, secondly, the spelling of Margaret's name as 'Margareyte' may suggest it was actually pronounced as Marguerite. Some fascinating detail is included, for example, the ironic fact that Henry VIII was considered as a future Archbishop of Canterbury if his older brother had lived. No wonder he thought himself an expert in theology.

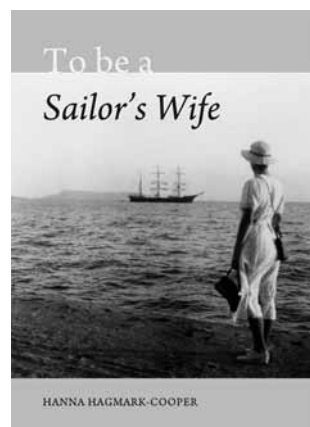


## Hanna Hagmark-Cooper, *To be a Sailor's Wife*

Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. £34.99, ISBN 978-1-4438-3642-5 (hardback), pp. vi + 149, 2 appendices, no index. B & W photographs, charts.

Reviewed by Jo Stanley

Freelance author/Lancaster University Centre for Mobilities Research



Of all the workers whose occupations impact on their partners, seafarers are among those who have the most effect on their loved ones at home. Above all, absence is a constant presence. Intimate connection is switched, on and off.

This book implicitly raises productive questions such as 'How is seafaring similar/dissimilar to such other careers in its impact

on spouses?' and 'would men behave as wives do, if it was the *women* who went away to sea and men were the principal carer?'

Being married to a maritime worker is like being the partner of someone constantly touring (such as a musician or international aid worker), or someone working away on oil rigs for most of the year. In seafarers' cases the job has two major impacts on the men – the way they identify with their profession and their lack of available friends outside it – which have knock-on effects on partners. Women are also the masters and fathers of the house, but only temporarily and partially; their independence is contingent. Seafaring men's wives are 'single' as well as married. And those in ports live on the borderlands; that marginal physical space with marked emotional and social meanings, neither quite land nor quite sea.

Seafarers wives 'careers' as partners and co-parents have not been much studied in English-language texts (apart from key works by Pat Ayers, Lisa Norling, and Michelle Thomas). Therefore, Hanna Hagmark-Cooper's research into women married to seafarers in the Åland islands in the Baltic sea off Finland is a useful addition to this field, and very welcome for its clarity, straightforwardness and firm organisation.

In these densely-packed pages she draws attention to the three main *foci*: the duality of family life which means that time is divided into 'he's home' versus 'he's away at sea, so now we live differently'; the symbolic status of such wives (as independent manager and pitiable semi-widow); and the relationship between discourse and reconstruction, meaning the way the women represented their views for the author, through the limitations of common discursive positions.

Hagmark-Cooper's interviewees were grouped into three different vintages, which enabled her to

compare traditional roles with the choices made by modern wives. Older women (born 1912-35) reveal how much technological improvements in communications have changed lives. Nowadays (those born 1948-69) speak to partners every day by text and email. This makes somewhat irrelevant the old mutually-supportive communities of other wives in formerly patriarchal coastal areas.

The book is fascinating because of the author's extremely incisive interpretations. But sometimes it seemed as if she was trying to extrapolate highly sophisticated observations from material that was limited because her informants had mainly responded in writing to questionnaires; only a percentage had met her. If the author had used oral history methods throughout then the intimacy would surely have encouraged informants to give the more nuanced replies she clearly sought.

Hagmark-Cooper argues that spring, summer, autumn and winter are the four symbolic periods in a seafarer's wife's life. Spring is about the awakening, preparations for his arrival home; summer represents a time of togetherness, with change, readjustment and conflict; autumn is when he departs – and women's response to his imminent leaving, as well as the farewell, is the focus here; while winter in such a wife's life is the period of longing, worrying, communicating and getting support in her man's absence.

Using such seasonal symbolism is striking and useful. But such a stark organising principle may have inhibited the author's ability to fully allow for contradictions and ambiguities, the telling mis-matches and a more complex view of marriages as sometimes happy/sometimes tricky. The seasonal model does tend to imply a rather simplistically positive view of partnerships, although Hagmark-Cooper does show that some wives did not see men's return as heralding a pleasant summer. Seemingly for them it was more like a challenging winter, a time of repression and undermined autonomy, which required negotiation (as did men's retirement).

For me *To be a Sailor's Wife* is at its most successful in the second section. Here is where the author discusses the informants' preoccupations and her own sophisticated responses to that. She tackles the very interesting question of how the seafarers' partners reconstructed their story with tools (discourses) that were reductive rather than enabling. A key example of this is 'Independence', a stereotypical ideal that does not sufficiently take into account the difficulties of sole parenting and financial stress.

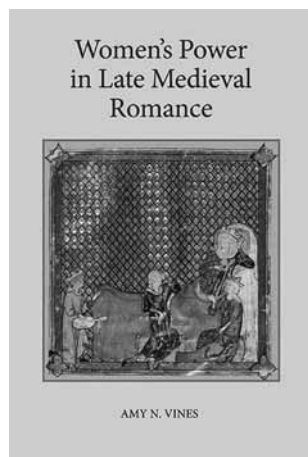
Though slender (given its high price) and not produced by a major publisher, this work will become a classic in the newly-popular study of sailor-towns as interfaces, and in the growing field of New Maritime historiography with its attention to gender, subjectivity and representation.

Hopefully it will also inspire comparative work, for example between these Åland Islanders and wives of Japanese whaling men or indeed the at-home Filipino husbands of wives working in the hotel side of cruise ships. Henry Trotter (2008) has done interesting work on

South African waterfront sex-industry workers who meet these seafaring men at the far side of their voyages. An exploration of the two groups of women's differing places in some seafarers' lives would be an intriguing project.

### Amy N. Vines, *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*

Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2011. £52.25, ISBN 978-1-84384-275-0 (hardback), pp. xi + 169  
Reviewed by Ruth E. Richardson  
*Independent Scholar*



Although this intriguing, densely argued book is deceptively short, time is needed to encompass the ideas discussed. Its premise is that previous studies concerning medieval women, and indeed men, have concentrated almost entirely on factual evidence arising from historical records which include wills, book inventories and dedications, and marginal notes made in manuscripts. Conversely, this book

examines 'what medieval romances convey about the possibilities for female social and cultural influence in the Middle Ages'. The author seeks to re-assess the influence, primarily over men, accorded to female characters in these romances. She 'considers how female characters functioned as models of cultural, intellectual, and social authority in medieval literary texts'. This is no small remit.

In the comprehensive 'Introduction' the author explains her intentions, setting out reasons for them. She concentrates on English texts revised in the 14th-15th centuries. These revisions demonstrate what was considered important in this period by what was retained, what was changed, how it was changed and what was omitted from earlier versions. She addresses who actually read these romances, giving an example of a text William Caxton first produced in French for Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII. She notes that Caxton subsequently translated it into English, which Margaret did not need for herself as she was proficient in French. Therefore, the likeliest explanation is that Margaret, who supported printing, wanted this book to be more widely read in England. The author discusses the probability that ladies such as Margaret, acting as they did in the context of a patriarchal system, saw written texts as part of a socially acceptable patronage.

The four chapters examine different mediaeval texts. Chapter One concentrates on the Corpus Christi Manuscript of *Troilus and Criseyde*. This version of Geoffrey Chaucer's story is the only one of sixteen surviving versions that omits Troilus' dream and his ensuing indictment of Criseyde's character. Examination

of the manuscript shows that here it was intentionally excluded and this makes Criseyde a more sympathetic character. The author postulates that Cassandra in the story is not so much a psychic as simply well-read, demonstrating how women could achieve an intellectual level through reading. This chapter has three black-and-white illustrations. Of these the reproduction of the frontispiece of the manuscript is extremely poor. Although discussed in the text, the picture is useless, which is a pity as this would have been clear if produced in colour.

The following chapters discuss further aspects of the methods women could use to hold power. Chapter Two looks at John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes*. Here Cleopes' knowledge of herbal sciences aids the success of the knight. Her Christian conversion does nothing to impair her intellectual ability and this, it is argued, appealed to the patrons of the story. Chapter Three focuses on *Partonope of Blois*. In this text the heroine, Melior, 'becomes the chivalric and financial patron of her lover'. She is a queen and as such has influence, but, even so, has to use it with circumspection in a male-orientated society. It is interesting that the story was probably commissioned by a daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife, in turn, to both French and English Kings. The fourth text examined is Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*. The discussion of this further develops the theme by demonstrating the positive value of women's sponsorship and men's reactions. The admirable Conclusion succinctly summarises the discussion. The value of these texts lies in the heroines' knowledge of the sacred and secular which facilitates the extent, and depth, of their influence and patronage. The romances provided an avenue for medieval women to learn how to operate with advantage in society.

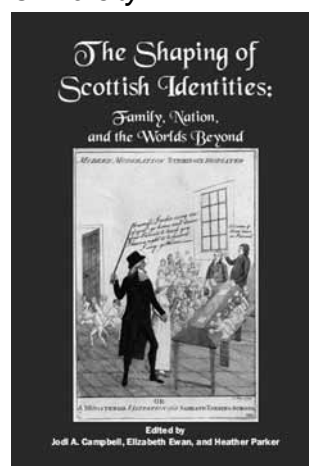
Romances, initially read for entertainment, thus became lessons in achieving a modicum of control in women's lives. The heroines may well have functioned as role models, and the author makes an excellent case for this premise. What is not emphasised is that even wealthy ladies such as Margaret Beaufort possessed, in modern terms, very small libraries. Books were read and re-read again and again. Therefore, what began on first reading as excitement for the story would eventually become so well known, and indeed loved, by the reader that the precepts in the story would be, perhaps even unconsciously, acted upon. However, only wealthy gentlewomen and ladies of the nobility had the leisure to read. Indeed, it was only this class in society who could afford to own books in the first place. Although literacy did improve in these centuries it was still only a minority who could read at all. Most women did not have the opportunity, could not read, did not have the time, or did not see the point anyway as it was not an accomplishment necessary for their lives.

This is a fascinating book full of ideas credibly supported from the chosen texts. Discussion of the patrons involved, and the literary changes they wanted, provide an immediacy that roots these papers firmly in the reality of the medieval world.

**Jodi A. Campbell, Elizabeth Ewan and Heather Parker, eds, *The Shaping of Scottish Identities: Family, Nation, and the Worlds Beyond***

Guelph: University of Guelph, Ontario, 2011. CAD\$30, ISBN 978-0-8895 5589-1 (paperback), pp. xiv + 263

Reviewed by Gillian L. Beattie-Smith  
*University of the Highlands and Islands / Open University*



**T***he Shaping of Scottish Identities: Family, Nation, and the Worlds Beyond* is the second book in the Series in Scottish Studies, published by the University of Guelph. It offers an interesting and, at times, entertaining read. Its fifteen wide-ranging chapters are organised under the three broad themes of the book's title. The contributors consider identity not only from an historical perspective of nation and kinship, but they also

reflect on its construct through literature, religion and architecture, and on its performance through difference in language, politics and education.

The selection of chapters appears to be based to a great extent on T.C. Smout's (1994) paper on Scottish identity. Several chapters refer directly to his theory of overlapping circles of identity but, interestingly, Smout's circles of home and family, locality, nationality, statehood, the Empire, religion, Gaelic, kin, clan and name and military culture, are all covered in the book's chapters. Michael Newton, for example, argues that Gaelic is a not simply a locator of Scottish identity, but is, moreover, a signifier of an international *Gàidhealtachd*, or Gaelic community, which encompasses all speakers of the language from Scotland to North America. Religion is addressed by John Sherry; the Empire by Katherine Terrell; and Daniel Travers takes an oblique look at the military. Other contributors directly address Smout's analysis. Sydney Wood's discussion on the Scottish school curriculum, for example, shares Smout's concern that knowledge of Scottish history has been confined to popular, partisan ideas of heritage, which lay limiting boundaries to a perspective of Scottish historical identity. The chapters sit well together and suggest a development of ideas such as those illustrated by the juxtaposition of Graham Chernoff's chapter on Edinburgh's Tron Kirk as an icon of identity, with Giovanna Guidicini's discussion of its pageantry, performance and display.

Although an independent Scotland has long been argued, Smout's paper does not reflect contemporary debates on Scottish identity in a Scotland independent of Britain. It was, furthermore, written several years prior to the establishment of the Scottish parliament. Yet in spite of the book's contextuality in Smout's eighteen-year-old

paper, its chapters offer topics relevant to Scottish political debate. Kenneth Baxter's sound argument on the strength of Scottish women in the British parliament; Michelle Ann Smith's analysis of a sixteenth-century female gendered Scotland to discuss Scottish agency and weakness in its encounters with England; and Katherine Terrell's chapter on Edward I's 'imperialist ambitions' (p.80) for Scotland, all offer perspectives which will contribute to upcoming debates, both reasoned and emotive, surrounding the vote for Scottish independence.

The breadth of topics and brevity of the chapters make it easy reading and it offers introductions to ideas on how identity might be created. However, the brevity also means that there are some arguments which are based on generalisations and non-specifics. For example, the word 'elite' is used extensively throughout as both an adjective and a noun to describe a social group which is never clearly defined. It is used to encompass Highland landowners, the professional classes, aristocracy and even named individuals, such as Boswell, both in the introduction and by contributors (such as Katie Louise McCullough, in her discussion of the Highland Society, and Katie Barclay, in her examination of sexual practices). Barclay refers to 'Elite men, whose behaviour signified the character of the nation' (p.34) and McCullough to 'a British identity ... constructed by Scottish elites' (p.205). To classify the diversity of Scottish society over six centuries in the singular word, 'elite', in a text which aims to examine the plurality of Scottish identities, was a shorthand too far for me. Nonetheless, Barclay's research on sexual practices was both interesting and entertaining. Her quotation of Isobell Anderson's description of 'a lusty loom' which was 'a braw pennyworth for a woman' (p.41) still raises a smile, and McCullough's discussion of the church's degrees of kinship cast light, not only on the grounds for marriage, but also for annulments and divorce.

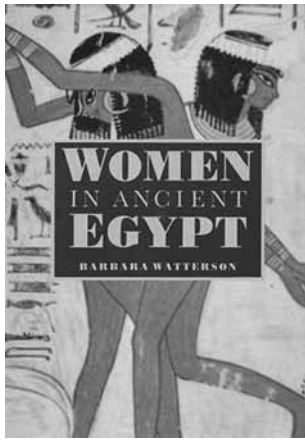
The research scholar is unlikely to find in the book much that is challenging, but the contributors' chapters provide a refreshing consideration of the creation and contexts of Scottish identities. It is a good read.

**Barbara Watterson, *Women in Ancient Egypt***

Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011. £18.99, ISBN 978-1-4456-0494-7 (paperback), pp. 157  
Reviewed by Jane Draycott

*British School at Rome*

**W***omen in Ancient Egypt* is the latest title from freelance Egyptologist Barbara Watterson, an updated version of a work first published in 1994 and subsequently reprinted in 1998. It surveys a range of subjects that informed or had an impact upon the lives of women in Egypt in the Pharaonic, Hellenistic, and Roman periods (circa 3100 – 30 BCE). It consists of a short introduction that summarises the difficulties in trying to establish a comprehensive picture of women's lives in the ancient world and introduces the main literary, documentary and archaeological sources that can provide assistance, and eight chapters. Seven of these chapters focus on themes relating to the lives of women in ancient Egypt,



and the eighth examines the lives of specific prominent and historically significant women.

Chapter 1 (Ancient Egyptian Attitudes towards Women) investigates the variety of ways (both positive and negative) that women are portrayed in art and literature, and illustrates them with interesting excerpts from ancient Egyptian stories and poems. Chapter 2 (Women in Society I: Social and Legal

Position) examines female autonomy, social status and legal rights in relation to land and property ownership. Chapter 3 (Women in Society II: Female Occupations and Professions) assesses the ways in which it was possible for a woman to make a living, such as through the production of textiles, midwifery and wet-nursing, and through religious roles such as priesthoods, leading mourning rituals, dancing, and making music. Chapter 4 (Love and Marriage) surveys the portrayal of romantic love in poetry, before turning to surviving legal documents for information on how pre-nuptial agreements, marriage settlements, maintenance, adultery and divorce were dealt with in real life. Chapter 5 (Health and Childbirth) uses ancient Egyptian medical papyri to discuss medicine and medical practice, primarily issues pertaining to women such as gynaecology, fertility, pregnancy and childbirth. Chapter 6 (Dress and Ornament) starts with the production of cloth for clothing, before turning to decorative items such as wigs, jewellery, floral garlands, hair and hairdressing, and also skincare and cosmetics. Chapter 7 (Domestic Life) investigates the ancient Egyptian household, discussing housework, laundry, food and drink preparation, and pets. Finally, Chapter 8 (Women of Power) presents a series of examples of prominent Egyptian women, starting with the four Egyptian queens regnant (Nitocris and Sobekneferu, about whom little is known, and Hatshepsut and Cleopatra, about whom a considerable amount is known), and then working downwards to the pharaoh's chief wives, minor wives and daughters.

Illustrations are provided in the form of thirty-five colour prints. Although the objects depicted are fascinating in and of themselves, it is unfortunate that many of the photographs are obviously old and have not dated well, appearing poorly shot and out of focus. Each chapter is referenced and comes with a selected bibliography, although these are likewise somewhat dated, and there is an index of ancient Egyptian words, and a general index. Considering the book's intended audience, a chronological list of historical periods, dynasties, and pharaohs would have been helpful.

The lives of women in ancient Egypt have been explored in numerous other works suitable for general readership in recent years (e.g. Gay Robins' *Women in Ancient Egypt* [1993], Joyce Tyldesley's *Daughters of Isis: Women in Ancient Egypt* [1995], Betsy Bryan's *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt* [1997], and most recently Carolyn Graves-Brown's

*Dancing for Hathor: Women in Ancient Egypt* [2010]), as have the lives of Hatshepsut and Cleopatra (e.g. Joyce Tyldesley's *Hatchepsut: The Female Pharaoh* [1998] and *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* [2009], Joann Fletcher's *Cleopatra The Great: The Woman Behind the Legend* [2009], and Stacy Schiff's *Cleopatra: A Life* [2010]). *Women in Ancient Egypt* is a serviceable addition to the collection.

### **Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay, *Sex Before Sexuality: a premodern history***

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011. £16.99, ISBN 978-0-7456-2523-2 (paperback), pp. 200.

Reviewed by Alejandro Melero

*University Carlos III, Madrid*



The 'invention' of sexuality is a topic that has become an important part of the most recent literature on gender studies. This new contribution focuses on the vast period of c.1100 to c.1800 in order to analyse the most meaningful shifts in the practices of sex in Western culture. The authors use an ambitious bibliography (from the required Foucault to more recent approaches) which allows them to present an intense dialogue with

contemporary scholars. It is quite unfortunate that there is not a section for the bibliography, as the references are only included in the 'Notes'.

The book is divided into five chapters that cover different aspects of sexuality. Before that, the introduction presents some of the most interesting topics in current debates, such as modern discourses on pornography, sex as a historical construct, or the instability of sexual identities. This is done in a clear and precise way, and many academics and students may find this section very useful, especially those who are new to Gender and Sex studies. The first chapter, 'Sin', looks at the representations of non-procreative marital sex in religious imagery. The authors argue that the sinfulness of sexual pleasure has been an important part of the discourse on sexuality and insist on the importance of religion in the construction of pre-modern ideas of sex and sexuality. They use numerous examples (from Augustine to medieval hagiographies) to question Foucault's model, which suggested that sex has traditionally been the measure of morality.

The second chapter, 'Before Heterosexuality', aims to displace any assumptions about pre-modern sexual identities. The case studies are far from being new (for instance, the case of Rykener to understand what we would today label as 'cross-dressing'), but the exposition of them is very effective nonetheless. The authors insist on the fact that the traditional focus on reproductive marriage must not make the contemporary mind assume that such models can be equalled to what we call today heterosexuality, and conclude that future studies on pre-

modern sexuality will require deeper considerations of specific cultural contexts and even the abandonment of the term 'heterosexuality'.

Chapter Three, 'Between Men', is possibly the most complete and documented. In it, the authors analyse how the existence of homosexual behaviour in the pre-modern world has misled many historians into assuming the existence of homosexual identities. The reader is invited to reflect upon the fact that people who engaged in sexual practices between men were exceptionally seen as members of a different group, and the authors provide many examples to prove it. An interesting section explores the relationship between sodomy (which was seen as 'excessive rather than perverted sex') and religion, and establishes parallels between same sex practices and heresy, so as to contextualise dissident behaviour in the pre-modern world.

The fourth chapter, 'Between Women', is equally dense and looks at some of the most relevant questions in Lesbian Studies, such as the idea of 'silence', 'friendship'

and classical imagery. The focus is still the same: to warn against the imposition of modern lesbian identities in pre-modern texts, and the authors take into account the specificities of sex between women and female homoeroticism. They argue that desire between women must not remain in a marginal position.

Chapter Five is called 'Before Pornography' and analyses how the representation of explicit sex was more often than not entangled with other discourses such as political, medical or anti-religious drawings and writing. This is an invitation to reconsider the potential effects of such representations, which were not necessarily aimed at the incitement of arousal. The question 'is this pornographic?' has been persistent in Porn Studies, and the study of pre-modern representations of explicit sex is indeed a good starting point for these debates, as this chapter proves. Finally, as a bonus, there is an Epilogue called 'Sex at Sea?', which looks at sexual behaviour in the missionary world, and concludes that cross-cultural encounters in the colonial times are one of the best ways to understand how heterosexuality is inexplicable without including the homoerotic, which, nevertheless, is far from being a simple representation of modern homosexuality.

Overall, Phillips and Reay achieve their aim and this book works very successfully as a reference for both academics and a more popular audience. It is as an engaging and comprehensive overview into the complexities of the study of sexual behaviour, the necessity to work carefully with the appropriate vocabulary and the difficulties of thinking about sex in a historic manner.

## BOOKS RECEIVED AND CALL FOR REVIEWERS

The following titles are available for review so if you would like to review any of the titles listed below, please email [bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org). **There are also still some titles available from the list published in the Autumn 2012 issue of the Magazine.**

Julia Allen, *Swimming with Dr Johnson and Mrs Thrale: Sport, Health and Exercise in eighteenth-century England* (Lutterworth Press)

Deidre David, *Olivia Manning: A Woman at War* (Oxford University Press)

Fred Hunter, *Hacks and Dons: Teaching at the London University Journalism School 1919-1939* (Kultura Press)

Christine Lunardini, *Alice Paul: Equality for Women* (Westview Press)

Joan Mant, *Land Girls: Women's Voices from the Wartime Farm* (Amberley)

Kat Meads, *For You, Madam Lenin* (Livingston Press)

Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press)

Lori Rotskoff and Laura L. Lovett (ed), *When We Were Free to Be: Looking Back at a Children's Classic and the Difference it Made* (University of North Carolina Press)

Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth (ed), *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights* (University of Rochester Press)

Nancy C. Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* (Oxford University Press)

Marc E. Vargo, *Women of the Resistance* (McFarland)

## Women's History Magazine Back issues

Back issues of *Women's History Magazine* are available to buy for

£4.50 inc postage (UK)

£5.00 inc postage (Overseas)

Most issues are available, from Spring 2002 to the present. Discover the contents of each issue at [www.magazine.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.magazine.womenshistorynetwork.org)

Order and pay online or email [backissues@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:backissues@womenshistorynetwork.org)



## WHN Book Prize

**An annual £500 prize for a first book in women's or gender history**

The Women's History Network (UK) Book Prize is awarded for an author's first single-authored monograph that makes a significant contribution to women's history or gender history and is written in an accessible style. The book must be written in English and be published in the year prior to the award being made. To be eligible for the award, the author should be a member of the Women's History Network (UK) and be normally resident in the UK. The prize will be awarded in September 2013.

Entries (books published during 2012) should be submitted via the publisher by 31 March 2013.

For further information please contact Ann Kettle, chair of the panel of judges, Mediaeval History, School of History, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9QW  
Email: [bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org)

## Clare Evans Prize

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

In memory of Dr Clare Evans, a national prize worth £500 is offered annually for an original essay in the field of women's history or gender and history. Essays are considered by a panel of judges set up by the *Women's History Network* and the Trustees of the *Clare Evans Memorial Fund*. The winning essay will be submitted to the *Women's History Review* for possible publication.

Clare Evans was an outstanding woman who died tragically of cervical cancer on 30 November 1997, aged just 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. 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, and c) normally resident in the UK.

The article should be in English and 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.

Please send completed essays to Ann Hughes by 31 May 2013. Please also include brief biographical details (education, current job or other circumstances) and include a cover sheet with title only (not name) to facilitate anonymous judging.

Those wishing to apply for the prize should first email or write for further details to:  
Ann Hughes, School of Humanities (History),  
University of Keele, Keele, Staffs, ST5 5BG.  
Email: [a.l.hughes@keele.ac.uk](mailto:a.l.hughes@keele.ac.uk)





## Committee News

The Steering Committee met on Saturday 17 November 2012. Five new members – Maggie Andrews, Lucy Bland, Sue Bruley, Meagan Butler, Imaobong Umoren – were welcomed to the committee. Meagan and Maggie will take on the new roles of Archive Secretary and Prize Coordinator respectively, while Lucy and Imaobong volunteered to join the *Magazine* team, and will take up their roles later in the year as two existing members stand down. Imaobong will also take over as membership secretary and it is hoped to identify a new treasurer by the next meeting in February. The treasurer presented the annual budget and pointed out the importance of continuing to increase membership in view of the spiralling costs of travel and postage for the *Magazine*. Provided we stay under budget it should be possible to fund three issues of the *Magazine* this year, although the possibility of moving to an electronic magazine could be considered. There was considerable discussion of arrangements for the joint conference with IFRWH to be held in Sheffield in August 2013. The committee also heard reports on the production of publicity material for the Network, schools liaison and arrangements for the relocation of the Women's Library to LSE.

The next two meetings of the Steering Committee will take place at 11.30 in the Senate House, University of London on 9 February and 15 June 2013. Members are welcome to attend meetings of the committee and should email **convenor@womenshistorynetwork** for further details.

## Publishing in *Women's History Magazine*

*Women's History Magazine* welcomes contributions from experienced scholars and those at an earlier stage in their research careers. We aim to be inclusive and fully recognise that women's history is not only lodged in the academy. All submissions are subject to the usual peer review process.

Articles should be 3000-8000 words in length. Contributors are requested to submit articles in final form, carefully following the style guidelines available at:

**[www.womenshistorynetwork.org/  
whnmagazine/authorguide.html](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org/whnmagazine/authorguide.html)**

Please email your submission, as a word attachment, to the editors at

**editor@womenshistorynetwork.org**





# What is the Women's History Network?

The WHN was founded in July 1991. It is a national charity 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	£15*	Overseas minimum	£40
Low income (*under £20,000 pa)	£25*	UK Institutions	£45
High income	£40*	Institutions overseas	£55
Life Membership	£350		

\* £5 reduction when paying by standing order.

Charity Number: 1118201. Membership application/renewal, Gift Aid Declaration and Banker's Order forms are available on the back cover or join online at [www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)

# Women's History Network Contacts

## Steering Committee Officers:

Membership, subscriptions, Imaobong Umoren:

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

or write to her at St Cross College, St Giles,  
Oxford OX1 3LZ

Finance, Gráinne Goodwin:

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

Committee Convenor, Barbara Bush:

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

Web Team:

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

WHN Book Prize, Chair, Ann Kettle:

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

UK Representative for International Federation for  
Research into Women's History, June Purvis:

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

Charity Representative, Jane Berney:

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

Newsletter Editor, Linsey Robb:

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

WHN Blog, Jocelynn A. Scutt:

[womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/](http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/)

## Magazine Team:

Editors: Katie Barclay, Sue Hawkins, Ann Kettle, Anne  
Logan, Emma Robertson, Kate Murphy, Lucy Bland,

Imaobong Umoren:

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

For Magazine submissions, steering committee and peer  
review:

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

For book reviews: Anne Logan:

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

or send books to her at University of Kent, Gillingham  
Building, Chatham Maritime, Kent, ME4 4AG

For magazine back issues and queries please email:

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

*You may now join the WHN online – just go to  
**www.womenshistorynetwork.org** and follow the instructions.  
Payments, standing-order mandates and Gift-Aid declarations can all be  
accessed online as well – see panel on page 11 for further details*

## 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: *Imaobong Umoren, St Cross College,  
St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LZ*

Email: [membership@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:membership@womenshistorynetwork.org)

---

## 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.

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.

---

### 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 \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_, and annually thereafter, on the same date, the sum of

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

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