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**Progress and patterns in the election of women
as councillors, 1918 – 1938**

Anne Baldwin

19 March 2012

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of requirements of a PhD, History,
awarded by the University of Huddersfield.**

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Abstract

This work has three core aims; to quantify the extent to which women stood as council candidates and were elected between 1918 and 1938; to assess the influences on the backgrounds of women seeking election in that period; and to examine a sample of women elected to determine how far they retained separate spheres reflecting gendered interests or were able to join male colleagues in wider council roles. The findings show patchy progress with far slower growth on county councils than in London and only one or two women councillors present at any one time on some important councils. Council culture and political geography were causes of low representation. Women increasingly needed access to political parties to be candidates, but the presence of a political battleground and the nature of local social leadership were equally important. London women needed to be politically driven from the outset whereas some towns elected women recognised as community leaders rather than politicians. Women councillors had experience of suffrage activism, voluntary work, as Poor Law guardians and of committee co-option. They could remain in office for decades. Women were concentrated on committees of domestic interest, but their activities changed as state intervention increasingly influenced family life. By addressing topics such as birth control, the special interest of women councillors became a very public discussion of a previously private domestic matter. Women also took on public roles as committee chairman or mayors. This blurring between public and private spheres is of relevance to wider discussion about women's activism as they gained in citizenship. Despite slow progress over 1,400 women contributed as councillors in this period with a very practical style and determined tenacity. This overview of their distribution, origins and activities shows an uneven spread of women councillors with divided political views, but unity in seeking improvement in family life.

Acknowledgements

Compiling this work has involved travel to archives and local history collections throughout England and Wales. The list of local staff who contributed in various ways is therefore far too long to publish. I am grateful to the Royal Historical Society for funding the travel for investigating county councils which necessitated overnight stays. My husband also found his holiday hijacked as we visited a series of towns and cities in the West of England and in Wales. He has patiently lived with my growing band of women and piles of press cuttings for years. The British Library and Newspaper Library have been invaluable, and I was grateful to the Guildhall Library who found a complete set of the *Municipal Yearbook* when the British Library stock was packaged away for a move. London Metropolitan Archives proved a very welcoming and useful venue. The work would not have happened without the support, encouragement and challenge of my supervisors Keith Laybourn and Paul Ward at the University of Huddersfield and the introduction of a bursary scheme covering fees at that institution. Discovering the Women's History Network added an essential dimension. Opportunities to share some of the findings through conference papers were invaluable and I am grateful to all those who create those openings.

I am also grateful to Patricia Hollis and the little band of women councillors and former councillors who agreed to my suggestion to revive the Women's Local Government Society back in 2007, starting me off on this path. Several of them are still working to encourage more women councillors in the future. They may learn a little from the past.

Table of contents

Chapter one: Developing a research framework.....	9
Aims and objectives.....	11
Scoping the research.....	15
Sources and methods.....	19
Structure.....	28
Chapter two: Women councillors and their place: the wider context.....	33
Identifying women councillors.....	34
The evolution of twentieth century Local Government.....	42
Local Government and political change.....	60
Women and a changing world.....	78
Chapter three: Making women count: quantifying women councillors.....	103
Women and the politics of London government.....	105
Women and the London County Council.....	117
County Women.....	121
Women in towns and cities.....	134
Comparing council types.....	140
Chapter four: Stalwarts, sisters, social workers: women's routes to election.....	145
Stalwarts.....	147
Conservative ladies of London.....	148
London Labour women.....	155
Common themes in London candidates.....	162
Provincial Labour Pioneers.....	165
Town and gown.....	171
Working together as women.....	174
Women in the North-West.....	180
The South coast.....	190

County Boroughs: an overview.....	193
The county elite.....	194
The London fringe.....	198
Northern county variety.....	204
County Council trends.....	210
Elected women in Wales.....	212
Common causes in the election of women.....	217
Chapter five: Private lives and public policy: revisiting separate spheres.....	227
Education.....	233
Housing and Town Planning.....	248
Maternity and Child Welfare.....	254
Recognition and reward: The promotion of women.....	263
Redefining citizenship.....	276
Conclusion.....	283
Bibliography.....	299
<u>Appendices</u>	
Appendix One: Councils covered by the study	311
Appendix Two: Selected pen portraits.....	313
Appendix Three: Sample data, selected London Boroughs	321
Appendix Four: Women County Councillors.....	329
Appendix Five: LCC; women councillors and candidates.....	337
<u>Illustrations</u>	
Figure One: Election material appealed to women as voters.....	97
Figure Two: 1922-1925 Bermondsey Council Labour Party.....	158
Figure Three: The distribution of county boroughs England and Wales.....	181
Figure Four: Campaigning for Mrs Royston	206
Figure Five: Women Mayors meet in Liverpool	274

List of tables

Table One: London-wide summary, all candidates.....	109
Table Two: Women elected in sample years, all London boroughs.....	112
Table Three: London borough elections, summary by political party.....	116
Table Four: LCC elections and the representation of women.....	120
Table Five: Verifying county data.....	122
Table Six: The impact of 1919 elections on county councils (England and Wales).....	124
Table Seven: Representation of women on English county councils.....	129
Table Eight: Representation of women on Welsh county councils.....	133
Table Nine: Sample from first tranche of post-war county borough elections.....	135
Table Ten: Numbers of women elected to town and city councils ranked by size.....	139
Table Eleven: Estimates of individual women candidates, 1919-1938...141	
Table Twelve: Women councillors, comparative estimates for selected years.....	142
Table Thirteen: Extracts of ward level data with all-women opposition teams	164
Table Fourteen: Women Mayors (London and County Boroughs)	270

Abbreviations

CLG	Communities and Local Government (Government department of).
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LCC	London County Council
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGB	Local Government Board (Government Office)
LGC	Local Government Chronicle
LMS	London Municipal Society
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
MR	Municipal Reform Party
NCW	National Council of Women
NEC	National Executive Committee
RA's	Ratepayers Associations
RDC	Rural District Council
SJC	Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations.
UDC	Urban District Council
WCA	Women Citizens' Associations
WLF	Women's Liberal Federation
WLL	Women's Labour League
WLGS	Women's Local Government Society
WVS	Women's Voluntary service

Chapter one: Developing a research framework

What fascinated me was the discovery that apparently academic and impersonal resolutions passed in a county council were daily revolutionising the lives of those men and women who they affected. The complex tangle of motives prompting public decisions, the unforeseen consequences of their enactment on private lives seems to me to be part of the unseen pattern of the English landscape.

Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* (London, Collins 1940), p.v

Women emerged from the Great War with new rights and responsibilities. That included enabling a greater number of women to contribute to those public decisions of councils that influenced the pattern of private lives. Members of the Portsmouth Women Citizens' Association (WCA) were triumphant when their candidate, Miss Kate Edmonds, won a council by-election in 1918. Portsmouth was the first town to hold a municipal election based on the new register of electors. Parliament was just about to dissolve in preparation for the December general election which included women over thirty amongst the newly enfranchised electorate. The by-election success was attributed to the systematic canvassing carried out by supporters of the WCA. It was a short lived victory, for Miss Edmonds lost her seat in 1920.¹

¹ The by-election was in St. Simon's ward, held on 17 November 1918 and Kate Edmonds had a majority of more than 600. Sarah Peacock, *Votes for Women: the Women's Fight in Portsmouth* (The Portsmouth Papers no 39, City of Portsmouth 1983), p.21. Portsmouth Records office, National Women Citizens' Association, our history (X/1055A/6/1) and Portsmouth WCA reports, 1920 (X/1055A/3/1).

By 1930 when Manchester and Salford WCA met for dinner they were able to celebrate a council committee chairman and deputy chairman in their midst as well as around ten women councillors. Councillor Mrs Shena Simon attributed their success to sixteen years of their local organisation. She considered male councillors were no longer prejudiced against women members, but also predicted that 'in another sixteen years women councillors would be as common as men'.² The reality of progress in electing women as local councillors didn't meet that optimism.

There are clues as to why this was not the case hidden in the two stories above. Miss Edmonds owed her success to the work of the WCA, but local government candidates increasingly stood under explicit political labels. The second woman on Portsmouth council was also supported by an active local organisation of women. Mrs Sarah Holmes was a founder of the Southsea Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG). Like her predecessor, she too completed less than one full term and died in office in 1921.³ It was 1929 before another woman was elected to Portsmouth council and numbers then remained limited throughout the 1930s.

Shena Simon was able to toast the success of gaining committee chairmanships in Manchester, but these were invariably concentrated on committees where it was recognised women had a right to a special voice, not necessarily an equal one. The steady progress being made in Manchester was not matched in neighbouring Salford either.⁴ The significant difference in progress between the adjacent and seemingly similar boroughs of Manchester and Salford reflected national variety in electing women as councillors.

² *Manchester Guardian*, 4 February 1930.

³ *Hampshire Telegraph*, 17 June 1921. Peacock, *Votes for Women*: p.21. G. Ashworth, *Portsmouth's Political Patterns 1885-1945* (The Portsmouth Papers no 24, City of Portsmouth 1976), p.19.

⁴ See table ten (p.139).

Aims and objectives

Understanding more about that diversity in electing women to councils in England and Wales and the patterns of progress in representation is the core objective of this work. The catalyst it takes as a starting point is legislative change, but the development it examines is mediated by politics and political organisation, social and economic geography, cultures and personalities. Examining the progress women councillors made at a time of considerable political and social change illuminates their hidden history but can also shed light more generally on how change is achieved. The patterns revealed can perhaps best be described as those of a kaleidoscope, where interlocking and overlapping factors determine where concentrations of representation are. No one factor emerges as the dominant driver of change. Cultural continuities in expectations about who should govern emerge as influencing the slow pace of change. As the activities of local government influenced daily life, the contribution made by women councillors assist understanding of what women mean by equality and how that should be achieved.

The vision of equal representation Shena Simon predicted is still not reality and women remain under-represented in local decision making. The Councillors Commission investigated this topic in 2007, charged with assisting a more diverse range of people to become councillors - 'encouraging able, qualified and representative people to come forward'.⁵ Their findings noted that 'although the proportion of female councillors has doubled over the past 40 years, the increases over the last decade have been very small and women still comprise only 29.3 per

⁵ Councillors Commission, *Representing the Future, the report of the Councillors Commission* (Communities and Local Government, December 2007) (downloaded 10 May 2010), p.7.

cent of the total even though women form the majority – 52 per cent – of the population'.⁶

The report was timely, for a century beforehand the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS) published a plea in *The Times*. It comprised a copy of a letter to Prime Minister Campbell-Bannerman asking for speedy introduction of legislation to allow women to stand as council candidates.⁷ Persistent lobbying by this group of women resulted in the 1907 Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act. That legislation legitimised women candidates on county councils, county boroughs and the London metropolitan boroughs.

This thesis sets out to explore the impact of the 1907 Qualification of Women Act by looking at the numbers, location and type of women who sought election to those councils after the Great War and examining their activities once elected. It starts with three aims: to quantify the extent to which women stood as council candidates and were elected between 1918 and 1938; to assess the influences on the backgrounds of women coming forward for election in that period; and to examine a sample of elected women candidates to determine how far they retained separate spheres reflecting gendered interests or were able to join male colleagues in wider council roles.

The struggle for the 1907 legislation and the achievements of women who were elected to a variety of local offices prior to 1914 is well documented by Patricia Hollis in *Ladies Elect* (1987) which covers the years between 1865 and 1914. The aims set out above develop some of her themes and project them

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13. See also the latest research on this topic which finds that whilst 31 per cent of councillors are women, 14 per cent of council leaders are women and 15 per cent of elected mayors are women. Women are a little better represented within council cabinets or executives where they make up 26 per cent of all portfolio holders, but with variations within that. Women are more likely to hold the Community, education or health portfolios. Planning (3%) Finance (4%) and Economic Development (7%) are the cabinet roles least likely to be held by women. Nan Sloane, *Unintended Consequences: the impact of the Governments legislative programme on women in public roles* (Centre for Women Democracy supported by the Feminist Review Trust, July 2011), p.25.

⁷ *The Times*, 1 February 1907.

forward. Hollis found that by the time local elections were suspended as a result of the outbreak of war in 1914 there were just 48 women elected to the range of councils covered by this study. Her conclusions suggest the numerical representation grew after the Great War, but there is little detail.⁸ Measuring progress by estimating the levels of representation on different types of council will help to fill that gap in research. Hollis accepts that the type of council initially influenced the fortunes of women, who found it far harder to be elected to the more politicised and powerful county boroughs than had been the case on urban and rural district councils, or the single issue school board.⁹ In projecting forward, the impact of the Great War is important in understanding how women candidates fared, but the culture of inter-war local government is also an essential component.

As implied in the title *Ladies Elect* includes a mass of biographic detail that helps place the role of women councillors in a wider context. There are details, for example, of the few women who gained council seats in 1907 in the first round of elections after the enabling legislation. Miss Edith Sutton in Reading was a former co-opted member and part of a family of civic worthies, whilst Mrs Elizabeth Woodward was 'popular as a hotel owner because she had erected public halls when the local council would not'.¹⁰ The conclusions Hollis reaches about the valuable contributions women made to local government life explore the concept of separate spheres, in which women occupy the private domestic sphere of family life, leaving the organisation of the wider public world to men. Wider interpretations of this concept by historians are explored in more depth in chapter two, but in *Ladies Elect* discussion examines the ways in which women councillors described their own roles and focused on those aspects of council activity that were

⁸ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1987), p.478. In addition Appendix C, p.487 includes a summary of the position in major cities including 1920 and 1930.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.398.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.396.

essentially domestic in nature. Detailed accounts portray the extent to which the accepted special interests of women in areas such as education and welfare were permeating wider aspects of council work.¹¹ Hollis concludes that women chose to utilise the language of separate spheres in a supportive way and that “Ladies elect’ stood as women for women, stressing that they had abilities that were in no way inferior to men’s and had aptitudes that men had not’.¹² Those abilities stress the domestic and family roles of women, but the reference to aptitudes summarises a gendered approach to council work with women driven by compassion and immersed in the detail of implementation. Women could see the extent to which the work of councils influenced the domestic sphere through town planning and regulating the quality of baby milk as well as through schools and hospitals. They recognised their special skills were needed to shape that developing public influence on the private domestic sphere.

My familiarity with the detail of *Ladies Elect* stemmed from working with contemporary women councillors celebrating the anniversary of the 1907 legislation and reviving the WLGS. Some councils investigated their own history as part of those celebrations to trace pioneering women. Invariably their examples pointed to one key individual, to a date in the 1920s when women first joined the council and to education or welfare as the main area of interest of those pioneers.¹³ Exploring both the spread of women councillors and their activity in the changing and challenging years after the Great War became a personal quest.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.422 – 460.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.463.

¹³ See for example coverage issued by West Sussex Council
<http://webserver01.westsussex.gov.uk/wsc/Assistant%20Chief%20Exec/Communications/Press%20Releases.nsf/0/66fe625f609443488025725f004fb1e1?OpenDocument> .

Scoping the research

Writing about local government within academic historical study is sparse. In 1956 Margaret Cole completed her personal account of life on the London County Council (LCC) and lamented that apart from individual accounts of various cities she gained more information of a similar kind from fiction than she did from the pens of historians.¹⁴ That situation has not changed immensely – although the likelihood of fictional accounts of local government life emerging is even less. That lack of writing is exacerbated by a lack of centrally collected local election statistics.

Discussion on the current extent of women's local representation draws on some retrospective statistical information. One example of this is the work of Bochel and Bochel who look at the impact on women of new council structures introduced by Labour in 2000. Their summary of other research suggests an interest in the topic dating from the 1960s. Bochel and Bochel suggest research stems from more general interest in councillor recruitment and retention rather than an interest in gender *per se*.¹⁵ Data collection and analysis does seem to emerge around the time of planning for local government reorganisation in 1974 and the nature of interest in women in society around that period will have had some influence on decisions to count women councillors. Stephen Bristow, writing in 1980, quotes a survey undertaken for the Maud Committee reporting in 1964 which found that about 12 per cent of all councillors were women. Bristow then

¹⁴ Margaret Cole, *Servant of the County* (London, Dobson Books Ltd., 1956), p.iii.

¹⁵ Catherine Bochel and Hugh M Bochel, 'Modernisation or Backward Step – Women Councillors and New Decision-Making structures in Local Government', *Local Government Studies* (2004 30;1), pp.36-50. See also Haberis, A. & Prendergrast, J. 'Research Report 1. Incentives and Barriers to Becoming and Remaining a Councillor: A Review of the UK Literature' (London: CLG, 2007).

examines data for 1974 and 1977 which show women's membership at 15.8 per cent and 17.3 per cent respectively.¹⁶

The initial intention in this thesis was to collect and analyse data on representation of women for the period between the renewal of local government elections in 1919 and the re-organisation of local government in 1974. It became clear at an early stage that comparable data would be difficult to trace for the whole of that time period and so the research covers a more limited timespan.¹⁷ Focusing on 1918 to 1938 gives a convenient measuring point, ending as it does roughly thirty years after the 1907 Qualification of Women Act entitled women to stand, as well as being shaped and framed by two wars and the consequent suspension of local elections.¹⁸ Although the statistical work is limited to looking at those women elected between 1918 and 1938, use of biographic case study material does reflect the fact that some of those individuals may have been elected prior to 1914 or co-opted to fill casual vacancies during the Great War, and conversely some of the individuals served well into the 1940s and beyond. The achievements of women councillors elected after 1938 remain an area to be explored. Estimates of the levels of their representation by the Royal Commission of 1964 show some limited interest in their presence, but interest in their activities

¹⁶ Stephen L Bristow, 'Women Councillors – An explanation of the under-representation of women in Local Government'. *Local Government Studies* (1980 vol. 6 part 3) pp.73-90. The research report of the Maud committee did not distinguish between types of authorities or areas in looking at the representation of women. See 1968-69 Cmnd. 4040-11 'Royal Commission on Local Government in England 1966-1969.' Chairman: the Rt. Hon. Lord Redcliffe-Maud. Volume III. Research appendices pp. 133 – 134.

¹⁷ Of the two main data sources discussed later, the Davies and Morley data only exists for 1919-1939 and does not resume after 1945. Although Rallings and Thrasher have more election data for post 1945 elections with gender identified it still does not form a complete set for all three types of council and there is no information with gender labels for county councils. The inaccuracies identified with the Rallings and Thrasher data for London suggest reliance on this as the only source over a wider area without any localised verification would be unwise.

¹⁸ The 'Elections and Registration Act' received Royal Assent on 29 July 1915 and postponed all elections for councillors and Poor Law guardians, extending the term of office of those who would have faced elections by a year. Casual vacancies were to be filled by co-option. This legislation was renewed on an annual basis until it was thought possible to compile the register of electors. Similar legislation was introduced in November 1939 – The 'Local elections and register of electors (temporary provisions) Act'. This was also renewed in subsequent years with resumption forming part of the Representation of the People Act, 15 February 1945.

only really resumes with the creation of women's committees at a much later stage.¹⁹

This thesis looks at England and Wales and to women elected to councils where membership was enabled by the 1907 Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act.²⁰ Appendix one lists the councils covered by this study. The extent of research needed was informed by my MA dissertation which examined women's representation in one county council (Derbyshire), one county borough (Huddersfield) and one London borough (Kensington). The considerable variety in patterns of representation unearthed by this sample study helped inform the creation of a hypothesis, suggesting as it did that London boroughs did have more sophisticated and advanced patterns of female representation than other areas.²¹ The hypothesis is that whilst changes to the franchise and the growth of party politics in local elections influenced the range of women seeking local office, cultural and geographic factors and the type of council had far more influence on the levels of success. The untested assumption at this stage was that even though the number of women who were able to seek election increased significantly from 1919 onwards there was still only a small number elected. What was far from clear at this stage was how far women had actually sought election.

Developing a hypothesis led to a series of supplementary questions. First, the influence of party politics on candidates coming forward and those elected raises questions about whether women fared better in some political arenas than others. Alongside this is discussion about the continued relevance of women-only

¹⁹ Wendy Stokes, 'Feminist Democracy: The Case for Women's Committee's' in *Contemporary Politics* (1998 4:1), pp. 23-37. This includes case study work on five women's committees and footnotes include a useful summary of other work looking at the relationship between feminism and local democracy over the preceding 30 years.

²⁰ In all the councils covered the 1907 legislation clarified women's entitlement to stand as candidates when they had previously been prevented from doing so. However that legislation did also apply to non-county boroughs which are not covered in this work.

²¹ This point is also made by Pat Thane in relation to Labour women in London, but my MA research had looked at a borough where the female representation was predominantly Conservative. Pat Thane, 'Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism' in H.L. Smith (ed.) *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*. (Amherst, Ma, University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p.140.

organisations and groups such as the WLGS. By quantifying women councillors by council type and by geography further questions are raised about how and when women candidates came forward and who was accepted by the electorate. In turn this raises questions about both council and election structure and about social class. As voting extended beyond the propertied elite, the relationship between social status and candidacy needs to be explored. Secondly, examining the backgrounds of those women who were elected in the context of women's activism raises questions about how far philanthropy and voluntarism amongst women continued to influence election candidacy and hence representative democracy. The relationship between political parties, candidates, election messages and voters are also under examination as the full impact of changes to the franchise is considered. Thirdly, the examination of the life stories of individuals and case studies of specific councils in the context of those wider studies of cultural patterns raises questions about theories of separate spheres and, given the findings of Hollis about how women found it useful to apply the language of domestic interest; how far such concepts continued to be of relevance after the Great War.²² Finally, data collection and biography from case studies assist with a new look at the degree to which women succeeded in penetrating positions of power within councils.

The starting point for the research, however, was to establish the extent of women's candidacy and success in the period. Answers to questions about the nature of women's representation and their achievements can be best appreciated in the context of this new information about just how many women became councillors and where they were concentrated.

²² Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.463.

Sources and methods

No complete source of local election data is available for the elections between 1918 and 1938. Statistical analysis is drawn initially from two collections built from primary source material such as council records and local newspapers; developed to examine trends over time and encourage comparative study. Sam Davies and Robert Morley at Liverpool John Moores University are carrying out systematic analysis of all inter-war county borough elections, but the published series is still far from complete.²³ Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher at the Local Elections Centre, Plymouth University are compiling a comprehensive database of current local election results. This has been supplemented by more limited historical information.²⁴ For the period 1919 to 1937 they do include detailed election results for London. That data is available in electronic format allowing analysis in a variety of ways. However, neither of these projects includes information on county councils for 1919 to 1937. Other than collecting individual county results from a mass of local newspapers or archive records, the only possible comparable source identified for such information is the annually produced *Municipal Yearbooks* which include listings of all councillors for most authorities.²⁵

There are some contemporaneous sources that can help verify collected data. These include archived records of the National Council of Women (NCW) and the WLGS and occasional references in *Hansard*.²⁶ Whilst the Davies and Morley data

²³ Sam Davies and Bob Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–1938: A Comparative Analysis*, vol. i Barnsley – Bournemouth, vol. ii Bradford – Carlisle, vol. iii Chesterfield – East Ham (Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999, 2000, 2006). Information extracted from these volumes and analysed in spreadsheets is usually referred to as the 'Davies and Morley data' in the text.

²⁴ Data downloaded from AHDS History's collection at <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/history/collections/index.htm> SN5319, *British Local Election Database, 1889-2003* (deposited by C.S Rallings, University of Plymouth). Referred to as 'Rallings and Thrasher data' in the text.

²⁵ Municipal Journal, *Municipal Yearbook and Public Utilities Directory* (London, Municipal Journal 1896 – present). The British Library holds a full set of the yearbooks, enabling collection of appropriate details in spreadsheets. London Guildhall library also produced a welcome full set when British Library volumes were packed up for many months for movement to Boston Spa.

²⁶ London Metropolitan Archives, (LMA) Records of the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS), minutes 1888-1925 and records of the National Council of women, Minutes 1926 - 1929 (ACC/3613).

proved to be very accurate when tested through case study, the Rallings and Thrasher data did have shortcomings acknowledged by the authors. The drawbacks of using compiled lists from *Municipal Yearbooks* is that they only include women elected, and do not give a picture of candidates to allow any examination of success rates. They also lack reference to political allegiance. Additionally both the main data sources ignore by-election results.

There are some features of local elections which need to be borne in mind when interrogating and analysing the primary data. The first is the prevalence of by-elections, and especially the round of by-elections created immediately after each local election by the promotion of some sitting councillors to aldermen. Because aldermen were selected by the new elected council, where political groupings were prominent, aldermanic elections could be used to help strengthen a narrow political majority, by promoting councillors in potentially safe seats causing a suitable by-election. Even where such tactics were not used, aldermanic by-elections could tip the balance of control on a council, and would frequently involve several by-elections in a very short space of time.²⁷ This potentially hides the election of women where regular election results are the only available source. Given that the study seeks to examine (at least in the case studies) the retention of women councillors as well as their election, lack of information about the elevation of women to the aldermanic bench may also create a false impression as to why a woman candidate did not seek re-election.

Also problematic, in some instances, is the extent to which records accurately capture the presence of a woman candidate. Initially, the election of women was sufficiently uncommon for their election to be recorded in the local press or council

²⁷ Josef Redlich, *Local Government in England*, ed. F. W. Hirst (vol. 2, London, Macmillan & co, 1903), p.18. This makes the point that unlike the borough, on the county council current aldermen do not join in the voting for the new alderman, making the county council less susceptible to tendencies of 'the majority to perpetuate itself artificially after it has lost the confidence of electors'.

minute book as a rarity. Formal protocol tended to encourage the inclusion of the title of Miss or Mrs as part of the registration of candidates.²⁸ The data collected by Rallings and Thrasher does record gender, but does not include the gendered title in published volumes and does not record marital status.²⁹ However there are some known inaccuracies in the application of gender labels to this data, perhaps inevitable given the mixed quality of source data available. Records collected from the *Municipal Yearbooks* have some inconsistencies, depending on the clerk who completed the annual return, and in some cases the preference of the women involved. Cambridgeshire, for example, frequently submitted returns to the *Municipal Yearbook* that only used first names when listing women councillors. The county borough information collected by Davies and Morley does seem to have checked and verified gender labels with a reasonable degree of accuracy including marital status, but data for other county boroughs may sometimes undercount, especially as in smaller councils *Municipal Yearbook* listings of members were more abbreviated. Newspaper articles and election result listings varied in the way they included women. Occasionally this meant reliance on less clear indications, such as the full given name of the candidate. This is also a problem with contemporary data, and statisticians collecting such material are beginning to request the collection of gender data on candidate nomination forms.

There are logical as well as practical reasons why this work focuses on three different types of council: the metropolitan London borough, the county council and the county borough, as this ensures the best possible examination of the

²⁸ As far as possible, when referring to women in the text I have followed the precedent of Cheryl Law. When first referred to women will be described by the fullest possible known names, including indicating marital status. Following references will use the description given most often in source material, which would usually include either Miss or Mrs or use of first name. Surnames are only used alone to avoid repetition within a short paragraph. See Cheryl Law *Suffrage and Power; The Women's Movement 1918 – 1928* (London, I.B. Tauris 1997), p.5.

²⁹ Alan Willis & John Woollard, *20th Century Local Election Results*, vol. 1: Election Results for the London County Council (1889 – 1961) and London Metropolitan Boroughs (1900 – 1928) (Plymouth, University of Plymouth Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, 2003).

relationship between women and welfare, given responsibility for provision of education services (and ultimately health and welfare functions) rested primarily with those councils. In addition these were the main council types where candidacy was legitimised in 1907 and where the impact of changes to the franchise in 1918 made a significant impact on the range of women who could stand as candidates.³⁰ In doing so it excludes the work on urban and rural district councils, and the parishes, where records are even harder to trace, even though their localised nature may have been attractive to women.³¹ References are made to women as Poor Law guardians, but no details are collected even though the separate role was not completely abolished until 1929. The sheer number of elected bodies and lack of centralised records makes collection of data from lower tier bodies outside London impracticable. Given the number of county boroughs was not static, the list of eighty-three included in Davies and Morley as reflecting the position in 1931 is taken as a starting point.³²

The lack of availability of any compiled election data on county council elections presented serious difficulties. Deficiencies necessitated time-consuming but valuable work extracting lists of women elected from appropriate editions of the *Municipal Yearbook*. This enabled a list of all women county councillors for the inter-war years to be drafted for the first time.³³

³⁰ Bryan Keith-Lucas and Peter G. Richards, *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* (London, George Allen Unwin, 1978), p.18.

³¹ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp.390-391 describes the impact of a significant number of women district councillors in Norfolk but also points out the practical difficulties of measuring their impact as the records of district councils have not been carefully preserved. John S. Clarke, *Outlines of Local Government of the United Kingdom* (London, Pitman 1936, twelfth edition) Appendix A, p.298 sets out the numbers of councils as at 1935. This illustrates how numerous the district councils were, with 697 urban district councils and 528 rural district councils as well as 278 town councils. There were 83 county boroughs.

³² The Davies and Morley data also excludes the smaller non-county boroughs and these have therefore also had to be excluded from this work even though they had some prominent women councillors such as Violet Markham in Chesterfield. A complete list of councils covered is included in Appendix one.

³³ Checking collected data against *Municipal Yearbook* listings also allowed some correction of the Rawlings and Thrasher London data, as well as supplementing the partial lists of women elected extracted from Davies and Morley.

Local newspapers and council minute books were the main sources used to supplement information in *Municipal Yearbooks* for those councils not covered by the two identified statistical collections. Even in these sources political allegiance was still not always evident or consistently recorded. For county councils particularly, results may be listed in a variety of newspapers throughout the area which have differing political editorial lines. This would sometimes confuse the political description. Alliances between political parties may be acknowledged in one source but not in another, so that descriptions of candidates as ‘independents’ in particular need to be treated with a degree of caution – as exemplified by the *Yorkshire Post* listing of Mrs Ramsden, wife of the local Conservative MP as an Independent.³⁴ Socialists were usually described as such by anti-socialist papers, even if they were not standing as an official Labour candidate. Conservatives not only stressed the importance of referring to Labour as Socialist, on occasions they considered using descriptions such as ‘Labour Conservative’ to increase their own appeal to working class voters whilst ensuring all their literature denounced Labour as Socialist.³⁵

The differing electoral cycles inevitably create difficulties in comparing outcomes from the various data sources. In London borough elections all councillors were elected at one time every three years, whilst county borough elections involved a proportion of councillors every year. These elections were all in November, and outcomes tended to be recorded in full in the *Municipal Yearbook* in the following year. County council elections were early in the year, again in a three-year cycle with all councillors elected at the same time. The *Municipal Yearbook* provides the only acceptable means of any comparison between council types. Even here there are statistical drawbacks when comparing

³⁴ *Yorkshire Post*, 9 December 1997.

³⁵ Adrian Steel ‘Explaining Changes in Political Party Fortunes in Greater London 1918 – 1931’ (Queen Mary University, London, 2005, unpublished PhD), p.124.

data that results from elections held at different times, so that all data should be treated as broadly indicative rather than fully factual. The need to use all three data sets for differing purposes does lead to the inclusion of some tables throughout the text and in appendices that may appear at first glance to be contradictory. To achieve as close a match as possible between data sets, comparative data drawing from different council types such as that in table twelve (page 140) has only been extracted for sample years. These allow for the three-year cycle of county borough elections, so the first comparison included is from the 1922 *Municipal Yearbook*, which will have absorbed the outcomes of elections in 1919, 1920 and 1921 and most consequent aldermanic by-elections. For County boroughs and London boroughs those will have been completed within November. However much of the discussion focuses on the position immediately after a particular election. Tables taken from other sources that discuss 1922 are likely to include post-election data for that year, whereas *Municipal Yearbook* tables will predate that election.

There are particular problems in calculating percentages. This is straightforward with the two election data sets as it is clear how many candidates there are and how many vacancies there are. However where listings of women are extracted from the *Municipal Yearbooks* no base count exists to show proportions. As the number of councillors on an authority varied over time (through boundary changes for example) estimates had to be calculated from the yearly *Municipal Yearbook* listings.³⁶ These limitations do mean comparative percentages need treating with particular caution and have only been included at an aggregated level.

³⁶ Where possible county data has been corrected from more reliable sources, but this has not always been possible. In pure statistical terms it seems logical not to correct this data at all – if a council had omitted some members from their *Municipal Yearbook* listings that omission could be of either gender, and therefore it would be purer to leave counts as the only base figure. However the potential inaccuracies were substantial and correction to reflect the actual number of councillors where possible became the preferred option.

Interpretation of statistical information involved turning electoral data and annually compiled lists into real people. The second research element of this work is then the exploration of those individual women through localised case studies. Finding the right locations for case studies was only possible after a degree of initial data collection within each type of council.³⁷ Pursuing a case study in a council that elected no women members has some merits in terms of understanding the reasons for non-representation, but it does not assist the discussion about roles after election. Some case studies were selected with the need to achieve a diverse sample in mind, whilst other biographic detail emerged through necessity – material collected incidentally in correcting known data errors or clarifying anomalies.³⁸

In London case study selection started with Bermondsey, where a good concentration of Labour women rose to prominence. Characters in nearby Camberwell and Battersea emerged when checking primary sources for accuracy. Examination of Conservative women focused on Kensington and Westminster, with essential checks carried out of information about women elected in Wandsworth, St Pancras, Hampstead and Holborn.³⁹ Given the low level of representation in county councils and the lack of any collected information on electoral outcomes some case study work focused on those counties where few women were elected – Kent and County Durham in particular. Study of the West

³⁷ This selection was initially carried out in three phases, with the readily available data for London analysed first followed by some London case study work. Analysis of the Davies and Morley data was left until last in anticipation of a further volume of their work being published, which didn't materialise. Collecting county council data and related case studies were the most time consuming phase given the scattered nature of archival sources in a county.

³⁸ Most case studies involved a limited series of visits to the area concerned. Council Minute books sometimes provided verification of the women elected and some details of by-elections. They were essential for gaining an overview of committee membership. Local newspaper records provided some details of candidates and campaigns, with some prominent women also featuring in reports of council activity and useful obituaries. Use was made of both local library microfiche newspaper collections and the collection held by the British Library.

³⁹ Published biographic or geographic studies have been added to supplement case study material. For example, the work of Noreen Branson, *Poplarism 1919-1925, George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979) provided sufficient material on women in Poplar to make the inclusion of a second case study covering a Labour controlled London borough unnecessary even though two Conservative boroughs are included.

Riding of Yorkshire identified both Labour and Conservative women, each with mixed fortunes, with Essex and Middlesex producing some interesting individual biographies, some with well-known names and others that should be. Tracing detail in Cumberland and Westmorland confirmed aspects of continuity and background for three prominent women. Identifying a good cross section of towns and cities for case study was problematic given both their diversity in size and economy and the concentration of so many county boroughs in the north-west. Some information from Cardiff and Swansea is included, but these two are not necessarily representative of Wales as a whole, with Newport and Merthyr being the only two other Welsh County Boroughs in 1931. Both Reading and Oxford made an early start in electing women councillors in 1907, and so looking at progress here was beneficial, whilst the collection of information in Gloucester and Worcester provided a balance to the industrial towns selected from the north-west. Hollis makes specific reference to the lack of women candidates in south coast ports; Portsmouth emerged as one port worthy of more detailed examination given the presence of preserved WCA records and indications that there were gaps in candidacy after an early start.⁴⁰

The range of supplementary information available in local archives varied. London councils tended to list full election results in Minute books but county councils did not. In some cases party political organisational records were present and very useful. In others, once links to particular women's organisations were identified, their records could be illuminating. Some councils published guides, and the series of *County Jubilee Guides* held at the British Library gave some useful background, as did the occasional County level 'Who's who' and similar.⁴¹ Although potential sources varied in each case prominent individuals emerged

⁴⁰ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.396.

⁴¹ Discussion of published sources that can supplement case studies appears in chapter two.

whose lives deserve to be shared more than this work permits. Examining one town or city in depth would have allowed a more detailed focus on a small number of women but with no indication of how typical they were, losing the value of comparative overview. On the whole case studies have been identified to enable exploration of a cross section of council types, political representation and locational elements. The resulting individual biographies provide a fascinating mix, but the selection method has probably missed some outstanding individuals. It is tempting to find and share at least a limited biography for each of the 1,400 or more women pioneers identified in the course of collecting this data who succeeded in being elected, but such an exercise is beyond the scope of this work, and would be practically impossible. Even amongst women who emerged as committee chairman or long-serving councillors there were those who had very limited coverage in archive collections or newspapers. A selection of those women who appear in the text have pen-portraits in appendix two. Those included in that appendix are indicated in **bold** when first mentioned in the text. Other profiles are held in electronic format. This summary of biographies proved a rewarding exercise and one with potential for expansion and cross reference to other work on women in this period.

My involvement with the revived WLGS led to a discussion some years ago with Florence Davy, who sadly died in 2009. Davy features in the work of Christine Collette and has a colourful past.⁴² Florence was elected to Hackney council in 1937 (as Florence Sills) and served there for a short time before moving away on war work. Whilst discussions were intended to focus on this, her memories of the post-war period were far stronger. Her preference was to talk about her time as an

⁴² Christine Collette, *The Newer Eve, Women Feminists and the Labour Party* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.83-87.

election agent in 1945 and the Aldermaston marches.⁴³ Interesting though this experience was, it confirmed impressions that including any personal or family oral history as part of this project would not be possible given the desire to provide a broad overview rather than a more geographically focused study.

A similar temptation arose in the course of the work when I made contact with a former colleague who had a short unpublished local history study on Margaret Tabor, former Essex county councillor. It transpired that a relative of the Tabor family still had a good collection of family papers. Having resolved the particular issue about that individual I rejected the offer of sight of the papers, hoping they will still be preserved and can be used at a later date. There are likely to be other family collections of this nature that could be preserved or collected for future study. Each individual and each town or county deserved more thorough study than proved possible in a work of this scale. The core objective however, was not just to identify individual women and their contribution but to evaluate their diversity and place those individuals in context. That included examination of a wide range of published work.

Structure

The need for this statistical work to be grounded in wide ranging contextual analysis became increasingly apparent as work progressed. Chapter two includes a discussion of relevant historiography and starts with an examination of the limited sources already available on elected women. Because the work highlights some differing trends in participation on different types of council there is a detailed examination of the genesis of local government and the varying internal and electoral cultures that resulted. This includes the historiography of local governance. The impact of the extension of the franchise on the local organisation

⁴³ *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Autumn 2009), p.12 includes an obituary.

of political parties and the relative fortunes of political parties in this period provide an important part of the backdrop. Coverage of this includes published discussion on women in political organisations and the appeal of political parties to women voters. The discussion that follows focuses on wider aspects of women's lives. It debates the reasons why older women were granted the Parliamentary vote and the important historiography of their continued activism and participation in public life. This includes discussion of concepts of separate spheres and the culture of domesticity.

Chapter three then quantifies the extent to which women stood as council candidates and were elected between 1919 and 1938. It looks at the three relevant council types in turn, with methods needing to take account of the limited data available. Wherever possible there is analysis by political party as well as discussion of issues about geographic distribution and the social class of those elected. It is within this section that significant differences begin to emerge about the number of women elected within London and on the fringe of London, with differences of class become more relevant at county council level. The statistics point to slow but unequal growth.

These issues of gender, class, and politics, the social and cultural influences and barriers on women seeking election are then explored in more depth in chapter four. This explores the second aim of the thesis, to identify the influences on women seeking election. Most of the discussion in this section is drawn from case study material and explores the individuals who were elected. Some of the characters who emerge at this point have a long and distinguished record of service.

Chapter five considers how far women councillors were concentrated on committees that reflected their special gendered interests. It looks at the work of women on education, health and housing committees where the topics dealt with

were expanding. Again there is new case study material here supplemented by secondary literature. Although it is clear women remained concentrated on committees with a more domestic or maternal remit, the section suggests that the changing work of councils blurred the lines between public and private to make the concept of separate spheres less relevant. The theme is explored further in looking briefly at the work of women as committee chairs and mayors and exploring how they formed part of a redefined citizenship that was emerging.

The conclusions recognise that a limited number of women penetrated inter-war local government through election and points to some reasons why that was the case. Conclusions do also highlight the contributions those women were able to make. In doing so it starts to uncover their rich histories, many of which deserve a higher profile.

There are many other possible ways of approaching a study of women councillors. A more limited geographic case study, a biographical approach, or limiting the study to women of one political persuasion were all options. However the methods used have developed out of aims established at the outset. The desire to achieve an overview covering England and Wales necessarily limits the level of detail on each individual woman. Written sources for some women have proved virtually non-existent. Even where specialisms are known, case studies that start from collections of council minutes do not always reveal the true achievements of the women concerned. Perhaps councils, communities and academics will help fill the gaps by starting to look at little closer at the legacy of their own local female pioneers. The overview this work has achieved can help to put those local studies in context by assisting comparison between the backgrounds and activities of women councillors in one area with that found elsewhere. Anyone choosing that route will find a limited number of individual

women to look at, but a rich tapestry of personalities who wove the everyday work of councils into local life.

In judging the achievements of those women, the conclusions here suggest a need to take account not only of the lives of the individual but also of the culture in which those individual women operated. The context of women's entry into citizenship at a time of social change is an important one. Progress in election was slow and patterns of representation patchy. Political and cultural factors ensured representation in London was far better than elsewhere whilst social eminence enabled some individual women to make local government part of an impressive lifelong commitment to improving life for others. The first priority within that was improving the health and welfare of other women and children. That might concentrate women's activity into some spheres of local government work. This did not mean that such work was minimal or marginal, but that it was gradually being absorbed into a redefined relationship between citizens and the state. This work sets out to chart the progress and reveal the patterns of how elected women councillors formed part of that changing relationship between the state and family life.

Chapter Two: Women councillors and their place: the wider context

In 1907 some women gained the right to be local government candidates at a time when they were still denied the Parliamentary vote. The diversity of the campaign for the franchise is increasingly under investigation as is the multiplicity of developing women's activism.¹ Writers now acknowledge 'difference, diversity, disillusionment and conflict among women and men as well as alliances and shared goals and ideas'.² The patterns of election of women councillors were part of the diversity of women's activism after 1918, but equally those patterns reflected other strands of cultural diversity. Placing the work of women councillors in those broad cultural contexts does contribute to a redefinition of what is meant by feminism and the extent of feminist action.

When local elections resumed in 1919 women faced very different social, legal and political circumstances from those that had coloured their local election results between 1907 and 1914. Granting the franchise to older women in parliamentary elections was accompanied by an extension of the local government franchise and a consequent widening of the range of women able to stand as council candidates. This chapter explores the reasons why this and other opportunities to participate in civic life were granted to women at this stage.³ Further debate looks at the direct impact of such change, the indirect consequences and the relationship with the everyday life of women. In the aftermath of war the state, particularly through the agency of local government, was increasingly influencing domestic lives. The nature

¹ Myriam Boussahba-Bravard (ed.), *Suffrage outside Suffragism; Women's Vote in Britain, 1880-1914*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) explores the way in which suffragists operated within political settings and how political parties responded to suffragism at a national and local level.

² Claire Eustance, Laura Ugolini and Joan Ryan, 'Writing Suffrage Histories – the 'British' experience in Eustance, Ryan and Ugolini (eds.) *A Suffrage Reader, Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* (London, Leicester University Press 2000), p.2.

³ Esther Breitenbach & Pat Thane (eds.) *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland; what difference did the vote make?* (London, Continuum, 2010), provides a recent summary of the issues.

of citizenship was changing, not just because there were more voters, but because welfare, education and personal relationships were becoming more acceptable as spheres of operation of the central state. New media, in the form of women's magazines, film and fiction increasingly emphasised the role of wives and mothers in rebuilding the nation. To understand those changing settings the chapter draws on the historiography of women's activism, the debate between old and new feminism and the concept of separate spheres.

The impact of the Great War and changes to the franchise was significant for women's lives and women's activism, but it also had a tremendous effect on the local organisation of political parties. The historiography of that local change, of how parties absorbed women as members and activists and of how each appealed to women voters is therefore equally relevant. It is of very direct relevance to the ability of women to stand as council candidates, but that also needs to be set in the context of the more limited historiography of local government itself. The varied culture of local government is explored in some depth, as is some of the relevant minutiae of methods of local government operation. The culture and organisation of local government, the nature of elections, the beliefs of political or organisational gatekeepers, plus the changing world of women's activism and class based patterns of women's lives all influenced the numbers of women elected as councillors.

Identifying women councillors

No-one knows how many women have served as local councillors. Patricia Hollis notes there were 48 women borough and county councillors in 1914. Her analysis of that early candidacy already points to an uneven spread, Some cities, she considers, were harder to penetrate than others:

In Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool only women with an outstanding reputation were successful. Women failed in Bristol, Bradford

and Sheffield...and seem not even to have sought a seat in Nottingham or Leeds.⁴

Martin Pugh also refers to some statistics although only dealing with those elected, and not with those who may have been unsuccessful candidates. Whilst commenting on the impact of legislation in increasing the level of local elected representation of women, he acknowledges that 'in spite of the increase in the number of women councillors, they remained at only five to six per cent of the total by 1937, a surprisingly low proportion in some ways'.⁵ Pugh and Hollis use a variety of primary sources in statistics which vary in depth. Pugh for example, includes a table with limited source information which refers to four (or six per cent) of all county councils, and 140 (nearly 38 per cent) of all city and borough councils not having any women members by 1937. The table does not indicate which councils this applies to. Neither does it explain why women were missing on some councils whilst they were better represented on others.⁶

Previous academic work which focuses on particular locations can add to the statistical information available. Such work is generally useful in being of greater depth, so that it will include statistical information about candidates as well as those who succeeded in getting elected, but work focusing on elected women is very limited. The theses of Sylvia Dunkley who looked at the West Riding and that of Janet Howes comparing Manchester with Cambridge are two useful cross-party studies with detailed references to women councillors.⁷ Dunkley does conclude that in the West Riding whereas cities with a more radical heritage were more likely to

⁴ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon 1987), p.398.

⁵ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999 Second Edition* (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 2000), p.57. (References to this work throughout are from the second edition as it includes a useful preface: References are otherwise identical to the first edition).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.58. The data on City and Borough councils mentioned here must include non-county boroughs which are not included in this work.

⁷ Sylvia Dunkley, 'Women Magistrates, Ministers and Municipal Councillors in the West Riding of Yorkshire 1918-1939' (University of Sheffield, 1992, unpublished PhD). Janet Howes, 'No Party, No sect, No Politics': The National Council of Women and the National Women's Citizens' Association with particular reference to Cambridge and Manchester in the Inter-War years. (Anglia Polytechnic, 2003, unpublished PhD).

elect women, there were proportionally fewer women elected in the smaller towns.⁸ Howes also provides a useful context in focusing on the influence of the WCA. Her text includes tabled information on the political loyalties of all women elected to Cambridge and Manchester councils in which she notes the former electing a far higher proportion of women as Independent candidates.⁹ The conclusions emphasise the extent to which women would simultaneously belong to both a political party and non-political organisations such as the WCA.¹⁰ More recently a thorough study of women in public life in Surrey highlights the high degree of networking and overlapping roles held by women, some of whom were elected councillors.¹¹ Ruth Davidson also unearths some variety with her area of study, with the UDCs and RDCs within East Surrey having a better representation of women than Croydon County Borough, as did the non-county borough of Reigate. Her findings also illustrate the nature of previous experience amongst women who stood as council candidates in the area, pointing to the significance of war-work and a move away from philanthropic institutions towards groupings like the WCA as contributors to activism.¹² Those three works then provide supporting evidence of some of the themes developed here, albeit starting from limited geographical bases.

Merseyside has inspired one published work based on academic study of women in public office and at least one PhD focusing on Labour Party history which makes reference to the council and to women councillors.¹³ Both those works include useful numeric and biographic information as well as discussion on the wider political context. Not all local studies in labour history do consider issues of

⁸ Dunkley, 'Women Magistrates, Ministers and Municipal Councillors' The study does include details of women elected in the smaller non-county boroughs in Yorkshire that are not covered by the Davies and Morley data.

⁹ Howes, 'No Party, No Sect, No Politics' p. 112 (Cambridge) and p.118 (Manchester).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.304.

¹¹ Ruth Davidson, 'Citizens at last: Women's political culture and civil society, Croydon and East Surrey, 1914-39' (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2010, unpublished PhD).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.165-171.

¹³ Krista Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother' Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations, 1890-1920* (Liverpool University Press 2004).

gender though and conversely, those studies of politics and gender may not refer to municipal roles or assist with quantifying the number of women who held public office.¹⁴ A useful contribution to this area of work also comes from Kenneth Baxter who included women councillors in his detailed study of political women in Scotland.¹⁵

Some information on the numbers of women elected may also be gleaned from studies which have looked at life on a particular council, or how a particular community is governed. There are some useful publications on the LCC for example, and work of J.M. Lee gives us a useful background perspective on the operation of a county council.¹⁶ Some work focuses on particular towns or cities. The work of George Jones in *Borough Politics: a study of Wolverhampton Town Council*, and earlier A.H. Birch, (*Small Town Politics: a study of political life in Glossop*) provide useful backdrops and some detail about individuals. The most detailed account of representation in a London Borough also looks at the most controversial as Noreen Branson covers Poplar.¹⁷ On the whole these studies are more beneficial in informing us about council culture rather than as factual guides to elections.

A similar contribution can be made by examining a small number of biographical and auto-biographical works of relevance. Manchester has accounts from both

¹⁴ R.S.W. Davies, 'Differentiation in the Working Class. Class Consciousness and development of the Labour Party in Liverpool up to 1939.' (Liverpool John Moores University, unpublished DPhil, May 1993). Other theses with a more limited mention of women as councillors include John Boughton, 'Working Class politics in Birmingham and Sheffield 1918 – 1931' (University of Warwick unpublished PhD March 1985) and Pauline Lynn 'The shaping of political allegiance, Class, Gender, Nation and Locality in County Durham 1918 – 1945' (University of Teesside unpublished DPhil, July 1999).

¹⁵ Kenneth Baxter, 'Estimable and gifted? : women in party politics in Scotland c1918-1955.' (University of Dundee, unpublished PhD 2008).

¹⁶ Andrew Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965* (London, Hambledon Press 1989); John Davis, *Reforming London; the London Government Problem 1855-1900* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988); J.M. Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of County Government in Cheshire since 1888* (Oxford, Clarendon,1963).

¹⁷ George Jones, *Borough Politics: a Study of Wolverhampton Town Council 1888-1964* (London, Macmillan, 1969), A.H. Birch, *Small Town Politics, a Study of Political Life in Glossop* (London, Oxford University Press,1959); Noreen Branson, *Poplarism 1919-1925, George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979).

Hannah Mitchell and Lady Shena Simon, the latter focusing on the council itself.¹⁸ Autobiography and biographies also exist of women who combined life in local politics with other more prominent national roles, such as Edith Summerskill, Eleanor Rathbone and Violet Markham.¹⁹ Some work looking at the fight for the franchise includes biographic detail of women who went on to take up elected office. The detailed work of Jill Liddington and Elizabeth Crawford is useful in this respect. Two sources were particularly useful in the compilation of short pen portraits; the useful collection in Cheryl Law's *Women: a political dictionary* and the on-line *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.²⁰ Occasionally a work looking at the wider franchise issue will reveal some useful contemporaneous statistics. For example Pat Thane uses details published in the contemporary newspaper *Labour Woman* to explain that 'in the local elections of 1934, which were generally good for Labour, of 729 Labour borough councillors elected in London 150 were female.'²¹ Thane recognises this level of elected representation was not matched in other areas.

Biography and broader studies aid understanding of why progress followed a particular pattern, as well as illuminating the statistical analysis. Guidance can also come from those political scientists who look specifically at women in elected posts. The key issues are still being debated and concern the relationship between

¹⁸ G. Mitchell, (ed.) *The Hard way up. The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel*, (London, Virago,1977) and S. Simon, *A Century of City Government, Manchester 1838-1938*, (London, George Allen & Unwin,1938).

¹⁹ Edith Summerskill, *A Woman's World her memoirs* (Heinemann, London, 1967); S. Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (London, Yale University Press, 2004); H. Jones, *Duty and Citizenship, the Correspondence and Papers of Violet Markham 1896-1953* (London, Historians' Press, 1994).

²⁰ Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The rise of the women's suffrage movement* (London, Virago Press 1978); Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: their fight for the vote* (London, Virago Press, 2006); Elizabeth Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement: a reference guide, 1866-1928* (Routledge 2000); Elizabeth Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement in Britain and Ireland: a regional survey*, (Taylor and Francis, 2006); Cheryl Law, *Women: A Modern Political Dictionary* (London, I.B.Taurus, 2000); *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press 2004-2011) accessed at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>.

²¹ Pat Thane, 'Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism' in H.L. Smith (ed.) *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*. (Amherst, Ma, University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p.140.

candidacy, electoral success and continuation in office.²² It would be possible, for example, for the same numbers of men and women to be elected to a particular council in any year, but if the successful women did not then seek re-election at the same rate as men a different overall statistical pattern could occur. Work which only focuses on successful candidates fails to examine potential differing gender patterns in electoral success. This complexity has been explored by Pugh in relation to women in Parliament, and he acknowledges that in examining that data, it is necessary to look not just at who was elected, which party they stood for, but also the nature of the seat they fought. His analysis reveals that, of women who stood as Parliamentary candidates in the inter-war period, 'Over four-fifths were placed in hopeless seats'.²³ He concludes that a significant proportion of women MP's could be said to be elected to Parliament by accident. As current practitioners will be aware, electoral success in local elections can be equally fortuitous, and statistics cannot therefore give a total picture. Some indication of how far women fought un-winnable local seats can be gleaned from looking at those results where there was a consistently significant margin in the polls between votes for different parties.²⁴ Given the complexity of local elections and the changing Party political picture between the wars this is far from reliable, especially as the collection of election data is so limited. Theories about causes of under-representation will be illuminated by this research, which benefits from using statistics as a starting point to look at patterns within groups of individuals.

²² A useful collection of articles appears in *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* (Political Studies Association {PSA}, vol.6 issue 1 February 2004). This collection of papers was first considered by the PSA women's group in 2002. Within that collection, Fiona Mackay, 'Gender and Political Representation in the UK: The state of the discipline' (pp. 99 – 120 especially pp. 102-104) provides a useful overview, citing 1997 as a turning point when political scientists could move beyond discussing reasons for low representation and focus on studying impact. She suggests two trends prior to 1997. The first focused on Party systems and electoral systems along with issues such as the creation of electoral districts to explain variations in candidacy. The second focused on the recruitment process. The article cross refers to previous works in this field including that of Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski's *Gender and Party Politics* (London, Sage, 1993) . This concluded supply factors may be more relevant in determining the level of representation than those that focus on barriers. The framework of systematic factors, Party political factors and individual factors that often govern consideration of candidacy patterns by political scientists stems from this work.

²³ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.159.

²⁴ See table 13 (page 164) for an example of this in two London boroughs.

Some commentators have applied the principles of a political science framework to look at local government elections. Jill Hills looked at information available about election of women in 1982, and suggested there were four stages to recruitment; eligibility for the pool, entrance to the pool, selection and then election.²⁵ Her work is critical of the earlier work by Bristow which had identified regional differences in levels of representation, but explained differences as being a result of class, not discrimination in the political selection process. The data analysed by Bristow aggregates information from councils after the 1974 re-organisation of local government and therefore cannot provide a comparable bench mark for this work. Nevertheless it is interesting that his analysis starts by noting a difference in representation between types of authority that echoes some of the findings here. In 1974 and 1977, 'women are less likely to be found as members of Welsh authorities and more likely to be found in London Government'.²⁶ The causes of this difference, the relevance of class and culture and the presence of barriers to election was as relevant in 1937 as 1977 and remains of relevance today.

Although the impact of political selection can occasionally be teased out of archive material it is less readily available for the inter-war period than it is for later analysis. There is a need to acknowledge the relationship between the time period in which women candidates were first coming forward and the changing degree of political influence on local elections. Pugh remarks that 'Lists published by the *Woman's Leader* in 1921 suggests that a majority of the women elected were still Independents'.²⁷ He prefaces this by suggesting 'many women appreciated the relative absence of party control in local authorities'. However examination of his source data reveals that the lists concerned were of women elected in county

²⁵ J. Hills, 'Women Local Councillors: A reply to Bristow', *Local Government Studies*, Jan/Feb 1982.

²⁶ Bristow 'Women Councillors- An explanation of the under-representation of women in Local Government' *Local Government Studies* (1980 6:3), p.75.

²⁷ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.58.

boroughs that particular year, which did not include a London election where party politics was more established. The list in *Woman's Leader* is of those women who reported their success to the National Council of Women. It does not relate the data about numbers of women elected as Independents to the political makeup of the councils they were elected to, nor does it refer to unsuccessful candidates or clarify how independent the women candidates really were.

Hollis does recognise that at least initially, after the 1907 legislation, standing as an Independent was not an option in London, and suggests that here it was party background which hampered women who 'would insist on standing as Progressives when most of London was swinging Tory'.²⁸ The incidence of Progressive candidates in the two London Borough elections before 1914 resulted in part from the efforts of the WLGS, responsible for lobbying for the initial legislation, who although describing themselves as being non-party (cross-party would be a more accurate description) had some strong links with the Liberal or Progressive movement in London. The collection of data Pugh draws on also owes much to the work of the NCW, who took up the work of encouraging women candidates as the WLGS diminished. The influence of these non-party or cross-party organisations in wider lobbying as well as supporting the election of women deserves fuller investigation.²⁹

With three volumes of election data and analysis Davies and Morley have some useful contributions to the overview of women's electoral success. They suggest the councils covered by the three volumes produced to date constitute a reasonable sized sample to reach conclusions. They do cover around one third of boroughs. However there is little aggregate analysis of the position of women in the third

²⁸ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.411.

²⁹ The work of Howes, 'No Party, No sect, No Politics' does address this issue and makes the point that other commentators have assumed the NCW in particular to be an 'umbrella organisation'. Howes argues that at a local level, in the two localities she looked at 'branches formulated their policy and instigated campaigns that were their own', p.303.

volume, although some statements in local summaries are clearly based on comparative findings. Thus we are informed that 11.8 per cent 'was a relatively high proportion of women candidates by inter-war standards' (Independent women candidates in Eastbourne).³⁰ Similarly in Darlington, we are told the number of women candidates and the number of contests they participated in constituted a 'remarkably low figure'.³¹

These limited commentaries on the election of women then point to variety from the outset, with local political organisation and the presence of supporting women's organisations referred to as influencing the levels of representation. They reflect however, the nature and volume of source material available, and the lack of quantified comparable information. Part of the explanation for that gap lies in the limited extent of discussion about local government as an entity beyond Victorian expansion and a concentration in that literature on the expanding towns and cities.

The evolution of twentieth century local government

Academic comparative writing on Local Government has a tendency to take the built environment of the city itself as a starting point. It is primarily urban in nature as a result and therefore tends to focus on one type of council. Tristram Hunt's *Building Jerusalem* takes a very detailed look at how local government emerged from the interplay of necessity, philosophy, philanthropy, religion, politics and aristocracy. Although it considers the suburban development of 'garden cities', most of the content focuses on Birmingham, Manchester and other larger cities. It is concerned with Victorian civic pride, and the city fathers who promoted it but does not examine the variety of local government models in operation at the time covering rural as well

³⁰ Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections* (Aldershot, Ashgate, vol. 3 Chester - East Ham 2006), p.529.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.239.

as urban areas.³² E.P. Hennock's 1973 study, *Fit and Proper Persons*, is accepted as being one of the more thorough studies of the nature of elected office in local government, again with a nineteenth century focus, but it too focuses on the cities of Leeds and Birmingham.³³ There is discussion of relevance on the relationship between elite groups in communities and municipal governance in Richard Trainor's *Black Country Elites*, although this predates the election of women.³⁴ More general commentaries are rare and focus on functional arrangements with case studies usually focusing on one council rather than having any comparative evidence. Published works first listed on page 35 as containing useful statistical detail are classic and isolated examples of this.³⁵

One useful study concentrating on local authority electoral arrangements is by Brian Keith-Lucas. In this he identifies the sixty years from 1834 as the period which set the shape of elected local administration in England we might still recognise. He describes how the various types of elected authority evolved:

During these sixty years there had been born the two democracies of Central and Local Government, as partners to manage the affairs of England. The whole of this revolution was achieved within a single lifetime, but it was not the product of one man's vision, nor the outcome of any single plan of democratic growth. The structure of elected councils grew up piecemeal, in a series of conflicts and compromises, compounded with experiments and accidents.³⁶

³² Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004).

³³ E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons. Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-century Urban Government* (London, Edward Arnold, 1973).

³⁴ Richard Trainor, *Black Country Elites: the exercise of authority in an industrialized area* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993).

³⁵ George Jones, *Borough Politics: a study of Wolverhampton Town Council 1888-1964* (London, Macmillan, 1969), A.H. Birch, *Small Town Politics, a study of political life in Glossop* (London, Oxford University Press, 1959); J.M. Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of County Government in Cheshire since 1888* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1963).

³⁶ Bryan Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise. A Short History* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1952), p.1.

Keith-Lucas details how the various tiers of local government grew out of arrangements for dealing with particular aspects of life. Many of those influencing urban municipal corporations originated in the preceding century, created to cope with increasing urban population. When county councils were created, however, their predecessors had far deeper roots – those of the administration of justice by magistrates who had gradually replaced the Sheriff’s Court as the voice of authority in rural areas. As Keith-Lucas describes, they sat alongside the parish vestry as selected representatives of a particular interest: ‘they represented only one class – the beneficed clergy and wealthy landowners from among whom they were chosen by an even wealthier Lord Lieutenant’.³⁷ There were several attempts to change that system, driven by desires for efficiency, effectiveness and greater democracy. The county councils that held their first elections in 1889 absorbed most of the duties of magistrates in rural areas. They were to absorb not only functions, but sometimes the individuals:

In some counties the squires were returned unopposed in many as half the electoral divisions...The result of the election was a strange contrast with that of 1836 after the reform of borough government; then the Radicals had completely vanquished the Tories of the old corporations; now, in 1889, the magistrates and squires were successful in nearly every case.³⁸

In areas where landowners no longer dominated, roles as magistrates were still influential, as J.M. Lee found in Cheshire, where ‘The landowning families who had traditionally run the politics of the shire, did not enter the county council elections in any great force. The group who entered most strongly were the manufacturing and mercantile families who by 1888 had secured a place among the country gentry and

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.85.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.114.

magistracy'.³⁹ Those institutional historic links were to influence the range of women who came forward for election at a later date. The uneasy relationship with the county borough also set the tone of many of their debates.

The creation of county councils started as a plan for rational administration, but suffered from 'political flaws'. The arguments of relevance were about the status of the larger towns and cities, around three hundred of which already had desirable status as boroughs under the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, some underpinning that status with Royal or ancient charters. As John Davis notes, the 1888 Local Government Bill 'as introduced would have created a uniform two-tier system across England and Wales, broken only by the ten largest provincial towns and cities, whose borough councils were given full county powers in their own right and classified as '*County Boroughs*'.⁴⁰

Members of Parliament wrangled over the status of their own constituencies. The numbers of potential county boroughs grew spurred on partly through debate about rating levels, but also because of intentions to devolve some central powers. So despite the recognition of Charles Ritchie, President of the Local Government Board (LGB), that 'It is obvious that it would be most undesirable to take out of our county councils the representatives of all the large and prosperous boroughs within their compass' the population threshold at which municipal boroughs could have parity of status with that of the county was reduced.⁴¹ Towns and cities that Parliament considered large enough, or important enough, were treated as county councils for administrative purposes. The significance of that split for the county council is often expressed in terms of the financial impact. As Redlich recognised, champions of counties were 'anxious that the richest portions of the county area

³⁹ Lee, *Social Leaders*, p.56.

⁴⁰ John Davis, 'Central Government and the Towns', in Martin J. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban history of Britain (1840 – 1950)* (vol iii, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2000), p.269.

⁴¹ Hansard, *HC Deb*, 19 March 1888, vol 323 cc1657. (All Hansard references are <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>).

should not be exempted from contributing to the new county authority'.⁴² That value derived from the concentration of population in urban areas.

The impact of the wrangling was that sixty towns and cities in England and two in Wales retained their independence as county boroughs, but because of the uneven distribution of the urban population and the inclusion of some anomalies, they were far from evenly distributed. In some counties notably Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Middlesex there were no county boroughs at all. Lancashire had 15, around a quarter of all those in England and Wales and remained the most populous County outside London even when those 15 county boroughs were excluded.⁴³ County councils were, to varying degrees then messy administrative areas covering large areas of rural and small town hinterland, sometimes encircling the city with a separate administration. Some smaller towns and cities did not achieve county borough status, even though they might have regional significance. The County towns of Cambridge and Warwick for example were classed as less powerful town councils or municipal boroughs. These and the numerous urban and rural district councils provided more limited services, sharing responsibilities with the county council.

The nature of the compromise legislation creating counties and boroughs meant that they were not static entities. A small number of those created in 1888 were subsequently swallowed up by neighbours, but new boroughs in expanding towns

⁴² Josef Redlich, *Local Government in England*, ed. F. W. Hirst vol. 2 (London, Macmillan & co, 1903), p.105.

⁴³ 1888 Local Government Act, 13 August 1888 Third schedule. As included in *Law Reports 1888* (London, Eyre and Spottiswood vol xxv), pp. 328-329.

meant that by 1933 there were 85.⁴⁴ With the more populous towns and cities gaining and expanding their independence, the focus of the work of the county council was on the areas surrounding them. Those smaller market towns left as part of the administrative county and their rural hinterlands were less economically and politically diverse than larger towns and cities. Stephen Royle details how small market towns changed significantly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Growth was frequent and substantial, although some decline could be experienced where towns were reliant on one economic feature. Where towns did grow it was often as a result of good transport links to a nearby urbanised area, which enabled either localised commuting patterns to emerge, or, more usually, increased the market demand for local commodity supply. The relationship between Surrey and London is a prime example, but other smaller scale examples of inter-dependence are listed by Stephen Royle.⁴⁵ This pattern of population distribution in smaller towns within counties is significant for county elections in that it added to the tendency to limit candidates to particular social or economic groups and to limit the degree to which those available and interested had a commitment to the wider county area. Candidates would need both time and money, and ‘the most

⁴⁴ 1933 Local Government Act, First schedule lists part I (counties), part ii (county boroughs) and part iii (non-county boroughs). This list of 85 is similar to that used by Davies and Morley who include those 83 boroughs as at 1931 in their work to enable use of census data - a total of 80 in England and 3 in Wales (taking Monmouthshire and Newport as being part of England rather than Wales). Their logic has been followed in this work. The 1933 Act consolidated local government legislation and the requirements for creating county boroughs. The frequent changes in status had been an issue in several counties. For example in West Riding CC Rotherham first gained county borough status in 1902, followed by Barnsley, Dewsbury, and Wakefield as their populations grew. The West Riding had already lost in population and, perhaps more significantly, in potential rateable value as Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford all grew before the Great War. The twin advance of county boroughs in the West Riding was, however, one factor that contributed to the eventual curtailment of the creation of new county boroughs. The county council fought vigorously when several major towns and cities, including Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield applied for extension to their boundaries. The proposals were defeated in Parliament. In addition the West Riding CC with others pressed for the 1923 Onslow Commission, which ‘found itself essentially in agreement with the case put forward by the counties’. The resulting legislation introduced more complicated criteria, effectively ending the creation of new county boroughs for many years, the last to be created being Doncaster. See B.J. Barber and M. Beresford, *The West Riding County Council 1889 – 1974, Historical Studies* (Wakefield, West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council, 1979), p.246.

⁴⁵ Stephen Royle, ‘The Development of Small Towns in Britain’, in Martin Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain 1840 -1950* (vol. 3, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.166-167.

conscientious councillor was the man with a business which could run itself and the man who could afford to travel'.⁴⁶

The nature of county councils and county boroughs is significant when looking at the representation of women. Firstly, quantifying representation in a model where boundaries were constantly shifting presents a statistical nightmare. Of more consequence though is the nature of the county itself, both internal civic culture and the populace it had to draw on. The hierarchy of a small town and rural populace continued to create an elitist leadership culture that would dominate county council representation for some time.

One exception to this cultural focus of county councils on small town politics and a battle for survival was the London County Council (LCC). Although it was created by the same legislation, the LCC had a very different legacy, highly politicised from the outset. The origins of the rights of women to stand as councillors lay in its infancy. When the county councils were created, the question of candidate eligibility was muddled. Qualification for candidacy and voting entitlement in local government both had common-law roots in the rights of attendance at parish meetings, where matters which could not be resolved by agreement could ultimately be subject to a ballot. Eligibility and qualification therefore had links to the payment of rates, property ownership and occupation, and land ownership. There were differing local interpretations, and differing interpretations for different types of bodies.⁴⁷

Despite some ambiguity in the relevant legislation women had previously stood for election: 'It was not clear whether women were eligible to serve on Poor Law boards, but in 1875 Miss Martha Merrington quietly stood for a London Union and

⁴⁶ Lee, *Social Leaders*, p.58.

⁴⁷ Bryan Keith-Lucas and Peter G. Richards, *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* (London, George Allen Unwin, 1978), p.30.

was elected'.⁴⁸ Women, who had previously taken part in the more informal arrangements of parish life, were barred from voting by the legislation which introduced municipal corporations in 1835, but the reference to male ratepayers was removed in 1869, ensuring women who were ratepayers in their own right could now vote in municipal elections. Later legislation confirmed they were still unable to be municipal candidates. Courts intervened to define the position of married women, who, it was deemed from 1872, gave up their personal right to be classed as ratepayers and voters when married.⁴⁹ Legislation establishing school boards in 1870 did allow women voters to be candidates, a role many performed with skill. When county councils were created, only the LCC succeeded in electing two women, and there 'The women members' right to sit on the LCC was immediately challenged'.⁵⁰ That court challenge was led by Conservative candidate and MP C.T. Beresford Hope, who had been defeated by Lady Sandhurst in Brixton. The decision meant Lady Sandhurst forfeited her LCC seat. Jane Cobden, the other woman elected, was unable to operate fully as a councillor for her three years. The judgements prevented future women from seeking election to county councils, despite that fact those bodies later absorbed the work women had performed well on school boards.

The women LCC candidates were supported by a group of women campaigners who later became the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS).⁵¹ When elections and court battles failed, they lobbied politicians. Their persistence resulted in the Liberal Government introducing the 1907 Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Bill. Between the battle for the LCC in 1889 and the clarification of women's right to stand as candidates in 1907 there were two further significant

⁴⁸ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.6.

⁴⁹ Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise*, pp.166-7.

⁵⁰ Gloria Clifton, 'Members and Officers of the LCC, 1889-1965', in A. Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965* (London, Hambeldon Press, 1989), p.7.

⁵¹ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.307.

developments for local government structures, as rural and urban district councils (RDCs and UDCs) were formed by the Local Government Act of 1894 (which allowed women candidates) and metropolitan borough councils were established in London in 1899 (which did not).⁵² The structures of modern elected local government were then in place, but with qualification for candidacy and the extent of franchise still limited.

The failure to allow women candidates when London borough councils were established in 1899 highlights the distinctions being made in women's acceptable roles. Their entitlement to stand as candidates on the many and varied London vestries was clarified as late as 1894.⁵³ The presence of a number of women doing good work through the vestries did not prevent their entitlement to stand being removed by the House of Lords when London boroughs were created a few years later. The decision was a deliberate one, for sympathetic MPs did try to amend the London Government Bill by inserting the words "and no person shall be disqualified by sex or marriage for being elected or being an alderman or a councillor".⁵⁴

Explanations for removing the entitlement of women to stand when London boroughs were created focused on both powers and politics. Although the powers held by boroughs were similar to those held by the vestries, they were primarily concerned with the regulation of the built environment, and this was not considered by some to be suitable work for women. At vestry level and on the LCC, it was more common for political labels to determine election than was the case in more rural areas. As the demand for women to enter national politics heightened at the turn of the century, allowing them to enter the political world of London local government was viewed by some as a step too far.

⁵² Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise*, p.234 (Summary of relevant statutes).

⁵³ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.341,

⁵⁴ Hansard, HC Deb, 06 June 1899, vol 72 cc467.

The administrative geography of London had little to draw on historically or culturally. The LCC had been preceded by the Metropolitan Board of Works, an initial attempt to co-ordinate the muddle that resulted from the plethora of vestries and other overlapping bodies. Asa Briggs suggests 'the definition of the area of the Board was determined neither by the facts of civic history nor by human geography but by the network of drains and sewers'.⁵⁵ It was the area covered by the Board which was to form the basis of the LCC area, and later the twenty-nine metropolitan boroughs which shared power and responsibility with it. Relevance of the administrative area was soon questioned as London grew rapidly, and by the 1920s Herbert Morrison led demands for a wider London area with a more powerful democracy to run it.⁵⁶

Created alongside the other county councils, the LCC shared their election patterns, with all members usually seeking election in early March every three years. The 118 councillors selected nineteen aldermen, each elected for six years.⁵⁷ London boroughs also elected all councillors every three years, sharing their 1st November election date with other towns and cities. London boroughs also selected one alderman for every six councillors, less than in county boroughs where one alderman was selected for every three councillors.⁵⁸ Creation of the London boroughs by amalgamation of vestries had not brought about electoral neatness. The smallest borough, Stoke Newington, elected just thirty councillors from an electorate of just over 8,000. More common were those electing sixty councillors; twelve boroughs in total were established to this size, with electorates of between 20,000 and 48,000 when elections first took place in 1900. The largest then,

⁵⁵ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities; A brilliant and absorbing history of their development*. (London, Penguin, 1990), p.322.

⁵⁶ Bernard Donoughue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973), p.114.

⁵⁷ Andrew Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London; The London County Council 1889-1965* (London, Hambledon Press 1989), p.1.

⁵⁸ Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections* (Aldershot, Ashgate, vol 1 Barnsley – Bournemouth 1999), p.4.

although lower tier authorities, were around a quarter of the size of the (1911) electorate of Birmingham, the largest of the county boroughs. Wards in London also varied considerably in size, electing between two and nine councillors each.⁵⁹

This variety in the number of councillors on each council is even more visible within the county boroughs, although there was less variation in patterns of warding. As a third of councillors were elected each year, the ward in a county borough tended to have either three or six councillors. The largest cities of Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester each had in the region of one hundred councillors plus aldermen (varying as boundaries expanded) whilst around half of all county boroughs had less than forty councillors. The smallest started life with just eighteen elected councillors and six alderman, their total membership therefore being less than the thirty or more alderman to be found in each of the three large cities.⁶⁰ Variety in warding and election arrangements may well contribute to the variety in which women achieved electoral success. Women standing as part of a six person team were less exposed to media coverage than their counterparts in the single person large county council seat.

Counties may have been established to provide a rational administration in predominantly rural areas, but their initial responsibilities were those demanded by increasing urbanisation – the provision of ‘Highways and Bridges’, sanitary and housing matters, and aspects of public protection arising from their former responsibilities as the ‘Justices of Quarter Sessions’.⁶¹ The first major increase in these responsibilities was to come before women were able to be elected as county

⁵⁹ Statistics in this chapter have been extracted at ward level from data provided by Rallings and Thrasher. Some examples of the summary spreadsheets are included in appendix 3.

⁶⁰ Geographic concentration and variety in size are amongst the reasons Davies and Morley suggest caution should be exercised in any aggregate analysis of election results. Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections*, vol. iii, p.649.

⁶¹ John J. Clarke, *Outlines of Local Government* (London, Pitman and Sons, 1918). p.18 lists the duties as at 1918, and includes ‘Highways and Bridges’ as one specific direct function for which a standing committee would usually be required.

councillors. The 1902 Education Act made every county and every county borough an education authority with responsibilities for elementary and technical education (although larger boroughs classified as UDCs or RDCs could also be an education authority for some aspects from the autumn of 1903). When those changes were proposed they resulted in a reduction in the opportunities for women to hold elected office, as many had previously been members of school boards. The debate in Parliament illustrates the typical divisions over women's franchise and candidacy. There were those who did not support women being granted the parliamentary franchise, but who welcomed the contribution they had made over the years to education matters. Others, like Mr Samuel Evans, thought that women in general had no interest in public life and that 'men could do all that was required without the assistance of women at all, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred could do it better'.⁶² The compromise was acceptance of an amendment from Henry Hobhouse which specified that the schemes for education committees drawn up by each authority for approval by the Board of Education should provide for 'the inclusion of women as well as men'.⁶³ In moving this amendment, Hobhouse acknowledged that without it women were unlikely to get equal treatment, given the appointing body was one from which 'women were at present excluded'.⁶⁴ In fact the Act specified elsewhere that schemes must usually include a majority of members of the parent authority. Women could not have taken up an equality of places on education committees specified in this way without the ability to be elected. The aim was not equality as it might now be visualised, but the restoration of an ability to draw on the skills and experience of some women by co-option that had previously happened through elections.

⁶²Hansard, *HC Deb*, 07 November 1902, vol 114 cc430.

⁶³ Amendment incorporated into 1902 Education Act as Part 1V, clause 17 (3) (c).

⁶⁴ Hansard, *HC Deb*, 07 November 1902, vol 114 c424.

Flawed though it was, this model of co-option was to have relevance when women did take up elected places on councils with education responsibilities, including counties. As a model of how elected local government might operate in partnership with other relevant agencies it was typical of the era. Redlich points out how the nature of counties in particular made joint working beneficial. Joint committees were commonplace. Size meant committees were more powerful, and could authorise action in advance of endorsement by the full council meeting:

The committee system makes it possible for the Council to hold few meetings, and the distances to be traversed make it impossible to hold many; for how could men be expected to accept an honorary office which involved constant loss of time and money in travelling and for which not even travelling expenses are allowed?⁶⁵

Committees then were powerful and could include non-councillors, and thus some included women before they had the right to be elected. The other area of co-option of special relevance to women was in the area of maternity and child welfare. There were various Acts which initially allowed and eventually compelled councils to register midwives, then register births, and by 1918 for 'making such arrangements as might be sanctioned by the Local Government Board for attending to the health of expectant and nursing mothers and of children who have not attained the age of five years'.⁶⁶ Although powers under this Act were permissive, where they were exercised the presence of a Maternity and Child Welfare Committee to oversee them was mandatory. The committee could include people with suitable training or experience in this area of work who were not members of the council, but whereas expertise was voluntary, the Act did specify that 'at least two members of every

⁶⁵ Redlich, *Local Government*, p.31.

⁶⁶ Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 8 August 1918 as included in *Law Reports* vol LVI (London, Eyre and Spottiswood) public statutes, p.87.

such committee shall be women'.⁶⁷ The 1918 Act replaced arrangements of 1915 which included optional committee arrangements which 'shall include women and may comprise, if it is thought fit, persons who are not members of the authority'.⁶⁸ Women then, had a right to take part in debate in areas where their expertise was recognised.

Some of this legislation requiring women committee members and recognising the need to draw on external expertise applied to other councils as well as county councils, and especially the county boroughs. As will be illustrated later, on counties where the presence of elected women was minimal, co-option provided both a mechanism for women to influence the council without election, and in some cases preparatory training for an elected role. Co-option and especially the mandatory co-option in education and welfare was the only mechanism that ensured women had any voice at all on some counties. Devon and Leicestershire were amongst those who did not elect any women at all until the 1930s.

Some responsibilities transferred to counties in 1888 were mandatory, and like the later education requirements some committees were a legal requirement. However, given the powers of delegation open to councils, the 'permissive' rather than mandatory nature of much of the legislation, and the ability to promote local legislation, a definitive list of responsibilities is impossible. There was further piecemeal change in responsibilities as the century progressed, the most notable change before 1938 being the absorption of responsibilities from former Poor Law Boards. By the time of this legislation contained in the 1929 Local Government Act, women had been able to stand as county councillors for twenty years, but were more prominent as Poor Law guardians. Parliament acknowledged there were some

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.88, paragraph 2.

⁶⁸ Notification of Births (Extension Act) 1915, as in *Law Reports* vol Liii ch26 p.191 (para 2(2)).

2,319 women guardians and as the Bishop of Southwark stated in debate there were concerns that:

...the women have not sufficient chance under this Bill, and that many devoted workers who have practically given their lives to assistance in this matter have little or no chance of continuing the work they have done, or of training others.⁶⁹

Co-option on to public assistance committees was again considered a suitable method of securing the services of some women, with debate over the degree of compulsion. This matter was pursued by Mr Lovatt-Fraser MP, who asked a question in Parliament that revealed there were just 260 elected women on the county and county borough councils that had replaced Poor Law guardians, with an estimated further 280 women co-opted. Women were again losing out in the redistribution of local responsibilities.⁷⁰

The absorption of Poor Law responsibilities may have helped create the impression stated in the report of the 1924 Onslow Commission that the system of local government in England and Wales as 'flexible and responsive to the facts of growth and change' but the nature of that flexibility could also create tension.⁷¹ Hostility between county council and county boroughs over size and status cannot have made for smooth co-operation in delivering services, and yet in some responsibilities, for roads, transport, water and utility supply for example, co-operation was inevitable and sometimes compulsory, with joint boards and locally focused sub-committees common.

⁶⁹ Hansard, *HL Deb*, 05 March 1929, vol. 73 cc64.

⁷⁰ Hansard, *HC Deb*, 29 April 1930 vol. 238 cc156.

⁷¹ 'Royal Commission on Local Government, constitution and extension of county boroughs', (Onslow commission) (HMSO 1924 – 1925, command 2506), para. 42 p.14.

The wording of the 1888 Local Government Act stressed that county boroughs were classed as an 'Administrative County itself' for the purposes of the Act.⁷² As Redlich states, they had the 'rights and duties of County Councils'.⁷³ However as Redlich and other commentators note, the county borough also had responsibilities for functions stemming from their previous borough status, especially in the areas of public health. By the 1920s this responsibility provided the foundations of public sector housing development and related town planning functions. Although recognised as not achieving its ambition, the 1925 Town Planning Act ordered boroughs and urban districts to prepare town planning schemes for those areas where development was anticipated – powers first allowed in the permissive legislation of the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act. The purpose of that legislation describes a desire that drove many women active in localised charitable work:

The object of the bill is to provide a domestic condition for the people in which their physical health, their morals, their character and their whole social condition can be improved by what we hope to secure in this Bill. The Bill aims in broad outline at, and hopes to secure, the home healthy, the house beautiful, the town pleasant, the city dignified and the suburb salubrious⁷⁴

The county borough emerging then combined the practical and detailed work of managing municipal change with the growing responsibilities for education and, increasing once Poor Law Boards were abolished, responsibilities for caring for the most vulnerable groups in the locality. Those areas of work might attract women, but it was still demanding work with limited reward. The need for visiting

⁷² Local Government Act 1888 section 31 as in *Law Reports* vol xxv Part ii paragraph 31, p.251.

⁷³ Redlich, *Local Government*, vol.2, p.106.

⁷⁴ Hansard, vol. 188 col 949, 12 May 1908 quoted in J.B Cullingworth, *Town and Country Planning in Britain* (London, George Allen & Unwin 1985 9th edition).

committees, standing joint committees or sub-committees was endless. For the average councillor on a county borough opportunities existed for standard committee attendance, for visits to establishments or the examination of the minutiae of life through specialist sub-committees on purchasing requisitions or planning new facilities. Some councils also developed ward or area level committee structures to complement their topic based discussion. With a prevalence of permissive legislation county boroughs were also likely to differ from each other in the detail of their functions, making straight comparisons on the responsibilities of individuals more complex.⁷⁵ Despite attempts at consolidation, the boroughs continued to experiment and initiate new activities through the use of local Acts of Parliament, a method of extending powers only made available to county councils in 1903 as its use started to wane.⁷⁶

The councillor on a county borough had the advantage over his neighbouring county councillor of having the same degree of power, but only having to travel within one town or city to administer it. The borough councillor also had responsibility for a wide array of services with a focus on the home that extended beyond that of the county council. Those practical and functional differences should have made the county borough a more attractive proposition for women.

County councils were then, for their first fifty years, gaining in responsibilities and, through pressure of a changing population shrinking in area as boundary changes acknowledged expanding urban areas. Between 1919 and 1937 they faced the challenges of economic depression, the spread of urbanisation, pressure for improved transport and changing education and welfare systems. Yet changes in

⁷⁵ For a breakdown of the complex division of responsibilities between different types of council that details both the permissive nature of some legislation and requirements to establish certain committees see First report of the Royal Commission on Local Government, constitution and extension of county boroughs', (Onslow commission) (HMSO 1924 – 1925, command 2506) 1924-25 [Cmd. 2506]. Part 1 Chapter ii 'the functions of Local Authorities of several types', pp. 59 -73.

⁷⁶ Bryan Keith-Lucas and Peter G. Richards, *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* (London, George Allen Unwin, 1978), pp.35-37.

the elected representation of county councils were less obvious. Redlich lists examples from several counties of the occupations of founding members and concludes that:

In spite of a democratic constitution, the classes who had, until 1888, the privilege of managing county affairs, still continue to do so, a de facto monopoly of wealth and position being substituted for constitutional privilege. The great landlords themselves and the smaller gentry who have settled upon the land, with the assistance of large farmers, manufacturers, parsons, and professional men are almost the sole candidates for a county council.⁷⁷

The prime study of county council life published in the 1960s, important not just for a theory based on Cheshire but for comparisons drawn with other county councils, recognises that starting point of 'social leadership' drawn from a local gentry or aristocracy, and that 'the principles of social leadership have survived in those parts of the country where members of the aristocracy and gentry were willing take up public service with conscious deliberation'. But, Lee contends, 'their devotion was only made possible in areas where there was a minimal amount of social and industrial change'.⁷⁸ Satisfaction with, or at least tolerance of, local rule by an elite meant that in many cases county council elections were to go uncontested.

As *The Times* found, in the 1930s, the resultant culture of uncontested county council seats remained prevalent in some areas for some time:

...few of them are yet awake to the importance of some of the questions raised for their consideration. The number of contested seats promises also to be small in comparison with the unopposed returns. In Berkshire

⁷⁷ Redlich, *Local Government* vol.2, p.46.

⁷⁸ J.M. Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of County Government in Cheshire since 1888* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1963), p.225.

to take an example, only about 4 contests are expected, though there are 52 seats to fill. In Shropshire, again with 51 elected members, it is probable not more than two or three of them will be opposed. It is still true of many counties that their elections are habitually fought on non-party lines by everyone but the Socialists.⁷⁹

With the introduction of the 1907 Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils Act) the position of women candidates was at least standardised although still very limited. If the structures of representation were settled though, the political struggle for membership of councils was about to increase in visibility and take on a new dimension as Labour established itself as a national party.

Local government and political change

Avowed party politics came to local government gradually. Unlike most other county councils, political labels were dominant in the first LCC elections of 1889. John Davis contends that personality could still determine results, but acknowledges that 'most of those returned in 1889 were party candidates, demonstrating the advantages enjoyed by political organisations in managing a large urban electorate'.⁸⁰ The majority of those elected in 1889 were Progressives, and they were to maintain political power (enhanced by holding the majority of aldermanic posts) until 1907. The Progressive group on the LCC were mainly active Liberals, some combining their posts with roles at Westminster, but also included some trade unionists and other such as (from 1892) Sidney Webb with Fabian links.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *The Times*, 24 February 1931.

⁸⁰ John Davis, 'The Progressive Council' in Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London, the London County Council 1889-1965* (London, Hambledon Press, 1989), p.29.

⁸¹ John Davis *Reforming London, The London Government Problem 1855-1900* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, Oxford Historical monographs, 1988), pp.115-117 describes how the London Liberals had built on changes made necessary by constituency reform to create effective grass roots organisations built on activism rather than patronage. He attributes their LCC success to the nature of this organisation.

Opposing the Progressive alliance on the LCC were the Moderates. They exercised control of the LCC from 1907 as the Municipal Reform Party. Adrian Steel examines the politics of London in the 1920s in depth, and describes the intentions of Municipal Reformers as 'a desire to represent those who were paying for local government as opposed to those who wanted money spending on them'.⁸² As Steel illustrates, drawing also on the work of Ken Young, Municipal Reform could adapt to local circumstances. Although links to local Conservative Associations were strong, their intention was to attract a wider group of voters by using an alternative name. Their origins lay in the founding of the London Municipal Society (LMS) in 1894, although Alex Windscheffel challenges the view of other commentators that this created a consistent local approach and suggests instead that Conservatives were able to adapt their message to a range of audiences.⁸³ Despite debate about the relevance of party politics to local government, the early elections of the LCC were usually party political in nature.

Municipal Reformers dominated the LCC for 27 years from 1907 to 1934. They were also the main vehicle for electing Conservatives to London boroughs in the same period. The nature of their representation though, is less clear cut at borough level. Between 1919 and 1937, they were consistently and clearly in charge of eight London boroughs by substantial majorities.⁸⁴ Only Poplar, Deptford and Woolwich saw consistent Labour control in the same period. Labour had a majority of elected councillors in most years in Battersea, Bermondsey and Greenwich. Bethnal Green was unusual in electing Liberals as an alternative to Labour in 1928 and 1931. In those boroughs not in Municipal Reform control, including the Labour strongholds, opposition to Labour was a complex mixture. Progressives remained prevalent as

⁸² Adrian Steel 'Explaining Changes in Political Party Fortunes in Greater London 1918 – 1931' (Queen Mary University, London, 2005, unpublished PhD), p.94.

⁸³ Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in London* (Chippenham, Anthony Rowe Ltd, 2008), p.24.

⁸⁴ Chelsea, Holborn, Kensington, Lewisham, Paddington, St Marylebone, Wandsworth and Westminster.

candidates, although rarely successful, in Lambeth and Camberwell, but in the majority of boroughs they all but disappeared after 1919. In that year Progressives had contested less than half of the available seats in London. In the next elections in 1922 it was to slump to fighting 149 seats out of 1362. Their disappearance reflected national decline in Liberalism, but the picture was distorted by the emergence of Municipal Reform dominated alliances.⁸⁵

Both in London and in surrounding areas the LMS would endorse candidates they considered supported their programmes and principles. Where Municipal Reform was weaker as a party, or where there were links with Ratepayers Associations (RA's), alliances could be shaped to suit electoral expedience. From 1921 onwards Ratepayers organisations outside London began to affiliate and the influence of LMS spread. Their research team, known then as the 'Department of Social Economics' was particularly renowned for producing anti-socialist literature, in high demand in many towns.⁸⁶ Most of the candidates in London supported by the LMS who were not from the Municipal Reform party were representatives of local organisations of ratepayers, but some were Progressives. Support could vary at a ward level and the nature of the alliance changed from year to year. Opposition to Labour in Stepney for example, consisted of a 'Ratepayers Alliance' in 1922 and 1925, with Municipal Reform candidates then fighting some Mile End wards, and the rest of the borough being contested by either Independents or Ratepayers. Southwark hosted several variations, with a 'Ratepayers Alliance' in 1922 and 1925, followed by Progressives, Municipal Reformers and Ratepayers sharing out some wards in 1928, but with Labour opposed by both Municipal Reform candidates and Liberals in two wards.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Steel, 'Explaining Changes in Political Party Fortunes' p.132.

⁸⁶ Ken Young, *Local politics and the rise of party: The London Municipal Society and the Conservative intervention in local elections, 1894-1963* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1975), p.127.

⁸⁷ Rallings and Thrasher data.

While the complexity of alliances meant that the number of candidates labelled specifically as Municipal Reform fluctuated between 78 per cent of all seats in 1919 and 62 per cent in 1937, and Progressive numbers dwindled, Labour was, in terms of number of candidates, going from strength to strength. There had been one Independent Labour Party (ILP) member elected in Finsbury in 1900. Other than this, the first local candidates elected as Labour in London stood in Woolwich. The successful Labour organisation here was one Herbert Morrison was to draw on years later.

The Woolwich Labour Party was one of the earliest and most successful Labour parties in the country. In 1903 Will Crooks was elected to Parliament for Woolwich and the party won a majority on the borough council, the first Labour local government majority in London. In 1904 it sent two Labour representatives to the LCC and nine to the board of guardians, and so became the first constituency in the kingdom to be represented on all elected bodies by Labour members.⁸⁸

There were further significant Labour successes prior to the Great War, including the election of George Lansbury in Poplar, and a small but vocal contingent in Kensington which, by 1912, included two prominent Labour women.⁸⁹ By 1912 election, the last election in London before the War, some candidates had a variety of labels recognisable as Labour in about half the London boroughs, but with numbers varying between one and thirty six, and totalling less than 200. Variety was to be expected, given the range of Labour, Trades Union and Socialist organisations

⁸⁸ Donoghue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, p.83.

⁸⁹ The election of Lansbury illustrates the complexity of political allegiance and organisation on the left around the time of the formation of the Labour Representation Committee and then the Labour Party. Between 1900 and until individual Labour Party membership became possible 1918 candidates representing 'labour' were elected from a variety of organisations and with a variety of labels. John Shepherd states that in the 1903 council election coverage the *East London Advertiser* described Lansbury as Socialist, Progressive and Labour in quick successions. Lansbury had left the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) around this time and then joined the ILP. The exact date of his Labour membership is unknown, but at this stage was likely to have been through ILP affiliation or similar. John Shepherd, *George Lansbury, at the heart of old Labour* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), p.77.

then organised as individual entities in the capital. In November 1914, after several unsuccessful attempts those organisations came together to form the London Labour Party. By early 1915 the London Labour Party had Herbert Morrison as part-time secretary.⁹⁰

From their limited representation in pre-war London, Labour fought the November 1919 local elections on an impressive scale:

With our 1,000 candidates we have fought on a larger scale than the Progressives and our candidatures are but a little less than those of the moderates. Future Municipal contests in London are going to resolve themselves into a great struggle between Labour and the reaction.⁹¹

Some of the strength of that improved Labour organisation in London in 1919 is attributed directly to Herbert Morrison, by that time full-time Secretary. Morrison was as committed to efficient organisation as he was to the principles of local democracy. His biographers suggest he was 'in the thick of all this electioneering, for not only did he draft the electoral programme of the party, but he wrote most of the leaflets, advertisements, circulars and pamphlets himself'.⁹² As emerges later, Morrison played a key role in the promotion of some Labour women in London.

Morrison was at the centre, too, of later disputes and divisions. The realignments which occurred were national, but many had a decidedly London focus. Morrison fought at all levels to maintain separation between Labour and communist movements, so that 'Even before the Labour Party's national conference had come out firmly against the communists, Morrison in London had rejected their overtures'⁹³ The impact of expulsion of individuals and disaffiliation of local parties in

⁹⁰ Donoghue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison* p.38.

⁹¹ *London Labour Chronicle*, November 1919 (no 49).

⁹² Donoghue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, p,74.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.99.

local government terms was strongest at the 1928 local elections, where some expelled members stood openly as communists, and others stood as independents. Women activists were amongst those affected. Mrs Jarrett, a regular Labour candidate in Kensington stood alongside her husband as an unofficial Labour candidate in 1925.⁹⁴

Some smaller parties reflected international and economic pressures, with fascist and communist candidates following those who lobbied for the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers. Alongside these candidates of smaller parties was a plethora of alliances and local organisations that could sometimes rightly claim political independence, but more regularly were allied to the LMS or reliant on its backing for candidates. Occasionally as time progressed, candidates did come forward in London with individual Conservative or Liberal labels, but in most boroughs these labels did not emerge until after 1945. For the inter-war period, the prediction Labour made in 1919, of a struggle between their party and everyone else had some truth.

For women, the establishment of a blatant political battle in London emerges as a prime determinant of their ability to stand as candidates. Outside London the intensity and timing of that struggle varies. One of the factors that would influence that timing was the degree to which local parties, and Labour in particular, established a local structure capable of fighting local elections.

The significance of the first half of the twentieth century in shaping national party politics in Britain has been well documented.⁹⁵ When the Liberal Government clarified the rights of women ratepayers to stand as council candidates in 1907 they had a substantial majority. Supporting the Bill was the newly formed Parliamentary

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 22 October 1925.

⁹⁵ Ross McKibbin, *Parties and the People England 1914-1951* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p.3. includes a summary bibliography focusing on the Edwardian era.

Labour Party. Less than forty years later Labour were forming a majority Government. In the intervening decades, Liberal fortunes were to slide, with Conservatives regrouping after wartime coalition and overcoming divisions around tariff reform to form a majority government under the leadership of Stanley Baldwin in 1924. Labour and Conservative General Election contests after 1918 were shaped not just by developing policy platforms however, but by the changing shape and size of the electorate, and the ability of the respective parties to win over new voters, including women over thirty.

Ross McKibbin recounts the impact this legislation was to have on the Labour Party, both in terms of its structural arrangements and in being legislation which 'transformed the conditions under which Labour grew'.⁹⁶ As McKibbin details, with many examples, 'until 1918, and for some time thereafter, the characteristic local organ of the Labour Party was the trades council, acting either in that name or nominally disguised as 'Trades Council and Labour Party''.⁹⁷ The level of pre-war organisation in a constituency or borough then would owe a great deal to the predominance of those Trades Unions who had not developed close links with Liberalism. Local organisation too was coloured by the varying response to by-elections, a pattern shaped by the continued efforts of Ramsay MacDonald in particular to reach agreement with Liberals about which seats to fight. Funding, especially from unions, to support agents and candidates was another contributing factor. In some areas, the presence of the ILP provided an additional dimension. Labour responded to legislation in 1918 by developing a consistent constitutional framework for local activity. For Labour attempting to stand alone as a national party required the zeal to develop local organisations in far more pervasive way. As Iain McLean describes 'Only with the introduction of individual direct membership, in

⁹⁶ Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), p. xv.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.33.

1918, could the Labour Party become any sort of nationwide mass movement'.⁹⁸ That constitutional structure needed to mesh together the varied interests, and built on local experience. 'Management of the divisional party was now to be in the hands of a general committee of four sections: representatives of affiliated unions, of other societies eligible for affiliation, individual members and a women's section'.⁹⁹

Prior to 1918, women found it necessary to establish their own Labour organisation as individuals were unable to join the Labour Party itself. The establishment of a separate organisation led to a variety of responses from scepticism through to outright opposition that would return to colour the development of women's groups as a part of the Labour Party later. The ILP, one partner in the alliance that established the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900 to promote Labour candidates, did include individual women members amongst its membership, whilst the majority of trades unions did not, or only recruited a small number of women workers. The result, Christine Collette suggests was that 'The executive committee of the LRC remained all male because it was drawn from the executives of its affiliated bodies, maximising the difficulties of women's participation'.¹⁰⁰ Although there were close personal links between early participants, the formation of the Women's Labour League (WLL) was not the establishment of an integrated part of the LRC or Labour Party, but, Collette suggests, 'far from being a client organisation, the Women's Labour League was set up in defiance of official Labour Party criticism. Its creation followed the normal pattern of contemporary political activity, women organising separately in their own

⁹⁸ I. McLean, 'Party Organisation', in C. Cook, and I. Taylor (eds.), *The Labour Party, An Introduction to its history structure and politics* (London, 1980), p.35.

⁹⁹ McKibbin, *Evolution of the Labour Party*, p.95.

¹⁰⁰ Christine Collette, *For Labour and For Women, The Women's Labour League 1906-1918*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press 1989) p.26.

interests'.¹⁰¹ With the benefit of individual membership, the League was to increase its membership speedily, recruiting 5,000 between 1906 and 1913.¹⁰² However Pat Thane suggests Colette overplays the exclusion of Labour women from mainstream Labour activism at a local level¹⁰³ At a national level one woman had significant influence. By the time the Labour Party was drafting the 1918 constitution Dr Marion Phillips was prominent in both the League and the SJC (Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations), a national body Labour came to rely on for advice. After 1918 Labour women in the newly created separate local sections had Marion Phillips as Chief Woman Officer providing guidance from head office. Her role was crucial in shaping the organisation. 'Throughout the 1920s, she maintained a staunch loyalty to the party leadership, by whom she was appointed and to whom she was directly answerable'.¹⁰⁴ Graves informs us that once membership was open women joined the Labour Party 'in their thousands'.¹⁰⁵ The initial years were to include discussion and disagreement about separateness, and consequent representation of women at a national level. Women had reserved places on the influential National Executive Committee (NEC), the national co-ordinating body, but as part of a carefully managed arrangement by which powerful unions led by the miners who were intent on limiting the influence of 'a putative army of middle-class socialists'¹⁰⁶ those places would be filled by votes of the whole annual conference, dominated by the Trades Union block vote. Pamela Graves also informs us that although women may have joined the Labour Party in significant numbers after 1918, their separate organisations frequently questioned the way in which local government candidates were chosen by local organisations:

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.34.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.41.

¹⁰³ Pat Thane, 'Women's History and Labour History', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 55, No.3, Winter 1990, p.14.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate, A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2005), p.41.

¹⁰⁵ Pamela Graves, *Labour Women, Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.6.

¹⁰⁶ McKibbin, *Evolution of the Labour Party*, p.99.

One of the most contentious issues in several of the local parties was the reluctance of the male-controlled executive committees to accept women candidates for local government office. This was an area where women were placing themselves in direct competition with men. Council seats were generally regarded as stepping stones to parliamentary seats and were therefore hotly contested.¹⁰⁷

Graves provides examples from a number of women's sections, including places like Manchester where women did achieve a reasonable level of representation on the council.¹⁰⁸ That commentary is a useful reminder of the barriers women faced. Given the uneven pace of change and the variety of groups that made up local Labour representation it should be viewed as one part of a complex picture.

Change was also recognised as necessary in the Conservative Party still needing to find the route away from coalition government. Whilst Labour needed to spread activity throughout constituencies, Conservatives needed to continue consolidating the local activity of a range of organisations that had supported their cause but were not integrated at a local level. They included the Primrose League, with a large female membership, open to both men and women but with a 'largely powerless' separate structure for women.¹⁰⁹ The importance of the Primrose League to the development of Conservative women is recognised – although as one recent commentator notes, Conservative women have received less attention in academic work.¹¹⁰ G.E. Maguire describes the origins of the Primrose League as a product of the internal Conservative power struggle that followed their 1881 election defeat and

¹⁰⁷ Graves, *Labour Women*, p.160.

¹⁰⁸ Graves, *Labour Women* p.160. The Manchester example is drawn from 'Manchester Women's Advisory Council, Minutes, 17 January 1932'. Other examples listed include Stockport, who asked why the names they had forwarded were not considered (1929); Windsor, York and Doncaster.

¹⁰⁹ N. McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage, Popular Conservatism, 1918-1929* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1998), p.21.

¹¹⁰ Mitzi Auchterlonie, *Conservative Suffragists: the Women's Vote and the Tory Party* (London, I.B Taurus, 2007), pp.31-35.

the death of Disraeli.¹¹¹ Both Maguire and Auchterlonie point to the significance of organisations like freemasonry in shaping the structure of the Primrose League that gave it a degree of 'ceremony and even a little mysticism'.¹¹² Auchterlonie suggests that the formation of the Ladies Grand Council within the Primrose League created a body that was subordinate but from which powerful women were able to negotiate participation in political life. Women members of the Primrose League were the workers who ensured its success in organising support for Conservative candidates. They were skilled at 'propagating Conservative principles, securing Tory success at the polls and registering voters'.¹¹³ Alongside the 1918 expansion of the franchise were changes to methods of voter registration creating space for new roles for local agents. That role increasingly became one of building mass membership and 'fostering organisations for women and wage earners and by involving more people in the party's operation'.¹¹⁴ Party Chairman George Younger (MP for Ayr and first Viscount Younger of Leckie) took responsibility for details. Significantly he included both senior and influential support for women's organisations from Central Office, the right to separate local organisation and protected quotas for women on local and national decision making bodies.¹¹⁵ Quotas were intended to avoid segregation as in the Primrose League. At a time when Labour women relied on a limited number of prominent women such as Marion Phillips and Margaret Bondfield (then prominent as a union leader) to influence policy decisions at annual conference dominated by Trades Union delegations, Conservative women had quotas protecting local delegations to conference, so that at their 1925 conference, out of 2,000 delegates, almost half were women.¹¹⁶ Leadership changes and the policy debates of the day

¹¹¹ G.E. Maguire, *Conservative women; a history of women and the Conservative Party* (Basingstoke, MacMillan Press, 1998) p.27.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.29.

¹¹³ Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies, Why do women vote Tory?* (London, Virago, 1987), p.17.

¹¹⁴ McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party*, p.19.

¹¹⁵ McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party*, p.22.

¹¹⁶ Campbell, *The Iron Ladies*, p.51.

were to give the new Conservative constitutional arrangements strong political direction. The principles of building mass local membership in all areas were ones Stanley Baldwin promoted as he led Conservatives through their 1924 election advance: 'the moment at which a new two-party balance was born'.¹¹⁷ The 'participatory representation' Baldwin was to foster as he became leader and then Prime Minister was to set the scene for local Conservative women.¹¹⁸

The scale of involvement of Conservative women in politics has often been underplayed by those who found the nature of their political activity less radical and perhaps less feminist. This image is one Auchterlonie sets out to reduce. As she acknowledges, however, the quiet backroom work of Conservative women has been seen as less campaigning in style to that of their Liberal counterparts.¹¹⁹

For Linda Walker campaigning played an important role in the work of women in all three main political groupings. She outlines how both Liberal and Conservative women (and then women in emerging Labour organisations) would both educate and train members as well and suggests 'whatever the characteristics and nature of the various associations their collective impact was to make women's contribution an essential part of the electoral process, extending into the twentieth century a tradition of political party work which has never been broken'.¹²⁰

Liberal women had a history of developing their own political organisations, and contributing to the practical work of campaigning. Pat Thane suggests that the membership of the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF) grew to around 133,000 by 1912 although it then experienced some decline. She roots the origins of that organisation in the 1884 franchise increase that needed women's canvassing and

¹¹⁷ John Ramsden, *A History of the Conservative Party*, Volume Three, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902- 1940 (London, Longman, 1978), p.206.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.208.

¹¹⁹ Auchterlonie, *Conservative Suffragists*, p.3.

¹²⁰ Linda Walker. 'Party Political women: A Comparative Study of Liberal Women and the Primrose League' in Jane Rendall (ed) *Equal or different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.166.

organisational skills.¹²¹ The organisation and individual women within it did not limit their activity to support for men however. Prominent Liberal women were directly involved with the suffrage campaign. Their presence and the struggle they had to contend with is central to several accounts of the suffrage movement.¹²² Some commentators suggest the struggle for suffrage sapped the strength of the Women's Liberal Federation before the war, and that individuals then pursued their interests through other organisations.¹²³ However the response of Liberals to the challenge of the new franchise was also limited by the divided nature of their party. Lloyd George led the coalition through the 1918 electoral pact between National Liberals and Conservatives (or 'coupon election') and harboured ideas of more permanent centre-based realignment, but his following lacked a separate identifiable operational party structure. Meanwhile those Liberals who had no coupon in the 1918 election suffered 'a rout and humiliation on a scale almost unparalleled in British politics'.¹²⁴ Reasons why are many, but the outcomes are more relevant here, for, as Chris Cook continues, the real impact of the division was at local level, where 'After 1918, many local Liberal Associations suffered an almost total collapse of organisation, membership and activities'.¹²⁵

Thane, though, suggests a less permanent Liberal rout, with female membership of the Liberal Party recovering by 1928 to around 100,000. At a similar point in time however 300,000 Labour women were reputed to make up around half the party's individual membership, whilst around one million women were Conservative

¹²¹ Pat Thane, 'Women and Political Participation in England 1918 – 1970' in Esther Breitenbach & Pat Thane (eds.) *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland; what difference did the vote make* (London, Continuum, 2010).

¹²² Hollie Voyce, 'From WLF to WLD, Liberal Women's Grassroots campaigning' in *Journal of Liberal History* (Spring 2009, 62) p.47 mentions the move of the Pankhursts from Liberalism to the ILP and states many other Liberal women lost patience with the leadership.

¹²³ C. Hirschfield, 'Fractured faith: Liberal Party Women and the Suffrage Issue in Britain 1892-1914'. In *Gender and History*, (2,1990).

¹²⁴ C. Cook, *A short History of the Liberal Party 1900-2001* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002), p.76.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.80.

members.¹²⁶ As younger women gained their right to vote and all three political parties developed localised structures, women were numerically significant in political life. To gain equal local elected representation, though, women still needed to contend with the culture of the political organisation itself, the culture of elections and candidacy and the increasingly bitter representation of politics portrayed as the forum for class conflict. McKibbin suggests it was the latter image that reduced the appeal of Labour to women voters. Both parties, McKibbin argued, appealed to women with a domestic agenda. He suggests that whereas working class men may recognise the appeal of collectivism through trades unionism, working-class women suffering from the 'particular burden of individual responsibility' associated with housework. As a result, he continues, 'A party which emphasized individual responsibility and the individual above the social stood for the reality of life; unlike the Labour Party which, despite its attempts to woo the housewife, stood for the fecklessness and aggression of men'.¹²⁷

Both the increase in the electorate and the rapid change in national political fortunes then had an impact on local political organisations, and consequently on participation in local elections. As seen in relation to London, Labour gradually increased the number of council seats they were able to contest. The response to their advance was expressed in two ways. The first manifested as a desire to keep politics out of local government and related to that, there emerged a spread of local electoral alliances designed to counteract the perceived 'socialist threat'. Liberals and Conservatives would co-operate to preserve their proportion of the council seats rather than risk allowing in Labour members. In some cases co-operation happened even when there was no immediate threat. As George Jones found in his study of Wolverhampton, unopposed elections did not mean there were not political

¹²⁶ Thane 'Women and Political Participation' in Breitenbach and Thane, *Women and Citizenship*, pp.13-15.

¹²⁷ McKibbin, *Parties and the People*, p.99.

allegiances. In 1900, the tendency was for candidates and their supporters to assess popularity before nomination. This would sometimes lead to uncontested seats as Conservatives and Liberals rallied behind a mutually suitable candidate, often the incumbent and often then balanced by a reciprocal clear path for an incumbent or favoured dignitary from the other party in another ward. On other occasions a contest would be held but with no political labels at all even though 'all the non-Labour members of the Council supported either the Liberal or the Conservative Parties, as voters and members, and many indeed held official positions in the local constituency and ward organisations of their parties'.¹²⁸ This trend was also noted as a significant factor in Cheshire where J.M. Lee noted that as early as 1889 an electoral pact emerged as the two parties carved up the seats in the council chamber by mutual agreement. 'For the party managers the ideal situation was a state of permanent electoral truce. The council election of 1901 came closest to this ideal: the only contest was fought by mistake'.¹²⁹ Lee describes the impact of this informal pact over several elections keeping a balance of power in the council chamber but favouring sitting councillors. This alliance was in place well before any Labour challenge in Cheshire which did not emerge until the 1920s, with the Labour group dating from the 1928 election.¹³⁰

As Labour increased in strength and particularly in the cities more formal political alliances grew, deliberately designed to keep socialists out at a local level. Dunkley summarises the impact in the West Riding. In Sheffield there were informal early pacts between Conservatives and Liberals in those wards where Labour started to field candidates. This led to a formal alliance at elections by 1913 and the formation of the anti-socialist Citizen's Party to fight post-war elections grew from

¹²⁸ George Jones, *Borough Politics: a Study of Wolverhampton Town Council 1888-1964* (London, Macmillan, 1969), p.29.

¹²⁹ J.M. Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of County Government in Cheshire since 1888* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1963), p.61.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.63.

there. In Leeds, however, informal co-operation in some wards remained the pattern until 1926.¹³¹ As with the formation of the LMS discussed earlier then, political labels at election could hide party loyalties. The term 'keeping politics out of local government' frequently meant working together to keep socialists out. Some of those alliances used labels that give a nominal appearance of independence when the reality was the opposite. The impact was clearer where a formal alliance was in operation rather than an informal pact, but the impact could be long term. In Sheffield the formal alliance was in operation for some time.

After the emergence of the Labour Party in 1919 the Conservatives and Liberals agreed to form a Citizens' Party to fight municipal elections, whilst continuing with their separate organisations for all other purposes. In this way it was hoped to avoid splitting the anti-Labour vote in the city. The Citizens' Party continued in existence throughout the 1920s, but in 1929 the Conservative Central office in London sent a representative to Sheffield to contest the local elections in their own name. The result of this visit was to split both the Citizens' Party and the Conservative Party, for not all the Conservatives agreed to leave their Liberal allies.¹³²

Even if women were able to join and influence a political party then, becoming a successful local government candidate would not be straightforward. In some areas political fortunes were distorted by alliances, in others the reality was that local elections were frequently uncontested and incumbency favoured.

As Labour started to bring Party politics to some county council elections, *The Times* increased its opposition to 'the socialist menace in the north'.¹³³ Frequently lack of electoral contest protected incumbents especially those drawn from a local

¹³¹ Dunkley, 'Women magistrates, Ministers and municipal councillors' p.118.

¹³² W. Hampton, *Democracy and Community a study of politics in Sheffield* (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), p.63.

¹³³ *The Times*, 19 February 1931.

elite, but Labour members could also find themselves unopposed. In 1937 *The Times* acknowledged that in a newly re-warded Nottinghamshire where Socialists might expect to gain seats 'Half the members of the new council, 23 anti-socialists and nine Socialists have been returned unopposed'.¹³⁴ Uncontested elections were not the only reflection of stability in county membership. When a number of county councils produced jubilee year books in 1939, with a common summary by the County Councils Association, a list was included of the sixteen English and five Welsh counties who still had members serving first elected in 1888. Herefordshire boasted of over half the alderman having served more than 28 years, whilst Northamptonshire had an introduction written by the chairman of 14 years standing who had been a member for 47 years. Worcestershire had a chairman who had lasted 35 years.¹³⁵

Whilst Lee refers to a similar inheritance of leadership in Cheshire – 'The chairman and vice-chairman of Cheshire County Council in 1939 had originally been elected in 1907 and 1913 respectively', the main thrust of his thesis is that during the course of the inter-war years, the typical county councillor shifted from being a 'social leader' appointed because of status to being a 'public person' who gained their social status from the office they held, rather than bringing prestige to it.¹³⁶ Those who chose to stand as candidates did so out of a desire to gain that prestige and were limited to those with the time and money available to carry out that role. Ultimately, Lee argues, it was the professional bureaucrat rather than elected politician who held that status. The challenges he illustrates however, remain similar to those identified earlier by Redlich.

¹³⁴ *The Times*, 22 February 1937.

¹³⁵ County Council's Association, *The Jubilee of County Councils, 1889-1939. Fifty Years of Local Government* (London, Evans brothers, 1939) 39 volumes, each relating to one county with common introduction are held by British library. Other volumes have been identified in local searches.

¹³⁶ Lee, *Social Leaders*, p.83.

The central problem of county politics was to reconcile the needs of the new administrative methods of County Hall, which required some degree of specialisation from those who were to be chairmen of committees, with the accidents of processes of election, which supplied the councillors to fill these positions.¹³⁷

From the bitterly contested ideological battles of London politics, to the accidents of election in rural counties, via the muddle of manipulation in the anti-socialist alliances of larger towns and cities, the political and structural factors that shape local government coloured the outcome for women considering seeking election. In London they would need to be a politician. In the county the changing image of the 'public person' would determine suitability for selection whilst electoral opportunities were limited by inbuilt council cultures that favoured the status quo.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset the impact of locality. Each elected council had its own set of unique circumstances; interplay between geography, economy, administrative boundaries and land ownership; between industrial or agricultural distribution and the personalities who owned and operated them, and between the level of population change or stability. The diversity in the structure of the councils and in their democratic relationship with the local community originated before the period of this study, but some knowledge of their formation assists understanding of why both politics and gender grew unevenly in local representation. Alongside it though, understanding is also needed of the role of women in society more generally, the post war development of women's organisations and the concepts historians have used to describe women's activity and place in society.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.156.

Women in a changing world

Some fundamental facts about the position of women in inter-war Britain often go unrecorded. The first is that women were more numerous than men. Analysis of the 1921 census reveals that there were 1096 females to every 1000 males, but as the commentary noted, the impact of the Great War and migratory factors meant that difference was greater in the working age population.

If the age group is extended to cover the years from 20 to 64, as including the mass of those who form the economic and reproductive elements of the population, it will be seen that while the males have increased in the ten years from 9,450,000 to 10,082,000 (i.e. by 6.7 per cent.) the females increased from 10,354,000 to 11,510,000 (i.e. by 11.2 per cent.) the preponderance of the latter being expressed by the proportion of 1,142 females to 1,000 males in 1921 as compared with 1,096 in 1911.¹³⁸

This analysis goes on to note that the draw of particular occupations such as domestic work meant that gender variation was greatest in London. Boroughs like Kensington in particular show a high concentration of females. One consequence of the preponderance of females was that not all women could marry. The lower proportion of men does not explain all spinsterhood though, and increased widowhood also had an impact. Of women aged between 20 and 64 in 1921, 38 per cent were not married. Women in the 16-20 age group also outnumbered men in full time education, although the ratios then change significantly for those aged 21 and over where men far outnumber women. The nature of that education though varied considerably, with the majority of young girls under 14 remaining in elementary education rather than secondary schools. Wealthy families might have girls

¹³⁸ HMSO *1921 Census England and Wales general report with appendices PART ii (population)* (other data in this paragraph from parts v, vi and vii). Published 1927 and available on-line at http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/report_page.jsp?rpt_id=EW1921GEN&show=DB (28 June 2011).

educated privately but higher education was far more likely to mean training colleges than university for women.¹³⁹ Although the overall proportion of women working had declined slightly since 1911 and women who found temporary employment during the war had been removed from the workforce, women's employment still stood at 32 per cent in 1921. Again there were regional variations, with Lancashire having almost 40 per cent of all females working.

There are some changes in these proportions in the 1930s. As Martin Pugh notes marriage did increase in popularity and the average age of marriage dropped, but women's participation in the workforce also increased.¹⁴⁰ The continuing variety in employment and marital patterns amongst women is significant not only as an actual trend but also in how it became interpreted in the two conflicting gendered images of the time – the irresponsible and indulgent young flapper and the content and reliable home loving wife. It is the latter image which is portrayed as acceptable, and as Deirdre Beddoe points out, not only became the predominant image of inter-war popular culture but also shaped public policy.

Women were forced into the role of wife and mother by the workings of the labour exchanges and the National Insurance Acts, by unequal pay, by marriage bars and by an outcry against women taking 'men's jobs'.¹⁴¹

The context in which this maternal welfare model developed started before the war with social investigation revealing a need to improve motherhood and child health, but the real impetus was war itself and the need to rebuild the nation. It was a contradiction in many ways, coming at a time when older women were not only granted the right to vote, but also gained other rights to participation. Acceptable behaviour, in nurturing the national home, was required of the new model female

¹³⁹ Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty, Women between the wars 1918-1938* (London, Pandora, 1989) p.35.

¹⁴⁰ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* Second Edition (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 2000), pp.91, 222-223.

¹⁴¹ Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty*, p.8.

citizen even if they also had increasing opportunity. For Martin Pugh this domestic middle-class reality lay at the heart of the granting of citizenship as war itself made men see the 'traditional roles as wives and mothers as even more important now that the flower of British manhood was being frittered away in Flanders'.¹⁴² His analysis emphasises the acceptance of a gendered contribution to the war effort by those women who participated in voluntary nursing or sewing circles as being more influential than the participation of women in manual trades in shaping popular opinion. Paul Ward adds to this debate by looking at women's own writing collected at the time. He concludes that middle-class women succeeded in developing their own gendered interpretation of patriotism based on domestic pursuits during the Great War. It was this gendered model of citizenship that encouraged the partial granting of the vote, excluding the younger women who had worked in munitions factories.¹⁴³

If motherhood was to be the model they aspired to, the younger women could participate in the workforce, but they were to do so in a way that prepared them for their future role. Popular cultural images would denigrate not only the frivolous flapper but also the unnatural spinster and misguided feminist – although as Beddoe points out more positive images of each could be found in less mainstream publications like *The Vote* and in fictional writing such as the work of Winifred Holtby.¹⁴⁴ The diversity of gender images portrayed by the thinking women also reflected an increasing perception of the Class dimension to women's lives.

¹⁴² Martin Pugh, *March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage 1866-1914* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2000). Pugh makes a similar point in the introduction to *Women and the Women's Movement*, second edition in which he questions how far 1918 was a major turning point for women.

¹⁴³ Paul Ward 'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History* (2001, vol.12 no.1), p.44.

¹⁴⁴ Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty* p.31.

Historical analysis of women in this period is changing as that diversity is investigated in more depth by gender, cultural and social historians.¹⁴⁵ The concepts they use to describe the collective activity of women are adapting to new information. There are four overlapping concepts of relevance. First, that of separate spheres and the gendered division of lives into the private and the public; second, the professionalization of voluntary activity undertaken by middle-class women; third the debate about the shape of the inter-war suffrage movement and whether it fragmented, faded or diversified; and finally the definitions of old and new feminisms which are being reinterpreted by looking again at the origins of definitions of feminism itself.

Concepts of a natural and inevitable separation of spheres underpin the reasons why some women were able to advocate female participation in local government whilst remaining opposed to female suffrage for Parliamentary elections. As stated earlier, on a practical level, 'separate spheres' can be seen simply as positive reflection of how women referred to their own special attributes as wives and mothers. For Mrs Humphry Ward and others who supported her crusade against female suffrage, local government and its domestic concerns were the natural sphere of activity for middle-class Edwardian women, who should leave parliamentary life to men. 'Charity and local government rather than politics were the spheres where women's emotion and understanding of personality could best be exercised'.¹⁴⁶

Academic debate surrounding separate spheres focuses not just on the way in which some women justified their special roles, but at the extent of subordination built into construction of images of the private and domestic focus of women's lives

¹⁴⁵ Esther Breitenbach & Pat Thane (eds.) *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland; what difference did the vote make?* (London, Continuum, 2010). This compilation provides a recent example, extending the critical analysis to include comparison between nations.

¹⁴⁶ Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres, the opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London, Croom, Helm 1978), p.83.

on the one hand and the public and powerful lives of men on the other. That discussion is usually associated with the impact of industrialised economic relations on Victorian or Edwardian middle-class women. Amanda Vickery traces these concepts back through American studies and suggests British counterparts started in the 1950s, carrying on through to the 1970s when

The first studies painted a highly-charged picture of the typical woman of the nineteenth-century middle class. A near prisoner in the home, Mrs Average led a sheltered life drained of economic purpose and public responsibility. As her physicality was cramped by custom, corset and crinoline, she was often a delicate creature who was, at best, conspicuously in need of masculine protection and, at worst, prey to invalidism. And yet she abjured self-indulgence, being ever-attentive and subservient to the needs of her family. Only in her matronly virtue and radiant Christianity did she exercise a mild authority over her immediate circle. She was immured in the private sphere and would not escape till feminism released her.¹⁴⁷

Challenge to those concepts has been gathered together by Vickery in a work that stresses the variety within the lives of middle-class women. One contribution relates specifically to women's roles in electioneering. Judith S. Lewis illustrates that Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire was not unique or new in influencing the political arena of the 1784 General Election.¹⁴⁸

Some analysis though accepts the presence of difference in roles but rejects notions of inferiority. Thus Krista Cowman quotes the work of Pat Thane which states that within the work of prominent women 'was their acceptance of such

¹⁴⁷ Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History' *The Historical Journal* (Vol. 36, No. 2 June, 1993), p.387.

¹⁴⁸ Judith S. Lewis, '1784 and all that' in Vickery A. (ed.) *Women Privilege and Power, British politics 1750 to the present* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001).

essential element of the ideology of separate spheres and their determined reinterpretation of it as a basis from which to promote the notion of female superiority'.¹⁴⁹ In the post 1918 setting therefore the debate about separate spheres becomes more than an examination of gendered roles. The aftermath of the Great War as much of the aftermath of partial enfranchisement led to a need to redefine the nature of citizenship itself. Some women were now voters, but women as mothers were also now accepted as areas of legitimate state intervention.

The analysis of Cowman continues with some useful categories to sub-divide the changing approach of women to their domestic roles, in which she recognises (in a Merseyside context) the continuation of acceptance of a traditional model of separate spheres alongside the *socialist model* which placed gender oppression as part of class oppression and a *sex-class* model that presented women as a separate class.¹⁵⁰ Her study, in focusing on one geographic area highlights the interplay between those approaches. Other work focuses on one particular aspect of the advances women made in areas of public policy now open to them. Anne Logan examines the progress women made in becoming magistrates from 1920 onwards.¹⁵¹

Those works both recognise the importance of contextualising discussion about the complexity of class, politics, organisation and community as they revisit the participation of women in the public sphere. For Amanda Vickery the evolution of women's involvement needs to take account of informal as well as formal political action, with the significance of the nineteenth century being primarily in the increased opportunities for charity and radical campaigning whilst the impact of

¹⁴⁹Krista Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother' Women in Merseyside's Political organisations, 1890-1920* (Liverpool University Press, 2004), p.7.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.7-11.

¹⁵¹ Anne Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: the campaign for women magistrates in England and Wales, 1910-1939' *Women's History Review* (16:4,2007, pp. 501-518), p.503.

women on twentieth public policy benefits from renewed research. When discussing the participation of women in elected bodies around 1900 Vickery recognises that can be interpreted in different ways but argues

..for many the flourishing of this vocabulary of separate spheres was part of an attempt to push the boundaries of local action further out and to recast local government in a humanitarian mold. It was a sign neither of limited goals nor of a masculine reading of local government.¹⁵²

Debate about how far local government work constituted part of the acceptable sphere of activity for women abounds throughout the history of their involvement. It formed part of the parliamentary debate surrounding the 1907 Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act.¹⁵³ The second aim of this work is to look at how far women's local government activity was limited to a domestic and maternal arena. Hollis suggests they viewed their special role in a positive way. Active women of the inter-war years themselves may not have thought in terms of concepts like that of separate spheres, but their speeches and attitudes suggest they could defend a position of difference. Davies and Morley cite one specific example from their considerable collection that sums up a common theme. Taunted by the councillors she opposed as a candidate in Doncaster in 1920 that a 'Women's place is in the home', Miss Clark retorted that 'Women's place was the home - she agreed – and it was because she believed that that she was asking them to return her to the Council. Women ought to have a say in the making of the homes in which they had their place'.¹⁵⁴ Yet as this research reveals, the topics councils dealt with in the 1920s and 1930s increasingly merged public and private lives. That merger stemmed in part from the new citizenship granted to women, their

¹⁵² Amanda Vickery, *Women Privilege and Power, British Politics 1750 to the present* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.33.

¹⁵³ *HL Deb 11 July 1907 vol. 178 cc3-23* sets out reasons why women should be appointed as aldermen but not elected as councillors.

¹⁵⁴ *Doncaster Gazette*, 29 October 1920 quoted in Davies and Morley, *County Borough elections* (vol iii) p. 422.

rights to enter the public sphere in a more formal capacity than in the immediate past. At the same time public policy increasingly shaped the domestic sphere.

The dilemma that surrounds how far female domestic lives really were a reflection of separate spheres is intensified by the growth of twentieth-century public policy as much as it is challenged by the rise of enfranchised women. That concept extends a principle established by Amanda Vickery who illustrates how definitions of what is public and what is private have changed over time. Vickery reminds us of the diversity and complexity in the home lives of the Victorian middle-class woman. Whilst for some managing a large household required as much energy as running a small business, others did develop the opportunities available to focus on philanthropy and public works. Vickery concludes in this work that the concept of separate spheres is flawed as a measure of changing patterns of subordination of women whilst at the same time having value as a means of encouraging study of lives beyond industry and formal politics.¹⁵⁵

Part of that wider arena of changing public space includes the election of women as councillors. Initially those women who were able to stand as council candidates were upper or middle-class women with time on their hands. Even though the 1907 legislation ensured women were not disqualified from being council candidates by reason of their gender, the vast majority of women were still prevented from standing for other reasons. That position was improved by the 1918 Representation of the People Act which standardised and increased the local government franchise, and by the 1914 County and Borough Councils (Qualification) Act, which used residency rather than payment of rates to determine qualification for candidacy, increasing the numbers of women who could stand for election.¹⁵⁶ The intervention

¹⁵⁵ Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?' *The Historical Journal*, pp.412-414

¹⁵⁶ Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise*, p.234, (Summary of relevant statutes).

of war and suspension of elections meant that those two pieces of legislation had an impact in the same elections.

Prior to the Great War, a woman would need to be a householder and thus a ratepayer to stand for election. In ruling out married women in particular, the WLGS explained, councils were deprived of a potentially valuable contribution. Evidence showed they were also excluding women who were able to build up experience as Poor Law guardians or co-opted members, and might therefore be encouraged to become councillors.¹⁵⁷ Those who were qualified before local elections resumed in 1919 tended to belong to a class of women for whom charitable community work was acceptable. Their practical support to ensure the election of male family members was welcome, but attitudes to their personal involvement in politics were more divided.

The second related arena of debate about the lives of middle-class Victorian and Edwardian women concerns ability to participate in voluntary action. Jane Lewis has examined the relationship between voluntary social work and the campaign for franchise by examining the lives and views of five influential women drawn from the ranks of elite women who participated in public work.¹⁵⁸ In so doing she highlights the importance of understanding a continuum of opinions about the relative merits of individual character improving support to the poor at one extreme, and the perceived eradication of all poverty through massive state intervention on the other. For many women the acceptable point between those extremes was a blurred and blunt one. The charitable visiting woman social worker would look at a family as a whole and might identify a range of solutions to help them. They could call on state welfare, on charitable institutions and often on their own pockets. The concepts

¹⁵⁷ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.400. Evidence included that from Croydon where the three women co-opted to Education committee and the four women guardians were all unable to stand as council candidates.

¹⁵⁸ Jane E. Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England*. (Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1991).

Lewis explores in investigating the work of women like Helen Bosanquet include using the term 'empowerment' to describe the need for individuals to fulfil their role as citizens. It helps to explain how women active in the next few decades found it natural to combine interest in charity and local government – their focus was the family and they could find different routes to helping out.¹⁵⁹

For all the five women Lewis examined though, views about how far the state should intervene shared common assumptions about the family which included gender distinct domestic roles as central to ideal society. As Lewis observes, in the holistic voluntary sector approach to social welfare provision 'social problems were dealt with locally'.¹⁶⁰ This added to the relevance of local government as an appropriate forum of activity for the philanthropic woman, even those who were unlikely to support the view of Mrs Humphry Ward that the appropriateness stemmed from 'strong formations of custom and habit resting ultimately upon physical difference'.¹⁶¹ The view Mrs Ward was to enshrine in her anti-suffrage charter was no longer straightforward though. The operation of state and local government expanded but still had limits for women. As Hollis recounts, many women elected before 1914 had previous experience as co-opted members of committees dealing with specific caring roles, or as elected School Board representatives or Poor Law guardians. Their acceptance as elected councillors reflected an acceptance of the benefits they could bring to those roles, but did not extend to the powerful roles developing in the new city councils: 'Women were welcome to visit, inspect and undertake after-care work, as long as men retained control of the budgets, the contracts, and the building work'.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.304.

¹⁶¹ Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, p.116.

¹⁶² Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.419.

For councils though, legislation was changing the opportunities for and shape of state intervention in the areas women were interested in, eventually standardising the administration of Poor Laws for example. These were areas where local activity had previously dominated. State intervention prescribed on some areas of voluntary action but added new ones. Jane Lewis argues such standardisation increasingly involved the professionalization and compartmentalisation of the previously holistic approach of local charitable visiting. Recognising that inter-relationship between citizenship, state action and the role of women in promoting family centred welfare explains for Lewis why some women changed their mind about the need for women to have a say in electing Central Government:

As the work of social administration moved more firmly into the orbit of national government, then women social activists were faced with a decision as to whether to move with it and to claim the right to fulfil their citizenship obligations at a different level. It is possible to see the split amongst women philanthropists over the vote as a battle about whether to redraw the battle between public and private spheres such as to push it beyond the local community.¹⁶³

Women, then, Lewis suggests, had gained an increased right to participate in local administration at just the time their reason for being there was moving elsewhere.

The centralisation of state welfare though followed from a significant increase in a different kind of social work generated by the war itself. Women worked hard at a national and local level in support of the war, and in the immediacy of war itself found new outlets for their charitable contributions. As Martin Pugh states, 'there followed an immense flowering of organisations in which women played a prominent role: the Red Cross Society, the Belgian Refugees Fund... and innumerable local

¹⁶³ Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, p.305.

Patriotic funds'.¹⁶⁴ Women were called into temporary employment. Those middle-class women who had preached temperance and decency before the war found a wartime need for their place as moral guardians of the nation – 'They frequented military camps, ports, parks, public houses and cinemas where opportunities for drunkenness and sexual immorality presented themselves'.¹⁶⁵ Their presence was not just inspection – their aim was to enforce standards in an unequivocal way.

For Pugh then, the impact of the war was to increase opportunities for women to participate in a voluntary manner, whilst Jane Lewis suggests opportunities decline as changes to the structure of welfare and the strengthening of family values grew out of the war and need to rebuild the nation. The role of women as mothers and carers increased in importance, and, as Central Government developed measures to feed the nation and improve its health, experienced greater state intervention. Although public policy was increasing its impact on women in general, Lewis suggests it was to reduce the ability of the middle-class woman to influence the delivery of social welfare in the way local voluntary activity had enabled her to participate previously.

...their ideas were also lost within the growing bureaucracy of the Welfare State, for while they came to occupy paid positions in social work, policy was made by a civil service that was almost entirely male in its upper echelons.¹⁶⁶

There is some recent work though that re-examines the debate about the extent of inter-war voluntarism amongst women by looking in more detail at the activities of some organisations previously ignored as elements of social history. Prominent amongst that work is the research of Catriona Beaumont looking at mainstream

¹⁶⁴ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.7.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.32.

¹⁶⁶ Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, p.16.

inter-war women's organisations such as the Women's Institutes and Townswomen's Guilds where women participated in mass membership societies that promoted campaigns and encouraged women to act as responsible citizens. What this work and others in similar areas start to do is to redefine the notion of women's voluntary activity by recognising the post-war context.¹⁶⁷ Beaumont examines one specific campaign that frequently features in debate about the nature of post-war feminism – the campaign for family allowances spearheaded by Eleanor Rathbone. Part of a large Quaker family based in Liverpool, Rathbone is said to have been assisted in her life as a settlement worker, councillor and MP by the patronage of her father, but chose to reject his liberal politics in favour of feminism. Her commitment to non-militant suffrage formed part of that.¹⁶⁸

Eleanor Rathbone developed her campaign for family allowances paid to the mother as a Liverpool councillor and through her philanthropic settlement work. As her biographer Susan Pedersen notes, there was a direct thread in her thinking from social investigation and settlement work through to her views on the economic position of women. Pedersen is in no doubt that Rathbone worked as a feminist 'concerned to see women as autonomous beings, apart from their relations to men'.¹⁶⁹ Pedersen contrasts the 'equal but different' views of Rathbone from that of 'equality feminists' such as Beatrice Webb who perceived issues of class and wages for paid work to be more important in resolving inequalities between sexes. There is a common theme here in debate about new and old feminism and that of separate spheres in that both examine the relationship of women to power. For Susan Kingsley-Kent that relationship is itself borne out of sexual difference and the

¹⁶⁷ Catriona Beaumont, 'Citizens not Feminists; the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organisations in England 1928-39', *Women's History Review* (vol. 9, no 2, 2000). See also Helen McCarthy, 'Service clubs, citizenship and equality: gender relations and middle-class associations in Britain between the wars', *Historical Research* (vol. 81, no 213, August 2008). McCarthy looks at how women gained confidence through professional groupings such as Soroptomists and through association with Rotary clubs.

¹⁶⁸ Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, (London, Yale University Press, 2004), p.3.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.98.

subordination of motherhood by masculinity. She argues that difference blurred by the impact of war became re-enforced by a variety of measures that sought to make marital and sexual harmony a part of the peace. That involved not just the removal of women from paid work in munitions factories, the creation of gendered images and association of alternative lifestyles with abnormality, but also the affirmation of biological difference through acceptance of Freudian theory.¹⁷⁰

For Rathbone subordination came not from sexual difference itself but from the economic position that created. Opinions like that of Kingsley-Kent that point to the decline of feminism in the inter-war years often start from a portrayal of pre-war feminism as united activity working towards the common cause of achieving the vote, with post-war – or post-partial suffrage feminism then fragmenting. The differences of views that emerge are encapsulated by the work of Rathbone. As Harold Smith describes Rathbone considered that:

Because of sexual difference women's needs were different from men's; feminists should seek reforms related to women's special concerns especially those involving motherhood, rather than seeking what men had'.¹⁷¹

Equality feminists, on the other hand, placed equal pay and equal access to institutions at the heart of their campaigning activity. As Smith goes on to illustrate however, the dividing lines between the two are not so clear cut, with new and equality feminists co-operating on a range of campaigns. His analysis though, is essentially one of fragmentation, with perceptions of the movement as a

¹⁷⁰ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990* (Florence, USA, Routledge, 1999), p.299.

¹⁷¹ Harold L. Smith, 'British Feminism in the 1920s' in Smith (ed.) *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p.48.

'beleaguered band very much on the defensive they were bitterly divided over fundamental feminist principles'.¹⁷²

An alternative starting point is work that looks at where women were active once the vote was won. Johanna Alberti discusses of a variety of contemporaneous and more recent perspectives on feminist activity in the 1920s and provides a useful framework. She demonstrates how women activists diverged into a range of organisations reflecting the breadth of topics of relevance to them. In her conclusions Alberti considers that the 'activities of the inter-war suffragists and feminists have been censured by historians from different angles'.¹⁷³ She suggests women were able to diversify, carrying on an outward movement that had roots in the suffrage campaigns, but which saw a small but influential band of women serving on wartime committees and supporting the increasing range of voluntary activities needed to clothe the troops, care for refugees and feed the family. That outward movement can then be traced through the inter-war period to chart the continued influence of some women and the organisations they developed right through to the Second World War. James Hinton, for example, maps out the development of the Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) and in doing so he not only develops the life stories of some remarkable individuals, but also starts to examine the networks, overlapping responsibilities and penetration into mainstream politics that those women epitomised.¹⁷⁴ Alberti, Hinton and Beaumont all challenge not only the analysis of separate spheres, notions of reducing women's voluntary activism and the decline of the women's movement. In doing so they contribute to a redefinition feminism itself.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.62.

¹⁷³ Johanna Alberti, 'A Symbol and a Key' – the Suffrage Movement in Britain 1918 – 1928' in S.S. Holton and J. Purvis (eds.) *Votes for Women* (London, Routledge, 2000), p.285.

¹⁷⁴ James Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War: Continuities of Class* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002).

A radical definition of the nature and position of feminism is to be found in the early work of Sheila Rowbotham. She suggests that *Hidden from History* (first published in 1973) finishes in the late 1920s and early 1930s because ‘the last great feminist wave of the late nineteenth century finally faded then.’¹⁷⁵ For Rowbotham, speaking from the background of self-defined second wave feminism expressed as the women’s liberation movement, feminism could only be defined as such if it were tackling the structural subordination of women inherent in capitalism as a whole.

The women in the thirties who continued to campaign were not only isolated from the younger generation; they contributed to the erosion of the pre-war feminist consciousness, which, however confused, had still extended uncontrollably beyond the reform of the Vote into an attack on male-dominated culture as a whole.

Out of the confusion they emerged reasonable and liberal, but confining feminism to a series of isolated goals. Feminism meant more reforms, more welfare, equal pay. It did not mean any longer a rejection of a man-made way of living and a man-made way of seeing. It was no longer in opposition to the structure and culture of capitalist male-dominated society.¹⁷⁶

The utopian vision of the early suffrage campaign Rowbotham defines as first wave feminism might not have been recognisable to all those Victorian philanthropists Jane Lewis highlights as prominent women of their age, but equally not all women activists of the 1970s would see their work as contributing to the goals of women’s liberation.

In recent work more broad-ranging definitions of feminism occur. In doing so they start to reduce the image of fragmentation portrayed by Smith and the isolated

¹⁷⁵ Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London, Pluto press, 1977), p.x.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.162.

goals Rowbotham despairs of. Cheryl Law uses and justifies the wide ranging definition first penned by Olive Banks of feminism being 'any groups that have tried to change the position of women, or the ideas about women'.¹⁷⁷ Starting from that definition and adding to the growing volume of evidence leads Law to a different conclusion about the state of the feminist movement at the end of the 1920s:

There had always been alliances and affiliations, but the widening of the movements objectives induced a need to re-examine and adjust policy to accommodate new ideas. For several years after the war the movement had been engulfed by the weight of practical considerations of survival; the subsequent period of readjustment was an attempt to refocus objectives in a changing political landscape.¹⁷⁸

Other theorists are adding to the redefinition of feminism and illustrating it with practical detail. June Hannam describes how a focus on organisations resulted in the 'common narrative' of first wave feminism as being 1860-1920 and second wave roughly 1960 to 1970. She then suggests the focus on ebbs and flows distracts us from continuities and reinforces assumptions there was no activity in between.¹⁷⁹ A similar line is taken in recent work edited by Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane who are also critical of the 'wave' terminology. Their collection of essays is intended to display a continued interest in politics by women but one they recognise changes over time. As they describe, activism responds to 'changing constitutional, political and social contexts which have presented both opportunities and obstacles and necessitated adaptation from women's organisations.'¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power; The women's movement 1918-1928* (I.B. Tauris, London, 2000) p.3.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.177.

¹⁷⁹ June Hannam *Feminism* (Harlow, Pearson Longman, 2007) p.8.

¹⁸⁰ Esther Breitenbach & Pat Thane (eds.) *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland; what difference did the vote make?* (London, Continuum, 2010), p.1.

Establishing the full extent of women's activism in the 1920s and 1930s needs to allow for significant overlaps and for networks of women who may not have joined organisations but could still join in activities. Thane quantifies political party membership as being in the region of 1,400,000. Beaumont estimates the combined membership of Women's Institutes and Townswomen's Guilds to be over 370,000 with a possible 600,000 women participating in various Christian groups. Law points to both the strength of organisations like the NCW with 126 local branches in 1918 and '142 affiliated women's organisations covering every aspect of women's activity'.¹⁸¹ Law then describes the spread of organisations that developed as women entered new areas of activity – trades unions and professional groups along with consumer organisations. To varying degrees all the organisations examined by these writers include citizenship education of women and lobbying alongside their social activities.

New analysis that focuses on the positive achievements of women and the extent of their activity does not always contradict older analysis but it does illuminate perceptions. Some work continues to remind us of the struggle women had to achieve an influence on public policy despite the scale of their activism. The limitations Graves identified in 1994 in analysing the participation of working-class women in Labour politics are echoed in more recent work by Helen Jones who argues that despite campaigns that placed important issues on the agenda women remained deliberately excluded from power.¹⁸² It is important not to lose sight of the struggle women had, but that does not mean we should dismiss or hide the diversity of activism or decide it was not feminist because it dealt with a domestic welfare agenda. That agenda was of importance, especially to working-class women.

¹⁸¹ Thane, 'Women and Political Participation'. Information aggregated from pp.13-14, est. 300 thousand joining Labour by 1927, 100 thousand Liberal women 1928 and around 1 million Conservative women in the mid 1920's; Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists' includes estimates of membership of the various organisations pp. 415-419; Law, *Suffrage and Power* p.52.

¹⁸² Helen Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914- 1950, Gender Power and Social Policy* (Harlow, Longman, Pearson education, 2000) p.100.

Revisiting and redefining feminist activity of the early twentieth century does need to recognise the emergence of working-class women as a political force as the franchise extended. Jill Liddington and others have succeeded in broadening our understanding of the extent to which working-class women worked alongside the middle-class suffrage activists in the pre-war period. Women like Dora Thewlis and Elizabeth Pinnance, suffrage activists and Socialists active in the Colne Valley in the 1900s, both arrested, the former aged just sixteen, in London suffrage demonstrations are as important to the history of women as the Victorian social leaders Jane Lewis identifies.¹⁸³ Accepting a broad definition of active women as all women who seek to change things and by recognising the way activity adapted to changing opportunities reminds us there was also a new agenda – one that focused on collective health and welfare to ensure the family could contribute to building the next generation.

Electurally, Labour appealed to women primarily as housewives, mothers and consumers, presenting Labour as a gateway to improved living conditions, cheap food and fair rents.¹⁸⁴ It was a view most of the women who campaigned earlier for the establishment of the WLL accepted. Their earliest leaflet suggested a separate organisation was necessary to 'enable wives and mothers and home keepers generally to meet at times convenient to themselves. At those meetings they can discuss subjects which directly affect the home lives of the workers'.¹⁸⁵

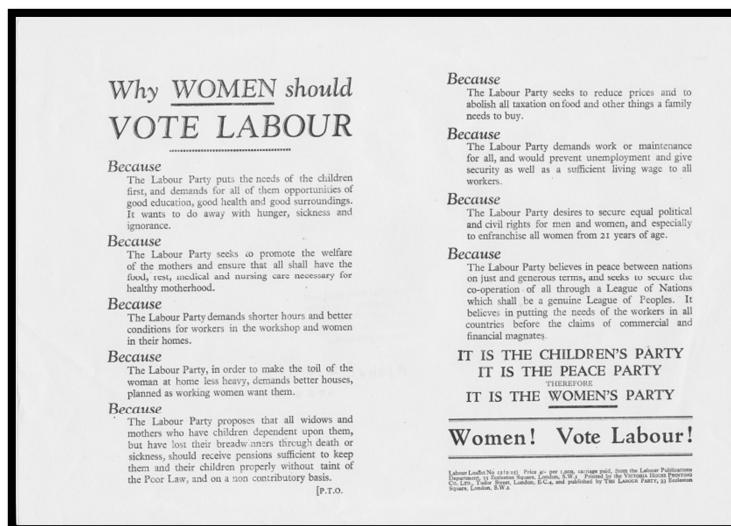
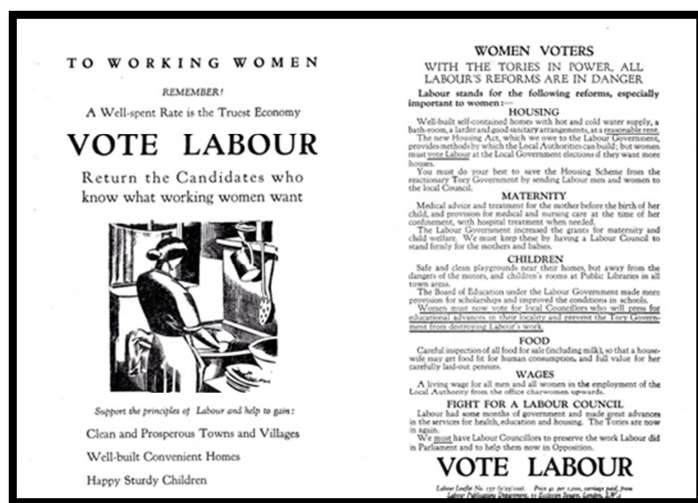
Pat Thane argues that as Labour developed women within the movement played an important part in the construction of social policy by constantly placing women's issues on the agenda. Although this included the right to choose paid employment

¹⁸³ Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, pp. 112-113 and 122-125.

¹⁸⁴ Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, p.40.

¹⁸⁵ Collette, *For Labour and for Women*, p.36.

Figure 1, Election material appealed to women as voters



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she states they also 'sought a feminism which valued rather than devalued the home and maternal experience of women'.¹⁸⁶ The examples include advocating day nurseries for those at home as well as working mothers, plus the vast improvement in the work of infant welfare.

¹⁸⁶ 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 Gisela Bock & Pat Thane (eds.) *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the rise of the European Welfare States 1880-1950s* (London, Routledge 1991), p.96.

Whilst in Labour the pursuit of welfare policy owed a great deal to the pressure of women members, David Jarvis suggests an appeal to women across class lines lay at the heart of Conservative electoral success.¹⁸⁷ The developing themes of 1920s policy recognised the range of identities within the working-class and new middle-class including those differences created by gender. Conservatives appealed to their women members through the magazine *Home and politics* and would also issue specific appeals to women voters, with wives contributing to their husband's electoral address to appeal to their sex.¹⁸⁸ The message to voters stressed the value of home life and included within that were images that illustrated the related threats of socialism and feminism. 'Party propaganda frequently portrayed women as the real locus of power in the household — the source of parental authority, the manager of the domestic budget, and the decisive influence on a family's voting habits'.¹⁸⁹ Conservative mothers were responsible citizens and consumers who would ensure home life continued to be valued. If women voters were central to the message Conservatives developed, Beatrix Campbell suggests women in the Conservative Party itself in the early 1920s had less involvement with the practical agenda being pursued by Labour women. Nevertheless she also recognises their protection of national culture stemmed from an 'idealised vision of the home'.¹⁹⁰

Just because political women had an idealised vision of the home however does not mean they needed to be confined within it. Women of all parties were recognising the value of wider participation in the public sphere by their very participation in politics. Indeed recognition of the importance of stable home life to rebuilding

¹⁸⁷ David Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', *English Historical Review* (vol.111, no 440, February 1996), pp. 80-83.

¹⁸⁸ David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History* (5 (2) 1994), pp.129 –152.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.140.

¹⁹⁰ Campbell, *The Iron Ladies*, p.63.

healthy post-war communities was in itself to accept the importance of newly negotiated citizenship.

Not all women saw citizenship as the prime goal. As Pugh remarks, for younger women there were social activities and attractive lifestyles to emulate: 'For the average girl, cheap dances, cinema tickets and copies of fashionable clothes were but a pale echo of the social life enjoyed by the wealthy'.¹⁹¹ The conclusion in his work emphasises the extent of the divide. There is a need to acknowledge the ground in between. Pugh looks at how that wealthy social life was portrayed by magazines like *Eve*, and argues that '*Eve's* challenge to conventional notions about the sexes was confined to the social sphere: the emancipated woman drove her own motor car, she did not stand for parliament'.

Most women did not stand for Parliament but they could take their work as moral guardians of the street corner to new dimensions as magistrates; they joined the international work for peace and were invited to participate in developing national housing policy.¹⁹² They met in new organisations and discussed opportunities for lobbying. These were new opportunities in a gradually changing world. Jane Lewis may be right to say that the opportunities for women to participate in family centred social work had diminished, but as illustrated later, women found new voluntary opportunities in shaping child welfare. Voluntary action had not disappeared. When work as a Poor Law guardian was combined with charitable activity and council life throughout the 1920s opportunities for joined up social action were still possible. Opportunities had adapted to suit the new models of delivering health, education

¹⁹¹ Pugh, *Women and the women's movement*, p.74.

¹⁹² Anne Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: the campaign for women magistrates in England and Wales, 1910-1939' *Women's History Review* (16:4, 501-518); Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty*, pp.146-147 discusses the work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes; the Politics and Architecture of Early state Housing in Britain* (London, Heinemann, 1981), p.91-92 describes the setting up of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee after lobbying mainly from the Women's Labour League, although accepting it had limited direct impact.

and welfare. Those models involved lobbying and campaigning as well as elected representation, with women coming together in a web of networks.

Encouraging examination of the wider defined feminism as *women who tried to change things for the better for women* adds to understanding of the women's movement in the 1920s and 1930s as being complex and fluid rather than fractured and fading. Women councillors were part of that evolving pattern. They may not have all wanted change in the same direction, but they were seeking change for women and children. Each individual had their own networks and their own history to draw on. There is recognition that more work is needed to place women in context. Karen Hunt and June Hannam have both been active in promoting the need for what they describe as a 'local archaeology' to examine networks and campaigns and the more informal links of women's lives at a local level. Looking specifically in this instance at socialist women Hunt and Hannam highlight the resulting flexibility:

If attention is paid to the lives of individual women, then what emerges is a complex narrative in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to categorise women neatly in terms of whether or not they had a feminist approach or were woman-centred in their politics. Instead, it is more helpful to consider the varied choices that individual women made in the course of a lifetime about how to balance their different interests and perspectives. Thus at some moments they might identify with their party, whereas at others with their class or their sex.¹⁹³

The approach they advocate is an appealing one and can lead to a fuller and more rounded perspective of active women. It has some similarities in direction to that promoted by Michael Savage in respect of political study in which he advocated the

¹⁹³ June Hannam & Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women, Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London, Routledge, 2002) p.49.

examination of what he terms 'practical politics' – they range of actions through which those with similar interests choose to act.¹⁹⁴

A local archaeology of the actions of women can be aggregated up to paint a fuller picture of activity that recognises struggle and barriers whilst also acknowledging the significant achievements women made in influencing domestic lives. It can also be argued that in doing so they were changing the very nature of political action and the language of political decision making. For a small number of those women one route to influencing domestic life was through election to the local council. Those women who chose that route were also influenced by and through involvement with lobbying organisations. They networked with other women through diverse organisations and social events. They had experience to draw on, some of it extensive. They may not always consider their agenda a feminist one, but the extent of their work deserves an overview to help put their individual life stories into a broader context.

¹⁹⁴ Michael Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics, the Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1940*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp.17-19. Similar principles underpin the reasons why Jon Lawrence argues that historians should take more note of locality in explaining the growth (or lack of growth) of Labour, although his evidence is drawn from an earlier time-frame. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1998). Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language, and Popular Politics in England ,1867-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Chapter Three: Making women count; quantifying women councillors

The President of the Local Government Board (LGB) was asked to quantify the number of women councillors in 1912.¹ At that stage he was able to identify just four women county councillors out of a total of 4,615. Town councils and metropolitan borough councils were counted together, with the slightly better figure of 24 women out of a total of 11,140 – or a rate of around 2 women to every 1,000 men. Given only a few elections had passed since legislation had enabled a limited number of suitably qualified women to stand as candidates this figure is hardly surprising, but it does illustrate the scale of the mountain women were climbing and remains one of the few formal and contemporaneous counts that provide a comparable base figure.

When elections resumed in 1919 the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS) issued various press releases identifying the number of women candidates and then those who were elected.² The society faded away in 1925 but although their work was absorbed and expanded by other bodies, overall interest in the numbers of women coming forward for local election ceased being headline news. *The Times* gave the issue prominence when covering LCC, county council and borough elections in 1919 with some coverage of the issue through to 1922.³ After that appeals to women voters made the headlines at local election time, but numbers of women candidates did not merit national coverage.

Parliament resumed interest in the levels of women elected when county boroughs and county councils took over the work of Poor Law guardians, discovering that the county boroughs and county councils taking on that work had

¹ Hansard, *HC Deb*, 21 March 1912, vol 35 c2068.

² London Metropolitan Archives, (LMA) Records of the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS), minutes 1888-1925 (A/WLG-1).

³ *The Times*, for example 29 October 1919 on nomination of women, 4 November 1919 on women elected, 31 October 1921 on presence of 80 women candidates and 9 February 1922 on LCC candidates.

just 260 elected women, in contrast to the 2,330 former female Poor Law guardians.⁴ This lack of central recording and publication may reflect a lack of concern about the numbers of elected women. But it does also reflect the relative autonomy of local government in the period – Parliament was not inclined to insist on local government taking specific action. Legislation did allow co-option of women when councils absorbed Poor Law work, and did insist on women being co-opted on some committees, but in terms of promoting or recording gendered outcomes of elections Parliament was unlikely to interfere.

There are more consistent records available for some other areas of public work. When Ann Logan examined the progress women made in becoming magistrates from 1920 onwards, she found slow but steady growth leading to almost a quarter of all magistrates being female by the late 1940s.⁵ Those estimates that do exist all suggest progress in the election of women councillors was slower. Because systematic collection of election records has not taken place for all council types there is no simple way of identifying if that slow rate of progress results from a lack of women candidates or the wishes of the electorate. Accurate tools to calculate candidacy success rates by gender systematically still do not exist for twenty-first century candidates, so setting quantification as the first aim of this research had to start by recognising the limitations of available data.

The distinct differences in election timing, the numbers of councillors elected at any point, the cultural origins of each type of council make calculation first by council type a logical option. It is also the only practical option given the variety in data sets available. For London Boroughs complete lists of election results are available for all councils and all elections, and have been improved here by local

⁴ Hansard *HC Deb*, 29 April 1930 vol 238 cc65-172.

⁵ Anne Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: the campaign for women magistrates in England and Wales, 1910-1939' *Women's History Review*, 16:4, 501-518, p. 503.

checks. The detailed but incomplete published collection of election statistics for County Boroughs is supplemented by some material collected from local sources and by records of those elected in *Municipal Yearbooks*. For county councils collection of data started from a blank sheet of paper. Information on county level candidates, success rates and political diversity is therefore limited to case study material. For all types of council the discussion focuses on 1919 to 1937⁶, but even though the aim is quantification, it is people that are of interest, not bland numbers. Individuals are therefore placed in context by looking at the position between 1907 and 1914, and occasionally looking at wartime and post-war continued service.

To enable a degree of comparison between council types the conclusions look at the only consistent data – the lists in *Municipal Yearbooks* of councillors in office at any one point in time. Although this comparison has some limitations, it does highlight some significant differences. As hinted at by Pat Thane, Labour women were thought to be more successful in local elections in London than elsewhere.⁷ Tracing those Labour women and their opponents in the highly politicised battles of London borough elections is therefore a good place to start looking at numerical distribution.

Women and the politics of London government

Women experienced limited success as council candidates in London before 1919. Following the battles over the rights of women to join the LCC, and London led lobbying for the 1907 Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act there was more organisational support to assist them than in other areas. As the LCC and London Boroughs both had triennial elections, the immediate impact of the 1907 legislation only occurred where there was a suitable by-election. This was to

⁶ 1919 marked the resumption of local elections after war-time suspension for all types of council; for London boroughs and for county councils, 1937 provided the last full set of elections before wartime suspension. Some by-elections (and county borough elections in 1938-39) are included.

⁷ Thane, 'The women of the British Labour Party and feminism' in Smith (ed.) *British Feminism*, p.140.

lead to the election of two women in Hampstead late in 1907.⁸ Both Reina Lawrence and Mary Balkwill sought election again in 1909 when elections were held in all London Boroughs. Mary Balkwill continued as a councillor until 1922.

In the 1909 London elections, a leader in *The Times* lamented that councils were becoming 'the chief nursing-grounds of politicians, especially of those of the more inflammatory type'. At a time when Labour candidates were increasing in number, language of this type was not uncommon in this voice of the establishment.⁹ The editorial went on to welcome the introduction of women candidates, suggesting the sixty-one women on the ballot paper were numbers 'not disproportionate to the record of female service on public bodies'. *The Times* had some doubts about those women seeking election however, who included a number standing as Progressives (who *The Times* considered suffered from wastefulness) as well as Socialists. In fact the numbers elected were limited. The WLGS, who had campaigned for the right to election for so long, found themselves amongst the defeated women candidates – their founder, Annie Leigh Browne, standing in Paddington was amongst the Progressives who failed to take seats. Progressive women were elected in Islington, Paddington and St Pancras, whilst Conservative women standing under the Municipal Reform label were also elected in Battersea and Kensington. Candidates with a variety of Labour or Socialist labels fared badly, in many cases not surprising as they stood in Tory strongholds of Wandsworth and Westminster. The exception was **Mrs Ada Salter**, elected as ILP candidate in a ward in Bermondsey that also returned one Progressive and one Municipal Reform candidate; she failed to keep her seat at the 1912 election.¹⁰

⁸ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.412.

⁹ *The Times*, 30 October 1909.

¹⁰ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.412 and *The Times* 2, 3 November 1909.

Those 1912 elections resulted in a slightly lower number of women candidates in London, but a little better electoral success, with Labour, Progressives and Conservative women all taking seats. Amongst the four Labour women elected were two in Kensington who were to later seek national office: Dr Ethel Bentham and Marion Phillips were already shaping the national work of Labour through their involvement with the Women's Labour League. They were to be outnumbered on Kensington however, where Municipal Reform women were beginning to make an impact. Amongst them was **Miss Charlotte Keeling**, first elected as Poor Law Guardian in 1900, and combining that work with her role as a borough councillor for two decades.

For Dr Ethel Bentham, her 1912 success in Kensington was a third attempt at election. She had been an unsuccessful candidate in 1909, and also stood for a Kensington seat on the LCC in March 1910, the first election after the 1907 legislation at which women stood for election to that body. As later examples will show, this degree of persistence amongst women candidates with a variety of political views was not unusual. The 1910 LCC elections did see Miss Susan Lawrence elected as a Municipal Reform candidate in Marylebone West. She gained prominence later as a Labour member of the LCC and in Parliament. The Progressive **Miss Henrietta Adler** was elected in Hackney Central. Although small in number, they were able to build on the experience of women as co-opted members, and were soon to be joined by Lady St Helier as Alderman.¹¹ Although their approach was recognised as valuable, the 1913 LCC elections brought only limited success, with ten women candidates defeated and only Susan Lawrence, then a Labour candidate in Poplar, successfully elected. Lady St Helier remained as Alderman.

¹¹ Gloria Clifton 'Members and Officers of the LCC, 1889-1965' in Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London*, p.8; plus *The Times*, 7 March 1910.

London then, reached 1914 with a numerically very limited but influential group of women representing both Labour and Conservative (the latter as Municipal Reform councillors) on the prominent LCC and some borough councils. Liberal or Progressive women were more isolated and were small in number. By the time electoral contests fully resumed in 1919 London politics and the experiences and rights of women had all undergone considerable change, including those legislative changes which were to qualify far more women to stand as local candidates.

Mrs Ada Salter renewed her membership of Bermondsey council in November 1919. She was one of five successful Labour women elected in Bermondsey at that time, along with one woman Progressive. The numbers of Progressive women elected reached their high point in London at this time, with one or two women elected to just over one third of boroughs. Meanwhile Municipal Reform voters in their strongholds of Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster, were also electing Conservative women in similar proportions to the Labour success in Bermondsey. In total, in the region of 132 women were elected in London in 1919. They made up around nine per cent of all councillors – a vast improvement on the position before 1914, and a level unmatched elsewhere.

These were the first borough elections in London following the end of the Great War, and as *The Times* noted in the seven years that had passed since the last borough elections there had been a significant increase in the number of women electors in London, from 120,000 to around 805,000.¹² There were 1,362 borough council seats to contest in 1919. A very small proportion of these were uncontested, and in total there were just over 3,000 candidates. In addition to those women who had been elected in 1909 and 1912, some women had joined boroughs as co-opted members as vacancies occurred during wartime. *The Times* looked at nominations

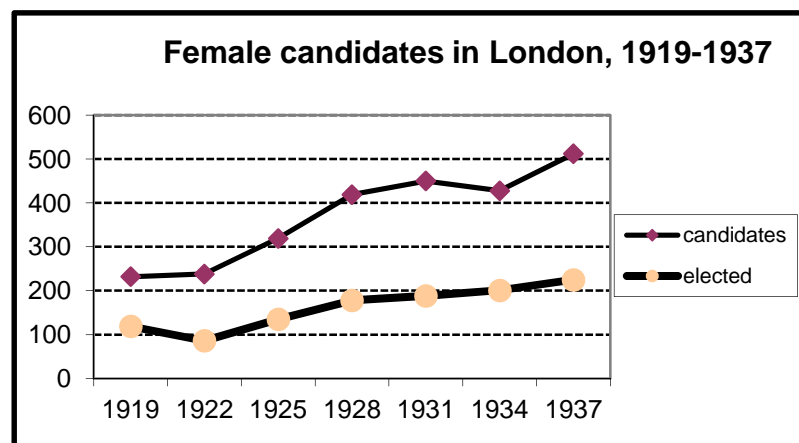
¹² *The Times*, 20 October 1919.

just before the November elections and pointed out that at that stage thirteen of the twenty-eight boroughs had not previously had a woman councillor.¹³ One of those thirteen, Chelsea had thirteen women candidates and elected eight of them.¹⁴

Table 1: London wide summary, all candidates

	seats	candidates	Women candidates	Percentage women candidates	Total women elected	Women elected as percentage of seats
1919	1362	3025	243	8.1%	128	9.4%
1922	1362	2672	238	8.9%	86	6.3%
1925	1366	2711	331	12.2%	142	10.4%
1928	1385	2869	419	14.6%	178	12.9%
1931	1385	2683	452	16.8%	191	13.8%
1934	1386	2739	428	15.6%	201	14.5%
1937	1377	2711	520	19.2%	238	17.4%

SOURCE: Data downloaded from AHDS History's collection at <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/history/collections/index.htm> SN5319 , British Local Election Database, 1889-2003. (deposited by C.S Rallings, University of Plymouth).



¹³ *The Times*, 18 October 1919.

¹⁴ Rallings and Thrasher data. *The Times*, 18 October 1919 article refers to 11 women candidates in Chelsea based on data provided by the WLGS.

Every London borough elected at least one woman, with around half of the two hundred women candidates elected. This was a critical increase on pre-war numbers, and with a variety of candidacy only possible because of the legislative changes that had occurred, but assisted by the way political parties responded to that change. Appendix three includes a sample of spreadsheets which give an indication of this political mix in candidacy.¹⁵

The position in Chelsea in electing over half of the women who stood as candidates in 1919 is fairly typical of that year when over half the women who stood were elected. Those who failed to get elected were far more likely to be Progressive candidates. Of an identified 112 women who were defeated in 1919, over forty were Progressives. Despite this all three main parties had succeeded in electing women as around ten per cent of all their councillors. The success of women in London was already linked to the varying success of political parties.¹⁶

In 1919 Labour found themselves in control of thirteen boroughs, a position Steel aptly describes as their 'high water mark'.¹⁷ Herbert Morrison and his colleagues at the London Labour Party were jubilant, but recognised the importance of the situation. *The London Labour Chronicle* reflected 'if any one of these new Labour Boroughs makes a false move, the whole movement throughout London (and possibly throughout the country) will suffer'.¹⁸ Most boroughs were to find at least one Labour woman amongst the contingent elected. Where no Labour women

¹⁵ Similar spreadsheets were prepared for all election years, using elections data downloaded from AHDS History's collection at <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/history/collections/index.htm> SN5319, *British Local Election Database, 1889-2003*. (deposited by C.S. Rallings, University of Plymouth) and corrected as in summary table two below. Analysis in this section is based on those tables and on lists of named candidates extrapolated from them.

¹⁶ The slightly lower percentage of 9.4% shown in table one results from a smaller proportion of women being elected from amongst those candidates classed as 'other'. Although small in number, this does seem to reflect a possible trend in London for women to fare better with overtly political labels and less well where alliances predominate.

¹⁷ Steel, 'Explaining Changes in Political Party Fortunes', p.144.

¹⁸ *London Labour Chronicle*, November 1919 No. 49.

were elected it usually reflected a lack of local Labour organisation overall, rather than a lack of Labour women candidates. In Holborn, for example, Labour only had seven candidates standing in forty-two seats, with no women included, and candidacy levels were similar in Finsbury, whereas in nearby St Pancras Labour contested more seats and two women were amongst those elected. The fifty Labour women elected in London in 1919 constituted over half of the Labour women candidates. There were concentrations of Labour women candidates in some areas where Labour was only likely to win in very few wards, such as Kensington and Wandsworth, but Labour women were also prominent in some boroughs where Labour had good results, mostly noticeable in Bermondsey.¹⁹

A smaller group of women stood as Progressives in 1919, and their presence as a separate entity diminished further over time. Out of the 130 successful Progressives candidates in 1919 just fourteen were women. In subsequent years numbers contracted further, with some former Progressive councillors standing as part of Municipal Reform led anti-socialist alliances and others, like those in Bermondsey, defeated by the growth of Labour.

The appearance of Labour women in London in 1919 was significant as a part of the overall advance of Labour, but in numerical terms it was almost equally matched by the election of Municipal Reform women. However, whereas Labour women appeared in relatively small numbers in most boroughs, the successful Municipal Reform women were more concentrated in some (but not all) of the Tory strongholds. Over half of the fifty-seven Municipal Reform women elected in 1919 were in the five boroughs of Kensington, Chelsea, Westminster, St Marylebone and Paddington. However some boroughs where Municipal Reform was strong in 1919 only elected very low levels of women (notably Camberwell, Fulham and

¹⁹ The Rallings and Thrasher data here has been supplemented by local checks, Camden Local Studies and Archive Centre, Holborn, St Pancras and Hampstead Metropolitan Boroughs, *Minute Books*.

Wandsworth). This may be because there was a relationship between the presence of strong role models and lobbyists or possibly the relative strength of the Municipal Reform women's section. Both Westminster and Kensington women were active in the latter, and in the pre-war work of the WLGS.²⁰

Table 2: Women elected in sample years, all London boroughs

Borough (and number of seats)	1919			1925			1931			1937		
	Women candidates	Women elected	% women councillors	Women candidates	Women elected	% women councillors	Women candidates	Women elected	% women councillors	Women candidates	Women elected	% women councillors
Battersea 54-55	6	3	5.6	9	2	3.7	25	9	16.7	32	11	21.8
Bermondsey 54	10	6	11.1	20	11	20.4	30	15	27.8	24	13	24.1
Bethnal Green 30	4	1	3.3	12	2	6.7	7	3	10.0	14	7	23.3
Camberwell 60	12	4	6.7	3	2	3.3	16	3	5.0	27	7	11.7
Chelsea 36	13	8	22.2	16	7	19.4	11	6	16.7	5	1	2.8
Deptford 36	8	5	13.9	12	5	13.9	16	8	22.2	16	8	22.2
Finsbury 54- 56	4	2	3.7	12	3	5.6	29	12	21.4	32	15	26.8
Fulham 36-40	7	2	5.6	7	2	5.0	20	7	17.5	18	8	20.0
Greenwich 30	6	4	13.3	12	8	26.7	9	4	13.3	13	7	23.3
Hackney 60-48	8	3	5.0	6	2	3.3	24	5	8.3	19	10	20.8
Hammersmith 36	9	2	5.6	8	2	5.6	15	4	11.1	8	4	11.1
Hampstead 42	6	6	14.3	14	6	14.3	19	10	23.8	7	7	16.7
Holborn 42	3	3	7.1	5	3	2.1	2	2	4.8	2	2	4.8
Islington 60	5	5	8.3	11	6	10.0	23	12	20.0	27	13	21.7
Kensington 60	19	12	20.0	23	12	20.0	20	12	20.0	14	9	15.0
Lambeth 60	16	9	15.0	13	4	6.7	18	2	3.3	17	8	13.3
Lewisham 42-53	6	4	9.5	10	4	9.5	16	6	12.0	24	8	15.1

²⁰ See for example, LMA, records of the Women's Local Government Society, (AWLG/33) which includes a printed record of attendance at a luncheon 27 November 1909 at which at least seven of the women present went on to be candidates in Westminster or Kensington.

Borough (and number of seats)	1919			1925			1931			1937		
	Women candidates	Women elected	% women councillors	Women candidates	Women elected	% women councillors	Women candidates	Women elected	% women councillors	Women candidates	Women elected	% women councillors
Paddington 60	13	5	8.3	15	7	11.7	18	12	20.0	33	13	21.7
Poplar 42	5	4	9.5	10	7	16.7	7	5	11.9	9	6	14.3
St Marylebone 60	15	8	13.3	20	7	11.7	9	8	13.3	28	12	20.0
St Pancras 60	17	5	8.3	19	7	11.7	31	9	15.0	38	14	23.3
Shoreditch 42	9	3	7.1	16	5	11.9	11	3	7.1	16	8	19.0
Southwark 60	11	6	10.0	10	7	11.7	21	9	15.0	26	13	21.7
Stepney 60	4	3	5.0	14	8	13.3	19	8	13.3	21	12	20.0
Wandsworth 60	12	3	5.0	10	0	0.0	10	1	1.7	18	4	6.7
Stoke Newington 30	2	2	6.7	3	2	6.7	8	2	6.7	12	6	20.0
Westminster 60	7	7	11.7	13	8	13.3	13	9	15.0	6	6	10.0
Woolwich 36-45	6	3	8.3	8	3	8.3	5	5	11.1	14	6	13.3
Totals	243	128	9.4	331	142	10.4	452	191	13.8	520	238	17.4

SOURCES: Data downloaded from AHDS History's collection SN5319; British Local Election Database, 1889-2003 <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/history/collections/index.htm>, (deposited by C.S. Rallings, University of Plymouth), with some corrections from local archive collections.

The statistics for 1919 indicate the start of general growth in the representation of women in London, although as records for the individual boroughs show, that growth was not always necessarily linear within one borough. Two exceptions to the general slow but steady growth are of interest. Chelsea suffered a fall in the numbers of women elected. The point at which this occurred was 1937, but with no particular electoral explanation. The Municipal Reform party retained its 100 per cent electoral record there, with a similar number of seats contested by Labour to 1934. The borough with the highest numerical growth over time is Finsbury. The Finsbury results illustrate that women could gain seats in areas where contests were fierce, for of the twelve women elected in 1931, ten were part of the anti-Labour alliance, whilst all fifteen of the women elected in 1937 were Labour.

This change in political representation within the overall quantification of women's representation helps to show how there are a variety of success stories for individual women candidates hidden within statistics. In some boroughs individuals could retain their seat with ease once elected, and records show a number of women with a significant length of service. In all a total of at least 1,500 women stood as candidates in London boroughs at some point between 1919 and 1937 and of those over 560 were elected for part of that time.

What is clear is that as the Progressive influence diminished after 1919, women in London needed to be associated with one of the two main political parties to be elected. By 1922 Labour was contesting over 1,000 of the 1,362 seats in London. By 1937 there were 1,208 Labour candidates; with the majority of remaining 1,503 candidates being either Conservatives standing as Municipal Reform candidates; or those Liberals or Independents endorsed as part of Municipal Reform led anti-socialist alliances.

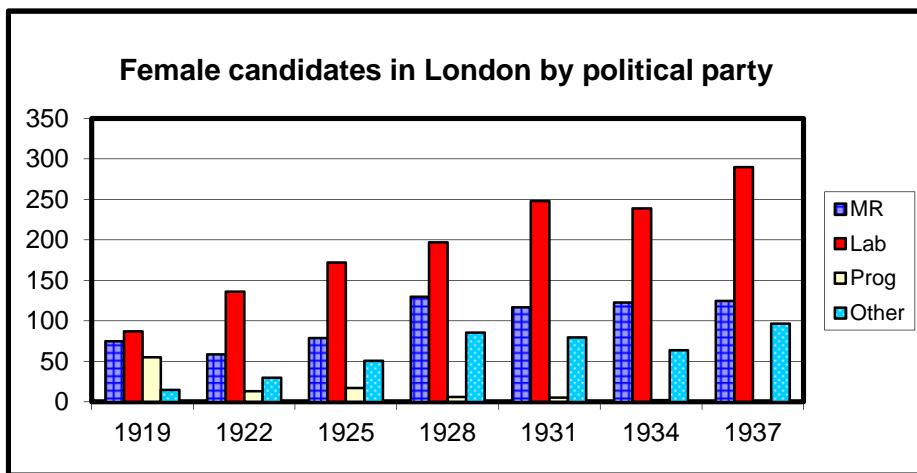
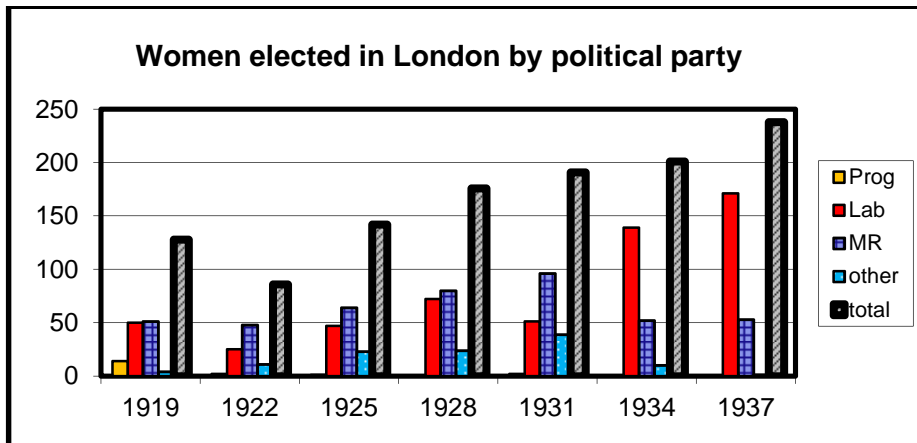
The picture was a confusing one. Steel considers Municipal Reform support was behind the Liberal defeat of Labour on Bethnal Green council in 1928 and that ratepayer candidates opposed the official Municipal Reform led alliance in one Hammersmith ward in 1925 because the alliance candidates were Liberals not Conservatives.²¹ In London local elections though, 1919 was the high point of electoral success for Labour, even though they had slightly fewer candidates numerically in that year compared with subsequent elections. Both Labour and Progressive women lost ground in 1922 as Municipal Reform candidates and some Municipal Reform led alliances succeeded in defeating socialists throughout London. With Municipal Reform women concentrated in boroughs where their party was already strong, the 1922 anti-Labour gains were not matched by a proportional

²¹ Steel, 'Explaining changes in political party fortunes', pp. 237 – 238.

increase in Municipal Reform women. In 1931, when the overall numbers of Municipal Reform women reached their highest point, most boroughs where candidates used that label rather than appearing as part of an alliance included at least one successful woman, but there were still concentrations. Islington and St Pancras joined Kensington, Paddington and Westminster in having a reasonable proportion of women candidates, who enjoyed a good success rate. The relevance of this concentration becomes apparent when moving forward to 1934 and 1937, for as Labour regained strength in London, the numbers of Municipal Reform women elected reverted to the levels of 1919. Although anti-socialist alliances were still present in some boroughs, by this stage virtually all women elected in London were either Labour or Municipal Reform and, as in 1919, there were some concentrations of Municipal Reform women in Kensington, St Marylebone, Westminster and Paddington, but with Chelsea now joining Wandsworth as a Municipal Reform stronghold where the numbers of women elected was low.

In contrast to this pattern of limited growth, as Labour advanced in London the numbers of Labour women grew, both numerically and as a proportion of all Labour councillors elected. Electoral setbacks in 1922 and 1931 did have an effect on the numbers of women, but they were more than matched by the dramatic improvements in the numbers of Labour women elected in 1934 and 1937. In boroughs where Labour advanced or was well established, Labour women made up significant proportions of the Labour councillors elected, in some boroughs making up over thirty per cent, a level still not achieved in some councils today. The overall proportion of women councillors in London increased from around eight per cent in 1919 to around seventeen per cent by 1937 with fifteen boroughs achieving an overall level of women councillors over twenty per cent.

Table 3: London borough elections, summary by political party



Municipal Reform and Labour women candidates and councillors.				
	MR candidates	MR elected	Lab candidates	Lab elected
1919	81	57	89	52
1922	59	48	136	25
1925	79	64	172	47
1928	130	80	197	72
1931	117	96	250	57
1934	123	52	239	139
1937	125	53	290	171

SOURCES: Data downloaded from AHDS History's collection, SN5319; British Local Election Database, 1889-2003, <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/history/collections/index.htm>, (deposited by C.S. Rallings, University of Plymouth), with some corrections from local archive collections

The revival of Labour strength, then, brought with it an increase in the proportions of women in London that intensified in the mid to late 1930s. By that time around one third of all London Boroughs had at least ten women members, but with numbers of Municipal Reform women diminishing as a proportion. The proportions achieved were not met in other major cities and the numerical levels achieved on only a smaller number of the much larger county councils. The only comparable achievements were on the London County Council.

Women and the London County Council

Elections had also taken place to the LCC in 1919, but in common with the usual pattern of County Council elections described in chapter two (p.23) they were held at an earlier point in the year. There had been a degree of co-operation between Municipal Reform and Progressive members of the LCC during the war, and there was then a degree of collaboration over the selection of candidates. Ken Young suggests this partial collaboration resulted from a difference of opinion. The LMS wanted Municipal Reform candidates to contest seats without any form of alliance, but the Conservative Party was depleted by the impact of war, and concerned about the growth of Labour. Young suggests, 'it is probable they had insufficient resources to fight both opponents and they were anxious enough to minimise the scope of the contest to agree on an electoral arrangement'.²² As a result Progressive and Municipal Reform candidates did not challenge each other in 26 of the constituencies, with a very low poll resulting in several of the 34 contested seats. Labour did make some gains, but mainly at the expense of Progressives. Municipal Reform remained in control of the LCC, and remained in that position until 1934.

²² Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of the Party*, p.117.

In total there were fourteen women candidates at the 1919 LCC elections.²³ Six of them were defeated. Five of those defeated were to come back and join the LCC in subsequent elections. They included Labour's Mrs Ada Salter in Bermondsey Rotherhithe and Mrs Caroline Ganley who was elected to Battersea borough later that year. Both Mrs Dunn-Gardener and Miss Rosamund Smith returned to serve for the Municipal Reform cause. In fact, standing for an LCC seat on repeated occasions even if defeated was common amongst those who were elected at some point. The greatest tenacity was displayed by Progressive Ida Samuel, a candidate on six occasions but only successful once. The successful Labour candidates in 1919 included two that are more well-known than most councillors. Susan Lawrence was again elected as LCC member for Poplar. Lawrence was joined by Miss Margaret McMillan, candidate in Deptford. McMillan had already made a significant contribution to the development of care and education of young children as a member of the Bradford School Board, where she had joined the ILP. Having returned to London reluctantly following ill-health she was now established in the Deptford area promoting child health and nursery education.²⁴ The earlier LCC work of Susan Lawrence in campaigning for women cleaners had contributed to her conversion to Labour. In Poplar she was to go on to participate in confrontation over Poor Relief and later served as MP for East Ham North.²⁵

Although the activities of both Labour women have been publicised in various ways, the successful candidates who were to be able to influence policy most in 1919 were those elected as Municipal Reform women. Their influence was to grow until Labour gained control of the LCC in 1934. One of the three Municipal Reform women elected in 1919 was **Lady Trustram Eve**. She was to remain a county

²³ Appendix five lists all LCC candidates 1919-1937.

²⁴ Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1931* (London, Virago, 1990), pp.47-50.

²⁵ David Howell, 'Lawrence, (Arabella) Susan (1871-1947)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34434>, accessed 17 Feb 2011].

councillor, first for Hackney and then for South Kensington until 1931.²⁶ Also working alongside her in 1919 was Mrs Hudson Lyall, who became Dame Beatrix Lyall in 1924. Born into an active Conservative family, she came to prominence for wartime work in Chelsea where she had previously developed her charitable work. She was recognised as a gifted orator with an enthusiasm for causes.²⁷ Numbers of Municipal Reform women on the LCC increased significantly in the 1922 elections when *The Ratepayer* was able to celebrate nine out of eleven Municipal Reform women being elected, one of the two defeated candidates then immediately being selected as Alderman.²⁸ Numbers peaked at eleven in 1925, with a total of twenty-four Municipal Reform women elected to the LCC at some point in the inter-war period. In addition to those women elected some Conservative women achieved senior positions on the LCC as aldermen. Mrs Jessie Wilton Phipps was a co-opted member of the LCC from 1907 then served as alderman from 1914.²⁹ Miss Thelma Cazalet-Keir and **Mrs Evelyn Emmett**, both elected in 1925 contributed at a senior level in their party as well as on the council, and both were later elected to Parliament.³⁰

Women LCC members then made an early impact in Conservative and Labour ranks. With support from prominent women selected as aldermen they were still far from achieving equality, but were capable of being heard. Gloria Clifton makes an important point when she relates their growing influence not just to numbers, but to

²⁶ *The Times*, 2 February 1934.

²⁷ Cordelia Moyses, 'Lyall, Dame Beatrix Margaret (1873–1948)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52026>, accessed 15 April 2011].

²⁸ *The Ratepayer*, Feb/March 1922. The article goes on to point out that Labour only had two women candidates elected, out of thirteen standing. Henrietta Adler, progressive was returned unopposed.

²⁹ *The Times*, 8 August 1934. Mrs Wilton Phipps became Dame Phipps in 1926. In her time as a co-opted member and alderman she was the first woman vice-chair of an LCC sub-committee, then vice-chair of council and between 1923-26 chairman of education committee. Her daughter, Lady Margaret Phipps later served as mayor of Chelsea borough.

³⁰ Cazalet-Keir see Law, *Political Dictionary*, pp.40-41; John Grigg, 'Keir, Thelma Cazalet- (1899–1989)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn. January 2007), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39850>, accessed 28 September 2011]. Emmett see G. E. Maguire, 'Emmett, Evelyn Violet Elizabeth, Baroness Emmet of Amberley (1899–1980)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn. January 2011), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50059>, accessed 24 January 2011].

the durability of some of the women involved, noting that ‘the majority had remained on the Council for twelve or more years, participating fully in committee work and earning the respect of their colleagues.’³¹

Over the period as a whole Labour had far more women who stood as LCC candidates (85 Labour women as opposed to 41 standing as Municipal Reform). However over half the Municipal Reform women candidates were elected, whereas amongst Labour the success rate was around 36 per cent. Although some women of both main parties did stand on several occasions, there are examples where they did so in seats where they were unlikely to be successful. Labour did not always contest the two Westminster divisions for example, but in years when they did women invariably featured amongst the candidates. In 1925 they provided all four Westminster Labour candidates and as usual here had a very small proportion of the poll.³² There are also a number of well-known names and names of borough councillors included in the lists of unsuccessful Labour women, which forms part of appendix five and provides the summary below in table four.

Table 4: Summary of LCC women candidates and councillors

	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Totals elected	8	12	20	22	18	17	20
(as % of 124 seats)	6%	10%	16%	18%	15%	14%	16%
Total candidates	14	24	40	61	48	41	40

Source: *The Times*, annual summaries of election results.³³

For the LCC as well as the London Boroughs the Labour revival in 1934 brought with it an increase in the representation of Labour women, a position sometimes

³¹ Gloria Clifton, ‘Members and Officers of the LCC, 1889-1965’, in A. Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965* (London, Hambledon Press, 1989), p.9.

³² *The Times*, 7 March 1925.

³³ *The Times*, 8 March 1919, 3 March 1922, 7 March 1925, 10 March 1928, 7 March 1931, 10 March 1934, 6 March 1937.

attributed to the personal approach of Herbert Morrison.³⁴ Ironically though, although the level of Labour female representation was significant, the Labour advances on the LCC in 1934 led to a slight drop in the representation of women as well-entrenched Conservatives lost their seats. The electoral dominance of the Municipal Reform Party on the LCC ended in 1934 and in this year Labour women outnumbered their Conservative counterparts.

The highpoint in terms of the overall representation of women though happened in 1928 when the combined ranks of women reached 18 per cent. As with some of the better performing London boroughs, which included Conservative Kensington as well as Labour Bermondsey these were respectable proportions. Women were becoming well integrated into the LCC, a position that sits in stark contrast to that on most other county councils.

County women

Tracing women county councillors has proved to be a bit like finding the proverbial needle in a haystack. There were not many of them, and their elections are not well recorded. Data sources for county council elections are non-existent other than in scattered newspaper reports and the occasional local archive. Most of the contemporaneous records available summarise the position in England and Wales. Statistics reported to Parliament in March 1912 provide a useful starting point. These stated there were just four women county councillors in England and Wales out of a total of 4,615.³⁵ The 1914 *Municipal Yearbook* is the last record produced before the Great War, and that informs us there were then only two women outside

³⁴ Discussed in more detail in chapter 4 p.160.

³⁵ Hansard, *HC Deb* 21 March 1912 vol 35 c2068.

London, Miss Mary Elizabeth Noble in Westmorland and Mrs Fanny Marshall in Suffolk.³⁶ County council elections had taken place in 1913.

The first *Municipal Yearbook* produced after the war was published in June 1920, and therefore included both the outcomes of the resumed county council elections held in 1919 and subsequent aldermanic by-elections. It lists thirty-two women county councillors in England (excluding London) and a further three in Wales. The majority of county councils, 38 out of 61 did not have any women members at this point (indicated in table six). Most county councils had just one or two, with only Essex, Cambridge and Carmarthenshire recording three or more women councillors each. Lists of successful county candidates are included as appendix four.

Table 5: Verifying county data

Comparison of data sources, 1920/ 1921 records	
Women county councillors outside London identified in June 1920 <i>Municipal Yearbook</i>	35
Women listed as aldermen in above	2
Known by-elections referred to by WLGS annual report	2
Women elected to LCC 1919	8
LCC women aldermen 1919	4
Total of above	52
WLGS annual report March 1921	53

The extent of councils without any women elected members was also recorded in slightly later statistics in the annual report of the WLGS presented to their meeting in March 1921, which indicated 53 women were then serving on 27 county councils

³⁶ *Municipal Yearbook* (1914 edition) and *The Times*, 7 March 1910.

(including the LCC).³⁷ Their report identified women elected in by-elections in Northumberland and Norfolk where no women members were present previously. It is possible the WLGS numbers included women aldermen. If that was the case their figure of 53 women county councillors is very close to the numbers extracted from the *Municipal Yearbooks*, as the verification in table five shows. Even though this is a significant improvement on the pre-war position on county councils it is still is a considerable divergence from the position in London where 1919 elections added at least one woman to every council.

Performance on individual county councils in England and Wales outside London then was poor in 1919 compared to the London picture. In the years that followed, when statistics are aggregated for England and Wales level, the picture is one of slow but incremental overall growth. As indicated in table six, 35 elected women county councillors were identified in a trawl of the *Municipal Yearbook* published in 1920. This rose to just 97 by 1928, and 200 by 1938. Percentages are difficult to estimate as the actual numbers of county councillors were changing over time especially as county boundaries were vulnerable to expanding towns. Those 200 women were amongst around 3,400 county councillors by 1938, giving a best estimate of around 6 per cent.

One contributing factor was that incremental growth did not always occur within a council. When Miss Mary Noble resigned from Westmorland council through ill health in June 1920 the county returned to having no elected women members.³⁸ It remained in that position until 1932 when Lord Stanley decided his busy parliamentary role and Conservative Party activities did not allow him sufficient time to carry on as a county councillor. On his resignation his place was taken by his

³⁷ LMA, Records of the WLGS, Volume of annual reports and statements of accounts 1909 – 1925 (A/ WLGS/28). As this count includes the LCC they record 35 out of 62 councils were without women members.

³⁸ *Cumberland and Westmorland Gazette* 14 February 1925 reports that Miss Noble died just before her 80th birthday having been unable to take part in her considerable public duties for some time. She is described as the 'Lady Bountiful' of Bampton.

Table 6: The impact of 1919 elections on county councils (England and Wales)

without women		with women
Bedfordshire	Soke of Peterborough	Cambridge (4)
Berkshire	Suffolk, East	Cumberland(2)
Buckinghamshire	York, East Riding	Dorset (2)
Cheshire	York, North Riding	Essex (3)
Cornwall	Anglesey	Herefordshire (1)
Derbyshire	Brecknockshire	Hertfordshire (1)
Devon	Caernarvonshire	Huntingdonshire (1)
Durham	Cardiganshire	Lincoln, parts of Lindsey (1)
Gloucestershire	Flintshire	Middlesex (1)
Hampshire	Glamorgan	Northamptonshire (1)
Isle of Ely	Merionethshire	Somerset (1)
Isle of Wight	Montgomeryshire	Staffordshire (1)
Kent	Pembrokeshire	Suffolk, West (1)
Lancashire	Radnorshire	Surrey (2)
Leicestershire		Sussex, East (2)
Lincoln, parts of Holland		Sussex, West (1)
Lincoln, parts of Kesteven		Warwickshire (1)
Monmouthshire		Westmorland(1)
Norfolk		Wiltshire (2)
Northumberland		Worcestershire (1)
Nottinghamshire		York, West Riding (2)
Oxfordshire		Carmarthenshire (3)
Rutland		Denbighshire (1)
Shropshire		

Source: 1920-21 Municipal Yearbook

wife, Lady Maureen Stanley, who was elected unopposed. As Westmorland County Council lasted from 1920 to 1932 without any women members, *The Guardian* mistakenly described Lady Stanley as the first woman member there.³⁹ Having a twelve year period without any women members was not unique to Westmorland as the resignation, defeat or death of the sole woman member, or elevation to the role of alderman resulted in a county council returning to this state. This would suggest that although the arrival of the first ever woman elected might be considered a newsworthy story, the election of women *per se* was not seen as essential.

There is also some evidence that once an acceptable pioneering elected woman was in place on the county council, unless there was a political drive to change the balance of power on the council there was little incentive to find additional women candidates. Two politically different county councils, Durham and Kent, were included in case studies because the level of representation of women in each was low. Case study evaluation was necessary to determine how far this reflected a lack of candidates as no published data is available for county elections. In county Durham, there are complete records for the six elections between 1922 and 1934 and more limited records for 1937. Given 75 electoral divisions were fought each time this makes around 450 possible electoral opportunities (plus by-elections for which there is less recorded). In addition to the two women elected, a further four women stood on behalf of the ruling Labour group each standing just once. Five women are known to have stood on behalf of the opposition alliance (who kept this particular set of records) with two of those women each standing twice. In addition three women were candidates in 1937 but their political affiliation is unknown. In total then women in Durham contested around 450 possible battles on around 20

³⁹ Cumbria Record Office (Kendal), Minutes of the Westmorland CC, 1910, 1920, 1932. *The Guardian*, 15 April 1932 (unopposed appointment of Lady Stanley to Westmorland); 9 March 1932 (election of Lord Stanley as president of council of National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations for 1932-1933). Council minutes record he was also at that time under-secretary of State at the Home Department.

occasions. Even though elections in county Durham were battles between Labour and the anti-socialist alliance it would be incorrect to assume those 450 electoral possibilities all involved two-way contests. Durham had a record of uncontested seats, including, despite strong anti-socialist rhetoric, occasions when several Labour members would be returned without opposition. For both Labour and the alliance then, more opportunities to promote women candidates should have been possible.⁴⁰

Like County Durham, Kent reached 1938 with no elected women, having promoted the one remaining woman member (out of three elected in the inter-war period) to the aldermanic bench. There were significant elections in 1937 for Kent as boundary changes increased the number of divisions and resulted in an increase in the number of contests. Out of 77 divisions that year 51 candidates were returned unopposed. All five of the women candidates that year were defeated.⁴¹ Records may not be complete, but analysis of *Kent Messenger* election coverage for the preceding elections identifies just three other women candidates in addition to the three elected, for the whole of the inter-war period.⁴² In two very different counties then not only were low levels of women elected, but very few stood as candidates. As case studies in Essex, Middlesex and the West Riding of Yorkshire confirm, this was not the case everywhere, but given the county responsibilities for education and increasingly for welfare it does indicate a tolerance of reliance on the individual woman's voice and the influence of co-option. Some growth in female membership might also be expected as the welfare responsibilities of the county council grew.

⁴⁰ Durham County Record Office, records of the Durham Municipal and County Federation (an alliance created in 1921 'to provide support for the moderate group in local politics, thereby providing a counter balance to the dominance of the Labour Party'.) County Council election results 1922-1934 (D/MCF 29). These are supplemented by council records for 1937 which do not state party allegiances. Details are included in appendix three..

⁴¹ *Kent Messenger*, 20 February 1937 and 6 March 1937. Three of the women listed are described as Labour candidates and two as Independent. None were standing for the ruling 'Ratepayers Party'. Kent archives, Kent County Council minute book (CC/MI/30) lists those elected and confirms none of them were women.

⁴² *Kent Messenger*, 5 March 1910, 1 March 1913, 8 March 1919, 15 March 1919, 4 March 1922, 11 March 1922, March 1925, 7 March 1928, 28 February 1931, March 1931, March 10 1934. The most significant coverage in each of these items is usually the high number of uncontested seats.

The mid-point of the inter-war period - around 1929 to 1930 - marked the stage at which government finalised plans to transfer responsibility for Poor Law work to councils. This was also a period of economic and social change which was having an impact on the political balance of councils in urban areas. In Parliamentary terms, after the brief period as the largest party Labour lost ground as recession deepened and national politics focused on Ramsay MacDonald. The low point was the 1931 general election when just fifty-two Labour MPs were returned.⁴³ The partial Labour recovery was reflected first in some urban council results, especially those in London in 1934. The Parliamentary upheaval, though, had limited impact on the more rural county councils, where uncontested elections were still common. With accepted incumbency leaving few opportunities for new candidates to succeed, women failed to make significant ground at a time when their previous elected roles as Poor Law guardians were being transferred, in non-urban areas to the county council. By this time the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS) had dissolved, and the National Council of Women (NCW) had taken over responsibility for monitoring the election of women at a local level. Data collected in the autumn of 1927 and reported to their meeting in February 1928 suggested 15 out of 62 county councils had no women members. Out of the 130 women county councillors they were aware of, 28 served on the LCC.⁴⁴ Even if the remaining 102 women were evenly distributed, the average on remaining councils in England and Wales would still be just over two per council. However as the analysis in table seven shows, the distribution was not even.

If the need to ensure women could retain their influence on Poor Law work was being recognised by those selecting and electing county councillors, a more prevalent increase in the number of women elected could be expected in either the

⁴³ John Ramsden (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century British Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.712-713.

⁴⁴ LMA, Records of the National Council of Women, Minutes 1926- 1929 (ACC/3613/01/007).

1928 election or the next triennial election in 1931. Table seven looks at the levels identified in *Municipal Yearbooks* during this period, grouping authorities as far as possible by the nature of the way their representation of women councillors changed over the inter-war period. This shows limited evidence of a possible effort to increase the numbers of women in a very small number of counties – Middlesex, for example, gained six new women councillors in 1929 and a further seven in 1935. That concentrated increase however is unusual and seldom coincides with that increase in responsibilities for welfare. Overall numbers remain low on a significant number of councils, with more even levels of growth or growth only at a late stage being common.

Categorisation in this way is not straightforward and, given the very small numbers of women elected in total, division is somewhat arbitrary. There are also some overlaps – several of the councils that only elected between one and three women by 1938 could also be described as ‘late starters’. There is a significant reduction in the number of county councillors not electing any women members between 1928 (when the NCW found 15) and 1938, when there are just two small counties who had no history of electing any women at all. However the number of county councils who failed to elect more than three women at any one time suggests compensation for the loss of elected roles in Poor Law work was minimal.⁴⁵

Given the levels of political and economic volatility in the late 1920s and early 1930s change in the representation of women cannot be linked to just one factor. Even in

⁴⁵ Of those shown as having a low level of representation in 1938, Monmouthshire, Norfolk and Cumberland all elected four or more women at some point in the preceding two decades, making a total of 24 county councils who never elected more than three women at any one time. There are a further 7 councils who never elected more than four women.

Table 7: Representation of women on English county councils⁴⁶

Low numbers of elected women				Improving levels ⁴⁷			
No women 1938 ⁴⁸	One - three women 1938			Late starters ⁴⁹	Periodic improvement ⁵⁰		More even growth or representation
Isle of Ely	Bedfordshire	Herefordshire	Northamptonshire	Derbyshire, 4 (1930)	Berkshire, 6 (1935)	Surrey, 10 (1932+1938)	Cambridgeshire ⁵¹
Durham (1926,1. 1930,1)	Buckinghamshire	Huntingdonshire	Rutland	Nottinghamshire, 5 (1935)	Dorset, 5 (1932-36)	West Sussex,7 (1929 + 1932)	Essex, 9
Kent (1923,1. 1929,1. 1930,1)	Cheshire	Isle of Wight	Shropshire	Yorkshire, North Riding ⁵² , 4	Hampshire,6 (1923)	Wiltshire, 8 (1935)	Hertfordshire,4
Lincoln (Holland) (1930,1)	Cornwall	Leicestershire	Somerset	East Suffolk,6 (1923)	Lancashire 11 (1929 + 1938)	Yorkshire, West Riding, 5 (1935)	Oxfordshire, 4
Monmouthshire (1924,1. 1926,1 1929,1. 1931,1. 1936,1.)	Cumberland ⁵³	Lincolnshire (Kesteven)	Westmorland		Middlesex 13 (1929+1935)		East Sussex,5
Soke of Peterborough	Devon	Lincolnshire (Lindsey)	Yorkshire (East Riding)		Northumberland,6 (1935)		West Suffolk,5
Worcestershire (1920,1. 1926,1.)	Gloucestershire	Norfolk ⁵⁴			Staffordshire, 6 (1938)		Warwickshire,4

⁴⁶ SOURCE: *Municipal Yearbooks*.

⁴⁷ Numbers are level reached by 1938.

⁴⁸ If there has been some earlier known representation this is shown in brackets.

⁴⁹ Dates in brackets here are the first point at which a woman is listed in the MYB.

⁵⁰ Dates shown here are points where numbers jumped the most.

⁵¹ Although Cambridgeshire has four - seven women throughout the rest of the period it dipped to three in 1938.

⁵² Mrs C.S.Turton elected to NYCC between 1919-1922, then no other female representation until 1930.

⁵³ Cumberland reached 4 women between 1928 – 1931.

⁵⁴ Norfolk had much better representation up to 1937 and had previously had seven members.

councils like Middlesex where there is some concentration of growth it is possible those jumps in women's representation resulted from a political campaign in which more seats changed hands rather than a specific move to increase the representation of women. That situation was exacerbated by the turbulent national political and economic picture. The regions of England and Wales suffered unevenly from the economic crisis that triggered the actions of Ramsay MacDonald.⁵⁵ That variation will have made some difference to the outcomes of county council elections.

The influence of politics on county council election campaigns is far more difficult to trace than that of the well-defined political campaigns of London – even though the latter were complicated by alliances. Political allegiance on county councils was not always expressed, and some local newspapers chose not to mention party when publishing nomination lists even if they went on to mention them when listing results. In 1931 *The Times* decided to run a series of reports, more detailed than usual, highlighting the need for voters to rally to various alliances to defeat Socialist candidates. Voters in Northumberland were, they judged 'face to face for the first time with the peril of Socialist dominance'.⁵⁶ That sentiment continued the next day in an article focusing on county Durham, whilst later articles looked at Lancashire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire. Those emerging political battles though, were not present on all county councils.

In an article looking at more rural areas *The Times* considered unfortunate the apathy and complacency that resulted in a number of areas where there were very few electoral contests. There were just four elections with fifty-two seats to fill in

⁵⁵ John Ramsden (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century British Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.712-713.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 19 February 1931.

Berkshire, and ten out of seventy in Surrey.⁵⁷ Reports on results were more muted, but continued to focus on low polls and the lack of contests. In Worcestershire ‘only 11 contests took place, and in the majority of cases old members were returned. At Evesham a Socialist captured a seat from the Conservatives, where no contest had previously taken place for 30 years’⁵⁸

Whilst the removal of Poor Law guardians might have increased the need for women to serve as county councillors then, it is clear that the limited number of contested seats at county level must have militated against women who might consider standing as county council candidates. Although *The Times* found uncontested vacancies everywhere, they were more prevalent in rural counties where political battles were less likely. Those women who were not of Socialist persuasion might be expected to wait for a local vacancy before contesting a seat. Political upheaval was creating some changes, and Labour moved forward on a limited number of county authorities, but anti-socialist sentiment and economic turmoil was increasing reliance on those who had traditionally dominated the county councils – the local elites. As described by J.M. Lee in Cheshire, in the more rural county council the transition from the social leadership of the ‘fusion of landed and business interests’ that made up a local elite was a gradual one, with aristocratic and gentrified interests still prevalent in some areas and new industrialists who had acquired land gaining in standing elsewhere.⁵⁹ In some instances they started to allow their wives and daughters to join them.

The nature of women elected to county councils, discussed in more detail in part four, helps to explain the low level of women elected, for rural county councils in particular were still drawing on a relatively small pool of well-known local families to

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 24 February 1931 and 5 March 1931.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 6 March 1931.

⁵⁹ J.M. Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of County Government in Cheshire since 1888* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1963), pp. 18 – 23 describe the fusion of the aristocratic and industrialist elite in Cheshire with pp. 224 – 227 providing a good overview of all county councils.

provide their female membership. This factor does not provide the sole explanation though, as Labour failed to find many women candidates in Durham despite a high level of activism there.⁶⁰ This remained the case when Labour ascendancy in London and in some other major metropolitan areas increased the representation of women.

The final round of county council elections before wartime suspension took place in 1937. The summary table provided by Pugh suggesting four county councils as still not having any women members at that stage hides a generally poor performance.⁶¹ The 1937 elections resulted in Bedfordshire, Cumberland, Gloucestershire, the Isle of Wight, the East Riding of Yorkshire and Norfolk all having just one elected woman, the latter having had a reasonable level of representation in previous years. Durham and Monmouthshire, both Labour strongholds, were amongst those counties without any women. Staffordshire, Surrey, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire showed some signs of improvement whilst Cambridgeshire and Hampshire maintained reasonably strong trends, although with some women promoted to aldermen, Cambridgeshire reached 1938 with slightly less elected women than in 1919. The Isle of Ely and Soke of Peterborough, both fairly small counties numerically, failed to find any women members in 1937 and had failed to do so throughout the whole of this period. Only Middlesex, Essex, Lancashire and Surrey stand out as improving over time. Essex reached 1938 with nine elected women, the other three just made it into double figures.

Comparable base figures to illustrate changing trends over time are not readily available given the frequent changes in the size of council membership as boundaries changed. However it should be noted that at 1938, based on estimates

⁶⁰ See page 203 for details of the activism of women in Durham.

⁶¹ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.57. Pugh does not give a clear source for this table or indicate if it includes women aldermen. The column is headed 1937 but it is not clear of this is before or after the 1937 elections. All sources listed for the table predate 1937.

from *Municipal Yearbooks* all four of these counties were significantly larger numerically than the ten London boroughs which reached this numerical level of representation in similar elections that year.⁶² For the four best performing counties it is estimated female membership was in the region of eleven per cent. With the majority of counties electing three or less women at this point, overall percentage rates are far lower and are estimated to be closer to five or six per cent.

Patterns of low county level representation are equally pronounced when looking at county councils in Wales. Pembrokeshire failed to elect any women at all in the inter-war period whilst Radnorshire and Flintshire failed to elect any until the 1930s. Brecknockshire, Montgomeryshire and Merionethshire each found two or three women at some point in the period. There were one or councils who did a little

Table 8: Representation of women on Welsh county councils

	1920-1921	1929	1938
Anglesey			3
Brecknockshire		1	1
Caernarvonshire		6	5
Cardiganshire		4	4
Carmarthenshire	3	2	2
Denbighshire	1	2	7
Flintshire			4
Glamorgan		1	2
Merionethshire		2	1
Montgomeryshire		1	
Pembrokeshire			
Radnorshire			1
Total	4	19	30

Source: *Municipal yearbooks*

⁶² Data in this paragraph compiled from the 1938 *Municipal Yearbook*, which would have included most aldermanic by-election results as well as reflecting the 1937 county council elections.

better, with Denbighshire increasing representation from two to seven in 1935 and Caernarvonshire increasing numbers from the late 1920s onwards. Estimates suggest that overall representation was lower here than on any other type of council. The thirty women councillors identified in the 1938 *Municipal Yearbook* are thought to make up almost five per cent of all county councillors in Wales. In percentage terms, only Denbighshire was achieving anything like the rates found in some of the better county councils in England.

Women in towns and cities.

One important distinction concerning elections in county boroughs, as opposed to those of the county council and London boroughs, needs to be made at the outset. This is that whereas both the latter held all-out elections, with all councillors retiring and seeking election at the same time, legislation governing county boroughs established that the number of councillors to be elected should be divisible by three, and that one third of all councillors should be elected at any one time. This pattern of annual elections could have had some impact on the election of women, for if a woman was enthusiastic about holding local office then in principle opportunities for election arose every year as opposed to every three. Candidacy does not just emerge from opportunity though and whereas in London the vast majority of women needed the backing of a political party to stand in 1919, there was initially a little more diversity in some towns and cities. Support for women candidates came from other women, and from their organisations. Women stood as Women Citizens' Association (WCA) candidates in towns as diverse as Bolton, Canterbury and Croydon, with the National Council of Women (NCW) appearing in Dewsbury and Carlisle.⁶³

⁶³ With the exception of examples discussed in later case studies, details here and elsewhere in this chapter are summarised from data extracted from the work of Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections*. Examples are therefore weighted towards those covered by the three volumes they have published to date.

Although prominent in putting forward candidates in a number of towns, the WCA and NCW were giving personal backing to candidates at a time when women were still struggling to be elected outside London. Data from those councils included in the three volumes of work so far by Davies and Morley shows just over 100 women candidates in the first three post-war elections, with just over 1,000 seats up for election in the sample of councils included. Women were elected to just three per cent of the those seats in these early years and only six women elected with WCA labels, three of those in Canterbury, the smallest of all County Boroughs. In the boroughs for which data is available, Labour were promoting the highest proportion of women candidates, although the small sample of identifiable Conservative women candidates had a slightly better success rate.⁶⁴

Table 9: Sample from first tranche of post-war county borough elections

	1919		1921		1922		total	
	Candidates	elected	candidates	elected	candidates	elected	candidates	elected
WCA women	10	5	4	0	1	1	15	6
Labour women	16	5	14	3	13	4	43	12
Conservative women	2	2	2	1	5	2	9	5
Other/ alliances etc.	17	1	10	4	17	5	44	10
Total	45	13	30	8	36	12	111	33

Source: data extracted from Davies and Morley vols. 1-3

⁶⁴ It is likely that a proportion of women who were members of the Conservative party stood under alliance banners. This is borne out by case study, and also by incidences where the same woman stood under a different banner in later elections. However the 'other' sample also includes women standing as 'co-op' candidates or with no political label at all.

These three volumes of data include a wide variety of towns and cities and can therefore be considered a reasonable statistical sample despite the considerable disparity in size of county boroughs.⁶⁵ However the significant variation in scale, coupled with the social, occupational and political disparity in these towns and cities make any projections of small sample of women problematic.⁶⁶

The prevalence of Labour women candidates in county boroughs is one aspect highlighted within the sample, and it is a trend that appears to consolidate over time. Davies and Morley data for elections in 1936 – 1938, show Labour making up around thirty to thirty-five per cent of all councillors, but with about half of all women councillors being Labour councillors. Growth in the numbers of women may well be then again associated with Labour growth as it was in London. In these towns and cities though, growth is more patchy, not a direct linear relationship and at levels lower on the whole than in London.

To supplement the picture gained from the Davies and Morley data, statistics have been collected from *Municipal Yearbooks*. Extracting details of women elected from this source and combining it with the more accurate Davies and Morley data reveals approximately 109 women councillors at the start of 1922 (so after first three sets of county borough elections) and around 246 by the start of 1938 as illustrated in table ten below. Percentages are very approximate given the actual number of councillors in some cases could only be arrived at by counting base data in lists, but these figures suggest women made up three per cent and seven per cent of all councillors in towns and cities in those years.

⁶⁵ Details of the origins and variety of size within county boroughs appear on page 38. Although this data set does include variety, the sheer size of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds does distort the picture a little, with Birmingham being the only one of the top five cities covered. Conversely, three out of the five smallest county boroughs are covered.

⁶⁶ Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections*, vol.3, p. 637. Davies and Morley are confident that the sample is large enough to be 'representative in statistical terms', a confidence re-enforced by trends emerging in volume one only altering a little by volume three. This statistical confidence is more problematic however when looking at women candidates, who make up such a small proportion of the total.

Although the figures in table ten show a degree of relationship between the size of council and the numbers of women elected, by the end of the period this relationship is neither an absolute nor a proportional one. It is true that the larger numbers of women are on the whole concentrated in the larger cities of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Bristol, but there are still councils in the top ten in size, notably Bradford and Newcastle who only perform as well as some of those in the bottom quartile.

If these statistics are accurate they show some variance from Pugh's suggestion that 140 or nearly 38 per cent of all city and borough councils did not have any women members by 1937.⁶⁷ This is not straightforward, and Pugh was clearly dealing with the larger base including non-county boroughs. There are some known anomalies. For example Rochdale elected its first woman member late in 1938, so although this is not recorded in the *Municipal Yearbook* data Rochdale could be counted as having elected one woman before elections were suspended.⁶⁸

The detailed research carried out by Davies and Morley found just five boroughs out of 29 without women members in 1937.⁶⁹ This is a percentage rate of 17 per cent, not the 38 per cent Pugh suggests. In addition *Municipal Yearbook* listings have identified a further eight boroughs where it is possible there were no women members in 1937, so reflecting a similar percentage rate to that of Davies and Morley sample.⁷⁰ An initial glance at a small sample of non-county boroughs suggests they may have had a greater tendency not to elect women at all. This may account for the variance between percentages found in this research and those of

⁶⁷ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p.58. The data on City and Borough councils mentioned here must include non-county boroughs which are not included in this work.

⁶⁸ See page 185 for details of the unusual circumstances in which Rochdale eventually elected a woman.

⁶⁹ Cardiff, Bootle, Darlington, Eastbourne and Burton-On-Trent.

⁷⁰ Salford, Sunderland, Wolverhampton, Rochdale, West Bromwich, West Hartlepool, Lincoln, Gloucester.

Pugh, but if that is the case it suggests a need to re-examine suggestions women fared better on smaller councils.⁷¹

Variance in progress within county boroughs is echoed by the research Sylvia Dunkley carried out within the West Riding of Yorkshire. Her work suggests women were elected at higher rates in cities with a more radical heritage than in the smaller towns. Dunkley finds Leeds having the highest representation at any one time (fifteen women, 1932 to 1935) with only Sheffield, Leeds and Doncaster achieving over ten per cent at some point in time. There were no women at all elected in Keighley, Todmorden, Morley or Ossett. In Goole no women candidates could be found.⁷² As her research included non-county boroughs the statistical information is not strictly comparable with the data of Davies and Morley. Her findings do tend to support the possibility that low representation of women occurred disproportionately in non-county boroughs. Leeds stands out in the research into West Yorkshire. It also stands out in the wider national picture. When Leeds is compared with other large cities in data collected in the *Municipal Yearbook* their level of female representation was amongst the highest of all county boroughs, both numerically and proportionally.⁷³ The explanation offered by Dunkley of cities with a radical heritage faring better than smaller towns does help emphasise the importance of local culture. It may help to explain some of the notable variations in table ten.⁷⁴

⁷¹ This area would benefit from further research. Looking at around 50 non-county boroughs included in the 1938 *Municipal Yearbook* it is possible about half did not have any women members at this point. There other contra-indicators to this evidence. As detailed on page 4, Hollis suggests women were better represented on smaller urban and rural district councils. Recent research *National census of LA councillors 2008* (Slough, NFER, 2009) suggests that women are better represented on the smaller lower tier district councils than on the county council. Case study research in Essex and Middlesex suggested women were represented on districts in those areas. The evidence so far then is inconclusive.

⁷² Dunkley, 'Women Magistrates, Ministers and Municipal Councillors'.

⁷³ The total of eleven women in Leeds identified above make up around 15 per cent of the 74/5 councillors.

⁷⁴ The details of this are shown in table 10 below. Those boroughs shown in bold use data extracted from Davies and Morley for elections in 1919, 1929 and 1921 as being the position at the start of 1922 and similar for other cohorts. This will not take account of aldermanic by-elections. For all other boroughs data is included from the *Municipal Yearbook* for the start of the named year. Councils are arranged in order of population size as at 1931, with the table split into four columns to show comparable cohorts. The 1931 population for each county borough appears in each volume of Davies and Morley, (in vol. 1 p. 677). This does not give the full picture of relative size of the council membership as this will have changed over time as boundaries shifted, but it does give an indicative common reference point.

Table 10: Numbers of women elected to town and city councils ranked by size

year	19 22	19 31	19 37
Birmingham	6	8	8
Liverpool	4	12	9
Manchester	4	10	6
Sheffield	2	11	8
Leeds	2	11	11
Bristol	2	4	8
Kingston –up-Hull	1	6	6
Bradford	2	2	3
West Ham	1	11	10
Newcastle	0	5	5
Stoke-On-Trent	2	6	7
Nottingham	2	3	6
Portsmouth	0	1	1
Leicester	0	3	6
Croydon	3	4	3
Salford	0	0	0
Cardiff	1	0	0
Plymouth	3	6	4
Sunderland	2	1	0
Bolton	2	5	3
Southampton	2	4	6

year	19 22	19 31	19 37
Coventry	2	5	4
Swansea	0	2	1
Birkenhead	3	3	3
Brighton	2	2	2
Derby	1	5	3
East Ham	3	3	4
Oldham	1	2	1
Middlesbrough	2	3	1
Wolverhampton	1	2	0
Norwich	4	5	6
Stockport	1	1	2
Gateshead	2	2	3
Blackburn	0	1	1
Preston	1	1	1
Southend on Sea	1	3	2
South Shields	0	1	2
Huddersfield	0	0	1
Bournemouth	1	1	3
St Helens	0	4	4
Walsall	3	2	2
Blackpool	0	0	1

year	19 22	19 31	19 37
Burnley	0	2	3
Reading	2	5	3
Halifax	0	1	1
Wallasey	3	2	1
Northampton	1	2	3
Grimsby	0	1	2
Rochdale	0	0	0
Newport	0	3	4
Ipswich	2	5	5
York	1	1	1
Wigan	1	4	2
Smethwick	1	3	5
West Bromwich	2	1	0
Oxford	4	7	7
Warrington	2	0	1
Southport	2	2	2
Bootle	1	2	0
Darlington	0	0	0
Barnsley	0	1	2
Merthyr Tydfil	1	2	1
Rotherham	0	2	2

year	19 22	19 31	19 37
Bath	2	2	3
West Hartlepool	0	1	0
Barrow-Furness	0	5	5
Lincoln	2	1	0
Exeter	2	3	3
Tynemouth	0	4	2
Doncaster	0	2	3
Hastings	2	4	2
Dudley	0	0	1
Wakefield	0	2	3
Carlisle	1	2	5
Great Yarmouth	0	1	3
Eastbourne	2	4	1
Bury	1	1	2
Dewsbury	0	2	1
Gloucester	0	3	0
Worcester	1	6	6
Burton-On-Trent	0	1	0
Chester	1	2	2
Canterbury	3	2	2
Totals	109	255	246

Women in Manchester fare much better than women in neighbouring Salford. Progress in Leeds is far stronger than in Bradford. Gaps in representation are prevalent and as with county councils a significant proportion of councils tend to rely on just one or two women for most of the period. Progress is slow and can sometimes go into reverse. Case studies examined later do suggest it would be wrong to rely on limited and selected statistics alone to build the full picture. In Portsmouth, for example, there are no women councillors by 1922 because Miss Kate Edmonds had already suffered defeat at the polls and Mrs Sarah Holmes died in office. Nevertheless the mixed picture from towns and cities suggests the radical cities that attract most attention from research provide a partial picture of the election of women. Women only achieve representation in double figures at some point in the inter-war period in Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield and West Ham. Those success rates could not compare with the far smaller London boroughs, but they are not matched proportionally in some smaller towns either.

Comparing council types

Summarising from the various data sets available, in total about 1,400 individual women were elected to London borough, county or county borough councils at some point during the inter-war period. Over forty per cent of those women were in London, even though London had a small proportion of all council seats. Actual proportions are difficult to calculate given the change in size of councils over time. However taking an average figure for those London boroughs where some change is known to have happened gives a figure of around 1,360 seats contested in London. Those boroughs included in the Davies and Morley sample of county boroughs had just over 1,000 seats, with estimates projecting this to be between 3,000 – 3,500. In addition there were known to be 4,615 county seats in 1921 although that is likely to have reduced over time.

Several of those women were elected many times over; some in all seven inter-war elections. In addition the limited areas where election statistics have been counted identify a further known 1,500 women who sought election but were not elected – some of them perhaps recognising they would never gain a seat, but being sufficiently interested in democratic governance to make a public stance. Given the scale of the gaps in the candidacy data actual numbers of candidates could be much higher, with at least another 1,000 unsuccessful women candidates likely in counties and those county boroughs where there is no published election data.

Four thousand women taking an active interest in participating in local decision-making may be a small proportion of those who were joining political parties, previously involved in suffrage campaigns or joining new organisations to participate in civic lobbying, but their activity in this area still should not be ignored.

Table 11: Estimates of individual women candidates, 1919 - 1938

Council type	Women elected	Unsuccessful candidates	Average number of seats
London borough	565	972	1,362-1,386
LCC	60	108	124
County council (England)	309		c 2,700 - 3,500
County council (Wales)	58		c 500-600
County Borough (Barnsley-East Ham)	83	419	1,000
County Borough (Exeter – York)	302		c 2,000 – 2,500
Totals	1457	1499	

Sources: Rallings and Thrasher data (London), Davies and Morley data (County Boroughs Barnsley – East Ham). All other estimates calculated from *Municipal Year Book* listings.

As the analysis shows, numerical progress in the election of women did not follow a predictable pattern. There were rarely straight linear trends either within

individual councils or within type of councils. The dominance of a strong pioneer could leave an unfilled gap on death, retirement or appointment to the aldermanic benches. Political change could generate an influx of women, but that was not guaranteed. Because personalities, culture and politics made so much difference there was variety within each type of council. The comparative picture in both numerical terms and indicative proportions does indicate a difference between each council type, illustrated by the proportional concentration of elected women in London.

Table 12: Women councillors: comparative estimates for selected years

	1922 women councillors	1922 estimated per cent	1928 women councillors	1928 estimated per cent	1937 women councillors	1937 estimated per cent
County boroughs	109	3.0	164	5.0	246	7.0
English counties	38	1.5	84	3.0	161	5.5
Welsh counties	6	1.0	14	2.4	30	5.0
Total outside London	153	2.0	262	4.0	437	6.0
London boroughs	133	9.6	149	11.1	227	16.5
LCC	12	9.6	22	17.7	20	16.1
Overall	293	3.5	426	5.0	695	8.0

Sources: These estimates are from the *Municipal Yearbook* at the start of the year in referred to. For London boroughs that data reflects election results at the preceding election and will vary from that shown in other tables which show elections that year.

To get some comparison of how women fared on the different council types over time it is necessary to use information from a common source. Data in table twelve is extracted from *Municipal Yearbooks* for a sample of years. The years selected recognise the annual nature of county borough elections – so use of 1922 data ensures all seats in counties, London boroughs and county boroughs will have had one election (even though that election may not have always been contested). There is less certainty that the data will include full outcomes of by-elections caused

by the promotion of councillors to aldermanic seats, a feature that tended to happen after each council election. The problematic creation of a base figure means the percentages need to be taken as indicative rather than accurate, but despite these shortcomings the data does show some comparative trends.

In 1922, both numerically and in percentage terms, London Boroughs show a far greater concentration of women than in any other council type. At this stage almost 10 per cent of all borough councillors in London were women, compared to around 2 per cent in all relevant authorities outside London. This trend continued throughout the period, so that after a further five complete electoral cycles, women made up over 17 per cent of all councillors on London boroughs, and women outside London only achieved closer to 6 per cent. This pattern is equally pronounced on the LCC. There were as many individual women elected to the 124 LCC seats as there were to all the Welsh counties combined, estimated to have between 500 and 600 seats between them at various points in time.

The paucity of women's representation and the variation within that can also be illustrated by looking at those councils that failed to elect any women. All London boroughs elected at least one woman in 1919. Once they had achieved that position only Chelsea reverted to a position of not having any woman at all at any point in time. By contrast the majority of English counties failed to elect any women in 1919. Even where women were elected there counties as significant as Durham, Kent and Worcestershire reverting to a position of not having any elected women by 1938 and towns like Salford and Rochdale that struggled to find any women to elect at all.

The year 1937 then provides a convenient point of comparability. It was thirty years after some women were granted the opportunity to stand as council candidates on London boroughs, the counties and county boroughs. There had been seven sets of all-out elections in London and in the county councils since 1919 when both the electorate and the range of women able to stand as candidates had

grown considerably. Women had been given the opportunity to seek election in all towns and cities on an annual basis. Women in London faced highly politicised battles. Party politics was not absent from county councils outside London but the impact was more gradual and muted and the incidence of uncontested elections was high. Some towns and cities initially elected women without political labels but that diminished over time. The total outcome was just under 700 elected women councillors in post after the election of 1937 and an overall rate of representation of around eight per cent. This is a considerable improvement on the pre-war position when the President of the Local Government Board found just twenty-eight women, or a rate of two per thousand, but it still represents slow growth.⁷⁵ Even in London where the level of women becoming councillors reached sixteen per cent the limiting factors surrounding election were strong.

Some of the trends emerging by analysing statistics suggest the overall estimate of eight per cent hides variety between town, city and county that requires further exploration. Where election statistics are available they show politics played a significant part in trends and that women succeeded best in the political battles of London. Limited levels of candidacy suggest cultural factors were also a cause of under-representation on some councils. Case studies that focus on very different locations provide the best means of exploring these issues in more depth, to start to unravel the life stories of individual women and variety of electoral expectations they faced. Setting individuals in the context of varied locations can help unpick the many patterns that determined the pace and style of women's progress.

⁷⁵ Hansard, *HC Deb*, 21 March 1912, vol 35 c2068.

Chapter Four: Stalwarts, sisters, social workers: women's routes to election

Once elected some women councillors succeeded in staying in post for a considerable number of years. When Poplar Labour councillor **Mrs Nellie Cressall** finally retired in 1965 she had completed an outstanding 46 years, despite being sent to jail for her beliefs whilst expecting her sixth child when aged 38.¹ Her tenacity is exceptional, but the fact that some women showed a remarkable ability to stay in office once elected throws into question assumptions that women were unsuited to council life. They were sitting alongside men who also frequently remained in office for a long time, but if council life was difficult for women, why did some last for so long? The answers to that question can be found in their varied life stories.

As Hills suggests, understanding representation starts with an understanding of eligibility to join the pool or pools from which candidates are drawn.² The second aim of this work is an assessment of the influences on the range and backgrounds of women coming forward for election. Consideration therefore starts by looking for those positive features that enabled women to be elected several times over, rather than starting by discussing barriers. Most examples are drawn from case studies, but these are supplemented by other published work. The life stories help to illustrate how those pools of potential candidates changed over time or varied between locations. Some patterns had roots in the cultural complexity of councils themselves. The collection of material looked at all women elected to a particular council as far as possible, but the emphasis is on those personalities who were

¹ Noreen Branson, *Poplarism 1919-1925, George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979), p.74.

² J. Hills, 'Women Local Councillors: A reply to Bristow', in *Local Government Studies*, Jan/Feb 1982.

regularly returned at the polls – or, as could become the case, found themselves sufficiently popular with all those promoting candidacy to be returned unopposed.

Some key trends became evident in turning election statistics into data that related to individual women. The extent of longevity was one such factor. Also evident were the strength of party political representation in London and the initial influence of women's organisations outside London. On county councils what emerged simply from compiling lists of names and addresses was a prevalence of titled elite women drawn from the families of aristocratic or industrial local leaders. The case studies used to gather life stories reflect some of the diversity that emerged, selected for both political and geographic variety. The prime focus is on understanding the combination of factors that enabled or encouraged women to stand as candidates.

Two further themes emerge as influential in shaping a pool of eligible candidates. They are the relevance of family connections and of previous related experience in civic or voluntary life. These factors cannot be separated from each other and apply across the social and political spectrum. Some prominent families dominated local philanthropy. That commitment to active citizenship is also reflected in the extent to which women elected or seeking election had a history of suffrage activity or participated in organised politics in other ways. Despite the emergence of some statistical trends though, every one of the 1,400 successful women candidates identified by this study remains an individual. A wide variety of case studies have been drawn on here given the diversity in numerical outcomes between different types of council identified earlier. They highlight some patterns, but in the stalwarts in particular they also unearth some fascinating hidden lives.³

³ See pen portraits in appendix two.

Stalwarts

The story of Nellie Cressall is exceptional, but other examples of women staying in office for decades can be drawn from across the political spectrum and in all council types. Examples of longevity appear in the small sample of women included in appendix two and the larger collection of pen-portraits they have been selected from. Miss Charlotte Keeling, Municipal Reform councillor in Kensington had a total of 33 years in elected office starting in 1901 as a Poor Law guardian then continuing as a borough councillor until 1934.⁴ At the end of the inter-war period, and the opposite end of the political spectrum to Charlotte, Mrs Jessie Smith started a term of office on West Riding CC in 1937 and was still there at its abolition in 1974. She went on to serve on the successor Kirklees council until defeated at the polls in 1978.⁵ Both these women experienced an election loss after considerable service.

Alongside those examples are other instances of women either being elected for long consecutive periods or following up defeat with a return to office. Every borough in London except Bethnal Green and Wandsworth had at least one woman elected three times or more in between 1919 and 1937. Bermondsey, Hampstead and Paddington all had nine or ten women who met this criterion. Individual Labour women in Woolwich and Bermondsey along with Municipal Reform women in Westminster and St Marylebone were elected in 1919 and were still contesting elections in 1937.⁶

Such extremes of longevity appear less common in county boroughs – or perhaps happened a little later. In the sample of boroughs published by Davies and Morley only Mrs Mercer (Lab) of Birkenhead and Mrs Squires of Croydon are

⁴ *Kensington News and West London Times*, 13 December 1935.

⁵ *Yorkshire Post*, 9 December 1997.

⁶ It is highly likely this summary of inter-war election patterns extracted from the Rawlings and Thrasher data underplays the true extent of longevity. Case studies have highlighted examples of women elected in the 1930s who continued in office during 1939 -1945 and were candidates again once elections resumed. Data for the later period is not quantified in this work.

identified who span the whole of the inter-war period. Labour women in Reading and Conservatives in Oxford both gave outstanding service starting in the inter-war period but extending beyond it.⁷ Birmingham and Liverpool are amongst the large cities producing women councillors from very different political and social backgrounds with a long service record. Miss Clara Martineau was first elected in 1913 and served in Birmingham until 1931. A Conservative and member of a well-established local family with a strong municipal record in Birmingham she was rarely contested in her inter-war elections.⁸ In Liverpool Labour's Mrs Bessie Braddock served as a councillor for over thirty years including time as an alderman. Co-option back to a favourite committee or aldermanic service could extend the term well past election for suitable women. The LCC and Manchester were amongst the councils where women were still present in the 1960s who still had some experience of the inter-war years. Some women had staying power. The reasons why lay in part in their social or political standing as individuals.

Conservative ladies of London

In London, political party allegiance was the prime influence on the likelihood of a female candidate succeeding from 1919 onwards. Statistics show that Conservative women were evident on some boroughs and on the LCC. Although their numbers did not grow incrementally, their concentration showed a degree of localised strength that merits further exploration.

In the Conservative party in Kensington and Westminster some women were accepted as candidates from the outset, and seemed to be integrated into

⁷ See in particular Mrs Cusden (Reading) and Mrs Townsend (Oxford) in appendix two.

⁸ Davies & Morley, *County Borough elections vol 1*, pp.262-263. At the time of the 1911 census Clara Martineau was living with her brother Ernest Martineau. He was one of five generations of this Birmingham Unitarian family to become Lord Mayor of the city. Their details are listed in Birmingham council house – see

<http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=WT-General%2FPageLayout&cid=1223092626219&pagename=BCC%2FCommon%2FWrapper%2FWrapper> (record of blue plaque to Martineau family accessed 17 August 2011).

mainstream local political work as well as having their own debating groups and campaigning organisations. The Abbey Division of Westminster, for example, reported on summer outings of the Women's Council attracting 500 members, and ladies involved in 'carrying out secretarial work and the hand delivery of notices...'; Councillors Lady Edith Bradford and Mrs Maude Horne would lead women's section debates on a range of topics including the Empire and education, whilst the 'distributors committee' would reward women who delivered leaflets with a special tea with the local MP.⁹ In Kensington Charlotte Keeling was at one time Honorary secretary of South Kensington Conservative Association and Chairman of their Women's Branch.¹⁰ Miss Evelyn M. Pennefather was also heavily involved in the local Conservative Association in North Kensington.¹¹

Although individually important women Conservatives emerge in other boroughs, Mrs Dewar Robertson in Wandsworth, for example, Westminster and Kensington stand out in their ability to draw larger numbers of women from a concentration of the wealthy and influential families.¹² The involvement of elite women in local politics in these two boroughs does have a long history. Judith Lewis investigated those women operating in Westminster alongside Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire in 1784. Lewis notes the novelty of that campaign was not in elite women as campaigners, but from the rivalries of high profile women seeking the favours of the more humble ratepayers who made up a unique electorate. She argues that in 1784 'with the fashionable town houses of so many grandees located

⁹ City of Westminster Archives (WA), Abbey Women's Conservative Association scrapbook, 1925 annual report, p.7, (1267/4).

¹⁰ *Kensington News and West London Times*, 13 December 1935 (obituary).

¹¹ *The Times*, 17 June 1937 (obituary).

¹² *The Times*, 6 February 1930; Wandsworth council minute books, 1928 – 1934; *Wandsworth Borough News*, 10 May 1935. Women elected in Wandsworth often only served one term. Mrs Jean Dewar-Robertson MBE was an exception, elected in 1928 but defeated in 1934. She was a magistrate in the juvenile courts before being elected as a councillor and in 1930 was elected chairman of the visiting justices committee, Holloway prison, the first woman to hold that role. She founded the Tooting branch of the Women's Conservative Association.

there, Westminster provided a ready battleground for competing political interests'.¹³ Participants included Georgiana, her sister and sister-in-law alongside 'some lesser lights of the Whig party, such as the Ladies Waldegrave, Mrs Damer, Mrs Bouverie and Mrs Crewe'.¹⁴ Duchesses and Ladies were also prominent in the opposite camp. Almost a century on, the Kensington Ladies Debating Society was leading the first fight for women's suffrage collecting signatures to support the petition John Stuart Mill would present to Parliament.¹⁵ This was also the location of the election of the first woman Poor Law guardian.¹⁶

Conservative political interests were well entrenched in Westminster by 1919, with the Municipal Reform Party holding at least 57 of the 60 seats at each election between then and 1937. The seven MR women elected there in 1919 included Lady Edith Bradford, **Mrs Douglas Vickers** (wife of the chairman of Vickers limited, the Sheffield cutlers who turned to manufacture of armaments and general steel products) and **Mrs Ridley-Smith** (who lived in Eaton Place as wife of the founder of the discount firm of Smith St Aubyn).¹⁷ The composition of the elite of Westminster may have changed since 1784, but the readiness of a group of elite women to participate openly in political life had not.

Some Westminster Conservative women had previous experience as guardians or in 'social work'. Ida Gascoigne is mentioned in 1919 election literature as vice-chairman of the board of guardians, and Amy Hughes is an experienced district nurse.¹⁸ To become a candidate they would have required some funding. Ida Gascoigne, living with her widowed mother, her uncle (a retired army major) and six

¹³ Lewis, '1784 and all that', in Vickery (ed.) *Women Privilege and Power*, p.100.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.91.

¹⁵ Jane Rendall, 'Who was Lily Maxwell' in J. Purvis and S.S. Holton 'Votes for Women' (London, Routledge, 2000).

¹⁶ Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870 – 1950* (Sussex, Wheatsheaf books, 1984) p.94.

¹⁷ *West London Press*, 8 September 1944; *Westminster and Pimlico News*, 8 September 1933, (see appendix two).

¹⁸ WA, Westminster Conservative Association, File of papers relating to the election of councillors, Victoria ward. (CON/1267/4).

servants in fourteen rooms in Buckingham Palace Gardens is likely to have had such resources.¹⁹ In 1919 and again in 1925 all Municipal Reform candidates in Westminster contributed ten guineas each to the cost of the election campaign before their nomination papers were submitted. Some correspondence suggests funding for the campaign of Adelaide Mercer, another 'social worker' who was elected in 1925, and who combined council work with lecture tours in the USA, may have been subsidised by the local Conservative Women's Association.²⁰ In 1919 although Mrs Ridley-Smith agreed to pay this 'forced levy', she objected in writing to the tone in which it was requested. Her handwritten correspondence does not give a clear reason, but the tone of the 1925 correspondence suggests she did not have much impact. All candidates had to contribute to the cost of the campaign.²¹

Conservative politics then had absorbed local women in Kensington and Westminster to the extent that some were comfortable coming forward as candidates, operating within familiar circles of women with whom they shared social and debating activities as well as participation in other public and charitable activity. These were confident individuals and their confidence will have been supported by the backing of a strong women's influence within the Municipal Reform Association itself. Influential amongst them was **Lady Trustram Eve**, first elected to the LCC in 1919. Active in the local Unionist Association, she was also at the heart of women's organisations; both political and those with a broader remit: 'From 1917 to 1928 she was chairman of the Conservative Women's Reform Association and from 1923 to 1929 chairman of the South Kensington Women's Unionist Association. After serving as honorary treasurer of the National Council of Women of Great Britain (NCW) from 1921 to 1931 she was then elected president, and held that office until

¹⁹ 1901 Census individual records search carried out by access to ancestry.co.uk at Westminster City Council archives and local history centre.

²⁰ WA, Election address of the Municipal Reform Candidates 1925; Adelaide Mercer, lecturer and Social worker. (CON/1267/4/5).

²¹ WA, Records of the Westminster Conservative Association (CON/0487/3).

1933'.²² By that time, the NCW was taking over the work of the Women's Local Government Society in promoting the principle of electing women as local councillors, and providing support to those who did so. Lady Eves' election to the LCC was accompanied by a further sphere of influence, for in May 1919 she and her two other elected LCC companions, Mrs Hopkins and Mrs Hudson Lyall were amongst at least a dozen women named as additional vice presidents of council of the London Municipal Society (LMS).²³

The executive of the LMS already included a number of women. Amongst them was vice president of the Society, Muriel, Viscountess (Lady) Helmsley, who had been an active participant in its work for fifteen or more years, founding a women's section, and was also involved in the Day Nurseries Association. The Lady St Helier, made an LCC Alderman in 1910 and well known for her work with the poor, was also a vice-president of the large LMS council.²⁴

One reflection of the strength of the women's section of the LMS is to be found in *The Ratepayer*, which promoted the principle of women as candidates and praises their success. It stated 'the Women's Section is watching closely all questions affecting local administration. They sincerely congratulate the women members of the LCC and the other local bodies in the country for the work they have done in helping to reduce the rates and thus fulfilling their election pledges to economy'.²⁵ They had reason to celebrate on that occasion. Mrs Wilton Phipps, an LMS alderman, had become chairman of the powerful Education Committee, whilst Lady Trustram Eve was then chairman of Parks Committee. Mrs Phipps was also celebrated in 1921 for being made vice-chairman of council. Those regular

²² *The Times*, 2 February 1934.

²³ London Guildhall Library, records of the London Municipal Society, Minutes 30 May 1919 AGM (subsequently transferred to London Metropolitan Archives as CLC/088).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, and Gloria Clifton, 'Members and Officers of the LCC, 1889-1965', in A. Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965* (London, Hambledon Press 1989), p.8.

²⁵ *The Ratepayer*, May 1923. (Annual Report of the Women's Section 1922-23)

celebrations, however, were included as part of a wider debate about the role of women in local government illustrated by women councillors active in Westminster and Kensington Conservative Parties. Although they were comfortable meeting as Conservative women, they did not promote a feminist line. *The Ratepayer* suggested:

a woman who puts forward a sound constructive policy for the good of the community as a whole stands a better chance of being returned at the top of the poll than the woman who introduces the sex angle. A woman does not gain or lose votes on account of her sex, but we venture to say that women who come forward at elections purely as the 'feminist' candidates are likely to damage the cause for which they stand.²⁶

That theme was also promoted in 1921 with an article that considered that 'the basis of citizenship is now so equal that to approach national and local problems from a sex standpoint is nothing short of treachery to the state. "Women's rights" as we formerly understood them have been granted, and it now behoves us as women to approach all problems from a wide point of view'. Despite that appeal for a wide point of view, the 1921 article considered Municipal Reform women had special skills which were more appropriate to local politics than to national issues:

There is a great deal of difference between the work of a great municipality and that of the House of Commons. The members of the House spend their time in making laws, the members of a municipal authority spend their time in carrying them out. It is obvious that to the mind of the woman the latter appeals more than the former..... a woman's true sphere is in the administrative side of affairs, and that is why women are rapidly seizing the opportunity of seats on municipal councils.

²⁶ *The Ratepayer*, Feb/March 1922.

And later, to conclude the article:

The drastic economy that the housewife has to bear upon the management of her household must be applied to the management of municipalities, and no-one is more qualified to see this is done than the women who are finding utmost difficulty in making ends meet.²⁷

Lady Helmsley was to return to the issue when she discussed the question of the additional women voters in 1923. Keen to reassure male members of the society that the women's section would continue to work with them she reported 'we are not a feminist body, but citizens, and it is due to that fact that our work has been so successful'²⁸

In most years Conservative women were elected in both Westminster and Kensington at a higher rate than in other boroughs where Conservatives dominated. Preserved local election literature is rare, but in Westminster literature promoting the candidacy of Ida Gascoigne and Amy Hughes alongside their ward counterparts refers to the 'special opportunities for valuable service' available to women candidates through experience in local social work, alongside more general political requirements to maintain high standards of service but resisting profligate expenditure.²⁹ Several obituaries draw out the actions of women engaged in charitable social work alongside their council activity. Mrs Odone, a school manager and trustee of several charities was a member of Westminster District Nursing Association, whilst Mrs Douglas Vickers represented the council on Westminster Day Nursery Committee.³⁰ Charlotte Keeling was recognised as having 'greater influence on the development of social services in Kensington than any other

²⁷ *The Ratepayer*, May 1921.

²⁸ *The Ratepayer*, June 1923.

²⁹ WA, Westminster Conservative Association, File of papers relating to the election of councillors, Victoria ward. (CON/1267/14/1925)

³⁰ *West London Press*, 8 September 1944 and *West London and Pimlico News*, 27 September 1940.

woman', an influence extended through work on the Old-age Pensions Committee, War Pensions Committee and as Kensington borough director of the Emergency Fund of the British Red Cross Society.³¹ Miss Evelyn Pennefather similarly worked tirelessly visiting the Harrow Mission Girls Club and joining the management committee of the baby hospital in Ladbrooke square.³² All four of these women were members of Maternity and Child Welfare committees of their respective councils.

Conservative women in London then, concentrated to some extent in Municipal Reform strongholds, were drawn from a small but traditional and titled elite well integrated into local political life, who mingled with and merged with other women of independent means with a solid background in charitable social work. Their leaders were well represented in political structures but with space to act collectively as women providing they supported the Conservative cause. They had formal and informal party networks to draw on and some experience of working together both through their political organisations and through the board of guardians. They focused on an agenda built primarily around family and welfare but did not emphasise the 'sex angle' of their politics. They saw themselves as citizens not as feminists. They shared an interest in the welfare of children with Labour women in London, some of whom also rose to prominence in Kensington.

London Labour women

Dr Ethel Bentham came to Kensington in 1909 as a qualified medical practitioner. She combined suffrage work as a member of the NUWSS with activity in various Labour organisations including the WLL and Fabian women's group. Her election to the council and attempts to join the LCC were coupled with the establishment of a

³¹ *The Times*, 11 December 1935 and *Kensington News and West London Times*, 13 December 1935.

³² *The Times*, 17 June 1937.

baby clinic in North Kensington.³³ She was elected in Golborne ward, a role she shared before 1919 with Dr Marion Philips. Both were elected Labour MPs in 1929. Other Labour women followed with mixed fortunes, amongst them Miss Margaret Slee and Mrs Alice Jarrett, the latter wife of a leading Labour councillor. She was awarded the MBE in 1955 'for services to schoolchildren in Kensington'.³⁴ Unlike most of those around her who stood as council candidates her background was working class.³⁵

In Kensington Labour circles then, we find a combination of working-class women working alongside women from more affluent backgrounds committed to the socialist cause. Affluent socialist philanthropy is a feature of Labour representation elsewhere in London. One of the most endearing of the lesser known Labour representatives in this period was Mrs Charlotte Bracey-Wright, otherwise known as Countess Charlotte de Lormet, a title she gained from family ties with France. She insisted on the title Countess de Lormet in the council chamber, and included her family coat of arms on her election address, but was known by the press as 'Countess of the Old Kent Road'. A Labour member of Peckham from 1919 to 1934, she had previously served on the Vestry, the education board and as a guardian, a role in which she succeeded in upsetting officials when her election literature suggested children had been wrongly punished, which led her to be challenged in the libel courts.³⁶ Her local popularity was reflected in repeated large majorities at the polls, and her commitment to those she worked for was evident in press

³³ Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: a reference guide, 1866-1928* (Routledge, 2000), p.51.

³⁴ *London Gazette*, 30 December 1955 (issues 40669 p.18).

³⁵ 1901 and 1911 Census records that Mr Jarrett worked as a boot-fitter, whilst his wife raised their three daughters in a four-roomed house. Records accessed through www.ancestry.com

³⁶ *The Times*, 18 March 1914

descriptions of someone who had ‘sacrificed wealth and luxury so that she could devote her life to poor people around her’.³⁷

Ada Salter, in neighbouring Bermondsey is perhaps better known than the Countess de Lormet. Ada and husband Alfred Salter (local doctor and later ILP and Labour MP) worked together through politics and philanthropy. Initially both active in Liberal politics, they then founded the local branch of the ILP and combined their medical and social work with Municipal Socialism.³⁸ Ada had left a comfortable and rural life in Northamptonshire to work in London settlements. Her initial drive was religious, with her political stance developing from time working in the Bermondsey settlements’ girls clubs. She was elected to Bermondsey in 1909, the first ILP woman to succeed in London. Because she went on to become the first woman mayor in London, her work is better known than that of other women who were later elected alongside her.

Ada Salter returned to Bermondsey council in 1919 having been defeated in 1912. Labour was in ascendancy throughout London, but did not achieve a majority in Bermondsey until three years later, a position they were then to build on so that in 1934 and 1937 they had a monopoly. From 1919 onwards other Labour women were prominent alongside Ada Salter. The other four Labour women elected to Bermondsey in that year were Miss Jessie Stephen, **Miss Ada Broughton**, Margaret Gamble and Mrs Emily Gledhill. Jessie Stephen was to become an influential figure in the Labour and Trades Union movement at a national level. Her background is a working class one; forced to leave school and enter domestic service, the eldest of eleven children of a tailor, she had been active in organising

³⁷ *South London Press*, 3 February 1939, *News Chronicle* 19 September 1934.

³⁸ Sybil Oldfield, ‘Salter, Ada (1866–1942)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38531>, accessed 8 Nov 2010].

domestic workers in Glasgow before her involvement in Bermondsey ILP.³⁹ Ada Broughton was also an ILP activist, local women's organiser and had a background in suffrage work and temperance.⁴⁰ Mrs Gledhill and some of the other women Labour candidates were described by *Bermondsey Labour News* as active workers at Bermondsey Central Hall, the Methodist mission still operating in the area.

Figure 2; Bermondsey Borough Council Labour Party



1922-1925 Bermondsey Borough Council Labour Party, (Southwark local history library collection).

As with their Conservative counterparts, there is evidence that Labour women in Bermondsey valued meeting as women and were also integrated into the local political machinery. When Ada Broughton was seeking re-election to the council in 1922 *Bermondsey Labour News* mentioned that she had 'held public positions on every sphere of the Labour movement'.⁴¹ That description was certainly true of both Ada Salter and Jessie Stephen, the latter having involvement with suffrage, the trades union movement and the co-operative movement in a variety of guises, and

³⁹ Audrey Canning, 'Stephen, Jessie (1893–1979)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54411>, accessed 8 Nov 2010]

⁴⁰ *South London Press*, 23 February 1934. (obituary).

⁴¹ *Bermondsey Labour News*, March 1922.

the former having international as well as national political roles through groups such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Both Ada Salter and Ada Broughton were members of the London Labour Party executive, and worked alongside Herbert Morrison in developing the London party. His organisational skills were recognised by many in London well before Labour's 1945 election victory resulted in him gaining deputy leadership of the national Party. Some of that early strength in Bermondsey Ada Broughton attributed to the targeting of women voters:

The steady advance of Labour in Bermondsey is undoubtedly due to organisation and to the effective machinery behind that organisation. For the past four years, particular attention has been given to the organisation of women. It is mainly through the steady and persistent work among women voters that Labour achieved the magnificent victories in the Borough Council elections.⁴²

Bermondsey Labour women could also celebrate success in the LCC elections. Although Ada Salter had failed in her bid to represent the ILP on that body in 1910, Bermondsey was later to have two LCC women representatives, Salter and **Mrs Eveline M. Lowe**. The two families were close, with their husbands working alongside each other in the progressive Bermondsey medical practice. Both women combined their Labour Party activism in the 1920s with continued involvement with the ILP. David Howell suggests Lowe found the 'ILP culture highly congenial' and stresses the importance of the Bermondsey approach to Socialism which combined several elements: 'Labour strength in Bermondsey was founded not just on ILP high-mindedness but also on trade unionism and its appeal to solidarity'.⁴³ Both

⁴² *London Labour Chronicle*, December 1922.

⁴³ David Howell, 'Lowe, Eveline Mary (1869–1956)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34609>, accessed 8 Nov 2010].

elements of that local Labour organisation had women activists embedded in them who were prepared to make a mark as councillors.

Mrs Lowe went on to develop a prominent role on the LCC when Labour took control in 1934. At this stage she was promoted to chairman of Education Committee, an appointment Jane Martin refers to as one of many where Morrison promoted women prominent on the London Labour Executive.⁴⁴ Herbert Morrison was a principal architect of that LCC Labour success.⁴⁵ Others have recognised that Morrison was in part responsible for encouraging Labour women. Martin draws on the recollections of Helen Bentwich, an unsuccessful LCC candidate in 1934, who describes how Morrison persuaded her to stand as an LCC candidate whilst manoeuvring round the dance floor. Martin suggests

Morrison has been singled out as a patron of “able” women. He appreciated their role in “caring for” the labour community, including the drudgery of envelope addressing, leaflet distribution, fundraising, canvassing and organising social events. Bureaucratic, utilitarian and with a reputation as an expert dancer, he used the party socials to win key women over’.⁴⁶

A future LCC councillor, Peggy Jay was also given a role as a co-opted member of an LCC sub-committee. She describes how

early in 1934 I went to see Herbert Morrison and asked if I could serve on Public Assistance Committee. He realized at once that my sheltered background in no way qualified me to understand or identify with the

⁴⁴ Jane Martin ‘Engendering City Politics and Educational Thought: elite women and the London Labour Party 1914 – 1965’, *Paedagogica Historica* (44: 4, 2008) p.401.

⁴⁵ Mark Clapson, ‘Localism, the London Labour Party and the LCC between the Wars’ in Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London*, p.129.

⁴⁶ Jane Martin, ‘Engendering City Politics’, p.400.

problems of family poverty and suggested I broaden my experience by joining the LCC School Care Committee.⁴⁷

Peggy Jay, from a well-educated and comfortable background, identified voluntary work as the appropriate place for her activity. She could draw on Quaker philanthropy and family experience of action in social reform through her connections with the biscuit manufacturers, Palmers of Reading. She had also thrived on the intellectual network her parents were part of in Manchester from 1912 to 1920, followed by time in Hampstead (with J.B. Priestley and her future husband Douglas as neighbours) when her father became General Secretary of the League of Nations Union. In her autobiography she notes: 'no one during all my childhood had ever made a point of mentioning that someone had to *earn* what was consumed, and Douglas continued to pay the bills while I undertook increasing amounts of voluntary work'.⁴⁸ Unpaid elected office was acceptable to a Labour activist like Peggy Jay as part of a broader commitment to voluntary work. There is little to distinguish her motivation from that of a Conservative like Charlotte Keeling other than the political creed they sought to deliver.

The importance of social service and voluntary activity as acceptable roles for middle-class women therefore emerges as one significant factor assisting some women in standing for election, with elected representation seen as part of that social service. Although in London political loyalty and integration into the relevant party machinery was also necessary for middle-class women to succeed in office, commitment to voluntary work was relevant to women elected for both Labour and Conservative Parties.

⁴⁷ Peggy Jay, *Loves and Labours; an Autobiography* (London, Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1990), pp.5-14.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

In London Labour circles some working-class women did appear as representatives alongside those prominent middle-class philanthropists. Given the nature of Labour politics in London they often benefitted from strong local organisation of women in the Party. They also extended the range of voluntary activity beyond those focused on home and family life. They combined elected experience with that as trades union organisers or in promoting socialist education. For Labour women in Poplar, not just Nellie Cressall but also Mrs Julia Scurr and Mrs Jenny Mackay, the extent of their commitment to the socialist cause was tested by imprisonment. All three were able to draw on a personal lifetime of union and suffrage activism and support of husbands also active in local socialist politics.⁴⁹ They had connections with the East End Federation of Suffragettes, the Social Democratic Federation and the ILP. Their home lives were working-class, enriched by a wealth of personal experience of activism as well as those influential and supportive connections.⁵⁰ The extent of commitment needed to participate as social leaders in both local voluntary organisation and in the relevant political machinery in addition to securing elected office on successive occasions meant that for the majority this activity was a way of life, not just an alternative to paid employment or a worthwhile hobby, but an integral part of the personality and character of the individual.

Common themes in London candidates

The fortunes of the two main political parties in London determined the range of women coming forward for election, but within those boundaries of Party membership other common factors emerge. Eligibility for the pool from which

⁴⁹ Noreen Branson, *Poplarism 1919-1925; George Lansbury and the Councillors' revolt* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1984) pp.233-237.

⁵⁰ Annie Barnes, elected to neighbouring Stepney in 1934 also had connections to the East London Federation of Suffragettes and to the ILP. Although she described her father as a 'high class fruiterer' her own east end life was dominated by caring for a large family after the death of her mother. See Kate Harding and Caroline Gibbs (eds.) *Tough Annie; From Suffragette to Stepney Councillor* (London, Stepney Books publications Ltd, 1980).

candidacy in winnable seats might be invited did not just involve being a member of a political party, but involved being accepted as part of the upper echelons of activism within that party. That might arise from being well known within the community through charitable work or some other form of activism. With one or two exceptions, from 1919 onwards women who participated as London councillors in a substantial way did not need to serve an apprenticeship in an unwinnable ward. They had often served their apprenticeship through other means. Several Conservative women in Kensington and Labour women like Julia Scurr and the Countess de Lormet could draw on elected experience as Poor Law guardians. Conservative women had previous co-opted roles on the LCC education board. Suffrage experience was common, especially in the East End where the work of Sylvia Pankhurst was of influence. What is notable is not just the range of activities undertaken by women pioneers here, but the extent to which individuals participated in a multitude of activities.

The London sample also includes examples of women in both Conservative and Labour ranks who were married to other prominent politicians. Ada Salter, as noted previously, is discussed more than most female councillors because her husband developed a Parliamentary career. Initially they served together as local councillors. Although there were more single women amongst Conservative women councillors in Kensington, their counterparts in Westminster had a higher proportion of married women, with two married to national politicians.⁵¹ Family alliances were also common in Poplar where both Nellie Cressall and Julia Scurr pursued council life as part of married partnerships, whilst Minnie Lansbury was appointed alderman, working alongside her husband Edgar and father-in-law George.⁵²

⁵¹ Mrs Douglas Vickers and Mrs Ridley Smith. Further details in appendix two.

⁵² Branson, *Poplarism*, pp.231-238.

For some women in London, being an election candidate was not to result in being elected. London borough elections had between three and nine seats in each ward all contested simultaneously. This concentration gives a good picture of the extent to which women were prepared to stand in unwinnable seats. Women opposition candidates or 'paper candidates' as they are sometimes called, appear to be more common in Labour ranks than Conservative, which may simply reflect the extent to which Labour was contesting an increasing proportion of council seats.

Table 13: Extracts of ward level election data with all women opposition teams

1925 result, Kensington Holland ward. Nine MR councillors elected.			
Barrs P.	M.R	2983	87.7
Kenyon H.	M.R	2979	-
Carter R.	M.R	2961	-
Bird A.	M.R	2937	-
Brinton M. Ms.	M.R	2889	-
Lansdown G.	M.R	2853	-
Parsons F.	M.R	2837	-
Voules F.	M.R	2830	-
Joseph M. Ms.	M.R	2780	-
Drake B. Ms.	Lab	420	12.3
Piercy M.	Lab	373	-
Laski F. Ms.	Lab	311	-
Wadley M. Ms.	Lab	296	-
1931 result, Kensington Pembridge ward. Six MR councillors elected.			
Fane H.	M.R	2780	91.0
Goldsmith H.	M.R	2777	-
Askew H.	M.R	2773	-
Pennefather E. Ms.	M.R	2749	-
Hamilton J.	M.R	2749	-
Ganel H.	M.R	2653	-
Bradbury E. Ms.	Lab	276	9.0
Owen B. Ms.	Lab	259	-
West M. Ms.	Lab	258	-
Burns L. Ms.	Lab	253	-
Wiltsher E. Ms.	Lab	221	-
1934 result Bermondsey No.1 ward. Six Labour councillors elected.			
Cragie W.	Lab	1070	73.6
Horwood G.	Lab	1067	-
Ayling T.	Lab	1065	-
Doyle E. Ms.	Lab	1036	-
Nix E. Ms.	Lab	1030	-
Laker R. Ms.	Lab	1007	-
Ball F. Ms.	M.R	216	14.9
Caney M. Ms.	M.R	215	-
Hart J. Ms.	M.R	186	-
Drewitt E. Ms.	M.R	183	-
Smith R. Ms.	M.R	172	-
Parkes E. Ms.	M.R	171	-
Browne J.	Com	168	11.6
Merrells H.	Com	162	-
Brown W.	Com	150	-

Source, Rallings and Thrasher data. N.B. The naming of candidates is as within the Rallings and Thrasher database, where Ms is used as a general indication of a female candidate. It does not reflect marital status of the candidates.

The presence of women in unwinnable seats is illustrated well by elections in Holland and Pembridge wards in Kensington illustrated in Table 13. In these examples there are Labour opposition teams comprised solely of women candidates. Women who appeared in seats with this electoral margin between winners and losers rarely went on to contest a more winnable seat, but would appear as candidates in other unwinnable seats. A similar pattern occurred in the Conservative led alliance opposition team in Bermondsey. Although outright concentrations of this extent are rare, the presence of women in opposition seats they are unlikely to win is not. The nature of these London elections was not replicated elsewhere because of the differing electoral cycles and the size of London wards. What examples like this illustrate is that some women were a central part of the sophisticated party political electoral machinery in London, prepared to stand as candidates, sometimes at several elections, even though they had no chance of becoming a councillor. This level of political organisation was not as evident in all other towns and cities

Provincial Labour pioneers

The election of women in some towns and cities has received marginally better coverage in other work than that of London or rural county councils, but coverage is patchy and has a tendency to focus on Labour women. Cathy Hunt, looking in particular at the life of **Miss Alice Arnold** in Coventry, suggests single women who retained working-class lifestyles struggled in both practical and social ways to become accepted by other councillors and integrated into the political and municipal machinery.⁵³ Hunt gives a convincing range of example of how Arnold differed from other Labour councillors in her radical and outspoken views, her evolution as a

⁵³ Cathy Hunt, 'Everyone's Poor Relation': the poverty and isolation of a working-class woman local politician in interwar Britain', *Women's History Review*, 16:3, 417- 430.

Labour activist and in her necessity to earn an income alongside being a Labour councillor. Alice Arnold was elected as a Coventry councillor from 1919, initially sponsored by the Trades Union movement and later joining the Labour Party. She remained a councillor until 1955. Longevity by itself does not therefore illustrate acceptance by the local political machinery – in this case popularity with the electorate she supported in very practical ways, and a desire by Labour politicians to avoid negative publicity helped sustain the long term role of one very committed individual.

The partial statistical information available in the work of Davies and Morley identifies just twelve Labour women elected in the first three county borough elections (1919 to 1921) in those towns covered by their study. The data suggests that of these, eight were married.⁵⁴ In addition to Alice Arnold, three had over a decade of service as councillors; Mrs M. A. Mercer in Birkenhead, Mrs C. Mitchel in Birmingham and Mrs L. M. Phesey in Bristol. One of those three, Mrs Mercer, was amongst the Labour women who featured in a series of articles published in the *Labour Woman* in 1920. Her background is rural, but described as one of relative poverty with limited schooling. She tried training as a nurse, worked as a housekeeper, and visited the poor when living in Belfast, where she married a Labour activist. On moving to Birkenhead she devoted herself to Labour work, for both the local Labour Party and the ILP.⁵⁵ Her profile shows some similarities with that of Mrs Hannah Mitchell, elected to Manchester council in 1924, and also coming from an impoverished rural background in Derbyshire, one of the very few women councillors to have left any recorded account of their experiences.⁵⁶ Hannah

⁵⁴ The three unmarried Labour women elected were Miss A. Hope in Bath, Miss M. Hickey, Birkenhead; and Miss A. Arnold in Coventry. Married Labour women were elected in Birkenhead, Birmingham, Derby, Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, and two in East Ham. A further Labour woman elected in Birmingham did not have marital status listed.

⁵⁵ *The Labour Woman* September 1920, 'Our women councillors'.

⁵⁶ G. Mitchell, (ed.) *The Hard way up. The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel*, (London, Virago, 1977).

Mitchell was also married to a Labour activist and had both extensive experience of suffrage work and previous election as a Poor Law guardian before becoming a councillor. Despite, or, she suggests, because of the breadth of her previous experience, her initial attempts to stand as a council candidate were thwarted when her 1921 nomination by the ILP was refused by the local Labour Party as her suffrage activities convinced them she was 'not amenable to discipline'.⁵⁷

Another example from *The Labour Woman* series, Mrs Fawcett of York, was also from a rural background, the self-taught daughter of an agricultural labourer.⁵⁸ A further article features the life of Mrs Palmer, a Poor Law guardian in Southampton who went on to combine her work as a Labour councillor with work for the British Seafarers' Union.⁵⁹ These two examples are drawn from county boroughs outside those covered by the volumes published so far by Davies and Morley. As the statistical base does not exist, we have no way of knowing how typical they are. However profiles traced in case studies re-enforce the impression that as a single working-class woman elected in 1919 Alice Arnold was unusual.⁶⁰

It can be argued there was no such thing as a typical county borough. The relative size of the five or six largest cities meant that even though the proportionate representation of women varied, some cities appeared to have a concentration of elected women simply because they had so many councillors. In 1928, for example Manchester had 104 elected councillors, Liverpool 113 and Birmingham 90. The average number of councillors on a county borough at that time was nearer 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p.194.

⁵⁸ *The Labour Woman*, April 1920 'Our women councillors'.

⁵⁹ *The Labour Woman*, July 1920 'Our women councillors'.

⁶⁰ There is evidence from other sources of a predominance of married women councillors as time progresses. Martin Pugh quotes unpublished work by Jonathan Billings suggesting that most of the Labour women elected to Newcastle and Gateshead were the wives of Labour councillors. (Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* p.60). John Boughton found that 'at least six of the 18 women Labour councillors and municipal candidates in Birmingham between 1918 and 1931 were railwaymen's wives'. (Boughton, 'Working Class politics in Birmingham and Sheffield 1918 – 1931'). Sylvia Dunkley found 'of the eighty-seven women councillors in the West Riding of Yorkshire in the inter-war period only nine were unmarried. (Dunkley 'Women Magistrates, Ministers and Municipal councillors').

Larger cities are more prominent in academic work looking at the local position of women councillors.

The work of Karen Hunt looking at Labour women in Manchester includes findings that emphasise importance of broad political participation - 'Prior political experience was ubiquitous amongst Manchester's first generation of Labour women municipal candidates'.⁶¹ There is also evidence of family ties - 'This first generation of Labour women candidates also has strong familial associations with the Labour movement'.⁶² Hunt (Karen) goes on to clarify that statement though, suggesting that although married partnerships featured strongly, not all political marriages resulted in equal activism. Those findings are re-enforced by similar trends evident amongst London Labour women, but as the work of Cathy Hunt shows, there are exceptions to any pattern. Even though key themes emerge, generalisation from them would be inappropriate. As Karen Hunt states, 'it is all too easy to homogenise them as 'Labour women''.⁶³ The importance of local culture in political life was particularly evident in Liverpool.

Labour politics in Liverpool in this period was dominated by Catholicism and as Davies illustrates, those wards returning the most dominant Catholic councillors had limited women's activism. The two most influential Labour women on Liverpool council in this period were mother and daughter – Mary Bamber and Mrs Bessie Braddock. The latter joined the council shortly after husband Jack. As Davies points out however, Bessie Braddock did not fit any stereotype of a loyal party activist, with most of her loyalty directed to the working-class families she represented even if that meant conflict with the local Labour hierarchy. The Braddocks had returned to

⁶¹ Karen Hunt, 'Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour Women in Interwar Manchester' in Matthew Worley *Labours grass roots : essays on the activities and experiences of local Labour parties and members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005) p. 84.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.85

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.82.

local Labour ranks in 1924 after being heavily embroiled in the Communist Party of Great Britain and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement.⁶⁴

With cities like Manchester and Liverpool featuring in other published work, case studies selected here included less prominent towns and cities. Reading was selected initially because women had been elected there at an early opportunity. Miss Edith Sutton was amongst the very first cohort of women to be elected following the passing of the 1907 Act. Initially serving as an independent and specialising in education matters, by 1918 she was vice-chair of one of the sub-committees of education, the chairman of the main committee being her cousin Leonard Goodhart Sutton. The Sutton family industry had developed from local corn merchants into leading providers of seeds. Steeped in local philanthropy she also shared membership of the Poor Law board with a brother and her father had been a founding member.⁶⁵ Miss Sutton chaired the local branch of the WLGS and on their behalf she was still stressing the independent nature of a Liberal woman candidate who stood in 1921.⁶⁶ Within a short while though, she was to declare her own political allegiance by joining Labour. Her influence was thought to be significant:

The 1920s were halcyon days for Reading Labour Party. The rapid decline of the Liberals, dramatic everywhere, was especially so in Reading, where the defection of Edith Sutton to the new party in 1920 set an example that was widely followed.⁶⁷

The subject of this local biography, **Mrs Phoebe Cusden** (sometimes known locally as Annie Cusden and before marriage Annie Blackall) was to also become a prominent Labour councillor in Reading, but not until she had been defeated several

⁶⁴ R.S.W. Davies, 'Differentiation in the Working Class. Class Consciousness and development of the Labour Party in Liverpool up to 1939' pp. 282-286.

⁶⁵ Reading Local Studies collection, Minutes of Reading Borough Council, (Minute of council November 1918); *Reading Mercury*, *Oxford Gazette*, *Newbury Herald*, all 11 November 1933.

⁶⁶ *Reading Mercury*, 15 October 1921.

⁶⁷ Adam Stout, *A Bigness of Heart, Phoebe Cusden of Reading* (Reading, Reading-Dusseldorf Association, 1997).

times at the polls and taken time off from election campaigns when first married. Her husband was elected in 1922 and they had married earlier that year. She not only ceased trying to win a council seat, she also stood down from the Board of Guardians.⁶⁸

In 1924 the Cusdens took over the production of the local socialist newspaper *The Reading Citizen*. In this and other phases of their life they worked together as activists. Both Phoebe Cusden and Edith Sutton had experience as Poor Law guardians, and wider involvement in public work and campaigning. Miss Sutton had been a co-opted member of the education committee and was involved with local suffrage work in addition to her involvement with the WLGS.⁶⁹ Mrs Cusden had joined the Women Workers' Federation out of sympathy with workers at Huntley and Palmers biscuit factory. She was an executive member and later part-time employee of the Nursery School Association.⁷⁰ The diversity in their respective backgrounds typifies the variety in the ranks of Labour women, one a member of the local business elite, the other the daughter of a farrier who worked from the age of 14, improving her life through WEA evening classes. Their initial experiences of gaining elected office are also different. Edith Sutton, as a member of a local elite family stood initially as an independent, convinced it was a suitable route for women, was supported by both Liberal and Conservatives and was returned unopposed, although she was later to find herself opposed by Labour before joining them.⁷¹

Before her marriage Annie Blackall worked hard at the polls in 1919, but found herself defeated in those early attempts to take a seat. Her campaign appealed to

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁶⁹ Alan Alexander, *Borough Government and Politics, Reading 1835 – 1985* (London, George Alan Unwin, 1985).

⁷⁰ Stout, *A Bigness of Heart*, p.37.

⁷¹ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon,1987), pp.396 and 399, *Reading Mercury* 03 November 1920.

women voters, with local suffrage campaigner and university professor Edith Morley supporting her. Her biography includes an unattributed account of the reaction of one woman to the canvas;

'I always read the Town Council news', she said, 'and I am ever so interested in your work. But will you go and see my husband – you'll find him in the workshop – you see I don't think there should be two opposing views in one household' ⁷²

Appealing to newly enfranchised women voters as a woman candidate was unproductive. In this 1919 campaign and again in 1921 she failed to get elected, but put the information collected to use encouraging women to join the Reading Women's Labour Party. Not all Labour women in Reading were defeated in the early years, and in 1921 Alice Jenkins, wife of a railway worker succeeded in defeating the local Mayor at the polls, despite her opposition to him being branded as 'decidedly ungracious' by the local newspaper, which later reported that 'the socialists conducted a vigorous propaganda but the mayor contented himself with issuing his address'.⁷³

Despite evidence of difficult campaigns, Labour women in Reading and elsewhere demonstrate an ability to succeed as council candidates with a significant degree of determination. Their backgrounds are mixed, but their tenacity and spirit are common. These were features they could share with Conservative counterparts.

Town and gown

If Reading illustrated how an early start in electing women was built upon through local organisation of Labour women, nearby Oxford demonstrates that Labour representation was not the only mechanism by which the numbers of

⁷² Stout, *A Bigness of Heart* p.25.

⁷³ *Reading Mercury*, 15 October 1921 and 5 November 1921.

women councillors could be gradually increased. Local culture and community again played a part, for in Oxford all political parties were able to build on the presence of an educated and cultured elite group of women who were established in the University town. Sophia Merivale was the early pioneer, elected in 1907, and an obituary suggests 'she won by her strength of character, her modesty and her utter singleness of purpose an unique position, which made the presence of women on the Council acceptable even to those who most strongly opposed the innovation'.⁷⁴ Both Liberal and Conservative women were to follow after the war. Labour women candidates did emerge in the 1920s, but like their male counterparts they failed to get elected.⁷⁵ Conservative grandees included **Lady Mary Townsend**. Her political career as a councillor began in 1925 and lasted 42 years, during part of which she was leader of the Conservative group on the council.⁷⁶ Serving alongside her as a Conservative group for most of that period was Mrs Ida-Harrison Hall, who was also a councillor or alderman for 42 years and **Miss Lily Tawney**, who first joined the council when there were no elections in 1918 and was then elected unopposed in 1920. She followed several family members into public service so that 'we find one Richard Tawney serving as bailiff, and in 1748 he appears to have been mayor of Oxford. On eight subsequent occasions there has been a mayor bearing this name, the last of these Charles Tawney, Mayor in 1840, being the great-uncle of the present Mayor'.⁷⁷ Liberal women elected to Oxford included Miss Quick and Mrs Thackery, both former Poor Law guardians. Several of the women had connections with the university, with Lady Townsend gaining the nickname of 'Lady Town and

⁷⁴ *The Oxford Magazine*, 3 May 1928, p.454.

⁷⁵ *Oxford Times* 04 November 1921 suggests the increase in the number of candidates that year was due to women seeking to take up their place on the council. There were Labour women in four wards but each suffered heavy defeats. *Oxford Times* 29 October 1926 shows only two women candidates, one Liberal and one Conservative. Labour only has three candidates in that year. *Oxford Times* 29 March 1929, elections took place in March because of boundary changes. This included Labour women candidates in Headington ward who were again defeated.

⁷⁶ *Oxford Times*, 30 May 1986, (obituary).

⁷⁷ *The Oxford Magazine*, 16 November 1933 See also *Oxford Mail* 17 October 1947.

gownsend'.⁷⁸ Mrs Mabel Pritchard provided a direct link as a University representative on Oxford City Council. Her work focused on mental health and the promotion of Higher Education for women, having succeeded there as a student and lecturer before her marriage to an academic.⁷⁹

As the cohorts in table ten (page 137) illustrate, Oxford had a consistently good representation of women compared to county boroughs of a similar size. Successful women from both Liberal and Conservative parties had personal and family associations with the university, but their social leadership was also illustrated by the strength of their representation on other bodies, including service as Poor Law guardians and as magistrates. Mrs Mabel Pritchard was chairman of the Oxford Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Oxford Council of Social Service, Miss Lily Tawney was a founder member of the latter and was said to be still distributing library books to local hospitals shortly before her death in 1947. Both these women were awarded OBE's for their public service.⁸⁰ Their combined impact is summed up by a letter just before the 1927 elections in which a group of mainly male dignitaries points out there are few women candidates. The emphasis is on the need to ensure representation to deal with those aspects of council work women are frequently associated with, in education and maternity & child welfare, but the appeal is unusual in seeking not just a women's voice but the services of several women on these committees. It suggests 'each sex makes its special contribution and if either is lacking there is a real and definite loss of efficiency'.⁸¹ That appeal was one being made by women's organisations in several towns and cities.

Two other cathedral towns show similar patterns of representation by women of experience to that of Oxford, although political allegiance was less commonly

⁷⁸ *Oxford Times*, 30 May 1986.

⁷⁹ *The Oxford Magazine*, 13 May 1965.

⁸⁰ *Oxford Times*, 17 October 1947 and *The Oxford Magazine* 13 May 1965.

⁸¹ *Oxford Times*, 28 October 1927.

recorded and actual levels of representation far lower. Just two women, Mrs Julia Mary Siveter and Mrs Martha Lilian Edwards succeeded in being elected to Gloucester County Borough between 1919 and 1937, and until 1926 Mrs Siveter appears to be the sole woman councillor. Both had long terms of office, with Mrs Siveter serving as alderman from 1931. Early inroads to Worcester County Borough were made by the Co-operative candidate Mrs Alice Edwards, described in the local paper as a lecturer and author.⁸² Elected in 1919 as Labour gained 6 Worcester council seats, she lost the seat in 1922 and failed to recapture it in 1923. This was followed by a period with very few women candidates until 1929 when Worcester gained several new women members. Given this date coincided with the abolition of Poor Law guardians it is possible that this illustrates former guardians moved to a council role. One was to make a speedy impact, reflecting her wider role in local society, for by 1931 **Miss Diana Ogilvy**, daughter of the Rev Ogilvy and Hon Mrs Ogilvy was appointed as mayor, with 'a special banqueting service of Royal Worcester Porcelain of 800 pieces, for 100 persons be made to commemorate the historic occasion of a lady being elected as mayor'.⁸³ Both Diana Ogilvy and her counterpart Lady Atkins had church connections, the former through her work with the Church of England Board for Moral Welfare, and Lady Atkins as wife of Sir Ivor Atkins, organist at Worcester Cathedral.⁸⁴ Once again then, social standing and a record of voluntary service typified the acceptable women candidates.

Working together as women

The fact that women were able to stand as municipal candidates at all resulted from the activities of the cross-party Women's Local Government Society (WLGS). By the 1920s their work in lobbying for women councillors was developed by both

⁸² *Worcester Herald*, 1 November 1919.

⁸³ Worcester Library, Minute books, Worcester County Borough 1931 p. 26 and *The Times*, 4 April 1955

⁸⁴ Worcester Library, County Borough records and *The Times*, 17 December 1954.

the Women Citizens' Association (WCA) and the National Council of Women (NCW). As Janet Howes suggests, the value of these non-party organisations in encouraging women's citizenship should not be under-estimated. The WCA had developed in 1918 from the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) whilst the NCW evolved in the same year, anticipating the forthcoming enfranchisement of some women and including securing more female local government candidates as an objective.⁸⁵

As noted earlier, it was the presence of an early group of the WCA that secured the election of Miss Kate Edmonds in Portsmouth in 1918. Despite her own success she was cautious in supporting the principle of electing women. '...she stressed the point that such candidates for public work must be duly qualified'.⁸⁶ The daughter of a chartered accountant and educated locally, Miss Edmonds showed herself to be a woman with experience and knowledge of wide ranging issues, in favour of equal pay for women teachers and others where work was clearly equal, keen too on pensions for mothers, and content that women who had proved themselves capable of work in wartime would be kept on. She had experience of local charitable work and 'in 1910 she was invited by the Education Committee to serve on the Canteen Committee for the provision of free meals for necessitous school children, and in this capacity she did good work for 14 years as Lady Superintendent of the Charles Street Feeding Centre'.⁸⁷ After Edmonds was defeated in 1920 there was no further direct WCA sponsorship of candidates in Portsmouth. The second woman on the council, Mrs Sarah Holmes of the Southsea Co-operative Women's Guild died in office in 1921.⁸⁸

⁸⁵Janet Howes, 'No Party, No sect, No Politics': The National Council of Women and the National Women's Citizens' Association with particular reference to Cambridge and Manchester in the Inter-War years. (Anglia Polytechnic 2003 unpublished PhD), p.9.

⁸⁶ *Hampshire Telegraph and Post*, 15 November 1918.

⁸⁷ *Hampshire Telegraph and Post*, 9 September 1938.

⁸⁸ *Hampshire Telegraph and Post*, 17 June 1921.

Despite early inroads by these two women, it was 1929 before another woman was elected to Portsmouth council and numbers then remained limited throughout the 1930s. The WCA frequently pondered over the reasons for this eight-year gap, and made efforts to find candidates to fill it. In their 1920-1921 Annual Report they lamented the defeat of Miss Edmonds and hoped 'she will not fail to stand again at the earliest opportunity'. They were of a view that the electorate had 'militated against the election of women candidates as a whole just lately'.⁸⁹ However the resolution they also considered that year demonstrated the real dilemma for those women involved with the WCA. Constitutionally non-party, the Portsmouth branch affirmed that they would not *as an association* support any candidate other than those they had nominated who had to undertake to be independents once elected. At the same time, the Portsmouth association made clear, *their individual members* were free to support party sponsored candidates of their choosing. This approach appears elsewhere but it was not always interpreted with the same degree of firmness. Janet Howes suggests both Labour and Liberal women in Cambridge were members of and received support from their local WCA in the 1920s.⁹⁰ There are gaps in the archived records of the Portsmouth branch, but when records resume in the early 1930s women there have reached another compromise. Unable to find candidates of their own, and aware party politics dominated local selection, the WCA 'offered each Party personal and financial assistance for any woman candidate they put into the field'.⁹¹ No women came forward to take up this offer and attempts to offer £5 to any woman candidate in future years found a divided executive questioning whether this support should be made available to political candidates.⁹² That report did reflect one success, for the Portsmouth WCA

⁸⁹ Portsmouth Records Office, (PRA) Annual report of the WCA 1920-21 (x/1055A/3/1/1).

⁹⁰ Howes, 'No Party, No sect No Politics', p.85.

⁹¹ PRA Annual report of the WCA 1933-34 (x/1055A/3/1/2).

⁹² PRA Annual report of the WCA 1934-345 (x/1055A/3/1/3).

nominated Mrs Childs as a co-opted member of Education Committee. Not only was her nomination successful, but Mrs Childs was later elected as an Independent councillor.

Despite this later success, the waning of the direct influence of the WCA was acknowledged internally as being a result of the growth of 'party politics'. The term grew in use as Labour representation spread along with the varying construction of local alliances to defeat it. Party politics was not new in municipal life, but the uneven advance of Labour representation brought new ideological tension. Women standing as Independents or on behalf of women's organisations were caught up in the midst of that fight. The consequent reduction in their direct electoral success is evident in other areas as well as Portsmouth.

As illustrated in table nine (page 133) there were a number of towns where women's organisations provided the initial impetus, but even in the early years their electoral success was small. In some of those towns covered by the Davies and Morley data records show the number of candidates standing as women was not replenished, or the women in question only serving a limited term. Some prominent women initially elected as WCA or NCW candidates survived once elected, but they were very limited in number – Mrs Squire in Croydon carrying on her work as a Ratepayers candidate, Mrs Buchanan in Carlisle and Mrs Wells in Canterbury both lasting until the late 1920s. That decline in direct influence though was more than matched by an increase in involvement in indirect lobbying as illustrated in one town where the work of women has been well documented, in Bolton.

One significant Bolton woman attempted to join the county borough council at the earliest opportunity. Sarah Reddish, author of *Women and County and Borough Councils: A claim for Eligibility* was defeated in the 1907 County Borough

elections.⁹³ She was elected as a Poor Law guardian in 1905 and a member of the school board. Reddish developed her wide ranging socialist and feminist activity having left school aged eleven to work in the local cotton mills. She is best known for her work on unemployment, establishing a labour exchange and also for her work with the Women's Co-operative Guild.⁹⁴ Her background and political outlook were very different from women she would have encountered in public life in Bolton, especially that of Mary and daughter Mildred Haslam, who were at the centre of a network of connected families dominating an elite and radical unitarian local philanthropy that was 'inextricably tied up with social activism and public service.'⁹⁵ Reddish and Mary Haslam worked alongside each other in a variety of suffrage and charitable activities, but once partial citizenship was granted, whilst Sarah Reddish focused on the Women's Cooperative Guild, Haslam devoted her energies to the creation of the Women Citizens' Association, which was to become an influential force in the town for many years.

Steven King charts the work of WCA in Bolton in detail. He acknowledges their role in promoting the early election of women as Poor Law guardians, and provides significant evidence of the networks that enabled women of high social standing to participate in voluntary activity and local administration, and the inter-relationship of those networks with local suffrage activity. With the ground laid by the suffrage work of Reddish and Haslam, Bolton was well placed to develop a strong WCA. Twenty-two local women's organisations were able to come together to support its formation.⁹⁶ Their leadership reflected the strong local social networks amongst women, with overlapping spheres of activity at the centre of which was Mary Haslam. King ends his work in 1922 when Mary Haslam died, but her influence and

⁹³ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.407.

⁹⁴ Stephen King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880 – 1920, 'We might be trusted'*, (Brighton, Sussex Academic press, 2010), pp79,178 and 185.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.269-270

that of Sarah Reddish was widespread and long-lasting. They had helped to generate what King sees as 'a broadly based, mature and large scale feminist movement in Bolton.'⁹⁷

Their influence at the polls however, was limited. The WCA and CWG found seven women to stand as candidates in Bolton in 1919. Although none were elected, amongst them was Jane Taylor who was elected as Conservative just three years later.⁹⁸ The WCA did succeed in getting one candidate elected in Bolton. They were delighted when Mrs Agnew was returned to the council in 1921: 'Our Association is very proud of having returned the first woman, and she a non-party candidate to the Bolton Town Council'.⁹⁹ Within a few years however, the difficulties of electing women in Bolton without party support were becoming apparent. Mrs Mawson was the last candidate to seek a seat on behalf of the WCA in Bolton, and supporters acknowledged that in her fight in 1926 'party rivalry was so keen on Election Day that nothing else counted'.¹⁰⁰

In fact, when the WCA discussed the option of finding a candidate for that election, 'opinion was divided. It was felt by some members that a non-party candidate had no chance whatever of securing a seat in the council, while others felt that for a long time to come it would be necessary for the WCA to run candidates'.¹⁰¹ The WCA were to find further disappointment at the polls the following year when their popular pioneer Mrs Agnew lost her seat. She remained involved in many aspects of public life for her few remaining years, and as the *Bolton Journal and Guardian* noted, 'her last public duty was on behalf of women and children when she led a joint deputation to the Public Assistance Committee to

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.198.

⁹⁸ Davies and Morley data.

⁹⁹ Bolton Archives and Local Studies Service, (BA) Bolton Women Citizens' Association (WCA). Annual Report 1921, (FW/3/9).

¹⁰⁰ BA, Bolton WCA, 8th Annual Report, December 1926.

¹⁰¹ BA, Bolton WCA Minutes, 16 June 1925, (FW/3/2).

plead that co-opted women might be allowed to continue their work on Guardians committees'.¹⁰²

The prominence of Sarah Reddish, of the WCA, Mary Haslam and Mrs Agnew, then later of Labour Mayor **Mrs Helen Wright** mean that Bolton has a record of strong female activity in local government matters. That did not though, lead to a high volume of women being elected – although Bolton was marginally better than some nearby towns. As in Portsmouth the local WCA ultimately resorted to lobbying and co-option rather than direct election.

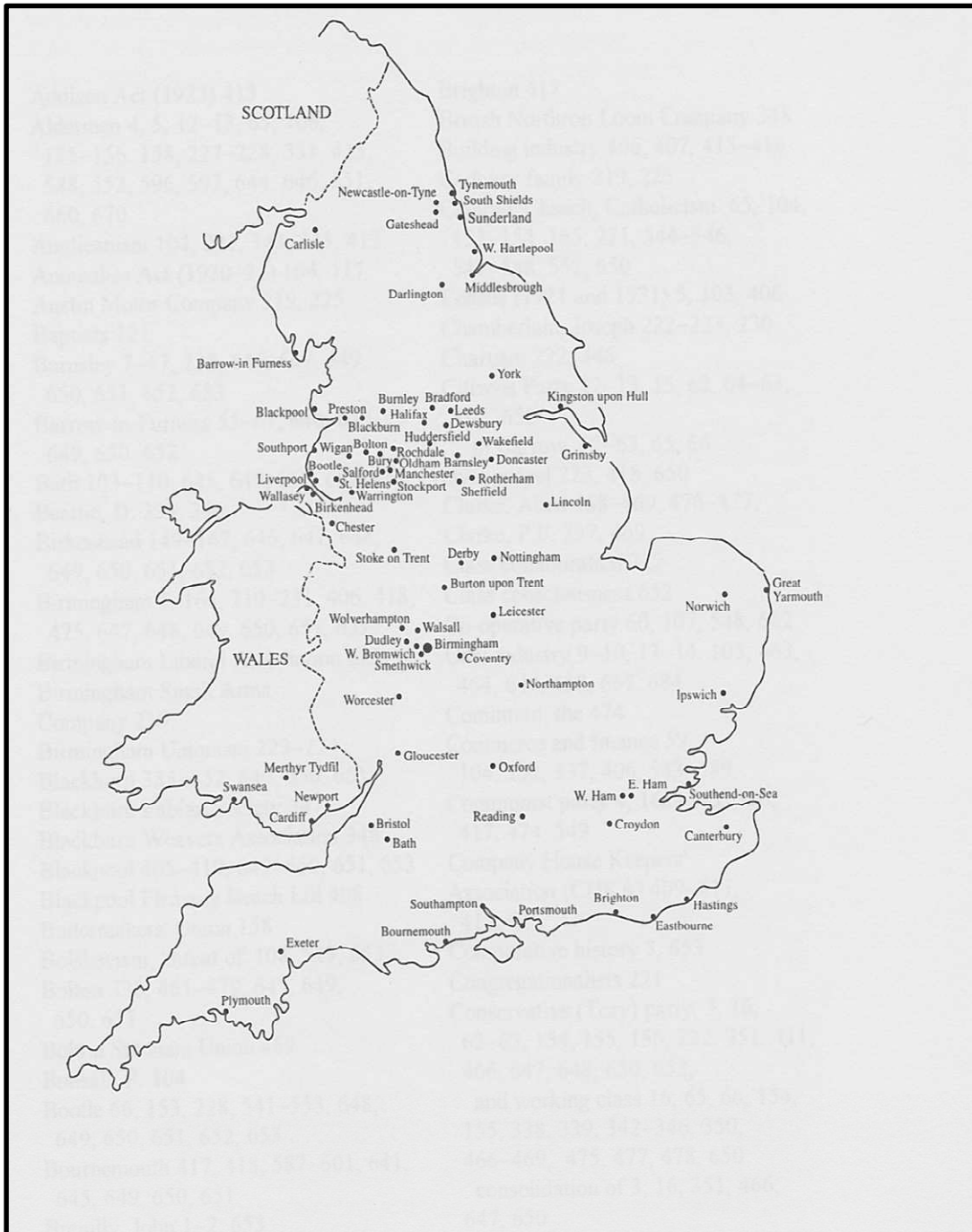
Women in the north-west

Bolton was at the heart of an area where suffrage activity and women's employment were both well established. It was also an area with a high concentration of county boroughs. One consequence of the uneven spread of nineteenth-century urbanisation in England was that fifteen of the initial sixty-one County Boroughs were in Lancashire. For those in the east of the county in particular the growth was a direct consequence of the spread of cotton manufacturing, an industry in which women were employed in significant numbers.

This region also provides some important examples of early election, with pioneers who demonstrated the extent of overlap between the membership of the various suffrage organisations and individuals who stood as council candidates in the years surrounding the Great War. Fifteen women were elected to county boroughs before the Great War, including Margaret Ashton in Manchester and Mrs Lees in Oldham. In many ways these two were typical of those very early successful candidates; As

¹⁰² *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, 11 April 1930.

Figure 3; The distribution of county boroughs in England and Wales



Source: Sam Davies and Bob Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–1938: A Comparative Analysis*, vol. i Barnsley – Bournemouth, p.687.

Hollis argues, 'Almost always women councillors were suffragist, feminist, and whatever their politics, progressive in practice'.¹⁰³

Whilst the militant suffrage campaign moved its focus from Manchester to London, and most discussion focuses on the militant activities, accounts that look at the more disparate base of the suffrage movement acknowledge a particular strength in the north-west. Jill Liddington traces this strength back through the influence of individuals starting with those working in Manchester in the late 1890's.¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Crawford also acknowledges the dominance of the north-west suffrage movement, and the Manchester origins, but then points out

The northwest region, outside Manchester, had a long history of involvement in reform. The condition of life in the towns of the industrial area spread out around Manchester amply demonstrated to women why, if social reform were to be affected, they needed political power and produced women who were prepared to take action to attempt to achieve it.¹⁰⁵

The dominance of cotton manufacturing continued to have an impact on the employment patterns of the towns to the north of Manchester throughout the inter-war period. Bolton and neighbouring Bury, Oldham and Rochdale had a combined population of just over 465,000. Manchester itself was much larger than the four combined, home to 766,800 people.¹⁰⁶ Within the working-class, 'nearly every unmarried woman and many married women went out to work'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.399.

¹⁰⁴ Liddington, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, p.83.

¹⁰⁵ Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement: a regional survey (2006)*, p.8.

¹⁰⁶ Sam Davies and Bob Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–1938: A Comparative Analysis*, vol. 1, p677. (1931 census data).

¹⁰⁷ Liddington, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, p.218.

The two early council election successes in the North-west both point to the presence of women social leaders involved in suffrage activity as the initial catalyst for representation rather than the presence of a large female workforce. The life story of Margaret Ashton in Manchester has been well documented.¹⁰⁸ Mrs Sarah Lees already had previous experience as a member of the education committee when elected to Oldham in 1907. This wealthy widow had already devoted considerable resources to improving her town. She also personally financed suffragist publications, and was president of the local NUWW, combining local representation with interest in wider suffrage issues.¹⁰⁹ Crawford records a less active presence of suffrage societies in Rochdale, although that town was at one time home to Ada Neild Chew, a NUWSS organiser and strong working-class speaker.¹¹⁰ Suffrage organisation was even less prevalent in Bury, an area campaigners acknowledged was somewhat difficult to organise.¹¹¹

Within this radical area then, there were historical variations in the strength of feeling about suffrage issues. The early election of women in Bolton resulted in part from the activities of the non-party WCA, but ultimately it was party political women who were to benefit. When future mayor Mrs Helen Wright joined Bolton council in 1929, she had three other Labour women for company, at a time when Conservatives still had overall control of the council.¹¹² Of the three, Annie Dowling was the most experienced. Her first election in 1925 was her third attempt at gaining a council seat in North ward, being defeated by a Liberal candidate in 1922 and a single Conservative in 1924, in each case the sole other candidate. The three main

¹⁰⁸ Jane Bedford, 'Margaret Ashton, Manchester's First Lady', *Manchester Regional History Review* (1998). Margaret Ashton also received coverage in 2006, including on woman's hour when her portrait was returned to the town hall. http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/05/2006_27_thu.shtml.

¹⁰⁹ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 403. Mrs Sarah Lees retired from Oldham council in 1919 having already served as mayor and been granted the Freedom of the town. She made substantial donations to the town whilst serving as a councillor and on her death in 1935 (aged 92) her house at Werneth park was also donated by her daughter Marjorie. *The Times*, 15 April 1935.

¹¹⁰ Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement : a regional survey* (2006), p.10.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.12.

¹¹² Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections* (vol. 1), p.466.

parties did not contest elections in 1931 so Annie Dowling and her colleagues were elected unopposed.¹¹³

Whilst these four women were occupied on Labour opposition benches, Mrs Ethel Lawson was the only woman Conservative. She had a very short period as an elected member, becoming the first woman alderman in Bolton just three years after her election in 1929. Although the sole Conservative woman at the time, she was not the first, as Jane Taylor, a widow, had represented Derby ward briefly in 1922. Although elected as a Conservative, Jane Taylor was one of a number of women in Bolton who had support from the WCA. After her successful election in 1922 she wrote to them 'expressing thanks for the little services rendered'.¹¹⁴

This level of candidacy was not matched in Oldham. Mrs Sarah Lees retired in 1919 and her daughter Marjorie joined the council around the same time. She remained the only woman councillor there throughout the 1920s and was granted the freedom of the town for her public service when she retires in 1934. That public service had also included 26 years on the Board of Guardians and chairmanship of the Public Assistance Committee. Like her mother she combined Liberal politics with a keen interest in the suffrage movement.¹¹⁵ Although the impact of Sarah and Marjorie Lees in Oldham was significant, it was not one instantly emulated by other women in the locality. Perhaps it was the strength of character of Sarah Lees in particular, and the wealth they were able to use to support their philanthropic town improvement that made them an impossible act to follow, but from her early election in 1907 until around 1929 mother and daughter were the only women representatives on Oldham County Borough. Apart from being hard acts to follow,

¹¹³ Davies and Morley (vol. 1), p.473. This commentary points out that the demands of the National Government for economies led to a number of electoral pacts to produce uncontested elections. In Bolton this was adhered to by all three main parties but with some challenges from minor parties such as Communists. It is suggested that the local electoral pacts helped prevent the collapse of Labour support in Bolton (p.478) a town where Conservatives maintained control for the whole of the inter-war period.

¹¹⁴ BA, Bolton WCA Minutes, 20 March 1923, (FW/3/2).

¹¹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 October 1934.

one explanation may lie in the strength of the electoral pacts between Conservatives and Liberals in Oldham which limited the number of elections in which there was a serious political contest.¹¹⁶

There was a similar shortage of women candidates in the early years in neighbouring Rochdale. No women appeared at all in news accounts of the 1919 municipal elections, which commentators described as one where there was 'comparatively little interest' on the part of electors and where Liberals and Conservatives ended up with an equal number of elected councillors, fifteen each, with two Labour men elected. Between 1920 and 1924 one or two Labour women appear at the polls, invariably ending up with a very small number of votes.¹¹⁷ Their ability to take seats is made more difficult by the presence of an anti-Labour alliance on the council. Labour publications record its presence in 1922, and it was still present in 1924 when, with local elections overshadowed by the general election, Labour fielded fewer candidates, but were still criticised by the Conservative press for bringing about any election at all.¹¹⁸ The Liberals had a large majority on the council. By 1932 they were denying the presence of any pact (although previous contests suggest otherwise). At this stage they did nominate a woman candidate, Miss Amy Jones who they thought might defeat a Labour nominee, but this attempt to achieve the first woman councillor in Rochdale was unsuccessful.¹¹⁹

This lack of contest and limited Labour growth was to lead to an unusual situation developing in Rochdale, where the first women elected joined the council at a late stage compared to councils close by, and by an unconventional route. Mary Duckworth was the daughter of one prominent Rochdale Alderman (John Petrie)

¹¹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 October 1928 and 29 October 1929. The former discusses the ending of a pact between Liberals and Conservatives in Oldham. The latter refers to the candidacy of Conservative Mrs Mary Waring Slocock, who Municipal Yearbook records confirm was elected.

¹¹⁷ *Rochdale Observer*, 5 November 1919, 3 November 1920, 4 November 1921, 3 November 1922, *Rochdale Times*, 3 November 1923, 7 November 1924.

¹¹⁸ *Rochdale Labour News*, 8 October 1922, 24 October 1924.

¹¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 October 1932.

and her father-in-law Sir James Duckworth, a former mayor became a Liberal MP. Her husband, also James Duckworth became mayor in November 1937, but died of a heart attack before the end of the calendar year. After much debate in the local press about how the mayoral vacancy should be filled, it was agreed that his widow should fill the post. She was entitled to do so by statute, even though not a member of the council. Towards the end of her mayoral year she was approached by her local Liberal association and asked to stand as a council candidate. As her mayoral duties would prevent her from campaigning until the first council meeting of the new municipal year Mrs Duckworth initially declined, but was eventually elected in a by-election shortly after her mayoral term ended. Thus as late as December 1938 Rochdale elected its first woman councillor who had already served as a Mayor. The local press was horrified when her election was opposed by a Labour candidate, and given the situation that had created her Mayoral debut, even more horrified when the Labour campaign criticised both her committee attendance as Mayor and her age, suggesting a woman of her age should have better things to do.¹²⁰

Although records are limited, the few discussions of women candidates do suggest that Labour did not promote women in a conscious way in Rochdale any more than the other political parties, and their reaction to Mary Duckworth may not have been entirely driven by party politics. When Mrs Miles stood as a Labour candidate in 1923, her (male) supporters promoted her presence by stating that they 'recognised no difference between men and woman'. Mrs Miles 'stood fair and square for the Labour programme' – a justification for her candidacy no doubt unnecessary for her male counterparts.¹²¹ Mary Duckworth was at home in the Methodist Liberal circles of educated Rochdale families who devoted their lives to

¹²⁰ *Rochdale Observer*, 21 November 1942 and 3 December 1938.

¹²¹ *Rochdale Times*, 31 October 1923. Mrs Miles was the only woman candidate in that year.

public service. Her Liberal counterparts thought her a suitable replacement following her husband's death, but neither they nor local Conservatives promoted other women as candidates successfully at any point between the wars.

Labour Party support for women candidates was more evident in nearby Bury. The first woman elected here was a Conservative, elected in 1919 and 1920 saw one unsuccessful WCA candidate. The relevance of Labour women to this area has been summarised well by Davies and Morley in their examination of Bury. They state:

As with other textile towns, the significance of women in the local economy meant that they might have been expected to play a greater role in public life than elsewhere. The co-operative movement, which had a substantial female membership and involvement, also occupied an important place in Bury. Through its strong links with Labour it might also have encouraged women's involvement in local politics. The evidence of the number of women candidates in Bury seems to bear out these expectations. Women stood as candidates on twenty-four occasions between the wars, representing 7.5 per cent of all candidatures. This was an unexceptional rate for female participation However seventeen of the women candidatures in Bury were for Labour, accounting for 19 per cent of the total Labour candidatures. This was in fact the highest proportion of women standing for Labour in any of the boroughs dealt with on the series so far.¹²²

¹²² Davies and Morley vol 2 p.438. The coverage goes on to refer to the two Labour women elected, Mrs Ethel Goodall 1928-31 and 1934-38 plus Mrs Isabel Bottomley 1934-37. They suggest women 'did count for something' in the local Labour Party and the Labour group, although there is no particular evidence here of them being more valued than the two Conservative women also elected to Bury, both called Mrs Taylor, one elected in 1919 and one in 1936.

In fact one Labour woman in Bury had support from a source that is rarely associated with encouraging party politics. Mrs Goodall, wife of a trade unionist was also secretary of the Women's Section of the British Legion and thanked them for their support after her election as a Labour councillor in 1934.¹²³

In Bury, Bolton, Rochdale and Oldham both Conservatism and Liberalism maintained strength in the inter-war years. The limited ability of Labour to advance in these areas despite a significant working-class population may help explain the limited election of women locally, but so too would the presence of local pacts that limited candidacy at all and tended to favour incumbency. Even though preparatory work was undertaken here by non-party organisations and women of significant social standing did emerge, ultimately political allegiance and the relative promotion of women by ruling political parties determined levels of success.

Although there were plenty of pioneering women involved in local suffrage work and an influence on early candidacy patterns, the history of local suffrage action did little to provide a reasonable pool of female candidates in the longer term. Women activists left something of a legacy in Bolton through the work of the WCA. Stephen King recognises the securing of elected office as part of wider campaigning and social networks. Elected office, in this case as a Poor Law guardian was 'not an incidental part of a feminist journey, but a core stepping stone and staging post for a wider assault on public life'.¹²⁴ That might have been the intention, but the impact was not sustained into cumulative growth, but overtaken by increasing reliance on the political machinery to provide local candidates, only promoting small groups of women as party candidates. As in other areas those elected had a background in either the political organisation itself or social welfare or, like Helen Wright a

¹²³ *Bury Times* 17 November 1934, quoted in Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary associations and democratic politics in interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal* 50, 4 (2007), p.905.

¹²⁴ King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics*, p.193.

combination of the two. Bolton did fare a little better than neighbouring areas. In Oldham the focus on one powerful individual woman may have had a negative effect, in Rochdale there are no early pioneers at all and in Bury participation was limited although female candidacy was high amongst Labour women. To ensure election it appears the presence of a motivated and networked female elite and political commitment was of more relevance than the degree of workforce participation or general radical tradition.

What is not clear is how far the small numbers of women who did succeed as councillors in this area were themselves participants in the significant female industrial workforce. Those elected at an early stage in Bolton and Oldham clearly were not and neither was Mary Duckworth of Rochdale.¹²⁵ Council records for Bolton invariably describe women candidates as either 'married woman' or 'housewife'. The only exception is Liberal Dr Jean Marshall, listed as a physician.¹²⁶ The life story of Helen Wright summarised by the council suggests her work before election was political, including time as a national organiser for the ILP.¹²⁷

The need for women candidates to have a strong record of political activism in the North-west seems to be borne out by the work of Karen Hunt looking at Manchester women councillors. She identifies Mary Welch and Ellen Wilkinson as both having experience as union organisers as well as in suffrage and political activity and summarises that 'amongst the first generation of Labour women councillors, few defined their occupation as 'housewife', as was much more common amongst their Liberal or Conservative equivalents. Indeed a surprising number were listed as trade union or Co-op officials and organisers'.¹²⁸ Hunt does

¹²⁵ *Rochdale Observer*, 21 November 1942.

¹²⁶ BA, Minute books of Bolton County Borough 1 November 1935. (AB/1/1/25).

¹²⁷ www.boltonsmayors.org.uk/wright-h.html accessed 03 November 2009.

¹²⁸ Karen Hunt, 'Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour Women in Interwar Manchester' in Matthew Worley *Labours grass roots: essays on the activities and experiences of local Labour parties and members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005) p.84.

go on to point out that several had training of various kinds, but that Ellen Wilkinson was the only elected Labour woman in Manchester with a degree. She also suggests that others may have taken up self-employment of various kinds as that provided the flexibility needed for political activism as well as limiting victimisation.¹²⁹

Representation of women in Manchester was not spectacular, but at a somewhat better level than the towns immediately to the north. Success levels here must have been boosted to some extent by Labour's advance and with the pioneering work of Margaret Ashton in particular the influence of local radicalism is evident. If there were limited numbers of women elected to county boroughs in those areas where both suffrage activity and women workers were concentrated, how did women fare in those towns and cities that might appear less supportive of women?

The south coast

When Hollis carried out her detailed research into the position women had reached in election to towns and cities before 1914 she notes that 'Plymouth, Portsmouth and Southampton as ever were indifferent to the rights and wrongs of women'.¹³⁰ These three cities, dominated by docks, are worthy of closer examination, being outside the scope of the current volumes of election statistics produced by Davies and Morley.

Portsmouth may have been indifferent to the position of women before 1914 in local electoral terms, but that indifference did not amount to a lack of knowledge of the general issues, for as local historian Sarah Peacock relates, various strands of the suffrage movement were active in Portsmouth, with the non-militant NUWSS

¹²⁹ Hunt, 'Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour Women in Interwar Manchester' p.83 - 84.

¹³⁰ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.398.

exceeding the WSPU, supplemented by several smaller organisations.¹³¹ By the 1931 census Portsmouth was the largest of the three south coast dock-yard towns, coping with an industry in decline. Alongside the docks however, other industries drew on a pool of available female labour. Peacock points out that female dressmakers and staymakers were a significant part of the local economy, supplying shirts for sailors in an industry where pay was recognised as poor and unreliable. The economic and political rights of women were a topic of local discussion. Peacock refers to a meeting in 1914 in which twenty-two local suffrage and related societies came together to protest about the low pay on offer to women in trades where sweated labour was common.¹³²

After the short-lived early efforts of the WCA and CWG to secure representation here, those women who were to re-open the doors at Portsmouth in the 1930s did so from political parties, but progress was still slow. The wide pre-war interest in employment issues did not translate here into a good level of female representation on the council. Mrs Ramsden, elected in 1929 was to remain the only woman elected member until 1937. A Conservative with close associations with St Matthew's church, she had been a founder of the South Portsmouth Women's Conservative Association.¹³³ She died whilst still in office in 1943. There were still only two other elected women at that stage. The other Conservative member, **Mrs Susan Sharpe** was to celebrate 25 years as an elected councillor, and in 1953 became the first woman on Portsmouth council to be chosen as alderman. On election she gave up her paid work as a singer to focus on family and council. Her first by-election win was in 1937, and her campaign the following year stressed the importance of electing women – a factor which her colleague had to qualify by

¹³¹ Sarah Peacock, *Votes for Women: the Women's Fight in Portsmouth* (The Portsmouth Papers no 39, City of Portsmouth, 1983), p.20.

¹³² Peacock, *Votes for Women*, p.4.

¹³³ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 27 July 1943.

pointing out that he was speaking 'in contrast to those who say there is no place for women on the council'. Her drive was the recognition of a special role for women in health and welfare work rather than a broader commitment to women's equality. 'As a woman', Mrs Sharpe addressed her electorate, 'I have tried to look at everything from a woman's point of view. I consider that in the cases of young girls' welfare, a woman should be available to handle matters in which a man might be of little help'.¹³⁴

Women did make some inroads into local government in Portsmouth then, but they were slow, with significant gaps in representation despite the early intervention of the WCA. In later years the Conservatives dominated the council, including a very small number of women in their numbers. This was not, however, a pattern that has a great deal in common with the other two south coast cities of Plymouth and Southampton. In fact the differences were highlighted by local press when Mrs Sharpe became the first woman alderman in Portsmouth as late as 1953. She gained this position because of her length of service, but the *Portsmouth Evening News* recognised was also a mark of her popularity and hard work. The article noted that 'Portsmouth has lagged behind some of its municipal neighbours in voting a woman to aldermanic rank. This has not, however, been the fault of the council but rather of the ratepayers in choosing comparatively few women to represent them. Southampton has gone ahead for years in showing a preference for greater civic equality among the sexes. The maritime county borough had a woman mayor before World War II, and at least two women have occupied the mayoral chair in post-war years'.¹³⁵

The contrast between the success of women in Portsmouth and those in Plymouth and Southampton is evident from data extracted from *Municipal*

¹³⁴ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 28 October 1938.

¹³⁵ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 15 July 1953.

Yearbooks. These confirm Mrs Louisa Ramsden as the only woman member in Portsmouth in early 1937 (so before the election of Susan Sharpe in June that year) whilst at the same point in time Southampton had six elected women in addition to Mrs Lucia Marion Welch JP, by then an alderman. She had been mayor of that city in 1928. Plymouth had four women members, including Clara Daymond, a Poor Law guardian who had also been a member of the city council since the early 1920s.

None of the south coast county boroughs referred to here had a particularly significant representation of women, but by the late 1930s their performance was at least average. The combined influence of political patterns and the diversity of industry had reduced the level of male supremacy in the dockyard cities, even though equality was still as far off here as it was in other towns and cities. They seem to have shaken off the image Hollis portrays.

County boroughs: an overview

The diversity of representation in towns and cities is in evidence in this sample of case studies and supplementary evidence, but there are some trends that emerge. What is evident here is that Party politics did influence outcomes, even though the initial need for party allegiance in the immediate post-war elections was not as pronounced as in London. As time progressed low levels of representation of women could be linked to a low level of Labour success at the polls. There were other factors that came into play alongside those of political allegiance.

In some county boroughs women already engaged in welfare and part of the local social leadership continued to provide a limited but influential woman's voice on the council throughout the 1920s and 1930s without explicit party allegiance. On several county boroughs one or two powerful individuals remained in office for some time, or were appointed as alderman. Where they did so their records of service usually included voluntary activity outside the council or a wider role in society. They

were social leaders. The dominance of a particular individual, an active women's organisation or a well organised local support network for women candidates could make a difference to the levels of representation in towns that might appear similar. Although middle-class women social leaders were primarily Conservative, there were isolated examples of Liberal women leaders surviving in some areas and in Reading we see an accepted local social leader joining Labour. Middle-class philanthropic Labour representation like that of Miss Edith Sutton in Reading is in evidence, but not to the extent it is found around London settlements such as Bermondsey. Working-class Labour women were often active in a range of social and political roles, multi-faceted political activism replacing or joining multi-faceted social elitism. Working-class women activists participated in political life alongside their husbands. The single working-class woman like Alice Arnold in Coventry was rare. Labour women were more likely to be married to local activists and immersed in political life themselves. When Alice Arnold was elected in 1919, Labour women were to be found in other large urban conurbations, but the WCA were also active in promoting non-party candidates, drawn from local middle-class suffrage activists who saw local government as part of wider citizenship. Their direct influence on elections was to diminish over the inter-war decades, but examples of women elected because of their local social standing could still be found. Their survival on county boroughs, however, was nowhere near as strong as the continued influence elite women had on county councils.

The county elite

David Cannadine, in charting the general demise of the land-owning aristocracy has suggested that:

From the 1880's, the sustained and successful political assault on the British landowning classes coincided with – and further accentuated – its economic decline and territorial decay. But in addition these

developments necessarily weakened its local position as the elite that for centuries had represented and ruled the counties of the British Isles by hereditary right and unchallenged tradition. The extension of the franchise led to a widespread rejection of old-style rural politics and representation, while the creation of the new county councils brought a more gradual, but no less real, change in the personnel and nature of local government.¹³⁶

Most commentators accept the nature of elites had changed by this period, and the comments of Cannadine on county councils echo those of Lee in his study of Cheshire.¹³⁷ However evidence from examination of the membership of county councils in the 1920s and 1930s suggests that although the position of aristocratic elites may have been weakened by challenge, it had not disappeared completely. Data and background detail on the women elected to county councils is very limited and the examples provided should not be taken as typical or average. They serve to illustrate that some members of elites continued to exercise a degree of local power through the county council in a period when most discussion focuses on the transfer of power to others. They were not the only women to join county councils, but, acknowledging the limited amount of information available, their presence appears out of balance with their numbers in the electorate as a whole. Although examples of social leaders drawn from local elites emerge in both London boroughs and the county boroughs they seem to form a larger proportion of county councillors, and are drawn in part from a more aristocratic elite.

A woman with the capacity to run several voluntary organisations and play a central role on Cumberland County Council at the same time was **Lady Mabel Howard**, daughter of the fifth Earl of Antrim and resident of Greystoke Castle.

¹³⁶ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, Macmillan (Papermac), 1996), p.139.

¹³⁷ J.M. Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of County Government in Cheshire since 1888* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1963).

Indeed her voluntary and council activities were so extensive that James Hinton suggested she 'ran everything that moved and quite a lot that did not'.¹³⁸ Her involvement in local government is of interest partly because she seems, for at least part of her life to have held the view that women should not have the national franchise. In December 1908 she presided over a meeting which concluded that extending the franchise to women would 'do away with home life'. The meeting is reported as deciding 'if they were going to have women of England going to political clubs, reading the newspapers and educating themselves before they could give their votes the right way, there would be nobody to look after the children and do the things a woman was required to do'.¹³⁹ It was not uncommon for supporters of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League to simultaneously support the principle of women entering local government. When her obituary referred to her earlier life, it was theatrical talent rather than suffrage campaigns that she was associated with. Tributes to her life of public service came from many local voluntary organisations. She combined her demanding role as chairman of a major county council committee with several local voluntary roles such as the Red Cross, district nursing and the Women's Institute. It was their representatives who led tributes to her on her death.

Lady Mabel held the unique position of being the head of every county organisation of women in Cumberland. ... she exercised a diplomacy which would have shone in a wider world, and which drove her mixed and sometimes difficult teams with a light and sure hand. Working with her and under her was a constant pleasure and stimulation, for she knew her world, and she knew there was also a big world outside it. ... a great lady,

¹³⁸ Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership* p.137. (see also obituary, *The Times*, 02 January 1943).

¹³⁹ *Cumberland and Westmorland Herald*, 5 December 2008 (internet version, downloaded May 2009). www.cwherald.com/archive/archive/25-years-hardknott-20081205319701.htm.

a great worker with a quick shrewd brain. ... there was no better chief to work under than Lady Mabel.¹⁴⁰

Another titled county councillor also leading local organisations was the Dowager Lady Suffield of Cromer in Norfolk. She was County Commissioner for the Girl Guides and one time President and Chairman of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes.¹⁴¹ The sole elected woman member of Norfolk County for most of the 1920s, she was joined in the 1930s by Lady Cook and Lady Walsingham. A similar concentration of titled women councillors is found in Wiltshire where Lady Radnor, widow of the Earl and mother of ten children became a leading contributor on education issues.¹⁴² Her colleagues, all first elected in the 1930s included Lady Muriel Coventry, Lady Hobhouse, the Countess of Pembroke and The Hon. Lady Beatrice Wickens Gatacre. Those five titled women were amongst 17 women elected to Wiltshire in the inter-war period. Listings do not always identify the extent of an elite presence by the inclusion of title. In Cheshire, Lilian Bromley-Davenport was only the only woman councillor between 1927 and 1932. Lee acknowledges that the Bromley-Davenport family, over four generations, were an exception to the rule that the gentry declined in its influence of local politics.¹⁴³ Elite power may have been in decline and dispersal, but the arrival of women candidates did not always contribute to that decline.

¹⁴⁰ This tribute from Mrs Wrights Brown, deputy county organiser for the WVS, pointing out that no mention of her WVS work had been made in the original obituary. The reports also describe her as 'the busiest woman in Cumberland'. She was a former Poor Law guardian and sat as a magistrate, chairman of the county Red Cross, she developed a convalescent home in the grounds of her castle, president of the Cumberland Nursing Association. She was awarded the CBE in 1920 for work with nursing. Although her husband did have some Liberal connections before the Home Rule debate caused a rift, as with many county councillors there is no mention of party politics in either coverage of her council nomination or of her death. *Penrith Observer*, 8 March 1919, 9 January 1943, *Cumberland and Westmorland Herald*, 2 January 1943 and 9 January 1943.

¹⁴¹ Municipal Journal *Who's Who in Local Government* (London, Municipal Journal, 1938), p.365. (microfiche version held at British library) .

¹⁴² *The Times*, 7 January 1946. Her obituary also mentions inaugurating the county Nursing Association and local Women's Institute.

¹⁴³ Lee, *Social Leaders* pp. 98- 101.

The gentlemen's agreements of elections in more rural counties were typified by uncontested seats and pride in length of service. It was in those arenas that elite women county councillors were more likely to emerge. The 'social leaders' of Lee's Cheshire may have given way to more 'public persons' but there was still significant contrast between the *gravitas* of rural contests and the bitter fights between Labour and anti-socialists that dominated more urban contests, especially those on the London fringe.

The London fringe

All urban counties were under constant threat from burgeoning towns and cities, but those that bordered London had additional complexities in that a 'greater London' region was already recognised for some administrative purposes. Case studies of these areas show considerable variety within each council, but also a degree of contrast with those more rural counties where uncontested elections were common and women sought election based on their social standing rather than on political lines. Of the three counties bordering London examined, Kent comes closest to the rural model.

Kent did not elect any women councillors in 1919, although one woman candidate, Mrs Frances Maxwell, did stand in Malling. She had some experience as a school manager and had been a wartime member of the Women's Agricultural Committee.¹⁴⁴ The next full election of 1922 saw two female candidates defeated. The only successful woman was returned unopposed; **Miss Eleanor J Wigan** remained councillor for her Strood (2) division until made an Alderman in 1929, and played an active part in the council until 1945. When she joined it she already had a history of local public service as a former co-opted member of education committee,

¹⁴⁴ *Kent Messenger*, 1 March 1919.

a parish councillor, district councillor and Poor Law guardian.¹⁴⁵ Only two other women were elected to Kent in the whole of the inter-war period, and both had short county council careers. Miss Deed of Sevenoaks served less than one full term between 1928 and 1931. Mrs Chalmers of Bromley served as a local guardian from 1907 and became vice-chairman of the Poor Law Board in 1922. She was also a member of the National Council of Women, and with her husband was well known in the locality for charitable work, especially during the Great War when their house became the offices of the local war pensions committee. He carried out his public service on the county council, and when he died in late 1928 she inherited his seat, elected to it unopposed. Their interests overlapped, but just before his death he was Chairman of Roads and Bridges Committee and a member of Finance Committee. She focused on Maternity and Child Welfare committee.¹⁴⁶ This low level of election of women in Kent reflected not just a low level of women candidates coming forward, but a general limited level of electoral challenges, with uncontested seats being common.

With Eleanor Wigan becoming an alderman in 1929 and both Miss Deed and Mrs Chalmers serving for a limited period of time, Kent reverted to the position of having no women elected members by the mid-1930s, with no women candidates at all in 1934. Election nominations and results for 1937, the last complete elections before wartime suspension, confirm that no women were elected. Three Labour women and two independent women were defeated in a contest which saw elections in just 26 out of 77 divisions, despite significant boundary changes. Labour did increase their representation in Kent at this time, and newspaper coverage acknowledges a significant number of new councillors, some of the change being

¹⁴⁵ *Kent Messenger*, 11 March 1922.

¹⁴⁶ *Bromley Mercury* 9 March 1934 and 16 March 1934; Bromley Local Studies and Archives,(Bio/cha/14 and Bio/cha/11).

driven by decisions to stand Ratepayers candidates in opposition to some Conservatives. That change, though, did not bring any representation of women.¹⁴⁷ It was a very different picture to that in Middlesex.

Middlesex was one area facing significant development pressure as London grew. By the county elections of 1919 all parties on the LCC were agreed that London needed to expand – an expansion that would ultimately remove Middlesex from the administrative map and in the interim period created a plethora of joint authorities¹⁴⁸ The woman elected to Middlesex was already well-known, and had many ‘firsts’ to her name, for suffragette and campaigner Edith How-Martyn had recently fought the 1919 Parliamentary seat of Hendon at the first General Election where women were allowed as candidates. Her time as a county councillor was short as she turned her attention to campaigning on birth control issues.¹⁴⁹ Two women were to succeed her as Middlesex councillors in the early 1920s – Mrs Baker and Mrs Barnes, both of whom continued to be either elected or aldermen until the late 1930s. Middlesex had more women candidates than most other county councils. By the 1930s there were about ten other elected women. One of them, Mrs Mann, was supported by Haringey Ratepayers Association and stood as a Moderate (or Conservative) candidate. She was to lose her seat in 1934 in what appeared to be a rowdy fight in the several county seats in Tottenham when Labour increased their numbers. The Labour candidate who defeated Mrs Mann was Dr Edith Summerskill. Labour had some women members on the County previously, including Mrs Ithell in nearby Enfield, but *The Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, informs us Dr Summerskill, who shared a surgery nearby, was ‘Labour’s most popular victor’. *The Herald* remarked on ‘booing’ from Labour supporters

¹⁴⁷ *Kent Messenger* 20 February 1937 and 6 March 1937; Centre for Kentish Studies, Kent County Council Minutes 1937 CC/MI/30

¹⁴⁸ *Municipal Journal*; 4 April 1919.

¹⁴⁹ Hilary Frances, ‘Martyn, Edith How (1875–1954)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56238>, accessed 1 June 2009].

drowning out several speeches from defeated candidates, and added 'Labour supporters struck up with a song during the wait for the West Green result, and Dr Summerskill came out of the council chamber and shouted "let's have the Red Flag". This was sung with gusto, the woman doctor acting as conductor'.¹⁵⁰

When the West Green result was announced, the seat had been captured by another Labour woman, Mrs J. D. Lynch, and a third Tottenham division saw Labour's Mrs Weymark defeat another Moderate woman candidate. The numbers of women were advancing here with each election, and in the later part of the period that advance resulted in part from Labour gains, but with the defeated candidates also including some women. Middlesex ended the 1930s with at least a dozen women councillors – still a low proportion of the total, but far higher than many counties nearby, although there are some similarities in the patterns of women candidates coming forward, with suffrage pioneers providing early individuals and a concentration of Labour women that provided the greatest numerical boost in the 1930s.

There were similar pressures from London expansion and urban development in parts of Essex as well as Middlesex. However whilst the majority of wards in Middlesex could be classed as urban or suburban, Essex had a more mixed geography. There are common factors amongst women candidates though and at least one woman elected at an early stage also had a background in the suffrage campaign. As a member of an eminent local family **Miss Katherine Mina Courtauld** also had the experiences of several close relations in local public life to draw on. The family were initially Huguenot refugees, and by the 1860's had established successful textile manufacturing firm of Samuel Courtauld. It was to grow further by specialising in the manufacture of rayon. Before being elected as a

¹⁵⁰ *The Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*, 9 March 1934.

county councillor in 1919 Miss Courtauld was a parish councillor and school manager, but alongside her interest in education she was, as a farmer in her own right, keenly interested in agriculture, her experience in this subject reflected in her portfolio of county council committees. She was also secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in North West Essex, and a member of the WLGS.¹⁵¹

The two other women who joined Miss Courtauld as Essex county councillors in 1919 were from a very different area, as the distribution of county council seats reflected the urbanised nature of the communities on the London fringe. Walthamstow and Leyton each elected ten county councillors out of a total of eighty. Of those ten Walthamstow divisions, four were contested by representatives of local teachers as a response to a local dispute, including Frances Wilde, who noted that division could become the first in Essex to elect a woman councillor, and Isabella Brown, President of Walthamstow Free Church Council and of the Walthamstow branch of the National Woman Teachers Federation. Miss Brown stressed her candidacy included 'no party politics'. She was returned unopposed in 1922 and then defeated at the polls in 1925. Her colleague Miss Wilde remained on the county council until 1928, when her place in Higham Hill was taken by a Labour woman, Jessie Lester who was elected unopposed.¹⁵² This local campaign then generated women councillors with a specialised interest based on their occupation.

By 1928 Miss Courtauld and Miss Wilde had been joined on the county council by two other women, both first elected in by-elections. Mrs Blanche Williams, a member of Romford RDC, known for philanthropic work elected in September 1926 and Mrs Catherine Chisholm in October 1926. Both remained on the county council

¹⁵¹ *Who's who in Essex* (Worcester, Baylis and Sons, 1935) , *Essex County Standard*, 15 March 1919, Essex Record Office, Essex County Council Reports 1919 – 1934.

¹⁵² *Walthamstow, Leyton and Chingford Guardian*, 31 January 1919, 14 March 1919, 28 March 1919, 3 March 1922, *Essex County Chronicle*, 13 March 1922.

throughout the 1930s, with heavy workloads and high attendance rates. Their hard work was rewarded by limited opposition to their candidacy in future years, and by the 1934 and 1937 council elections both were returned unopposed. Being unopposed as a woman candidate in Essex was not unusual, and in 1934 two women were elected competitively, and a further seven elected without a contest, including alongside the two mentioned above, the Labour candidate Katherine McEntee and Margaret Tabor. The latter already had considerable experience as Poor Law guardian.¹⁵³

Perhaps partly because of the limited number of contests county elections from 1928 onwards did see small increases in the number of women elected in Essex, although total numbers still remained below those in Middlesex. The changes taking place seemed to be influenced both by the growing responsibilities of county councils, about to take on the work of poor law guardians, and by the growing influence of Labour. Those two influences are not, of course, mutually exclusive. *The Essex County Chronicle* had a fairly standard format for reporting county elections in this period, in which nominations listed did not mention party allegiances at all, and where results listed identified Labour candidates. By 1934 those lists identify five Labour women in the Walthamstow and Leyton areas. Two of the successful Labour women, Mrs Sorensen and Katherine McEntee were married to local MPs, Reg Sorensen also being a county councillor. Katherine McEntee already has a strong record of service as a district councillor.¹⁵⁴

Other women elected by 1934 include Mrs Alderton of Colchester, daughter of the former mayor of that town, and herself a prominent town councillor and magistrate, and Christina Custerton of Saffron Walden, who had been a member of the local board of guardians since 1910. Both these two women were active

¹⁵³ *Essex County Chronicle*, 2 March 1934, 9 March 1934.

¹⁵⁴ *Essex County Chronicle* 2 March 1934 and *Who's Who in Essex*.

members of the WLF and Mrs Custerton also had a record of work in the British Women's Total Abstinence Union.¹⁵⁵

Essex women councillors were therefore drawn from a broader political spectrum, not as numerous as their counterparts on Middlesex, but still better represented than some, with ten women out of eighty-three by 1934, and a similar number after 1937 once two women were promoted to aldermen. On these two partially urbanised counties several of the early candidates had multiple connections with public life in general or commitment to specific campaigns. Party politics increased in importance as Labour representation spread through the urban fringe. The relatively low profile of political influence here may reflect the nature of county elections or it may be that party activity is simply less recorded by the press than other contributions to public life. Family connections, both with local philanthropy and with associated county service were in evidence, as was previous experience of elected office.

Northern county variety

When *The Times* referred to the 'Socialist menace in the north' in 1931 Durham was at the forefront of their thoughts: 'Six years of Socialist control of the Durham county council have saddled the county ratepayers with the highest county rates in England.'¹⁵⁶ Labour strength on Durham CC dated back to 1919 when they won control of Monmouthshire and Durham, with a total of 236 county councillors in the country as a whole. They were only to take control of just four county councils by 1939.¹⁵⁷ Their rise to power in Durham was not accompanied by the level of female representation seen in London. County Durham elected just two women in the whole of the inter-war period. By 1938 both those women had been appointed

¹⁵⁵ *Who's Who in Essex*.

¹⁵⁶ *The Times*, 20 February 1931.

¹⁵⁷ Keith-Lucas and Richards, *A History of Local Government*, p.114.

aldermen, leaving the council again with no elected women members. Both were part of the ruling Labour group.

The early organisation of Labour in County Durham was a major factor in their electoral strength, with practical support as well as mass patronage coming from the Durham miners. Constituency Labour Parties were formed at an early stage in every division, building on the presence of the ILP. The formation of those constituency parties was supported by four full-time agents, each working with two constituencies and funded by the Durham Miners' Association.¹⁵⁸

Within that local organisation in County Durham were strong and substantial women's sections. Almost a year before she was elected to Durham County Council, **Mrs Elsie Royston** was one of two local women on the platform as representatives of 'practically all the 120 Sections in the County of Durham', 'estimated at over 10,000 Labour women of Durham County, Northumberland and Cleveland processioned through the streets of Durham on Saturday on the occasion of the second annual demonstration promoted by the Durham County Labour Women's Advisory Council'.¹⁵⁹ Maureen Calcott suggests that the backing provided by the political agents of the Durham Miners' Association was one of the reasons why women's Labour organisations flourished in this area in advance of others, with practical support - 'Miners' halls were lent free of charge for meetings, financial grants were made and bills were paid'.¹⁶⁰

Despite this early high level of organisation amongst Labour women at a time when their party was making significant advances on the county council the level of representation of women was low. Records suggest that this did not go unnoticed,

¹⁵⁸ Maureen Callcott, 'the Making of a Labour Stronghold: Electoral Politics in County Durham between the Two World Wars', in Challinor M. and Calcott, R. (eds.), *Working-Class Politics in North East England* (Newcastle, 1983), pp.64 – 66.

¹⁵⁹ *Durham County Advertiser*, 20 June 1924.

¹⁶⁰ Callcott, 'Making of a Labour Stronghold'; and M. Callcott, 'Labour Women in North-East England', *North East Labour History* (no17,1983), p.36.

and that an early attempt was made to improve the position, in a very early attempt by a political party to apply positive discrimination to the selection of local government candidates – a practice still controversial today. In January 1922 the Durham County Labour Party met to form a permanent organisation and adopt a

Figure 4, campaigning for Mrs Royston



Campaigning for Mrs Royston (undated) Durham County record office.

new constitution. They resolved the following:

That we appreciate the action of the Local Labour Parties in encouraging the nomination of Women; and suggest as a means of ensuring the coming forward of Women Candidates, that the Local Labour Parties

should request the Women Sections to be responsible for putting forward at least a definite quota of nominations.¹⁶¹

This early example of positive action does not seem to have had an immediate effect, for in the 1922 elections in County Durham there were no Labour women candidates. Women stood as Independents or Moderates that year in two county Durham divisions and were defeated by Labour. When Mrs Elsie Royston took her seat three years later she was the only Labour woman candidate, with Moderates and Independents again fielding a small number of unsuccessful women.

Of the limited number of women county candidates from any party in Durham only two Labour women were successful: Mrs Royston (elected at first attempt 1925) and Mrs Mason (elected at first attempt 1929). The other unsuccessful Labour women all stood in the 1930s.¹⁶² Mrs Royston was in her early fifties when elected to the county council and already had experience as a Poor Law guardian. Married with two children she was a Scot by birth and educated at Elgin academy and Aberdeen training college.¹⁶³ Her services were rewarded in 1934 when she was appointed alderman. In the coverage of her appointment as alderman one of her counterparts suggested it was in recognition not only of her own work but also that of 'the loyal army of women workers in the county.'¹⁶⁴ That army of women were not to seek election and as Mrs Mason was also appointed an alderman a few years later Durham then ended the inter-war period with no elected women.

Labour was to achieve better representation of women on a northern county where the advance of Labour was more gradual, the West Riding County Council. The first Labour woman elected there in 1919 was one example of transition

¹⁶¹ Durham County Record Office (DCRO), Shotton family of Bearpark estate and family records, (Durham County Federation of Divisional Labour Parties Minutes of Executive, 21 January 1922). (D/Sho/131/5 (D)).

¹⁶² (DCRO), Durham Municipal and County Federation, Durham County Council Election results. (D/MCF 29 – 30)

¹⁶³ *Who's Who in County Durham*, (Worcester, Ebenezer Baylis & Sons, 1936).

¹⁶⁴ *Durham County News*, 22 March 1934.

between the elite ladies of rural counties and the growth of Labour representation. A history of that council suggests that with her socialist views and aristocratic background **Lady Mabel Smith** provided an ‘unconventional link’ between county society and the County Council.¹⁶⁵ Lady Mabel Smith did not enjoy good relationships with her family, who were shocked by her socialist views. Her father was Viscount Milton, and her brother the 7th Earl of Fitzwilliam, a former Conservative MP. When he inherited the estate in 1902 he gained Wentworth House, then the largest private family house in Britain, land in Ireland, property in London, but also the riches buried under Wentworth house – mining rights in one of the most productive coal fields in England, between Barnsley and Rotherham. According to relatives it was the poverty of children in those pit villages that drove Lady Mabel Smith to socialism.¹⁶⁶ In the 1930s she was also a member of Labour’s National Executive Committee.

Lady Mabel Smith was joined by two other Socialist women on the West Riding CC. in the early 1930s. One of those two, Mrs Lilian Jones gained the division of Thorne in 1934. Another Labour woman, Mary Walker had contested the seat unsuccessfully previously. However Mrs Jones, a keen activist involved in the Workers’ Education Movement served less than one full term as county councillor, as her husband, the deputy head of the local grammar school took up a promotion in Wales.¹⁶⁷ Also responsible for a Labour gain in 1934 was Martha Heald in Ardsley, wife of a Labour agent. Her convincing win over the former vice-chair of finance committee was to result in her being elected without contest three years later. These gains in 1934 were in the context of strong Labour advances in the county. As Barber notes:

¹⁶⁵ Barber and Beresford, *The West Riding County Council* p.196.

¹⁶⁶ C Bailey, *Black Diamonds: The Rise and Fall of an English Dynasty* (London Viking (Penguin) , 2007), pp. 399 – 401.

¹⁶⁷ *Doncaster Gazette*, 8 March 8 1934, 19 December 1935 and 2 January 1936.

The 1931 election bought a slight but scaring set back, but, in 1934 and 1937 Labour came close to gaining an absolute majority. Had this happened, the West Riding would have joined the three other mining counties, Durham, Glamorgan and Monmouthshire which were the only ones to fall under Labour control in the period.¹⁶⁸

1937 was also to see the election of a further socialist woman, and one who was to go on to contribute to local government for many years to come. Councillor Mrs Jessie Smith was elected in the Colne Valley, an area with strong Labour roots, but one where finding people to stand as county council candidates was still difficult. Minutes of local party selection procedures talk of futile efforts to find candidates in divisions, and direct approaches to individuals to ensure a candidate stood. The Linthwaite division was contested by Labour in 1925, but no candidate could be found for the Honley division, and it was decided not to contest Golcar that year.¹⁶⁹ The search for candidates when Jessie Smith stood in 1937 was the first time Labour members in Colne Valley had needed to vote between competing candidates, a contest Jessie Smith won by 16 votes to her opponents five.¹⁷⁰ She went on to win at the polls on numerous occasions afterwards, and became the first ever woman chairman of the county in 1964.¹⁷¹

That 1964 chairmanship happened during one of the intermittent periods when Labour gained control of the West Riding CC.¹⁷² In the inter-war years Labour's advances were resisted by two other women with strong political views. As wife of the Sir Eugene Ramsden MP, Lady Margaret Ramsden was a key player in the local Conservative party. She joined the West Riding CC in a 1939 by-election

¹⁶⁸ Barber and Beresford, *The West Riding County Council* p.160.

¹⁶⁹ Huddersfield University Archives (HUA), Colne Valley Labour Party, Linthwaite and Golcar County Council elections January 25 1925, January 22 1928 and January 29 1928, May 1928 (CV14).

¹⁷⁰ HUA, CVLP, Linthwaite and Golcar County Council elections, October 18 1936 (CV14).

¹⁷¹ *Yorkshire Post*, 9 December 1997.

¹⁷² Barber and Beresford, *The West Riding County Council* p.168.

where she was described as an 'independent' candidate in the local paper, despite being vice-chairman of the Yorkshire Area Committee of the Conservative Women's Association two years previous.¹⁷³ One of her first actions in 1939 was to promote a joint meeting with the Liberals and Independents to develop a better anti-socialist platform. Joint meetings between non-socialist councillors on the county were also held in 1932.¹⁷⁴ Other prominent Conservative women were also elected to the West Riding in the 1930s. Mrs Haselgrove, who returned as a co-opted member of the public assistance committee after her one term as a councillor was at the same time treasurer of the Yorkshire area Conservative Women's Committee.¹⁷⁵ Mrs Emily Wragg was to go on to leading positions in the Conservative group during the 1940s, at one stage protesting because she failed to be granted a place on finance committee.¹⁷⁶

By the 1930s then women politicians were prominent although numerically small in both the Labour and Conservative groups on the West Riding. Women had been candidates in 18 different divisions with eight of the seventeen different women candidates not succeeding at the polls. Repeat attempts to stand for election did not happen with the defeated women candidates, and unsuccessful candidates were more likely to be Conservative women. As seen in other areas this may be a reflection of their contribution to campaigning by taking on unwinnable seats, rather than any rejection of women candidates by the electorate.

County council trends

The patterns of representation illustrated in these county cases studies show variety within a general trend of low representation of women and reliance on

¹⁷³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds) (WYL), Yorkshire Area Women's Committee AGM minute book 1931-1956 (WYL 1856 20/1).

¹⁷⁴ WYL West Riding County Council Conservative Group: Party Meetings minute book 1929-1952 (WYL 1856 14/1).

¹⁷⁵ WYL (WYL 1856 20/1).

¹⁷⁶ WYL (WYL 1856 14/1).

women of high social or political standing. Political allegiance was not as evident in the county council election coverage as it was in London and some larger urban conurbations. As no election data is collected for county councils, it is impossible to know how typical the low levels of female candidacy are. Given representation was particularly low in the very different counties of Kent and County Durham there will be more than one explanation. The contrast between Kent and Essex suggests the relative advance of Labour will form part of the explanation, bringing far more pressure on the London fringes of Essex than on those in Kent. That does not explain the picture on county Durham though. Representation here was very low despite Labour growth, despite active Labour women's sections and despite early commitment to find women candidates. Here one factor may be the very early success of Labour. Once Labour had gained control few seats changed hands. Labour women would need to challenge sitting councillors to gain seats, unlikely to happen in an area of strong class based solidarity and with a Labour group of councillors tackling very prominent economic difficulties. The presence of a political battleground with seats changing hands can therefore be viewed as one of the factors influencing the growth and spread of women candidate and incumbency viewed as a serious barrier to their advance.

Women were not always welcomed to the county council. When Mrs Reith, a co-opted member of Education Committee decided she might stand for election to the West Riding CC in 1919 the *Yorkshire Post* quoted her opposition as thinking that she should have stayed where she was rather than seeking to 'usurp the functions of a businessman in other respects'.¹⁷⁷ That view was not uncommon. Women might be entitled to the dedicated voice available to them through co-option, but that did not give them the right to sit on education committees as elected members.

¹⁷⁷ *Yorkshire Post*, 28 February 1919.

With newspapers like the *Yorkshire Post* not convinced women should be seeking election to county councils it would be easy to assume that the low levels of women present on these councils resulted in part from a prejudicial view on the part of the electorate. However on most occasions in the case studies those women who were elected succeeded at their first attempt, and although some women were defeated at the polls, they were not prevalent in number. One clue to the low level of candidacy may lie in the language used in the *Yorkshire Post*, for the assumption portrayed is not just that women should not be candidates, but that county councillors ought to be businessmen. The transition from aristocratic landed elite to 'manufacturing and mercantile' leadership Lee identifies in Cheshire may have varied in impact between counties depending on their economic diversity, but for many women it was their acceptance as part of the appropriate elite, usually as wives and daughters that determined their ability to stand. In Wiltshire and Westmorland that still included a role for the landed titled elite, in the West Riding and other areas the emphasis was on business, with the wives of business leaders or wives of politicians being suitable candidates. Labour women had a more varied experience, with Labour strongholds not always increasing the number of women candidates or councillors, but women being included in the more closely fought contests of the London fringe. Political variety mattered in English counties. That political picture was more complex in Wales, where the desire for a national identity overshadowed debate about gender.

Elected women in Wales

The principles of Welsh Home Rule formed an integral part of pre-war Welsh Liberalism. Issues of national identity generated debate especially around preventing the decline of use of the Welsh language. Impetus for devolution also strengthened in 1918 as a potential means of supporting reconstruction. It was to result in the 1919 Speaker's conference on devolution; but with no agreement about

method the compromise became the establishment a Welsh Secretary of State.¹⁷⁸

The disagreement that ensued was to encourage the creation of Plaid Cymru as a nationalist party. It was a dispute that reflected the geographically diverse nature of Wales.

As Deirdre Beddoe describes, the south of Wales was dominated by heavy industry that thrived until 1914, but where depression then hit hard. This was especially so in the mining valleys, with the ports of Cardiff and Swansea protected by some diversity in employment patterns. In contrast mid and northern Wales were predominantly rural and agricultural in land use, but with the seaside towns of the northern coast benefitting from growth in tourism. Although the depression led to population decline the south remained the more populous.¹⁷⁹ It was the north that retained the greatest proportion of Welsh speakers.¹⁸⁰ The extent of the diversity dominated further debate about the potential for devolution, with the leadership of Plaid concerned that an Assembly structure that reflected population rather than geography would put 'agricultural and pastoral Wales at the mercy of the miners'¹⁸¹

The economic and political division of Wales into rural, seaside, port and mining communities had a distinct gendered dimension. Beddoe points out that the availability of male Labour in mining did not always lead to families moving as a unit, so that some parts of Wales such as Cardiganshire retained a high proportional female population as men sought work elsewhere. Wives in mining communities

¹⁷⁸ Wil Griffith & Chris Williams, 'Welsh national identity and governance 1918-1945' in Tanner *et al*, (eds.), *Debating Nationhood and Governance in Britain 1885-1945; perspectives from the 'four nations'* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 118-121.

¹⁷⁹ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: a History of Women in Twentieth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 9, 10, 85, 86.

¹⁸⁰ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, highlights the extent of the north/south language divide, with 90% recorded as Welsh speakers in Anglesey and Cardiganshire as opposed to 38% in Glamorgan (p.10). In addition Chris Williams clarifies that the coalfields were more mixed, with the eastern valleys in Monmouthshire and Glamorgan primarily English speaking immigrants and the West Glamorgan/ East Carmarthenshire coalfields retaining a stronger Welsh speaking element. See Chris Williams, 'The dilemmas of nation and class in Wales, 1914-1945' in Tanner *et al*, (eds.), *Debating Nationhood*, p.157.

¹⁸¹ Wil Griffith & Chris Williams, 'Welsh national identity and governance 1918-1945' in Tanner *et al*, (eds.), *Debating Nationhood*, p.123.

had demanding domestic duties, but could sometimes secure income from letting rooms. In more rural areas women were working in family retail and agriculture as well as seaside landladies.¹⁸²

The statistical evidence suggests that the diverse nature of Wales did not make a significant difference to the volume of women elected as councillors. This is especially true within county councils where representation was consistently low. Where it did have more impact was on the nature of that female representation and especially political allegiance.

The uneven distribution of county boroughs resulting from diversity in population density was as notable in Wales as it was in England. Rural north Wales did not have any towns and cities with County borough status, with the concentrated southern population giving rise to county boroughs in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Merthyr Tydfil. In three of those there are pioneering women who share common features of long-standing and diverse public service, but who remained isolated as elected councillors, rarely joined by other women. There are examples here again of women experienced in local political organisation, with strong local family connections, some with families with a history of public service. The Liberal Mrs Edmunds in Merthyr Tydfil was the daughter of the former local high-constable and joined the School Board in 1901. She was one-time chairman of the Board of Guardians and the first woman magistrate locally. She went on to become the first woman mayor in 1927. Mrs H. D. Williams had an equally impressive record in Swansea where she was a Poor Law Guardian for 20 years, a member of the Hospital Board and the Education Authority. As a councillor she then became chairman of the Public Assistance Committee and was tipped for mayor had she not lost her seat. In Cardiff Mrs Rhoda Parker was the only woman member of the

¹⁸² Beddoe, *Out of the shadows*, pp.9-31.

council for most of the inter-war period and had sixteen years' experience as a Poor Law Guardian. An active Conservative she was also involved in the British Legion and as vice-chairman of the Glanley Hospital house committee.¹⁸³ The political backgrounds of these women vary, but their social standing was similar. For them, local government service was part of a wider package of public duty.

In Cardiff and in Swansea the municipal political advance of Labour was limited by the presence of anti-socialist alliances. That was not the situation in other parts of south Wales, where Labour advanced at a faster pace.¹⁸⁴ As several commentators note within the south Wales communities political action formed part of a highly gendered division of labour. Men would socialise together out of work and carried on their workplace solidarity into trade unionism. Miners' wives in particular had demanding domestic duties and their activity outside the home was limited but sometimes included women only meetings.¹⁸⁵ Labour fostered women only organisation in south Wales with organiser Elizabeth Andrews playing a prominent role. The scale of women's involvement was to grow significantly. By 1935 Newport had the largest female membership of any constituency in England and Wales.¹⁸⁶ Labour representation on Newport did include at least one prominent woman member in Mrs Hart, the first woman councillor elected there, who became

¹⁸³ Cardiff Central Library, Local Studies Collection. This collection of photocopies is indexed as appearing in the *Western Mail* between 1931 and 1933. It consists of a series of individual pen portraits, but individual entries are undated. (LC:92 WES; Representative women of Wales). See also Davies and Morley, County Borough elections, Vol ii; West Glamorgan Archives, D/D 253/6/3; W.T. Mainwaring Hughes, *Kicks and Kudos; Forty years as a councillor* (Swansea, undated). Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p.102 refers to the election of Professor Barbara Foxley to Cardiff council. However Davies and Morley data and subsequent checks of council records show that Miss Foxley was elected for a very brief period following a by-election in 1924.

¹⁸⁴ Kenneth Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980*, (Oxford University Press, 1987), p.272 notes that Labour had over 40% of the vote in Wales in both 1922 and 1923 general elections and that in 1929 they held 25 out of 36 seats, being most entrenched in the southern valleys.

¹⁸⁵ Sue Bruley, 'The Politics of Food: Gender, Family, Community and Collective Feeding in South Wales in the General Strike and Miners' Lockout of 1926', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2007, pp.58-59. Bruley refers to the work of Angela V. John, Deirdre Beddoe and others.

¹⁸⁶ Lowri Newman, 'Providing an opportunity to exercise their energies'; the role of the Labour Women's sections in shaping political identities in South Wales 1918- 1939' in Esther Breitenbach & Pat Thane (eds.) *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland; what difference did the vote make* (London, Continuum, 2010), p30. Newman quotes the work of Neil Evans and Dot Jones who found that in 1933 women made up 45% of individual party membership in Wales.

the first female mayor of the town in 1927.¹⁸⁷ As noted earlier Newport did achieve a slightly larger representation of women than other county boroughs in Wales. Elizabeth Andrews, as paid organiser, is often mentioned as the prime catalyst who ensured Labour women in Wales tackled the very real social problems brought about by the poverty of the depression, large families and poor housing. Her style was a campaigning one, frequently writing to councils to urge them to provide maternity care lobbying for women to be consulted on housing design. Despite her efforts and that of her women's organisations being dismissed as the work of 'interfering busybodies' she was co-opted to represent the interests of women in the Rhondda.¹⁸⁸ Her municipal work in Wales is often referred to in association with that of Rose Davies, Alderman on Glamorgan county council. These two women and Labour women lobbyists in Swansea are recognised as achieving essential improvements in ante-natal care in south Wales at a time when such facilities were non-existent elsewhere in Wales.¹⁸⁹ Sue Bruley concludes her work on the role of women in 1926 by calling for a very different approach to studying gender relations in Wales, whilst Deirdre Beddoe calls for 'painstaking research into the role of women in politics, including women in local government. Beddoe stresses that the role of women in nationalist politics in particular has been 'written out of history'.¹⁹⁰ It also the case that the limited study to date tends to focus on Cardiff, Swansea or the mining communities. The statistics gathered here suggest Newport and the northern counties of Flintshire, Denbighshire and Caernarvonshire all deserve further attention. Even councillors of some prominence like Rose Davies seem not to feature in the National Library of Wales *Welsh Biography online*. In fact the only woman councillor there appears to be one with a profile far closer to the elite

¹⁸⁷ Newman, 'The role of Labour Women's Section' p.34.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁸⁹ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p.94. Newman also notes that both Elizabeth Andrews and Rose Davies served on the Ministry of Health Welsh consultation council.

¹⁹⁰ Bruley, 'The politics of food' p.56 and Beddoe, *Out of the shadows* p103.

women of English counties. ‘Public Administrator and social worker’ **Dame Gwendoline Joyce Trubshaw** included membership of Carmarthenshire County Council in her many activities. When appointed chairman in 1937 she would have been the first woman county chairman in England and Wales.¹⁹¹ Her path to public service included wartime voluntary work and it was followed by school governorship. She was later to lead the local WRVS. Her experience would have been familiar to women of her class in England, just as Labour women would recognise the lobbying skills of Davies. Diversity had added dimensions here, but there were some familiar patterns and even slower progress.

Common causes in the election of women

Despite the difference between city and county and the nuances of local communities there are some common features that appear frequently in the profiles of women elected. Class, previous voluntary roles or related experience, family ties, links to suffrage activism and the activity of women only organisations all emerge as key factors influencing the extent to which women’s representation developed in a given area or remained at a low level. Increasingly though party politics becomes the dominant force, with the presence of a political battleground as important as the extent of political labelling of candidates. Those aspects need setting alongside the realities of practical limitations and consideration of council culture that also contribute to electoral patterns. A significant proportion of the women elected succeeded in staying in office, either through gaining a safe seat, finding their election uncontested or being elevated to the aldermanic bench – occasionally with all three in succession. Stalwarts with a long record of service can be found in both Labour and Conservative ranks and some for whom politics is less prominent. They are more numerous in London but emerge in all types of council. The extent of

¹⁹¹ National Library of Wales, <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s2-TRUB-JOY-1887.html>

longevity is not a simple reflection of acceptance of women as councillors. It reflects far more the extent of reliance on a small group of women, who were already widely accepted in their community or their political party, to provide the pool of candidates. Their high public profile enabled them to add council service to their diverse range of activities and to stay there once elected. It also meant on the whole they were capable and confident women who worked hard. The title of stalwart is an apt one.

The extent of available evidence of activity and achievement is mixed and it may be that members of more prominent families feature in press coverage simply because of their family connections, but the over-riding image that emerges is that in boroughs as diverse as Kensington and Poplar, in several of the counties identified and in a cross section of towns and cities, variations on the themes of family connection and social standing were at least as important, if not more important, than party politics in providing the pool of women council candidates.

This is especially evident in some rural county councils where the titled elite who continued to lead included some women. In Westminster, Kensington and more mixed counties like Essex and Cheshire the upper-middle class women elected are more varied with the wives and daughters of leading industrialists more prominent than landed gentry. Upper class social leadership by one dynasty dominated women's representation in Oldham too. In each of those cases though, entry to local government from a position of personal or familial social standing was purchased through previous activity in social work or philanthropy, which contributed to local rank.

As seen in Bermondsey and in Reading social philanthropy could have a political edge, but the extent of involvement in charitable voluntary work to support children in particular is as evident in Westminster as it was in Bermondsey and appears in Oxford as well as Reading. In all those cases there are also examples of women combining charitable work with other activities that made them particularly

suitable as candidates. This included prior election as Poor Law guardians, evident in all types of council.¹⁹² For those who were members of county councils and in some county boroughs prior experience of election could also come from earlier or concurrent membership of the parish or an urban or rural district council. This route to election seemed particularly noticeable in Essex, whereas on the West Riding CC previous co-option to education committee was a common feature amongst early candidates. Service on local hospital boards and as school managers was common. So too was the legacy of women's work in war with women who had been co-opted to War Pensions committees, working with the Red Cross or founding local nursing organisations.

These features amongst women candidates are part of a complex web of patterns. Each individual woman could draw on a range of experiences to influence their council work and whilst some trends, such as the extent of experience of Trades Union organisation, had clear political links, others are far more likely to cross political divides. Because the extent of social standing that led to council membership could be a familial one rather than simply a personal one women could also draw on the experience of parents, partners and siblings to inform their council work. For some, like the Tawneys in Oxford and the Rathbones of Liverpool that representation was almost dynastic. Essex and Reading also saw prominent local families represented by generations of men and women, with Essex including one woman who served as a councillor at the same time as her sister.¹⁹³ There are examples too, in Kent, Cumberland and Rochdale of women inheriting their partner's council seat, whilst both Labour and Conservative women were working alongside equally committed husbands. Two Labour councillors in Essex and

¹⁹² Details above include references to women who had served as Poor Law Guardians elected to Kensington, Westminster, Peckham and Poplar, Manchester, Southampton, Reading, Oxford, Plymouth, Cardiff, Swansea and Merthyr, plus the counties of Kent and Essex.

¹⁹³ *Essex Weekly News*, 12 February 1957. I am grateful to Mrs Janet Gyford who shared her compilation of notes on Margaret Tabor including summaries of this and other press coverage.

Conservative Mrs Ramsden in the West Riding were married to local MPs. The lack of consistent data on marital status may lead to over generalisation, but it would appear that married women were more common in Labour ranks, with Conservatives and Liberals drawn from the single supported daughters as well as political wives.

If women could be supported in their work by other family members they also valued the support of other women. The influence of the Women Citizens' Association (WCA) in county boroughs appears widespread although the limits on their ability to secure the direct election of women long term are notable in Bolton and in Portsmouth. Women county councillors were also leading members of Women's Institutes; the National Council of Women seems to have had some influence in both counties and county boroughs. This influence arises in part from another frequently recurring theme in the extent to which women councillors had previous experience of wider suffrage activity. This was evident in well-known pioneers such as Eleanor Rathbone in Liverpool and Margaret Ashton in Manchester (also showing family ties – these two were cousins) but was also to be found in Labour Bermondsey and rural Essex. The profile of Essex CC member **Miss Margaret Tabor** and her sister, Cambridge councillor Clara Rackham provides a glimpse at another common factor, for not only were both active in suffrage activity, they were not alone in being educated at Newnham college, Cambridge. So were LCC member Susan Lawrence and Manchester councillor Shena Simon.

The factors that determine the extent of that pool of candidates then include the social makeup of the community as much as the volume of political activity. Unearthing the links and common features has been one positive advantage of taking an overview, for looking at the history of the inter-war years primarily through a party political spectrum or in a focus on one town or region can assume the

individual is unique or special when in fact they have their place in a wider continuity which saw the women's movement adapt to the changing world. In fact the actual links may be underestimated here. Women from a variety of locations came together through conferences and special interest groups, such as the Nursery School Association and through national structures such as the National Council of Women. Meeting together strengthened ties developed in earlier suffrage activism or through a common education. Networking is apparent – so too is the variety of networks in which each individual woman participated.

The presence of women who devoted such intensity to a wide range of public duties throughout their lives might help to explain why they remained relatively limited in number, for whether they emerged as ladies of social standing or as political stalwarts, the energy and commitment they gave to the task of local public leadership can hardly have endeared them as role models to other women, who had competing demands on their time from the renewed domestic agenda or from a new career or professional life. Although case studies have unearthed some examples of women teachers seeking elected office as a result of their career, their numbers are limited, with those women who combined council work with other voluntary roles far more prominent. A smaller number, such as Mrs Phoebe Cusden were able to turn their special interest, in her case in nursery education, into paid work for a time. Council work was not paid work, so women without financial support or paid work that would fit round council duties would be unable to consider elected office. Those with limited time to spare also had other routes to influence – through lobbies and through political conferences. Perhaps rather than wonder why only 1,400 women took on this task in the space of twenty years we should be wondering why around 4,000 of them allowed their names to go forward. To do so they also had to increasingly find political support.

The sophistication of party political organisation so apparent in London spread gradually to other areas, as did the development of anti-socialist alliances. Matthew Worley suggests this led to Labour women facing more developed selection procedures than their rivals.

Labour also spent much time and effort on the selection of its municipal representatives. The Labour Party had led the way in politicising local government, and the divisional party executive and general committee took far greater interest in the adoption of local election candidates than either the Liberals or Conservatives.¹⁹⁴

As two very different counties illustrate however, political party allegiance and procedures did not bring about common experiences. Labour women with the right reputation could find the support of Herbert Morrison opening up access to the LCC, whereas the well organised Labour women of county Durham rarely sought council seats. This difference is partly one of culture and localised expectations, but also reflects the importance of the political battleground. Morrison needed a wide range of new candidates to strengthen Labour representation on the LCC, whereas Labour in Durham could be more content with their level of representation and had no need to bring about new challenges.

Where political activity is important then is in creating the opportunity for candidacy by increasing the numbers of electoral contests and conversely by reducing the range of candidates by developing local alliances. That can translate into cultural barriers that emanate from the nature of the council itself. Where social status remained more prevalent than politics in determining accepted suitability for office, particularly in the county council, women would not be expected to challenge incumbents in otherwise uncontested seats.

¹⁹⁴ Worley, M, *Labour's Grass Roots* p.16.

Those women who succeeded as councillors then could often draw on a wealth of other experience, some of it rooted in their political party, some in community roles, and some as co-opted, elected or nominated representatives on councils and other public bodies. In county councils particularly but not exclusively that multi-faceted leadership role often reflected a personal status in society that resulted from their family social standing. For Labour women it represented one example of committed and ideologically driven activism that could penetrate every aspect of their lives – as workers and consumers, but primarily as mothers.

Focusing on success stories of those women who were elected should not distract attention from the presence of some practical barriers preventing women seeking election, or cultural norms that discouraged candidacy. Working women of limited means would seldom have access to the practical support needed to become a candidate. Those women who survived as councillors were drawn from a limited pool of dedicated activists with wider experience, increasingly needing to be politically as well as socially active, but the fact that the available pool was limited is not a complete explanation for limited growth. The same pool provided candidates for the magistracy and as noted earlier, women achieved more equal representation there at a faster pace. Some of the practical difficulties are ones of scale and organisation. The rural county council would be out reach for the majority of women who did not have access to transport. Councils did not always meet at times convenient for those who had homes to run or factories or offices to work in.

With distinct differences in the levels of representation achieved between council types, the varying nature of the elections themselves could also provide contributing factors. In London, women would be presenting their case as part of a team, with at least three and sometimes six councillors being elected in a ward at any one time. Some commentators on later patterns of gender representation suggest this factor

makes it easier for women to succeed. In county boroughs women defeated at the polls were able to try again the next year.¹⁹⁵

The evidence from London – and it is the only place where data enables statistical analysis – is that once selected on the whole women were not discriminated against by the voters. The nature of London's population meant that when a ward changed hands at election it usually changed as a whole. In a six member ward, all six candidates would change at once – wards split between parties were rare (other than where an informal alliance meant one party did not contest all the seats available). A look at all the instances where votes split within a ward suggests there was no particular pattern of women losing out more than men. The team responsible for the Rallings and Thrasher data did carry out their own analysis, also including more up to date material from other areas. In a paper that uses the techniques of psephology they also conclude that 'women candidates contesting borough elections in Birmingham and inner-London throughout the last century were not subject to any systematic bias in seat selection in terms of the marginality of the seat they contested'. Nor could any evidence be found of any voter hostility towards female candidates in terms of levels of turnout. Their analysis of London does suggest some degree of bias, but by looking at individuals and their repeat performances, the analysis of people rather than numbers suggests at least some of this is due to women standing as candidates in seats they couldn't win.¹⁹⁶

If the pool of women who sought election was limited by the nature of those who might be considered acceptable is it still fair to assume political parties were acting

¹⁹⁵ Very similar patterns persist to this day. In the 2008 survey of councillors, 36% of those on London boroughs (now a much wider area) were female as opposed to 25.6% on county councils. County boroughs have changed in nature in the intervening period but Metropolitan districts and Unitary councils are the nearest comparators and do show percentages in between those two. Differing electoral patterns are cited as explanations. *National survey of local authority councillors, 2008*.

¹⁹⁶ Paul Lambe, Colin Rallings, Michael Thrasher and Lawrence Ware 'Gender Imbalance in Representative Democracy: Women and Local Government in London and Birmingham 1918 – 2003'. (Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics School of Politics and International Studies, Queens University Belfast. Occasional paper 10, November 2004).

as discriminatory gatekeepers? Pamela Graves presents findings in relation to Labour women.¹⁹⁷ Her interviews with individual women and the evidence they detail include instances of women's sections finding it difficult to convince men to select women candidates. However her account also includes many positive stories of working-class Labour women who thrived on council life – 'They felt personally enriched and thought they had helped others of their class.'¹⁹⁸

The biographies of those women who did succeed, from working-class Labour ranks as well as the elite ones suggest the need for a devotion to duty and a background of relevant prior experience to endear women to those who enable candidacy. The degree of commitment needed would not have appealed to all, even if the nature of the work they were to undertake was increasingly of interest. Their successes need to be set in the context of their wider personal and collective commitment to new definitions of citizenship which placed family life at the centre of state action. Graves accepts that on the whole Labour women councillors did focus on domestic issues albeit with a different focus to their Conservative counterparts. 'Labour women's achievements in local government were related to their goal of improving the conditions of life and the opportunities available to working class families. They were practical and small-scale reforms which merited a side column in the local newspaper but which had an immediate ameliorative effect on the lives of local people.'¹⁹⁹ Their public actions were shaping private lives.

¹⁹⁷Pamela Graves, *Labour Women, Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp.168-180.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.180.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.177.

Chapter five: Private lives and public policy: revisiting separate spheres

Tracing the distribution of women councillors in the inter-war years shows considerable variety. There were concentrations in London, who operated in a highly politicised arena, where a number of prominent Conservative women thrived and the quantity of dedicated Labour women increased. Working-class women were elected in some cities whilst more rural county councils tended to draw women from the local elite. Looking at their backgrounds shows a rich diversity of experiences to draw on, from family connections that linked women to generations of civic service, through to personal involvement with suffrage campaigns as an introduction to principles of citizenship. Despite that variety in politics, class and experience there was one theme that linked the activities of women councillors – their focus on home, school, health and welfare.

Similar themes are evident in Scotland. Kenneth Baxter includes systematic analysis of committee participation amongst women councillors in Scotland and finds a common pattern, with women more frequently represented on education, welfare and committees focused on domestic life.¹ Hollis finds the same interests in those women elected at an early stage in England and Wales.

Education, public health, and amenities were identified by women in their election addresses as suitable work. They paid less attention to three other areas of council responsibility that of municipal undertakings, the

¹ Kenneth Baxter, 'Estimable and gifted? : women in party politics in Scotland c1918-1955'. (University of Dundee, unpublished PhD, 2008), pp.234-234 looks at the committee distribution of all women councillors on Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen councils and finds that between 40% and 50% of women served on health, education and welfare committees, whilst one third of men served on these committees. Child welfare in particular had a very strong female presence.

central resource committees, and the licensing or regulatory committees, all of them committees much sought after by men.²

Women recognised they might make a special contribution to local government because of their domestic experience and role as mothers. Reports of the election meeting supporting Mrs Reay as a WCA candidate in Carlisle in 1920 quoted the reasons she needed to stand, emphasising:

Men and Women looked at things from different points of view, and they wanted both to be represented. Every year bills were brought before Parliament affecting the homes, morals and welfare of children, and municipal bodies had to carry them out when they became law, and the experience and assistance of women were needed in carrying out those laws..... The subjects for which they especially wanted women on the City Council were education, infant welfare, health and housing, and she would like to see them on the Watch Committee. (Cheers).³

That sentiment might be taken as evidence of return to a pre-war world Hollis identifies of separate spheres. Yet by seeking representation as a result of those special interests women asserted that their opinions were equal but different, challenging the pre-requisite of feminine subordination that underpins the public-private divide of separate spheres analysis. As Vickery reminds us, the presence of a 'constraining' Victorian private sphere became the prevailing interpretation of studying women in literature and in real life for decades; to the extent that 'rather than conclude from positive female testimony that women were not necessarily imprisoned in a rigidly defined private sphere, the dominant interpretation simply

² Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1987), p.428.

³ *Carlisle Journal*, 2 November 1920, quoted in Davies and Morley, *County Borough elections* (vol ii), p.603.

sees the private sphere in a better light'.⁴ How far then, were the positive testimonies of women who entered public life to bring about change for mothers and children part of an escape from the prison of domesticity?

Most commentators agree that in the aftermath of war a strengthened cult of domesticity occurred at the same time as some women gained greater access to public life. Explanations as to the relationship between the two vary in the extent to which that represented continuity or reaction. The presence of gendered continuity was displayed by middle-class women who participated in 'the outbreak of knitting and sewing in the summer of 1914' and earned citizenship from that patriotic action.⁵ An alternative explanation stresses the perception of war itself as a challenge to both masculinity and femininity. For Susan Kingsley Kent war blurred gender dividing lines; not only through women's participation in factories, canteens and farms, but also in the caring roles army officers carried out, coupled with the passive compliance that had to be displayed in the trenches.⁶ The compromise reached over granting the franchise to women was thus a reactionary one, designed to prevent the return to a sex-war.⁷

The reality of the importance of domesticity, femininity and motherhood was evident. Whether brought about by gendered continuity or reaction, the private sphere of home life was to be revered. Sue Bruley suggests this came about from a complicated picture, in which war was just one factor, with pre-war trends like falling birth rates also shaping 'the new vision of private domesticity in which women were encouraged to think that they could find complete fulfilment in looking after home

⁴ Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal* (vol. 36, No. 2, June 1993), p.386.

⁵ Paul Ward 'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History* (2001, vol.12, no.1), p.30.

⁶ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990* (Florence USA, Routledge, 1999), p.277-279.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

and family.⁸ To protect and promote that vision however, home and family had to become the focus of state as well as the stuff of new women's magazines.

Local Government was one arena where public decisions were of most relevance to women as homemakers and mothers. The pre-war evolution that transferred education roles to general purpose councils gathered pace through the post-war reconstruction, emphasis on renewal and desire to prevent future conflict. New laws were increasingly focused on issues that were central to the lives of women. Local councillors were making choices in maternity and welfare, in town planning and in expanding education. The permissive nature of some legislation meant those were very political choices, opening up new public roles with a decidedly domestic agenda.

Vickery contests that the private home lives of Victorian women were less constrained once informal political actions such as charity and radical campaigning are taken into account. She urges historians to 'take care to discover whether our interpretation of public and private marries with that of historical actors themselves'.⁹ For active women in the inter-war years networking through a plethora of new organisations, lobbying and newly legitimised political and public roles also challenge constraints, but so too did the increased public interest in private lives. Just as women were gaining access to the public sphere of local decision making, legislators were advancing into the domestic sphere women knew well.

The domestic sphere had increased in importance, but family life remained one of economic dependence. Rather than seeing women's local government work as part of a well-defined continuum of domestic interest, this chapter recognises that whilst there may be different spheres of emphasis for men and women they are not

⁸ Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain since 1900* (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1999), p.72.

⁹ Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?' *The Historical Journal* (vol. 36, no. 2, June, 1993), p.412.

clear cut or static. Women activists of the 1920s and 1930s adapted their public actions to meet changing circumstances and expectations, whilst maintaining their special interest as women. Those changed circumstances included both an elevation in the importance of family life and an increasingly politicised arena in which family life was being regulated.

Recognising the relationship between local public office and the experience of women as homemakers and mothers transcended political interest. Mrs Flora Baker sought to renew her place in the anti-socialist grouping on Middlesex in 1928. Her work had focused on Maternity Committee, work that was 'carried on by men and women but was especially a woman's work'.¹⁰ She explained to her church-based audience that although she was impressed by the way women managed to carry out public duties, in her view the home remained their first duty. There were examples of recognition of the special view too amongst women in Labour ranks. Hannah Mitchell maintained a broad interest in her time as a Manchester councillor, but recognised that on public assistance work she could draw on special skills; As a woman 'I knew just how much food could be bought out of the allowance, knew the cost of children's clothes and footwear'.¹¹

For the majority of elected women, including those from both Labour and Conservative ranks, the predominant language remained that of separate spheres and those special spheres of interest did influence the committee choices - or allocations - of women councillors once elected. Some committee allocation built on previous experience through previous co-option to Education or Maternity or Child Welfare Committees.

¹⁰ *Middlesex Advertiser and County Gazette* (Harrow edition), 9 March 1928.

¹¹ G. Mitchell, (ed.) *The Hard way up. The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel*, (London, Virago, 1977) p.215.

The final aim of this work is to look at how far women retained separate spheres or became associated with the wide variety of council roles. Evidence all points to women councillors continuing to emphasise the domestic agenda. In returning to the language of Vickery though, there are more complex questions that reflecting changing times.

The first question is how far the domestic sphere could continue to be considered a private matter. For Sue Bruley home lives were the site of a redefined privacy for men and women built around gendered roles as 'the new anti-heroic, less romantic and more inward looking Britain of the 1920s offered new roles for both men and women'.¹² But the importance of stable moral motherhood as a means of rebuilding the nation influenced public policy. As a result, even on those council committees where women were concentrated, controversial debate would place the lives and attitudes of women firmly in the public arena. The dividing lines between separate spheres were becoming blurred.

The second question concerns the notion of femininity and domesticity as a site of subordination. The valued image of respectable home life at the core of post-war culture does not match that of the prison from which women might need to escape. Yet, as the campaigns of Eleanor Rathbone epitomised, family life remained the focus of economic subordination and a gendered division of roles. Women of all political persuasions might seek to elevate family life as a focus of the public arena, but they varied in the extent to which they favoured continued economic dependency as part of that scenario and in the potential routes away from dependency. Not only were the boundaries between public and private lives blurring, they were increasingly examined in political and economic terms.

¹² Bruley, *Women in Britain* p.72.

The analysis here investigates these questions by looking at the work of women on three committees relevant to their special areas of interest. The first traces how the accepted contribution of women to caring for schools developed into an economic debate about the employment of women teachers; the second looks at how women gradually gained access to decision making on homes and the environment. Debate then turns to health and welfare, initially looking at political difference within family welfare policy, then turning to the ultimate example of state operation in private lives – the debate about birth control.

For women councillors their committee experiences might focus on the domestic, but it would be wrong to dismiss that activity as peripheral or marginal at a time when home life had a high cultural value. The apparent homogeneity of interest in women does also mask a variety of actions. The degree to which women were able to join the public demonstration of power; evident in the work of committee chairs and mayors forms the final part of analysis of how they used their new found status as citizens.

Education

Providing a national system of state subsidised education came about through incremental developments, each surrounded by controversy. Underpinning that long debate was the gradual recognition of mass education as an acceptable sphere of state activity.¹³ Debate focused not just on who should be taught and the topics they would need to understand, but also on related organisational matters such as the need for a more professional staff and the direction and management of schools

¹³ David Wardle, *English Popular Education 1780- 1975* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976) pp.21-22.

through elected bodies.¹⁴ Conflict concerning the latter culminated in the 1902 abolition of the free standing school board, through which Progressive influences had succeeded in bringing about the large subsidised and secular school. They could be seen as competing with both the interests of the church and the grammar schools sustained by middle-class patronage.¹⁵ Education authorities, (county councils with some delegation and county boroughs) now had the ability to subsidise education for those over the aged of eleven. They did so within a framework that maintained divisions between the state-sponsored secondary schools educating a select few, alongside the elementary school providing a more limited education to the majority. Elementary education expanded to all those aged fourteen from 1918, but the debate about providing a comprehensive system of secondary education for all was to develop throughout the next two decades. Alongside that philosophical debate, organisational disputes continued, fuelled in part by the requirements of the 1918 Education Act for expansion throughout the economic uncertainty of the 1920s and 1930s.

Frances Wilde succeeded in persuading voters in Higham Hill ward, Walthamstow to be 'truly Progressive' in the Essex County Council elections of March 1919. Nearby electors also favoured Isabella Brown by a narrow majority, so she ousted the sitting councillor of fourteen years, Caleb Day. Electing women at county level was unusual in 1919. The story of the Walthamstow women is even more unusual in that both were elementary school teachers and supported in their campaign by Walthamstow Teachers' Association, who were in the middle of a local dispute. This concerned evening school teachers at Monoux School who had been

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 103 – 112 discusses the progression from the 1846 pupil-teacher system of staffing elementary education, with little opportunity for career progression from apprentice and with considerable variety in rates of pay, through to the more professionalised and standardised hierarchies needed to staff larger board schools emerging by the turn of the century. Wardle mentions that pay structures meant the classroom teacher tended to be female, (p.109).

¹⁵ Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870 – 1920*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), pp.176 – 178, 215 – 237.

dismissed by the council.¹⁶ It is unlikely those newly-elected teacher councillors were able to affect the future employment of their colleagues directly as a small sub-committee was about to hear appeals in private, but this dispute marked a turning point in the relationship between women and education. Women were now not only able to influence the welfare of children through charitable work with schools, they could also participate fully in managing them again as elected councillors, in this case elected as representatives of their profession as well as their gender.

Women had participated as candidates when school boards were first established in 1870. In London Elizabeth Garrett and Emily Davies were popular choices with the electorate with elections in towns and cities as diverse as Bath and Manchester finding women able to stand as candidates. They were drawn from the educated elite, several with suffrage connections, and others with experience of founding or working in schools. Around the time of their abolition it was estimated most boards included some women, with around 220 holding office at that time.¹⁷ Debates in Parliament quantified the extent of women's involvement in education. In London two thirds of teachers were women, and almost a third of school managers.¹⁸ As the Parliamentary debate acknowledged, women excelled in the work on school boards, where their commitment to duty and meticulous approach was combined with contributing a significant amount of time. Jane Martin suggests for some women it was 'the main business of their lives' and would include several days a week at the offices coupled with local work.¹⁹

Martin draws in part on the unpublished biography of Florence Fenwick Miller to look at the work of 29 women elected to the London School Board during its thirty-

¹⁶ *Walthamstow Leyton and Chingford Guardian*, 7 March, 14 March and 28 March 1919.

¹⁷ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp.77, 133.

¹⁸ Hansard, *HC Deb*, 15 July 1903, vol. 125 cc713.

¹⁹ Jane Martin, 'To 'Blaise the Trail for Women to Follow Along': Sex, gender and the politics of education on the London School Board, 1870-1904', *Gender and Education* (12: 2, 2000), p.173.

four year life. The work illustrates that school board women had a variety of views and were particularly influential in roles that related to their gendered experience – so women members ‘dominated the membership of the Cookery, Laundry and Needlework Sub-Committee’ but were less influential on finance. Her findings draw attention to the differentiated curriculum being established in schools which emphasised work for males and domestic life for girls, but also reflected a class dimension in assuming middle-class girls needed knowledge of culture whilst working-class girls were trained for domestic roles. Women board members influenced the detail of schooling for girls, but rarely challenged the gendered assumptions. Despite the hard work of women members, the 1902 Education Act removed them from elected office as it transferred the expanded role to counties and county boroughs. Women were denied direct election to roles they had performed well. Limited co-option was the compromise position, so that a very small number of women retained their experience of education committee work in the years before direct election to the county council and county borough. Many more continued as school managers.

If the reservation of some co-opted places on education committees had been an uncomfortable compromise for women since 1902 the increase in responsibilities between 1902 and 1914 exacerbated that position. Board women had used their role as opportunities to increase attention on the welfare of children.²⁰ Their pioneering endeavours were to become national policy, first in 1906 with permissive legislation that enabled councils to ‘spend money out of the rates on feeding necessitous children’, a measure described as ‘a new principle in social legislation –

²⁰ Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, pp. 156-158 refers to the examples of Annie Beasant in campaigning through the Board for school meals and then establishing the ‘London School Dinner Association, along with the work of Margaret McMillan in Bradford who pioneered school medical inspection and challenged the principle of younger children combining school with work in the ‘half-time system.

it implied acceptance by the community of responsibility for poverty.²¹ It was quickly followed by the first stage of school medical inspection.²² These were areas women had campaigned for and helped to pioneer in practical ways. Co-option gave them the only direct route to secure and influence implementation, especially on the county council where, as previous chapters illustrate, the election of women as councillors had a very slow start. Lobbying for those concerns was vital given the permissive and developmental nature of the legislation.

Although unsatisfactory in extent and prominence, co-option did ensure some women continued to play a role in education committees and their various sub-committees. In the West Riding of Yorkshire, Hermione Unwin never sought election, but her co-option to education committee led to appointment as a county alderman in 1922. Aldermanic places for women were rare at that stage, and it was very unusual for a woman to be appointed to that role without any period in elected office. She continued as an alderman until 1937. Her appointment reflected hard work as a co-opted member in part through the vice-chairmanship then chairmanship of the 'Head-teacher appointment sub-committee'. In 1920 she was also entrusted with chairmanship of a special short term sub-committee looking at the issue of teachers' supply. A few years later Miss Unwin was selected as a representative of the West Riding CC on the Association of Education Committees.²³ Her appearance at a joint meeting of the Liberal and Conservative groups confirms she took part in wider council political activity despite never seeking election and she came from a prominent local Liberal family. Biographical details are sketchy, but she appears to have had a long association with Bingley teacher

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.282 – 283.

²² *Ibid.*, pp.285-289.

²³ West Yorkshire Archives (Wakefield) (WYAW) WRCC Minutes 1918 – 1923.

training college.²⁴ A mixture of experience, hard work and appropriate family connections could therefore lead to prominent public roles without any recourse to election.

Not all women wanted to stay in co-opted roles however, once election became a possibility. Of the five women who stood as candidates to the West Riding CC in 1919, three were co-opted members of education committee. Mrs Reith was unsuccessful in her election attempt, but Sarah Cockshott, a liberal 'gentlewoman' candidate in Haworth, and Lady Mabel Smith in Ecclesfield, were both returned unopposed.²⁵

The place where significant numbers of co-opted and elected women were most conspicuous however was the LCC, where women had significant roles as co-opted members from the start with Sophie Bryant and Maude Lawrence taking on vice-chairmanships of sub-committees.²⁶ Amongst those co-opted to the LCC education committee was Mrs Wilton Phipps. Widowed in 1911, Mrs Phipps had settled in Chelsea with her husband, a company director, but she originated from New York. Her co-option on to the LCC education committee by 1907 developed from experience as a school manager. By 1909 she had chairmanship of the special schools sub-committee and by 1923 she was chairman of education committee. It was in that capacity that she had to consider if women teachers should be allowed to carry on working after marriage.

Preventing married women working as teachers had previously divided women on the London School Board. Elizabeth Surr led opposition to restrictions on married women teachers working throughout the 1870s and 1880s, whereas the attack on

²⁴ Dunkley, 'Women magistrates, Ministers and Municipal Councillors' p.162; WYAL, WRCC Conservative group party meetings (WYL 1856 14/1); and WYAW, records of Bingley college (A00451/10).

²⁵ *Yorkshire Post*, 3 March 1919.

²⁶ Gloria Clifton, 'Members and Officers of the LCC, 1889-1965', in A. Saint (ed.) *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965* (London, Hambledon Press, 1989), p.8.

their rights to work took place under the leadership of Alice Westlake.²⁷ Martin recognises that the difference between women on this matter was couched in gendered terms, with those supporting married women borrowing the language of separate spheres by suggesting that women who had produced children would be better teachers. Nevertheless she concludes that even at this early stage women school board members 'drew upon and developed the ideology of domesticity to create empowering public identities'.²⁸

A broad marriage bar was in operation on the LCC from around 1906. The standing order stated 'all women appointed hereafter to the service of the council except teachers and others specially exempted shall be required to resign their appointments on marriage'.²⁹ Marriage bars of this type were to emerge in a variety of councils throughout the first thirty years of the century. Margaret Ashton, the first woman elected to Manchester council opposed the marriage bar there in 1910 when the resolution was specific to teachers.

- 1....in future the employment of a woman teacher should terminate on marriage;
- 2 that no married women other than widows be engaged by the committee as teachers; and
- 3 that no action be taken regarding married women teachers now in the employ of the committee.³⁰

Women councillors then had to take a position on the role of married women from the outset. Marriage bars reflected a culture that saw women predominantly as wives and mothers. The extent to which women were employed as elementary

²⁷ Martin, 'Blaise the trail for women', p.176.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.179.

²⁹ LMA, LCC Education office staff files, married women teachers (LCC/EO/STA/2/13). Report to Education, General Purposes Sub-Committee, 20 November 1922 summarises the history.

³⁰ Jane Bedford, Margaret Ashton, Manchester's First Lady', *Manchester Regional History Review* (1998).

teachers also reflected an acceptance of their special interest in children. Although teaching was increasingly becoming professionalised as it expanded, unqualified teachers were still common in the more rural elementary school. Alison Oram argues that despite the increase in professionalization it was the maternal value of women teachers that was increasingly emphasised:

In the interwar years the influence of new ideas about the political and social importance of motherhood to the nation, combined with an increased emphasis on the individual woman's capacity and duty to be a mother had an effect on the image of the women teacher, whose individual maternal instincts were increasingly cited as a requirement for their work.³¹

Despite the requirement for maternal instincts, women were not considered employable as teachers once they had babies of their own. These views emerged when the LCC reviewed their position between 1922 and 1924, at the time when Mrs Phipps became chairman of the education committee. The *Times Education Supplement* (TES) reported on the eventual decision and considered that continuing to employ women teachers was bad for the home and encouraged a lower birth rate.³² Women thought the right to work had been enshrined in legislation but that was frustrated by a public desire for mothers to nurture their young. The initial report to the LCC education committee seeking a review of the exemption of teachers from the LCC marriage bar started from more practical considerations. Young women teachers coming out of training college had not been able to find jobs and it was married women who were considered expendable.³³ As younger teachers were cheaper to employ there was also some financial gain from favouring the newly

³¹ Alison Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics 1900 – 39* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996), p.20.

³² *Times Education Supplement*, 26 January 1924.

³³ LMA, LCC Education GP sub-committee, Report of 20 November 1922,(LCC/EO/STA/2/13).

qualified over older women. The practical, economic, social and egalitarian arguments split women councillors along party lines. Alongside Dame Wilton Phipps on education committee was Lady Trustram Eve. At the time Lady Eve was chairman of the Conservative Women's Reform Association, and active in the National Council of Women.

There were just two elected LCC Labour women. Susan Lawrence had been challenging LCC marriage bars for some time. Mrs Eveline Lowe led for Labour on education matters. Also influential was one of the few Progressive women to survive on the LCC in the inter-war years. Miss Henrietta Adler had joined the council in 1910 and by 1923 was vice-chairman of council. When education committee considered ending the recruitment of women teachers, Adler seconded an initial attempt to refer the matter back to sub-committee for further consideration. She had the support of Labour women and some co-opted women, but there were six women amongst the 24 who voted against. In opposing the reference back those six women were effectively supporting the end of recruitment of married women. This political division is more apparent at subsequent council meetings when seven Conservative women including Lady Eve and Mrs Wilton Phipps continued to vote to bar women teachers from working.

However votes were not so clear cut when councillors considered the details of implementation, such as the extent of exceptions where a husband was unable to work. Two Conservative women, Dr Adeline Roberts and Miss Rosamund Smith initially voted with their political colleagues, but then voted with Labour and Progressives to ask committee to rethink. Labour's Mrs Lowe led a consequent discussion when she sought to ensure those married women barred from employment retained the opportunity to re-apply for work at a later stage. At this stage three Conservative women, Roberts, Smith and Lady Trustram Eve voted against the Conservative majority to seek further discussion at committee. Lady Eve

had also voted with Labour at education committee when Mrs Lowe sought to widen the scope of exceptions to the ban. Women who could prove their husbands were permanently unable to support them were allowed to carry on working. Mrs Lowe wanted that rule to apply to those women with husbands temporarily out of work.³⁴ Dry council minutes do not explain why Lady Eve supported this measure, but it is likely benevolence was mixed with a desire for financial efficiency in a tough economy – perhaps better for a married woman to work than have the family applying for Poor Relief.

The fact that women councillors needed to make a stance on the employment of married women reflected a wider debate that underpinned the actions needed by inter-war feminists. Complex forces were driving women into accepting domesticity, increasing the value of home life at the same time as economics impinged on opportunities to work. The broader appeal for equality including equal rights to work was led by Lady Rhondda and the work of the Six Point Group, which attracted a new generation of equality feminists; young, talented and ‘whose politics were on the left’.³⁵ Labour women LCC councillors were to assert a more equal view as portrayed by the Six Point group, but Conservative women too participated in the wider organisation of women that was developing in a variety of directions.

Both Lady Trustram Eve and Rosamund Smith were involved with the National Council of Women. In 1926 for the second year running the National Council of Women joined a delegation to the LCC received by Mrs Wilton Phipps, then chairman of education committee. It was councillor Rosamund Smith who presented the delegation to her. The delegation had been organised by the Six Point group

³⁴ LMA, LCC Council 6 March 1923, 16 July 1923, 13 November 1923 (LCC/EO/STA/2/13)

³⁵ Harold L. Smith, ‘British Feminism in the 1920s’ in Smith (ed.) *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press 1990), pp.49-50.

and included women representing 18 separate organisations.³⁶ The delegation was a very practical example of the degree of networking amongst women and the extent of co-operation between organisations often described as divided, even though impact was limited.³⁷

There was a better reception when women's groups lobbied the LCC again in 1935. By this time LCC Municipal Reformers had lost control to Herbert Morrison's ascendant Labour Party. Amongst the growing ranks of Labour women was Agnes Dawson, who had been part of the most persistent lobbyists of all – women teachers themselves. Alison Oram details the approach taken by the various teacher unions in opposing the marriage bar. She suggests that whereas the NUT would argue that married women were valuable as teachers because of their maternal nature, it was the NUWT who focused on arguments of equality.³⁸ **Miss Agnes Dawson** had resigned her post as a head teacher in London to stand as a Labour candidate in the LCC elections in 1925. As an active member and one time president of the NUWT her successful election campaign was not only supported by the union, members also paid an additional subscription to help fund her time as a councillor.³⁹ Agnes Dawson had a record of working for equality, including significant lobbying on the other controversial issue of equal pay for women teachers. By 1935 Dawson was Chairman of the powerful General Purposes Committee. That committee received the report of the Open Door Council 1934 lobby, which sought to persuade the LCC to lift the marriage bar. Although led by those with a clear commitment to equal rights, arguments about the maternal nature of mothers were highlighted by the lobbyists and reported on to General Purposes Committee. There were references to the artificial and unnatural atmosphere in

³⁶ LMA records of the LCC Education office (LCC/EO/STA/2/13).

³⁷ Harold Smith 'British Feminism in the 1920s' focuses on the divisions within NUSEC between 1925 and 1927 which he describes as 'a widening rift between new and equality feminists' (p.58).

³⁸ Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*, p.166.

³⁹ *Ibid* p.170.

institutions where all women were single. Lobbyists had argued that the marriage bar was 'injurious to the council's work owing to the exclusion of experienced workers specially qualified by their intimate knowledge of home life'.⁴⁰ Others argued that the intrusive nature of investigation that took place annually for those women who had argued they did not have economic support should cease, whilst officers had delayed reporting on the need to allow married women to act as supply teachers to ease shortages because they feared committee may 'seize the opportunity to re-open the married woman question in relation to permanent posts'.⁴¹

It was the persistence of Agnes Dawson that ultimately succeeded in having the LCC marriage bar lifted for women teachers in July 1935. Perhaps because there were practical and maternal reasons to support the change Dawson was able to count on the support of twelve other Labour women and two Conservatives. Only one woman voted against.⁴²

When the LCC prepared for removal of the bar they surveyed other councils. At that time major cities like Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield usually prevented married women working as teachers. Labour women had taken a lead in challenging then removing the bar in London, but this was not a straightforward party political issue. County Durham had been Labour controlled for some time, but still operated a bar in 1934⁴³. Manchester was one of the largest urban areas where the bar had been removed. Margaret Ashton had been unsuccessful when she campaigned alone against its introduction in 1910, but a group of her successors succeeded in overturning it in 1928. Leading debate was Liberal and feminist Shena Simon. Alongside her were Labour women. As letters in the press illustrate, the

⁴⁰ LMA, report of General Purposes Committee, 22 November 1934 and 8 July 1935 (LCC/EO/STA/2/14).

⁴¹ LMA, Memo of 28 March 1934, (LCC/EO/STA/2/14).

⁴² LMA, Report to Council 16 July 1935, (LCC/EO/STA/2/14).

⁴³ LMA, Report of survey November 1934, (LCC/EO/STA/2/14).

National Council of Women was again involved, perhaps not surprising as Shena Simon had a wide involvement with local women's groups. The council was finely balanced and debate ran into many months as the opposition tried to thwart the initial decision.⁴⁴ Shena Simon succeeded though – and with equal treatment of teachers being a significant part of her work developed a long association with Manchester education committee. She campaigned for equality, but on occasions could justify her approach with a reference to the special domestic skills of women – teachers, local government officers and councillors needed to deal with the 'extremely intricate details of family life' and women were well suited to that.

The contributions made by women councillors to ensuring the rights of married women teachers to work show some political unity amongst women. The reasoning behind the debate highlights though that different views can generate the same end result. There were differences of view on urgency and on reasoning. The language of separate spheres that recognised women's difference and specialist knowledge was being employed towards what could be perceived as equality feminist goals. Oram reminds us that teachers themselves could also employ such language and that 'many believed that women's femininity fitted them appropriately for particular aspects of their work, such as infant teaching.....it was feasible for them to develop these ideas alongside equality professionalism.'⁴⁵ There was then, in the practical everyday work of women activists, a blurring of the lines between equality and difference feminism. Shena Simon was not the first – or the last – to argue that women's special domestic knowledge was one reason why they should have equal access to public life and to jobs like teaching – it was in itself one of the reasons women councillors were more prevalent on education committees.

⁴⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 February 1928, 20 March 1928, 27 July 1928, 30 July 1928,

⁴⁵ Oram, *Women Teachers*, p.148.

In part because their contribution to education debate was accepted, women councillors of all political persuasions were able to influence public policy from powerful positions, with a numerical concentration supported by co-option and by the earned rights to committee chairmanships. The rationale used in debating the right of women teachers to work was mixed. For some, married women were needed as teachers because of their maternal instinct and gendered roles. The women who worked together to lift the bans as lobbyists and as elected members were asserting a public voice that challenged perception of subservience at the same time as tackling the intrusion of politics into the personal decisions of married partnerships. The boundaries between public and domestic life were being redefined.

If issues of equality concerning women teachers placed women councillors in the centre of a very public debate, they also found themselves at the centre of movement for change in education itself. Again, the LCC was at the forefront of change. Jane Martin describes how two influential Labour women, Mrs Eveline Lowe and Helen Bentwich influenced the development of education once Labour took control of County Hall.⁴⁶ Although recognising differences in the approach of the two women, Martin describes how the two laid the foundations for a more comprehensive system of schooling that the LCC was to develop in post war years. Lowe had encouraged Helen Bentwich, previously an unsuccessful Labour LCC candidate, to join education committee as a co-opted member.

When the Education Committee was asked to report on postprimary education in London, Lowe delegated the task to a special Joint Section consisting of Labour and Conservative members of the Elementary Education and Higher Education Subcommittees with Hugh Franklin as

⁴⁶ Jane Martin, 'Engendering city politics and educational thought: elite women and the London Labour Party, 1914-1965', *Paedagogica Historica*, (2008, 44: 4), pp.397 - 413.

chair. Its 12 Labour members included Helen Bentwich. During the winter of 1934–1935 meetings were held at which London's Education Officer urged the merits of the existing system, and critics like Franklin promoted the idea of the multilateral school. They produced a report which recommended a unified system of postprimary provision for London under a single regulatory control. Admission to each secondary school would be automatic and non-selective and each child would receive a common schooling up to the age of 14.⁴⁷

The radical nature of the policies being developed had roots in wider Labour organisations, but formal policy as reflected in the Hadow report maintained the principle of separate education 'reserved for the intelligent few'.⁴⁸ Thinking behind the concept of non-selective secondary education was being promoted as a principle by the National Association of Labour Teachers. The women members of education committee were therefore part of a wider movement for change, but it was their responsibility, under the leadership of Mrs Eveline Lowe to win the debate at council. Like council leader Herbert Morrison, Lowe developed a reputation for a pragmatic if forward looking programme for change that some may not have considered radical enough.⁴⁹ Agnes Dawson and others may have preferred speedier implementation of the Comprehensive school vision Helen Bentwich and others were developing . Martin suggests Bentwich thought the issue was put to one side for pragmatic reasons, unable to challenge the vested interests of the Grammar school, especially those of staff.⁵⁰ Nevertheless Lowe did spearhead considerable improvement in London schooling with a building programme and increase in scholarship places reversing years of austerity. The more radical plans for

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p 407.

⁴⁸ Simon, *Education and the Labour movement*, p.362.

⁴⁹ Martin, 'Engendering city politics', p.408.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.407.

comprehensive education re-emerged in the post-war years with Helen Bentwich leading implementation as chair of education committee from 1947.⁵¹

From the pursuit of an industrial dispute through seeking election in Essex, the personal dedication of Alderman Hermione Unwin in appointing head teachers; through the battle for employment rights of married women, to co-ordination of a pioneering strategy. Women councillors were operating in an accepted sphere, exercising their new rights as citizens to shape the intervention of democracy in education. Education was no longer 'regarded as peculiarly a matter for private enterprise'.⁵² State intervention in the private affairs of citizens required women's participation in public life.

Housing and Town Planning

Cultural expectations might emphasise the importance of domesticity, but the changes that underpinned inter-war housing provision resulted initially from a very male issue. The reality of the poor condition of housing was well known, but as war drew to a close and plans were made for demobilisation it was fear of the consequences of dissatisfied troops returning home that drove the housing programme. The principles of *homes fit for heroes* thus formed part of the pledges on which Lloyd George fought the 1919 General Election. 'In the aftermath of the Armistice, the government promised a wide-ranging programme of social reform (Including unemployment protection, hours of work, industrial democracy and land settlement), but at its heart was the promise of a great housing campaign'.⁵³

Most of the information about the sub-standard nature and limited supply of housing was available before 1919 and some of it stemmed directly from the survey work of

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.411.

⁵² Simon, *English Popular Education*, p.22.

⁵³ Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes: the Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain*. (London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1981), p.79.

philanthropic women like Maud Pember-Reeves and Henrietta Barnett. The influence of the latter is of particular relevance, not just in her contribution to social survey, but in the nature of the solutions she was to promote. Her plans to develop Hampstead Garden Suburb as an alternative to the East-end slums around Toynbee Hall were one interpretation of the principles of 'garden city' development which Swenarton considers had three strands; the slum to suburb redevelopment, the philanthropic provision of worker housing (like that of Lever at Port Sunlight) and the development of new settlements that started with Letchworth. At Hampstead the principles of building homes with spacious frontage and access to green space, as an alternative to greedy speculative town cramming drew on the philosophy of architect Unwin, who would influence government thoughts on housing layout and design for the next decade.⁵⁴

Women were to develop their philanthropic concern about housing through a variety of routes. As Deirdre Beddoe explains, the Ministry of Reconstruction was informed by a women-only committee, whilst voluntary organisations such as the Women's Village Councils movement and the Women's Co-operative Guild focused on housing issues.⁵⁵ The nature of their involvement results in part from the work of Unwin. Alongside design theories promoting cul-de-sac layout and small blocks of housing, Unwin advocated very specific aspects of internal design, such as the creation of open living space. His thoughts were behind designs put forward in the Tudor- Walters Report. That advocated half a million new homes in a short space of time with moderate densities and innovative layout.⁵⁶

On the issue of layout, there were very different ideas being presented, originating in the work of the Women's Labour League. Their pressure resulted in the creation

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.5-12.

⁵⁵ Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty, Women between the Wars 1918-1938* (London, Pandora, 1989).

⁵⁶ Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes*, p.82, 92-97.

of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee. They consulted widely on how to design a suitable work place for women. The gendered approach is apparent in that consultation:

Woman's chief task is to make a home. To do this well the house in which her family lives must be so constructed as to give opportunities for health, comfort, leisure and social well-being. The house must be not merely a roof for shelter, but must be sufficiently well-planned, well-built and well-furnished to make life pleasant and beautiful. The working woman spends most of her time in her home and yet she has nothing to do with its planning. It is time that this state of things ended.⁵⁷

The language emphasises the domestic as the sphere of women and yet through their work in highlighting the importance of details of internal layout 'working women were now empowering themselves through their claim to their own expertise as housewives'.⁵⁸ Their findings led to a critical approach to the Tudor-Walters Report, with women seeking both the inclusion of a separate parlour and a separate bathroom.⁵⁹

The well-intentioned if controversial rhetoric behind the Tudor-Walters plans for the well-designed housing boom were short lived. The scale of housing envisaged proved well beyond capacity with shortages of raw materials compounding the problems of funding house building on such a massive scale and producing low-density estates that were economic. The legal mechanisms were in place, but the envisaged centralised funding was far from adequate. The inclusion of parlours and bathrooms as optional extras would become a focus of discussion driven by

⁵⁷ Women's Labour League consultation leaflet as reproduced in *Labour Woman*, January 1918.

⁵⁸ Karen Hunt, 'Gendering the Politics of the Working Woman's Home' in Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (eds.) *Women and the Making of Built Space in England* (Aldershot, Ashgate 2007), p.111.

⁵⁹ Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes* notes that Unwin did not find a parlour essential, however much it was desired by tenants, (p.98).

economic difficulty. 'With change in the political climate, the housing programme that in 1918-19 had appeared to offer the best hopes of social salvation assumed, for some people, the appearance of inexplicable extravagance'.⁶⁰

If the desires of women for housing that fitted their purpose were to be recognised, women would need to lobby locally. As a result of their national pressure, women were given a route to influence housing development in Circular 8/1919 in which the Ministry of Health encouraged not only the development of local housing committees with co-opted members, but also states that 'it is desirable that at least some of the co-opted members should be women'.⁶¹

When examining the impact of that Circular in Swansea Nigel Robins suggests that the clause had been widely anticipated amongst the women's organisations in the city, with both the Women's Freedom League and the Labour Party women's section lobbying for the council to co-opt women as requested. Their lobbying was resisted. That resistance to women's input on housing matters was not new. The Women's Local Government Society wrote to every appropriate council in 1917 urging that every housing committee should include suitable women. Portsmouth Council resisted that request.⁶² The local WCA in Portsmouth carried on lobbying for places on housing committee and frequently sent observers there.⁶³ Bolton WCA also lobbied the council at an early stage for involvement in the work of Housing Committee. They had more success than counterparts in Swansea and Portsmouth. At some point in 1919, two years before she was elected to the council Mrs Agnew

⁶⁰ Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*.

⁶¹ Nigel Robins, *Homes for Heroes: Early Twentieth Century Council Housing in the County Borough of Swansea* (City of Swansea, Studies in Swansea's History 1992), p.74.

⁶² PRA, Portsmouth council minutes 1918, p28, letter dated 18 Dec 1917.

⁶³ *Hampshire Telegraph and Post* 17 June 1921.

was 'appointed to the panel of assessors to judge the plans of houses'. Full co-option followed later as rules were changed.⁶⁴

In Bolton the special interest in housing and related health issues became a regular feature of the work of the local WCA. Regional conferences on the topic helped them share ideas with other north-west women and they carried out their own local surveys to find out what women wanted to see in new housing and to assess demand. The interest followed through once their members, and other women, started to take up places on the council. The local paper considered Mrs Agnew carried out her most useful work as a member of the housing committee and that 'many of the amenities that were incorporated in the Council's early house plans were the result of Mrs Agnew's practical experience and her inspection on behalf of the Housing Committee, of housing schemes in various parts of the country.'⁶⁵ In later years Labour women regularly took up places on this committee.

The extent of influence of women upon housing committees was as mixed as their early attempts to seek co-option. In Swansea Nigel Robins considers the women advisors marginalised, ignored even on an issue on which they could be considered experts, as a row developed over the type of range to be installed for cooking, women preferring newer models which could also provide hot water.⁶⁶ The struggles women had were on practical detail, but they took place in an atmosphere where economic considerations were paramount.

The internal design of housing was a topic women could claim as a special interest even if those claims were resisted. Hunt suggests recognition of their expertise 'gave a spur to newly-enfranchised women to engage in the political process.' She suggests Labour women succeeded in pushing housing up the

⁶⁴ Bolton Archives and Local Studies Service (BA), Bolton Women Citizens' Association (WCA). Annual Report 1919, (FW/3/9).

⁶⁵ *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, 11 April 1930.

⁶⁶ Robins, *Homes for Heroes*, p.80.

political agenda and that as they did so 'aspects of the housing issue moved from the private to the public arena'.⁶⁷ The nature of the newly centralised housing policy also meant that women involved with housing committees did not just have influence on internal housing plans. The scale of development needed and the economics of land supply meant housing committees were considering new edge of town estates. Women were then drawn into far wider considerations of the nature of the built environment itself. The decisions they had to face were increasingly fraught with economic difficulties.

In 1934 Labour reviewed their impact on Bermondsey after twelve years in control of the council. They were proud of their record which suggested that 'In another twelve years at the present pace every slum will have been wiped out, overcrowding will be abolished, and all unsatisfactory house property will have been abolished'. Their socialist vision would bring about the creation of 'veritable New Jerusalem in miniature'.⁶⁸ Those dreams were way beyond the economic reality of the period, but that visionary drive to improve housing in Bermondsey involved women members from the outset. Of the five Labour women elected to Bermondsey in 1919, four chose to join housing committee.⁶⁹ When Labour gained their majority in 1922 the newly formed Beautification Committee also included a significant number of prominent Labour women, and operated under the watch of Ada Salter, chosen that year as mayor. The Salters both recognised the value of a healthy environment in tackling local poverty and ill health.⁷⁰ Their task was all embracing. They strove to 'complete the reconstruction, not merely of the houses and homes in

⁶⁷ Hunt, 'Gendering the Politics of the Working Woman's Home', p.120.

⁶⁸ (unknown authorship) '12 years of Labour rule on the Bermondsey Borough Council, 1922-193: Labour's magnificent record'. (J.A.W. Douglas, London, 1934), p.4; (held in Southwark Local Studies Library).

⁶⁹ Southwark Local Studies Library, Bermondsey council minutes, volume 20 1919 - 1920

⁷⁰ Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: a study of changing interests, politics and policy in Southwark from 1919 to 1982* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1988).

this neighbourhood, but of the very social life of our citizens'.⁷¹ In this, the Beautification committee played a significant part, charged with creating public spaces 'for exercise and play' in addition to planting trees and encouraging the spread of window boxes.⁷² Labour were proud of the transformation they led in Bermondsey and women were at the heart of that implementation. Biographic record such as the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the work of Sue Goss recognise the contribution made by the Salters to reconstruction in Bermondsey. It should not go unrecorded however, that the 1922 Bermondsey Beautification Committee had five women members out of a total membership of thirteen. Amongst them were women who were to have a long-standing if underreported influence on Bermondsey, including alderman Mrs Ada Broughton and councillors Emily George and Mary Nix. At a time when some councils still struggled to appoint any women at all, the all-encompassing socialist vision for improving Bermondsey was being driven forward by women.

Housing and environmental issues then presented far more of a challenge for women councillors, but their assertiveness assured an influence that went beyond the confines of the *working woman's home*. By taking on this council committee women helped shape the streets and parks as well as the design of the kitchen range. They recognised the need for a broad approach to improving family welfare.

Maternity and Child Welfare

As Pat Thane has emphasised, the efforts of Labour women to secure better services for children and expectant mothers encouraged the shape of legislation in 1918 and its consequent implementation. The Maternity and Child Welfare Act was permissive in nature. It allowed the local authority to provide services such as

⁷¹ Unknown, 12 years of Labour rule, p.4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.33.

domestic help after childbirth, food for expectant and nursing mothers and the provision of crèches and day nurseries. The permissive nature meant that services of this kind only resulted from local decisions.⁷³ The legislation insisted on the co-option of women on Maternity and Child Welfare committees when they were created, but the very nature of the services it was providing attracted women councillors of all political persuasions. Their approach to family life was not a uniform one. Conservative women in Kensington were well represented on Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, where the ten co-opted women in 1937 were supported by eight women out of 22 council representatives (including Aldermen).

Charlotte Keeling included chairmanship of the Kensington Maternity and Child Welfare Committee in her long list of public works. She exercised considerable influence on the detailed operation of services as a Poor Law guardian, an occupation that took up a significant proportion of her day to day life in the 1920s. Along with her women counterparts in Kensington the driving force for her actions was one that imposed moral standards. A guardian's sub-committee under her leadership agreed in 1914 that:

Women known to be leading immoral lives who become inmates of the House or infirmary shall be visited by their mothers and sisters only except by special permission of the Women's Committee.⁷⁴

By the time the Poor Law Board was abolished in 1930, Kensington women made up almost 50 per cent of the membership of that body, with considerable overlap with the work of the borough council. The Women's Committee was made up

⁷³ 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 Gisela Bock & Past Thane (eds.) *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1810-1950*. (London, Routledge 1991), pp.104 – 106.

⁷⁴ Kensington Archives, Minutes of the Parish of St Mary Abbots Kensington Proceedings of the Guardians, Women's Committee, 26 Nov 1914 (KBG 178).

entirely of women guardians and spent most of its time dealing with individual cases. Throughout the 1920s they carried on the traditions of Poor Law implementation more commonly associated with an earlier era, involved in detailed casework and intervening personally in individual lives. They set down procedures which ensured that poor women with new born babies did not make a long term demand for support. Children were placed in suitable residential schooling or where appropriate sent for adoption. The committee was also strong on promoting the special interest women had in family welfare, so that women admitted to maternity wards and female venereal wards could only be interviewed by women officers. This protection of women inmates lasted until abolition, with a resolution seeking that 'in future all cases of unmarried women applying for admission to the maternity wards be dealt with where possible by a woman officer...'.⁷⁵

Although minutes reveal less detail, there is nothing to suggest that the moral stance taken by Kensington women throughout their Poor Law work was not replicated by their work on the borough council, focusing on improving the behaviour of immoral women and ensuring those born in the workhouses for whatever reason could be moved into more suitable families or institutions that would reform the character. Welfare support and nursery education would help prevent future distress. There are similar examples of Conservative women combining Poor Law and borough council work in nearby Westminster. The language used may have differed from that of their Labour counterparts, but the areas of council activity they were most prominent in were similar. In Bermondsey Jessie Stephen also contributed to the work of the Board of Guardians, but was insistent in her work that poverty was not a crime but a consequence of the economic system. Her contribution was to end the practice of segregating

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, January 1930 (and intervening years).

unmarried mothers in the workhouse infirmaries and their subjection to assumptions of sinfulness.⁷⁶ The common interest of women in welfare then included variety in underlying political philosophy. Baby clinics could be justified by women of all political persuasions as either an essential component of ensuring a future healthy population, essential to post-war replenishment, as a right of all mothers, or as a means of educating the poor and uninformed.

As Thane acknowledges their legacy is a substantial one, with significant improvements in the quality of maternity services between 1918 and 1939, so that most babies would receive at least one visit from a health visitor.⁷⁷ The ability of women to secure improvement was noticeable even in areas where their representation was limited. Deirdre Beddoe found the actions of Labour women in Wales vital in improving a very poor level of provision even if advance was slow.⁷⁸ For many women the newly established council clinics would provide the only source of practical advice on matters of child health.⁷⁹ Political opinion on most aspects of welfare provision varied only on matters of cost, cause and relative priority.

The same degree of unity was not to be found on the other aspect of inter-war approach to family life of prime relevance to women. As Jane Lewis describes, middle-class women had more limited family size, but in the inter-war period it was the drop in working-class fertility rates that were most noticeable. 'Social taboo' however made access to information difficult.⁸⁰ Two women who were at the centre of the campaign for access to contraception were elected to Middlesex county council. Edith How Martyn was briefly elected as a Liberal member before her time

⁷⁶ Pamela Graves, *Labour Women, Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.171.

⁷⁷ Thane, 'Visions of Gender in the Making of the British Welfare State' p.106.

⁷⁸ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: a History of Women in Twentieth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000), p.94.

⁷⁹ Pat Thane, 'Visions of Gender in the Making of the British Welfare State' p.104.

⁸⁰ Jane Lewis, *Women in England, 1870 – 1950* (Sussex, Wheatsheaf Books, 1984), pp.15-16.

working internationally with Margaret Sanger and at the London Birth Control Information Centre. Her brief period on Middlesex was followed over a decade later by Dr Edith Summerskill, also a campaigner on birth control. Summerskill was not alone in finding support for birth control an area of contention in her political career with suggestions a campaign by the Catholic church influenced the outcome of her election it hampered her chance to gain a Parliamentary seat later in her life.⁸¹

Catholicism was also at the heart of political debate about birth control on Merseyside. Bessie Braddock could be outspoken on any matter and birth control was one principle she fought for vociferously. Her left wing politics frequently brought her into conflict with the local Labour leadership. Sam Davies describes how a 1936 debate became bitter as the leader of the Labour group Luke Hogan tried to prevent a grant being renewed to a local clinic where birth control was promoted. Bessie Braddock pointed out that three quarters of the 87 women who died in childbirth the previous year might have lived if they had access to contraception. For her contraceptive methods as offered through the clinic were far preferable to abortion. With religion dividing the Labour vote, Davies points out the four women councillors were also divided with Bessie Braddock and Mary Cumella (and 13 Labour men) voting with protestants and Tories in what Davies describes as 'a curious alliance of left and right' ... that .. 'triumphed over the majority catholic caucus in the Labour group'.⁸² The other two Labour women members of Liverpool at the time, Mary Hamilton and Agnes Middleton voted with the Labour majority on the losing side.

⁸¹ John Stewart, 'Summerskill, Edith Clara, Baroness Summerskill (1901–1980)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31734>, accessed 24 January 2011].

⁸² R.S.W. Davies, 'Differentiation in the Working Class. Class Consciousness and development of the Labour Party in Liverpool up to 1939.' (Liverpool John Moores University, unpublished DPhil, May 1993) pp. 256-257.

The role of Bessie Braddock in this debate, alongside the contribution other women made to the development of birth control services through municipal clinics, highlights the degree to which public and private spheres of operation were merging. The state was beginning to intervene in the most private aspect of domestic relationships. In Bessie Braddock's case support for that intervention came primarily from a commitment to fight for the health of working class mothers rather than the more feminist promotion of rights to control their own bodies that typified later debate on the issue. As Davies points out, by joining in this bitter and controversial debate in a prominent way, Braddock challenges many of the preconceptions of women councillors – and yet here she was dealing with a primarily domestic agenda as befitted women.

She would never have described herself as a feminist, but chaired the Maternity and Child Welfare Sub-Committee of the Council from its creation in 1934, and in that capacity did much work on behalf of women. Her committee was responsible for the opening of a Maternity and Child Care Centre in Everton which was claimed to be the only one of its kind in the country. Only a few days later she organised a major national Conference on Maternity and Child Welfare in Liverpool, working with many other non-party women's organisations. The conference called for birth control clinics to be established by all health authorities, and improved pre- and post-natal care, and received much publicity in the local press.⁸³

It was the agenda that had shifted as much as women's participation in it. There were perhaps inevitable divisions over birth control in a working-class Catholic community like Liverpool, but divisions too amongst women over the same issue in

⁸³ Davies, 'Differentiation in the Working Class, p.283.

the more refined and elite political landscape of Oxford. The matter came to a head there in 1934 when Maternity and Child Welfare Committee recommended a scheme for supplying contraceptive advice to married women on medical grounds. Press coverage indicates that most women councillors there were prepared to support the supply of contraceptives with those conditions, led by Councillor Mrs Collier, a prominent Liberal woman, but supported by some Conservatives including Mrs Townsend and Harrison-Hall. At that time Lily Tawney was mayor, and was the only woman councillor to speak against this move.⁸⁴ Lily Tawney was prominent in social welfare work in the City. She had previously served as a member of the board of guardians and was a founder member of the Oxford Council for Social Services, an organisation established to respond tackle local poverty. Her obituary informs us she 'knew the particular problems of the city intimately' but for her birth control was clearly not an acceptable method of dealing with some of those problems.⁸⁵

For one woman councillor in the East End of London a commitment to birth control was more important than her otherwise dominant religious beliefs. **Miriam Moses** was one of several members of the local Jewish community to find their way on to Stepney Borough Council. She succeeded her father as a councillor and also in prominence in both local Liberal organisation and in Jewish society. She was a founder member of the League of Jewish Women and fought for the rights of women to vote in elections for the United Synagogue executive elections. Although she observed traditional Jewish practice herself she was known to be in favour of 'the municipal provision of contraception for poor mothers.'⁸⁶ The interest in municipal promotion of contraception also formed part of the campaign of Dorothy Thurtle, councillor, later Mayor and alderman, in Shoreditch. Her work led to

⁸⁴ *Oxford Times*, (County edition) 2 Nov 1934.

⁸⁵ *Oxford Times*, 17 Oct 1947.

⁸⁶ Sharman Kadish, 'Moses, Miriam (1884–1965)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/70162>, accessed 17 Feb 2011].

membership of the Executive of the National Birth Control Council.⁸⁷ John Shepherd suggests that her father, George Lansbury, changed his mind about birth control in the mid -1920s as Labour debated policy on this controversial issue.

This East End focus was clearly on the relevance of birth control to poor families. As Deirdre Beddoe describes, Victorian middle-class women had found ways of limiting their family size. In the inter-war period it was working class women who followed suit. They may have been driven to use contraception by a combination of exhaustion from producing large families and a need to spend more time in the workplace, but those pioneers who promoted their service did so with mixed motives. Pioneer Marie Stopes was 'a eugenicist interested in curbing the breeding of the lower classes'.⁸⁸ Her pioneering clinics of the 1920s predated municipal provision. It was the women councillors of the 1930s who were able to take up the issue in a practical way. One councillor who succeeded in stressing the positive role of birth control in a very practical way was Lady Maureen Stanley, who took up her seat on Westmorland council when her husband decided he was too busy as an MP to devote time to the county. She combined the role with that of president of the Manchester, Salford and District Mothers' Clinic and membership of the National Birth Control Association. She spoke out in the topic with eloquence and a practical logic. She was a staunch advocate of good scientific advice being offered in preference to ill-advised dangerous contraceptives and abortion practices. For her the purpose was to encourage the spacing of children for better health, not to prevent birth. Birth control for her would raise the standard of married life. Although her work saw fruit in the Manchester clinic she opened in 1939 her plea was to councils everywhere. 'Women had nowadays she said, much fuller and more

⁸⁷ John Shepherd, *George Lansbury, at the Heart of Old Labour* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.350-351.

⁸⁸ Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty, Women between the Wars 1918-1938* (London, Pandora, 1989), p.107.

varied lives, and she did not think we could expect any more that a woman should give up so great a part of her time to having children'.⁸⁹

Women councillors then were active participants in the debate on birth control. A small number were leading advocates whilst others found they were drawn into debate as councils considered the principles of providing municipal advice. In doing so they expressed the same mixture of practical concern, moral imposition and political or religious fervour that influenced views on other topics. For many active women their views on birth control were part of a wider view on welfare and the central role of the health of the family. Through their Poor Law work and continued administration of welfare policy through council committees some women had found a route to administering public policy as it applied to family life. The central importance of the birth control debate was that it took that administration right to the heart of home life by influencing the very shape of the family. A distinction between the public and private sphere was now difficult to justify.

In welfare as well as in education then, women councillors were drawn into some of the most controversial domestic policy debates of the day. There were aspects of council work where their special knowledge was recognised, but even in areas where national policy might encourage the views of women, such as the design of housing, women were not always welcome as elected members. In areas as politically diverse as Bermondsey and Kensington the concentration of women on particular committees in addition to co-options meant they were a sizeable force, although that pattern was not replicated everywhere. The changing nature of the debate on those committees brought the public actions of the state increasingly into the public domain. That alone cannot be the final conclusion of this re-examination of municipal life and an ideology of separate spheres, for one vital aspect remains –

⁸⁹ *The Manchester Guardian*, 23 May 1939. See also 2 December 1935 and 18 December 1935.

a small number of women did succeed on taking on the very public leadership duties including election as chairman of committees and as mayors.

Recognition and reward, the promotion of women

Women had special interest in committees that enabled them to influence the daily lives of children and families. They also displayed an eye for detail and a willingness to become involved in the day to day administration of institutions and personal case work. For local government in the 'twenties and 'thirties these were still the substance of the life of a councillor, so housing committees may have planned slum clearance and design of new estates, but someone still had to ensure the tenants who went there were deemed satisfactory. Because women found the time to involve themselves in the detail of council life their skills were sometimes welcome, and rewarded initially with chairmanships of the sub-committees they immersed themselves in, then full committees, with occasional promotion to the aldermanic bench for those valued the most.

The appointment of aldermen was part of council life for all municipal authorities covered by this study, although the numbers involved varied, with county boroughs having a higher proportion of aldermen (one for every three councillors) than London boroughs or county councils. Aldermen were frequently appointed from amongst the ranks of councillors, but other appointments were legally possible. As a result not all women who became aldermen needed to have been elected as a councillor first. As noted previously the WRCC added Hermione Unwin to the list of aldermen in March 1922 after several years co-opted to both Education Committee and the West Riding Mental Deficiency Committee. Whilst still a co-opted member and before her aldermanic appointment Miss Unwin chaired the head teachers sub-committee. She had a long-standing involvement in education matters and throughout her time as an alderman – which lasted until 1937 she was frequently relied on to carry out time consuming tasks of importance, chairing special sub-

committees looking at issues of teachers shortages, and acting as one of the councils representatives on the Association of Education Committees.⁹⁰

A few months after Miss Unwin was appointed alderman in the West Riding Mrs Ada Broughton was also made an alderman in Bermondsey. In this case an aldermanic appointment was a means of bringing her back on the council after she has lost her seat, as had many other London Labour representatives previously elected in 1919. Also defeated in 1922 was Katherine Groves, who joined the Bermondsey aldermanic bench in 1925.⁹¹ Both these women were valued members of the progressive advance in Bermondsey. Immediately after her appointment as an alderman Ada Broughton became chairman of Maternity and Child Welfare Committee. She remained an alderman until her death in 1934.⁹²

Although the numbers of women appointed as alderman were small, the aldermanic system could assist those who were valued by those politicians who had the power to appoint. In a limited number of cases like Alderman Unwin the role followed co-option; for others it followed electoral defeat. Some women also started their life as elected politicians in the round of aldermanic by-election that followed the appointment of sitting councillors to aldermanic positions. This method allowed Florence Sills to join Hackney council in a 1937 by-election when she had been defeated in the all-out November election a month beforehand.⁹³ For many councils though, appointment as alderman rewarded long-standing councillors, and as a result women only gained places slowly. Where they did take up such places, other women did not always seek election in their place. Both Kent and County Durham

⁹⁰ West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield, Minutes of the West Riding County Council 1918 – 1939 (WRC/33-WRC/41) and Minutes of the WRCC education committee 1920 - 1925. (WRC/13/16 – WRC/13/25).

⁹¹ Southwark Local Studies Library, *Bermondsey Council Minute book* Vol 25, council 9/11/1925

⁹² Southwark Local Studies Library, *Bermondsey Council Minute book* Vol 22, council 9/11/1922 and *Bermondsey Labour News* March 1922. (N.B. *South London Press* 23 Feb 1834 (obit) erroneously records that Miss Broughton did not stand in the 1922 election. Council records and collected London elections data show that she was defeated).

⁹³ Hackney Archives, council diaries 1937 and 1938 and personal information.

reached 1938 with no elected women members as a result of women being appointed alderman. Aldermanic positions could be renewed. Miss Davies remained an alderman in Anglesey throughout the 'twenties and 'thirties as did Madeline Adeane in Cambridgeshire, whilst Lady Mabel Howard ruled from her aldermanic position in Cumberland from 1924 onwards. The West Riding County Council Labour group appears to have been unusual in developing a policy of insisting aldermen 'faced the electorate' at the end of each three year term of appointment, a ruling which applied to Lady Mabel Smith in 1931. The council also had a system of sharing aldermanic places proportionally between the political groups. In some councils appointment of alderman were more likely to be used to create a political majority.⁹⁴

The appointment of Alderman Broughton to the chairmanship of Maternity and Child Welfare Committee in Bermondsey at an early stage in Labour's dominance of that council was not an isolated example of early leadership by women in London. Other Labour women also took on leading roles in this area, for example, Mrs Bracey-Wright in neighbouring Peckham who was vice-chairman of that committee at an early stage. However female chairmanships had already become accepted in London in areas of activity where women had special interests. Gloria Clifton argues that it was the appointment of co-opted women as chairman of various sub-committees of the LCC that helped pave the way for changes in the law allowing election. Dr Sophie Bryant and Maude Lawrence were both vice-chairmen of sub-committees from 1904 with Dame Jessie Wilton Phipps becoming the first woman to chair a sub-committee in 1909.⁹⁵ The subsequent career of Jessie Phipps is an example of the way women who devoted themselves to public administration could

⁹⁴ Doncaster Archives Department, Minutes of WRCC Labour group 1919 – 1974 (DS/36/1 & Ds/36/2); Barber and Beresford, *The West Riding County Council* p.161.

⁹⁵ Clifton, 'Members and Officers of the LCC', p.8.

achieve results when they combined talent and tenacity with political allegiance relevant to their council. In 1913 she was appointed by the Municipal Reform Party to the LCC aldermanic bench, the second time they had nominated a female alderman. In March 1920 she was unanimously appointed vice-chairman of the council, the first female to hold that role. Between 1923 and 1926 she chaired the Education Committee.⁹⁶ She was joined on the LCC in 1925 by another Conservative woman who developed a successful role chairing committees, Evelyn Emmett, later a Conservative MP and pioneer in the House of Lords.⁹⁷ By 1925 Clifton informs us, there were 24 women serving as elected councillors or alderman at the LCC, a sign of their growing acceptability, around 16 per cent, or double the average rate achieved on all councils a decade or so later. With this level of representation chairmanships were more likely, particularly given the high volume of women members (20) who had no other paid employment. Not all those chairmanships related to committees traditionally viewed as within the natural sphere of women – Lady Trustram Eve, for example, chaired the Parks committee by 1923.⁹⁸

Having the time to devote to a task also ensured Conservative women were able to take up practical chairmanships as part of their role as Poor Law guardians. In Kensington Charlotte Keeling was chairman of the Indoor Relief Committee in 1907, with Miss Alexander as her vice-chairman. Miss Hayne was Chairman of Visitor appointments and Supervision committee. All three went on to elected membership of Kensington council, with Charlotte Keeling taking on the chairmanship of Maternity and Child Welfare Committee by 1920 and the Public Health Committee

⁹⁶ *The Times*, 12 Mar 1913 and 8 Aug 1934 (obituary).

⁹⁷ G. E. Maguire, 'Emmet , Evelyn Violet Elizabeth, Baroness Emmet of Amberley (1899–1980)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50059>, accessed 5 Feb 2009]

⁹⁸ Clifton, 'Members and Officer of the LCC' pp. 6,9.

by 1921.⁹⁹ Conservative women also took on chairmanships in Westminster in the 1920s, with Mrs Douglas Vickers becoming chairman of Maternity and Child Welfare in 1925. Again, a precedent was set with women taking leading roles on the Board of Guardians, where Ida Gascoigne was vice-chairman before her election to the council in 1919.¹⁰⁰

Conservative and Labour women in London then gained some committee chairmanships at an early stage because they had other experience of relevance and time to take on detailed work and because they had gained seats in councils where their respective political party had a strong majority. However experience was also present in women elected to some provincial towns outside London. Information available from case study is limited, but it would appear women in towns and cities did take on committee chairmanships and vice chairmanships, although perhaps at a later date than in London. Amongst early appointments Shena Simon did take on the vice-chairmanship of education committee in Manchester and later became chairman; Rhoda Parker was vice-chairman of secondary schools committee in Cardiff during the 1920s. There are two uncommon examples of women taking a lead on finance issues, with Miriam Lightowler in Halifax chairing the council's finance committee in the 1930s, and Mrs Ridley-Smith in Westminster chairing the Rates and expenditure sub-committee.

As time progressed some women also achieved committee chairmanships on those county councils where they succeeded in becoming established. The prime county council role, of chairman of council almost eluded them. The only woman in England and Wales to reach that position was Dame Gwendoline Joyce Trubshaw in Carmarthenshire and that not until 1937. Essex had Margaret Tabor, first

⁹⁹ Kensington Local Studies Collection, Parish of St Mary Abbots, Kensington, Minutes of the proceedings of the Guardians vol 12 (KBC75 1907) and Minutes of the Kensington Borough Council vol. 21 and 22.

¹⁰⁰ *West London Press* 8 September 1944 (obituary) and City of Westminster Archives, Municipal Reform election address, Victoria Ward 1919.

chairman then vice-chairman of Education Committee. The West Riding CC was unusual in that for most of the inter-war period agreements led to the allocation of committee chairmanships between political parties, with Conservatives and Liberals effectively acting as an alliance, but sharing chairmanships and vice-chairmanships with Labour. The unusual nature of this practice needs to be taken into account when looking at the advance of women into leading positions, for where chairmanships were allocated by the majority party or anti-socialist alliance, women elected to opposition would not achieve high office however strong their experience or credentials. Given earlier analysis found a higher proportion of Labour women in towns and cities than expected by the overall level of Labour representation, the volume of women initially elected to roles in opposition outside London may have led to slower take-up of committee chairmanships.

Although small in number and on the whole limited to committees in which women's special interest was widely accepted, the appearance of women committee chairmen adds weight to the argument that those women who chose to take on public office were not entirely confined to the private sphere. Committee chairmanships brought with them public duties and a degree of authority. Although most committee decisions had to be ratified by the full council, and powers to raise finance were held by the council, schemes of delegation would allow the committee and particularly the committee chair considerable scope for acting in an authoritative manner. That would include appointment of staff and requisitioning of supplies as well as decisions on particular individual cases. The detailed management of buildings and facilities would include issuing direct instructions to staff on some matters.

The area which a limited number of women seemed to excel in public life was that of mayor. Not surprisingly perhaps, amongst the first women to hold this role were those who had been pioneers in seeking election back in 1907. In November

1933 Miss Edith Sutton became Labour Mayor in Reading. She had joined the council there at the first opportunity for women back in 1907. Another pioneer in that 1907 election had been elevated to the mayoralty very quickly. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson became mayor of Aldeburgh a year after her election, and was almost joined by Miss Dove in Wycombe. Both those councils had the status of non-county borough – retaining the ability to appoint a mayor from their borough status, but sharing responsibilities with the county council. The first woman mayor in a County borough was Mrs Lees, first elected in Oldham in a 1907 by-election, and becoming mayor in 1910. The non-County boroughs of Stalybridge, Worthing and Honiton all appointed women in 1919 or 1920. In 1921 the Liberal Miss Hartley faced opposition to her appointment as mayor in the County Borough of Southport. *The Times* reports that at her mayor making she handed over a cheque for the unemployed, following opposition to her candidacy from their representatives. Miss Hartley was the second woman mayor in a County Borough in the North-West, following on from Mrs Lees. She pre-dated the election of Mrs Ada Salter as Mayor in Bermondsey, the latter frequently being described as the first Labour mayor and first in London.

With the possible exception of Ada Salter most women who became mayors have faded into relative obscurity (apart perhaps from within their own neighbourhoods). Her relative prominence probably owes more to the pioneering work Bermondsey was undertaking at the time she took on the mayoralty and to the wider roles she undertook with her husband rather than her early achievement of the mayoralty itself. Her experience though was not unique, with several boroughs in London selecting a woman as mayor at some point in the 20's and 30's. Proportionally London boroughs were electing women mayors at a faster rate than county boroughs. By 1937 half of all 28 London Boroughs had selected a woman as

Table 14: Women Mayors (London and County Boroughs) 1919 – 1937

	London	County Boroughs
1921-22		Miss Hartley (Southport)
1922-23	Mrs Ada Salter (Bermondsey)	
1923-24		Miss E. M. Colman (Norwich)
1924-25	Miss C. M. Eve (Stoke Newington)	Mrs Mary Ann Mercer (Birkenhead) Mrs Leach (Great Yarmouth)
1925-26		Miss M. E. Neville (Lincoln)
1926-27		Mrs Grace E. Cottrell (West Bromwich)
1927-28	Mrs Beatrice Drapper (Deptford)	Mrs Margaret Beavan (Liverpool) Miss A. Hudson (Eastbourne) Mrs M. A. Edmunds (Merthyr Tydfil) Mrs Cottrell (West Bromwich) Mrs L. F. Welch (Southampton)
1928-29		Dame Maude Burnett (Tynemouth)
1929-30	Lady Margaret Phipps (Chelsea)	Dame Maude Burnett (Tynemouth)
1930-31	Lady Margaret Phipps (Chelsea) Mrs Henrietta Girling (Shoreditch) Miss Walters (Woolwich)	Mabel Clarkson (Norwich)
1931-32	Miss Moses (Stepney) Mrs C. Turner (Greenwich)	Miss M. Goodger (Burton-On-Trent) Ald Mrs Sands (Smethwick) Florence Ann Farmer (Stoke-On-Trent) Miss Diana M. E. Ogilvy (Worcester)
1932-33	Mrs Emily George (Bermondsey)	Ald Mrs Sands (Smethwick)
1933-34	Miss Lydia Benoly (Bethnal Green)	Miss Margaret Hardy MBE (Brighton) Miss L. S. Tawney (Oxford) Avice Margaret Pimblett (Preston) Miss Edith M. Sutton (Reading)
1934-35	Miss A. Gilliat (Fulham) Mrs F. Carter (Greenwich)	Miss E. M. Thornton (Eastbourne) Mrs Creswell (Walsall) Mrs M. Lightowler (Halifax)

	London	County Boroughs
1935-36	Mrs H. Roberts (Stepney)	Mrs A. M. Perrett (Great Yarmouth) Miss E. M. Thornton (Eastbourne) Mrs M. G .Townsend (Oxford)
1936-37	Mrs E Martin (Finsbury) D Thurtle (Shoreditch) Miss M Crout (Woolwich)	Mrs A. E. Longden (Sheffield) Mrs E. Petty (Derby) Lady Atkins (Worcester) Mrs D. Parsons (West Ham)
1937-38	Mrs J. L. Blythe (Islington) Mrs E.M. Lambert (Poplar) Mrs P. Tidy (Southwark)	Miss A. Arnold (Coventry) Mrs A. Taylor (East Ham) Mrs M. A. Hart (Newport Mon.) Mrs E. Bock (West Ham)

Source: *Municipal Yearbooks*.

mayor at some point, whereas women had been appointed to the mayoral role in 27 of the 83 County Boroughs.

Cities were only able to use the title of Lord Mayor in special cases, so the appointment of a woman to the role of Lord Mayor was noteworthy. When Margaret Beavan took on that role in Liverpool in 1927 the *Liverpool Post* noted interest in her appointment from both France and Spain. It also noted that she would have been the first to hold the title of Lord Mayor in the country had Ethel Colman not been appointed in Norwich a few years earlier.¹⁰¹ The nomination of Margaret Beavan by the Conservative group was greeted with enthusiasm locally. Margaret Beavan was well known in the city for her philanthropic work, and particularly as the founder of the child welfare association and her work with crippled children. A year before her mayoral appointment she was honoured with a council banquet in recognition of her 25 years of social work in the city.¹⁰² When Conservatives announced her appointment they did so with eager excitement as Lady Muspratt ‘rushed forward and kissed the future Lord Mayor and aldermen and councillors crowded her with

¹⁰¹ *Liverpool Post*, 4 October 1927, 7 October 1927 and 26 October 1927.

¹⁰² *Liverpool Post*, 19 October 1926.

outstretched hands'.¹⁰³ Labour councillors were less enthusiastic, although there initial objections ended in an unusual display of unity as they decide not to oppose her election as mayor. They had earlier caused a stir by opposing her re-election to the council itself, a decision the Conservative paper thought may have resulted from her conversion from Liberalism to join the Conservative ranks, but was expressed by socialist opposition to her charitable actions –

There ought to be no flag days or other systems of cadging to maintain crippled children and destitute people and the Labour Party maintained it was a state obligation to help these children.¹⁰⁴

If Labour councillors found the philosophy and actions of Margaret Beavan hard to swallow, they could not fail to be impressed with the vigour and energy with which she approached her mayoral year and the manner in which she set about opening up the Mayor's parlour to ordinary people and especially ordinary women. There are accounts of parties for children from special schools, for invalid children and for 700 schoolchildren chosen by special ballot. Alongside the afternoon tea parties for ordinary citizens we also find novel special events for mothers with young babies.¹⁰⁵

Women and matters that affected the lives of wives and mothers were central to Margaret Beavan's mayoral year. She spoke to several women's organisations including presiding at the annual meeting of the Liverpool Ladies' Temperance Association. She was also able to weave a women's point of view into other visits to the area, so when the President of the Royal College of Surgeons addressed a local audience she used the opportunity to promote two of her own public health goals –

¹⁰³ *Liverpool Post*, 4 October 1927.

¹⁰⁴ *Liverpool Post*, 12 October 1927. See also 25 October 1927 and 26 October 1927.

¹⁰⁵ *Liverpool Post*, 14 December 1927, 15 December 1927, 17 January 1928, 14 March 1928.

tackling the deaths of women in pregnancy and ensuring the provision of good quality TB tested milk to nursing mothers and infants.¹⁰⁶

The ability to chair difficult council meetings and to perform at a wide range of civic functions illustrates how well women like Margaret Beavan were able to operate in the public sphere and to bring their own special touch to those proceedings. In her period of office Margaret Beavan made an official trip to Italy, entertained King Faisal of Irak , a Canadian delegation and the King and Queen of Afghanistan. *The Post* noted that during the visit of the latter not only did she convey special greetings to the women of Afghanistan, the Queen was also entertained to a special informal mayoral reception attended only by women.¹⁰⁷

Margaret Beavan recognised the pioneering nature of her position and wanted it to be an encouragement to other women to take up public positions. As she outlined in when accepting her nomination as Mayor 'I have a sacred trust. If I fail people will say 'no more Lord Mayors thank you'. So that I shall have to show that a woman's ideas were quite as sound as a man's and her interests equally catholic.'¹⁰⁸ She continued with language common amongst women in public office at the time. There was room for both women and men in public life and women were needed in all positions of responsibility. Their interests though were not the same. There were aspects of public life women were better suited to than men. In making her case Margaret Beavan was also able to draw on her experiences as a magistrate working on their juvenile bench alongside her work on Maternity and Child Welfare Committee. One feature of her mayoral year that emphasised how much she recognised the nature of the task took place in January of 1928, when Margaret

¹⁰⁶ *Liverpool Post*, 25 November 1927, 29 February 1928.

¹⁰⁷ Cowman notes in her DNB entry on Margaret Beavan that the trip to Italy highlighted her general lack of political astuteness. The newspaper coverage does detail her admiration of Mussolini. Cowman notes this contributed to a lessening of public confidence in her that was blamed for later failure when seeking election for the Conservatives as a Parliamentary candidate.

¹⁰⁸ *Liverpool Post*, 4. October 1927

Figure 5, Women mayors meet in Liverpool, January 1928



Liverpool records office archives collection, reference 920 MBE 18001.

Nine of the 13 women mayors of the country were entertained yesterday by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool (Miss Margaret Beavan). The City of Liverpool showed great interest in the visit. The mayors who accepted the invitation were the Mayor of Southampton (Mrs Foster Welsh), The Mayor of Deptford (Mrs Beatrice Drapper), the Mayor of Eastbourne (Miss Alice Hudson), the Mayor of Lichfield (Mrs Stuart Shaw), the Mayor of Tenby (Mrs Jenkins), the Mayor of Pudsey (Mrs Lund), the Mayor of West Bromwich (Mrs Cottrel) the Mayor of Wrexham (Mrs Edwards-Jones), and the Mayor of Whitehaven (Miss Hilder).

Wearing her robes of office and plumed hat, the Lord Mayor received her guests in her parlour and chatted with them over a cup of coffee. As all except the Mayors of Deptford and Whitehaven wore their robes the scene was a brilliant one with colour. The Mayor of West Bromwich was conspicuous in her ermine and scarlet and the Mayor of Southampton also struck a distinctive note with her robes of blue.

The Mayor of Deptford who was dressed in blue velvet conveyed the greetings of the Lord Mayor of London to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool. ...

... The Lord Mayor, who presided at the luncheon said that the visit was a historic one. There had never been a gathering of women mayors before. The reason why she had invited them to come was imply that they might encourage each other. Team work – men and women pulling together – was the secret of success in their work.

The Times, 19 January 1928

Beavan invited all other current women Mayors to join her in Liverpool. Coverage in *The Times* focused on the scenes of brilliant colour given that most of the nine mayors who attended were wearing robes. Sadly illustrations are only available in monochrome. Also noteworthy is that fact that several of the illustrations available show the party visiting Liverpool dockyards. Although her prime interest may have been in children and welfare, Margaret Beavan and her companions on that day were also capable of taking interest in matters less frequently associated with their gender. The same could be said a few months later, when Margaret Beavan met her counterpart the Mayor of Birkenhead. The meeting place was underneath the Mersey in the tunnel still under construction.¹⁰⁹

Proportionally the selection of women as mayor, chairman and alderman was small but their local impact was significant at least in the initial cases attracted wider interest. Women who succeeded in getting elected were showing commitment and a willingness to take on wide ranging tasks. They were drawn from both Labour and Conservative ranks but as illustrated by the work of Ada Salter, Margaret Beavan and others shared a commitment to promote the interests of women and children in a variety of ways alongside an ability to work hard. Their local appointment seemed to be in recognition of the strength of the personal character, but that did not mean the pioneering nature of their role as women went unnoticed. Neither though was there any real groundswell of opinion lobbying for women to be promoted in these ways – perhaps partly because of limited public interest in local government itself, but also because women activists were finding a diversity of ways in which to make their voices heard. Whilst there might be few demands for a collective increase in the representation of women, there was growing acceptance of and admiration for that small band of women who made local government their daily life. Often known

¹⁰⁹ Coverage of the Mayoral meeting in *The Times*, 20 January 1928 and *Liverpool Echo* 10 January 1928. Photo part of collection of Liverpool Record Office and Local History Service, part of collection '20 MBE' which also includes a file of the local press cuttings used above.

for resilience, determination and forthright views, they may not have acted as role models for the majority, but they were far from being confined to the domestic sphere.

Redefining citizenship

When the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Margaret Beavan, gathered women mayors from around the country in 1928 the visit included a trip to the port, acknowledging the very strength on which that city was built. Liverpool owed wealth, culture and civic architecture to the fortunes of seafaring trade and especially the slave trade. Tristram Hunt describes how the concepts of local citizenship Victorian city fathers were building deliberately drew on earlier models of city leadership. William Roscoe, Hunt suggests, would inspire fellow civic leaders to emulate the aesthetic vigour of Florence built on the patronage of commerce.¹¹⁰ The city architecture that would house commercial life alongside civic activity and a shared public culture was consciously constructed in the style of Athens. Hunt suggests this was not a simple reflection of taste or display of wealth, but the creation of civic pride:

Classical architecture became intimately associated not only with the commercial and cultural ideals of the Greek city states, but also with a more philosophical celebration of the public sphere.... To build in the Greek style indicated a confidence in the values of urban living and the ethic of citizenship. Nineteenth-century civic leaders were determined to emulate that ideal by erecting structures that similarly celebrated the wealth, benevolence and virtue of their cities.¹¹¹

Liverpool was far from alone in developing this philosophy and indeed was influenced by the development of Chamberlain's Birmingham as well as

¹¹⁰ Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem; The rise and fall of the Victorian city*. (London, Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2004), pp. 152-155.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p173.

neighbouring Manchester. The diversity and relative autonomy of those expanding cities, along with the surviving powers of a landed aristocracy in more rural areas form the varied backdrop to the debate Jose Harris promotes about the relationship between communities and the central state prior to 1914. At the same time as rights to participate in national elections gathered momentum, local government achieved a more uniform democratic strength. Parliament was increasingly acting to standardise the public realm, but as Joseph Redlich notes it often did so by building on local innovation.¹¹² For Jose Harris the state was under pressure to change, but did not do so in a coherent fashion, retaining the ‘framework of law, liberty and sound finance within which “society” and autonomous social institutions could largely govern and develop themselves’.¹¹³ As Harris continues, until 1914 most citizens could retain clear concepts of those elements of private lives outside the power of the state, even though the limitations of government were being challenged by the need for increased public intervention. Harris recognises local government diversity in responding to those challenges.

There were many spheres, such as technical education, civic universities, free school meals, municipal milk supplies, free libraries and promotion of model conditions of employment in which radical and dynamic local authorities such as the corporations of Bradford and Birmingham and the London County Council ran far ahead of central government in their thinking.¹¹⁴

Reconsidering the role of women within notions of post-1918 citizenship should then start from the gradual and piecemeal development of public policy and the varied relationship of individuals to the local as well as the national realm. For

¹¹² Josef Redlich, *Local Government in England*, ed. F. W. Hirst (vol. 1, London, Macmillan & co, 1903), p.223.

¹¹³ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit, Britain 1870-1914* (London, Penguin, 1993), p.181.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.200.

women, citizenship became a reality not just through the granting of the franchise, but by the gradual transition of family life and welfare into the public sphere. They were to negotiate their place in a very different post-war world, but one in which local identity and local autonomy still had relevance. It was though, a world in which the language of separate spheres grew in importance.

The extent of that importance is perhaps best emphasised by the campaigns of Eleanor Rathbone and her fundamental belief that women could only win economic freedom if their central role as mothers were to be rewarded by the state. For her biographer Pedersen those views were feminist ones even though they emphasise difference.¹¹⁵ The extent of the change that had taken place though also needs to emphasise the importance of motherhood. Rebuilding family life was as important to policy makers coping with the aftermath of war as rebuilding city centres had been to municipal pioneers seeking to create local civic democracy.

Although some individuals held views that might appear contradictory, the rights of women to participate in democracy and the striving of city fathers for philanthropic civic leadership have related roots in the ideologies of enlightened liberalism. The dreams of those philosophers however did not account for the upheaval of the Great War. Leaders rarely imagine the implications of their actions. When city fathers started to create public spaces in cities as a forum for representative democracy they would not have anticipated the impact women would make on them as the language of public policy grew in council chambers. The examples here show the extent of change. Margaret Ashton, even before the impact of war, argued for the rights of married women to paid work in a debate that was to continue for decades, whilst on councils as diverse as Stepney and Oxford women led campaigns for birth control. Inter-war women's activism as elected councillors was part of the new

¹¹⁵ Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, (London, Yale University Press, 2004).

expansion of citizenship into a formerly private arena and yet in their participation women were able to maintain a degree of continuity. Not only were they able to continue to define their own special role as wives and mothers in the appropriate language of separate spheres, but they could also develop their new public role as part of their earlier displays of local citizenship through voluntary action.

Margaret Beavan, was welcomed by Conservatives into the democracy of Liverpool precisely because of her role in charitable social work. Her response was not just to show solidarity with other women mayors, but to open up the mayor's parlour to mothers and their babies. Those actions may not have been at the forefront of the minds of those who built the foundation of Victorian local citizenship, but they were appropriate for the demands of the development of local welfare.

The combined actions of women councillors investigating domestic concerns in the public sphere displayed a common interest, but as decisions on welfare were taken in the political arena their responses were not always identical. The categories identified by Cowman are useful here, in describing how perceptions of separate spheres can be expanded to recognise diversity within acceptance of a special interest. For Cowman that included a traditional concept of separate spheres that continued to define women's interests as confined to family life with implications of subordination, alongside the socialistic model of gender and class oppression and the belief that women should be perceived as a separate class.¹¹⁶ When viewed in the context of public decision making that diversity in interpretations by women of their own actions becomes in essence a mixture of political and pragmatic choices.

Recognising diversity within acceptance of a special sphere of interest is not a new concept. Jane Lewis accepted strands within the nineteenth century feminist movement that could challenge 'the idea of a natural separation of spheres' whilst

¹¹⁶ Cowman, *'Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother'* p.7

also accepting the idea 'of women as the natural guardians of the moral order.'¹¹⁷ In the aftermath of War and in consequence of suffrage women were taking that variety of views forward gradually. For some of those elected in the inter-war period greater public roles were to come after 1945. In Reading Phoebe Cusden became mayor in 1946.¹¹⁸ Her lifelong pacifism led to her mayoral year and future work developing the Reading-Dusseldorf Association, expanding her focus on child welfare in a new direction. West Riding County Councillor Jessie Smith devoted her continued service to both the Arts Council and Open University, as well as overseeing the development of an early example of Comprehensive Education. Some women took on the political leadership of their party group on the council, including Mrs Townsend (Conservative) in Oxford and Mrs Wright (Labour) in Bolton. Mrs Wright also joined the mayoralty. Her work was valued. The *News Chronicle* suggesting that 'she worked a 40 hour week without a penny payment', and had 'one of the best known phone numbers in Bolton'.¹¹⁹

Some women councillors chose the Parliamentary route to public life. It is notable that half of the 18 Labour women elected to English constituencies in 1945 had a background in local government.¹²⁰ One of them illustrates well the difficulties in identifying women's activism by a focus on organisation or time period. Mrs Caroline Ganley 'joined the Social Democratic Federation in 1906, campaigned for the suffrage, was instrumental in setting up a socialist women's circle in Battersea and developing it into a branch of the Women's Labour League (later the Labour Party women's sections)'. That pre 1914 activity led to her being elected to

¹¹⁷ Jane Lewis, *Women in England, 1870 – 1950* (Sussex, Wheatsheaf Books, 1984), pp.88-89.

¹¹⁸ Adam Stout, *A Bigness of Heart, Phoebe Cusden of Reading* (Reading, Reading-Dusseldorf Association, 1997), pp.46-47.

¹¹⁹ *The News Chronicle* 23 May 1950.

¹²⁰ List of 1945 women MPs in Nan Sloane (ed.), *A great act of justice; the flapper election and after* (Centre for Women and Democracy, York Publishing Services Limited, 2009), p.75. There were 24 women MPs elected in 1945 of which 21 were Labour. The others included Eleanor Rathbone continuing as an Independent. The count of nine out of eighteen having local government experience ignores the three women elected in Scottish constituencies.

Battersea council in 1919 and then joining the LCC. She helped develop a maternity home as committee chairman in the first role and served on education committee in her second. She combined that activity with activity in the London Co-operative Society and the Co-operative Women's Guild. She also served as a magistrate for 20 years. In 1945 she was elected MP for Battersea. Defeat in 1951 did not end her political career though and she chose to return to Battersea council where she remained until 1965.¹²¹ Like many women her prime interests remained the special sphere of family life, but a family life that could now be firmly placed in the public sphere.

¹²¹ Gillian Scott, 'Ganley, Caroline Selina (1879–1966)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50552>, accessed 25 Jan 2011].

Conclusion

When some women first won the right stand as candidates on all councils it was the Earl of Halsbury who argued that they would be unsafe guides if they were allowed to become councillors because they might 'argue from sentiment and not from reason'.¹ Thirty years after that right was won some councils still did not have an elected woman member, but around 660 women were busy influencing the everyday lives of children and families around them. Although they made up a small proportion of all councillors, the approach of these pioneers was part of a redefinition of citizenship itself, gradually bringing in the era where domestic life was a valid part of state action and where the definition of citizens therefore needed to reflect those wider interests. The concerns of the Earl of Halsbury were being turned on their head. The language of citizenship and governance no longer needed to be the language of conflicts or commerce - sentiment was a legitimate consideration in the developing welfare state.

That does not mean bringing sentimental decision making into public life was acceptable to all. When women were finally admitted to the House of Lords in the 1950s there was a striking echo of Halsbury, as Lord Chatfield argued against the principle, suggesting 'we all know that women may not make good debaters. They are, by nature, it may be said, more inclined to argue and to refuse to hear what the other person says than are men. They are also, perhaps, inclined to be sentimental rather than reasonable². The acceptance that women were suited to public life would be a slow affair. It was, however, part of wider change in the relationship between the state and citizens.

¹ Hansard, *HL Deb*, 12 June 1907, vol. 175 cc1355.

² Hansard, *HL Deb* 17 December 1957 vol. 206 cc1210

The voices of women campaigning for a Parliamentary vote in the late nineteenth century emphasised growing demands for fairness and equal recognition, but could do so whilst arguing that their voice was needed because it was different. Thus, Jane Lewis reminds us, Millicent Fawcett wanted to see women keep 'your womanliness, your love for children, your care for the sick, your gentleness, your self-control, your obedience to conscience and duty'.³ In many respects the increasingly domestic agenda of local government gave inter-war women the ideal opportunity to do just that. They were finally granted the opportunity to become councillors and take on other civic roles at a time when all political parties were emphasising the importance of wives and mothers as part of their election campaigns. Domestic matters were centre stage. Yet women did not join local government in huge numbers.

In earlier decades women had negotiated the right to participate as Poor Law guardians or on school boards and did so in more significant numbers. As Hollis notes, their position on those bodies became increasingly politicised as the distribution of relief extended from being another form of localised charity to broader questions of redistribution.⁴ For a small number of women being a local councillor became part of the feminising of a changing political agenda. Accepting the extent of the renegotiation that was needed to bring about such a cultural shift helps explain the slow pace of change. Councils and gatekeepers to council elections did not just need to accept women members; they needed to accept the special interests of women as at the core of their activity and change language and behaviour to suit.

³ Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870 – 1950* (Sussex, Wheatsheaf books, 1984), p.95.

⁴ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1987), pp.294-298.

The consequence, to summarise the findings of the first aim of this work, was that progress was both slow and patchy, with around 1,400 individual women in total elected to these councils in the twenty-year period. Other women were prepared to stand as candidates and in all around 4,000 women may have taken part in these high profile local elections in some way. Four hundred of them can be singled out as having a significant and influential level of local government service. This is a low proportion and is also low given the extent of both pre-war feminist activities and earlier elected roles. It is also a small part of women's activism in the period. What is more significant though is that numbers were so patchy. At the extremes there is a contrast between the good representation of influential women on the LCC in 1934 and the position on other major county councils such as Durham and Kent where representation was negligible. There is some limited evidence that such patchiness has persisted through to more recent times, emphasising the cultural complexity that explains unequal representation.

Those women elected were sometimes undertaking a very lonely role as the sole elected female member on a committee or sometimes a council. Their lives must have been made at least a little easier by the presence of co-opted women required to give an accepted voice on areas where women had special knowledge. The prevalence of co-option forms part of one of the many explanations of why numbers remained low, for through specialised co-option, participation in lobbying groups or more general membership of women-only organisations, women were finding a range of ways to make their voices heard. Although some chose to move (or were invited to move) from co-option to elected office others were content in another niche, or more frequently moving from one niche to another as campaigns ebbed and flowed. The rigid structures of local government were not the natural place for that style of operation.

The prevalence of co-opted women forms part of the findings surrounding the second aim of this work, seeking to assess the backgrounds of women coming forward for election. Previous experience gained through co-option was in itself a sign of the social acceptability of individual women and often reflected a wider role in local philanthropy or a degree of political activism. Co-option also reflected a view that it was a women's specialist voice, not equal representation that was needed. On the more rural county councils women were more likely to remain as co-opted members rather than seeking election. This indicates another cause of low representation in that to win an election the first prerequisite was that communities and the local press had to be satisfied there was a need to have an election. Tolerated incumbency happened in Labour controlled County Durham, but was even more prevalent in those areas where Labour was yet to make a significant presence. Where Labour did seek candidates separate women's organisations could find themselves excluded from the process, but if women were already present in positions of local political leadership they could be called upon to take up candidacy. As a result the early examples of Labour women councillors showed similar characteristics to those who stood on a variety of non-Labour platforms, but with a more politicised edge. They were all immersed in voluntary activity and wider civic life, but with Labour women directing that activity to political causes rather than just benevolent social work. Familial ties could also give women some knowledge of local government work and in some towns and cities support from all-women organisations was important.

Because they already had a degree of social standing, once elected a small number of women could remain as councillors for some time and did find it possible to penetrate positions of power fairly quickly. In some instances such as education sub-committees men were happy to leave the detailed time consuming work to

women, but as indicated by the rise in numbers of women mayors, sometimes it was their community leadership itself being recognised.

In carrying out their role as mayors women used the opportunity to promote the case of wives, mothers and elderly people whilst still carrying out more traditional mayoral tasks. The perception though was that women councillors had a special role. If that included the gentle womanly approach Millicent Fawcett envisages then local politics was gaining a great deal even if it was concentrated in particular areas of work. As illustrated by discussion on birth control, housing and the rights of married women to work, specialisation did not mean women councillors avoided tough issues even if they did approach them in a gentler way.

Consideration of the third aim then, of determining how far women retained separate spheres or participated in wider council activity, becomes a task of measuring a blurring line. Women continued to promote their special interests but in a less segregated arena and focusing on the emerging domestic-centred state.

The limited numbers of women elected might give the initial appearance their views were marginalised. Being heard was not easy, as illustrated in the struggle to achieve the right to work after marriage even in Labour's progressive LCC. Yet pioneering women needed strength of character to be heard, a direct result of their limited number. It is difficult to describe them as being confined to the side-lines whether measuring on personality, commitment to duty or achievement. Gentleness was no doubt present in their everyday actions, but drive and determination are talents they also required. Because they needed to be strong and experienced politicians or social leaders to make an impact in this very male world some women councillors show a remarkable tenacity and staying power. The appearance of powerful women in places like Oldham followed by a gap in representation suggests women sometimes did not provide good role models. Their strong personalities or negotiated social standing could not be replicated by the many women taking an

interest in community life through membership of women's groups or through joining political parties. There are some exceptions, but on the whole being a councillor remained the provenance of privileged and experienced women leaders.

The low numbers of women involved could be seen as contributing to analysis that suggests women's activism was in decline in the 1920s and 1930s. Women were making very slow progress in infiltrating councils and remained focused on their domestic agenda. Nevertheless there are some aspects that point to the opposite view. Firstly, women did particularly well in the highly politically charged atmosphere of London elections. Some women were clearly not shying away from party politics. Where they had a sophisticated and supportive established party machine as in Kensington and Bermondsey they could achieve levels of representation some council still find difficult to manage now. There were barriers to better representation outside London, but those barriers were complex in nature and reflected continuing general assumptions about the role of elites in democracy as much as any assumptions about women *per se*.

The second key factor has to be the changing nature of political action itself. As illustrated by looking at work on welfare, education and housing, the need to rebuild the nation placed domestic politics centre stage. Women councillors remained concentrated on particular committees, but the relative importance of those committees was changing. Women councillors were able to network with women lobbyists, often activists they knew from other roles, to bring about change. Those women who took on the tasks of reforming education or building family centred communities were reflecting the needs of the nation.

As a result some enduring and remarkable images emerge, not all of them in locations we might expect. Sadly as this thesis set out to look at how widespread women councillors were, where they came from and what their roles were, it has not collected a solid set of evidence about their legacy. That remains a topic to be

explored in greater depth at a local level. Perhaps there is a challenge here for all. The next time we walk past a 1920s baby clinic or ponder over the setting of a 1930s technical school we should make a commitment to find out how it got there. The grandiose Victorian civic architecture municipal history tends to focus on belongs to the city fathers of an earlier generation. The fabric of early twentieth century municipal welfare owes something to our city mothers – sometimes as civic leaders, but also as campaigners and lobbyists. The legacy is not just a physical one though. It can be found in a plethora of charitable trusts, clubs and societies and in the shape of the welfare and education systems that evolved.

The notion that evolution is a gradual affair is reinforced by starting with Charlotte Keeling – an enduring figure who remains intriguing as it has been impossible to trace a visual image of her. The limited coverage of her thirty years of public service in either academic study or local newspapers is typical of many of her contemporaries – and especially those who are not part of Labour history. Her contribution to welfare was to continue the traditions of her Victorian predecessors well in to the 1930s with an emphasis on rescuing children and correcting mothers. The unmarried daughter living with parents, siblings and servants, she represents a class of socially and politically elite women Conservatives. Auchterlonie argues those women should not be written out of suffrage history and neither should they be written out of twentieth century feminist history. Her legacy can be found in the maternity unit and modernisation at St Mary Abbots hospital – work she is likely to have helped fund as well as campaign for.⁵

The welfare of children was at the heart of the work of others in local government, some drawn from a very different background to Charlotte Keeling. The work of Phoebe Cusden in promoting the nursery school helps highlight the

⁵ *Kensington News and West London Times*, 13 December 1935.

variation in the philosophy of welfare, for here collective responsibility was promoted rather than correcting or ameliorating individual action. In recognising that ‘it is only rarely that the needs of the whole child – physical, mental, spiritual – can adequately be met in the home’ Labour pioneers like Phoebe Cusden were paving the way for an even more centralist response to welfare.⁶ Her background was rural and artisan rather than industrial working-class, not unusual amongst the women traced. Married to a fellow Labour activist they both turned their hands to a variety of activities to further the cause on a limited budget. She combined some paid work with her substantial council and voluntary activity. Her legacy could also be traced to some buildings, but more durable benefits can also be found in her work in the immediate aftermath of 1945 in which she persuaded Reading to twin with Dusseldorf to support impoverished German children. This application of welfare idealism to a wider international scene all the more striking, coming as it did from a woman unlikely to have experienced any form of foreign travel in her younger life.⁷

If women made use of opportunities to work in their neighbourhoods on behalf of the council, then one final enduring image must be that of Margaret Beavan. Her legacy includes the records that remain from her personal initiative to bring together those 1928 women mayors. It has provided one of the few collective visual images of women councillors. Margaret also found time in her mayoral year to invite parties of mothers and babies into the mayor’s parlour. Not only were women taking the council out into the community, here were ordinary citizens being brought into the council. That particular visual image should sit alongside discussions of language and policy as a reminder of how women were changing the very image of municipal life and starting the path to a more feminised politics – changes not just in what the

⁶ Adam Stout, *A Bigness of Heart, Phoebe Cusden of Reading* (Reading, Reading-Dusseldorf Association, 1997, p.37.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 53 – 63.

state tried to do, but changes too in the way it operated as women took those steps into citizenship.

Some women may have only experienced that changed relationship with citizenship through their use of the new welfare centre, through those parties organised by Margaret Beavan in the council chamber, or through exercising their own right to vote. They may not have noticed it, but their experienced was being enriched by women who chose to seek election. Around 1,400 of them participated at the frontline of local government. It was a small step towards bigger goals of equality– and goals that perhaps were not always recognised. Those 1,400 women remain individuals of variety and not all would display the resilience and commitment illustrated above, but very few of them would qualify for the modern description of ‘token’. Yet as one commentator noted, what seemed to be accepted in this era was not the need for equality, but the need for a woman’s voice on particular topics. ‘...we are only just emerging from the stage at which one put on a woman. You find they mention “the” woman councillor and not “a” woman councillor’.⁸ Logan goes on to describe the women (magistrates and councillors) as being the ‘statutory’ woman – a reference perhaps to the practice of co-option which ensured a limited level of representation by statue.

The progress then in electing women to local government was slow and concentrated in some areas. The patterns that emerged stemmed from a series of overlapping factors, with social standing as relevant as political representation and incumbency providing a cultural barrier alongside the more widely recognised ones of political participation or practical ability to travel. The hypothesis set out at the start of this work, that whilst changes to the franchise and the growth of party politics in local elections influenced the range of women seeking local office, cultural

⁸ Quoted in Anne Logan, ‘In Search of Equal Citizenship: the campaign for women magistrates in England and Wales, 1910-1939’ *Women’s History Review*, 16:4, p. 512.

and geographic factors and the type of council had far more influence on the levels of success has perhaps just one missing factor. That is that cultural and geographic factors woven in with the nature of the council itself not only affected levels of electoral success, they also affected the extent of candidacy.

Examination of the backgrounds of women elected and the factors that influenced them in standing for election therefore need to recognise the reality of place and community. The most useful guidance on this perhaps comes from Sam Davies for as he states, it would be wrong to generalise from a small number of case studies. We should not start with one case study as the norm and then assess how other examples differ from it. 'Local studies taken on their own become a collection of empirical data, and they must still be put into a national or a wider context to have historical meaning'.⁹ A wide collection of case studies here supplemented by previous academic work does help to illustrate the extent of diversity. Some of it, like the variation in representation between Manchester and Salford can only be explained by combining more local information and placing it in the wider context. The degree of radical heritage of the two communities, the strength of female organisation and the nature of the local elite along with political and practical factors will all have combined to make a difference.

Each community also finds itself affected to varying degrees by the widespread social and economic changes that faced local government of the 1920s and 1930s. There is one image that sums up the extent of that. When Margaret Cole claimed she gained a better picture of local government from fiction rather than historians the work of Winifred Holtby was probably foremost in her mind.¹⁰ Prominent in the story of *South Riding* are the areas of changing public provision that have featured in this work. Town planning schemes are to bring about new council housing to

⁹ Davies and Morley *County Borough elections* vol. iii p.6. and vol. I p.2.

¹⁰ Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* (London, Collins, 1940).

replace the slum dwellings, the girls school has a new mistress to encourage greater female ambition and health, education, housing and social welfare concerns come together in the story of Lydia Holly, trying to cope with running the family after the premature death of her mother, who may have been protected from early death in childbirth had there been access to contraception.

Author Winifred Holtby admitted the *South Riding* character of Alderman Mrs Beddows owed a great deal to her mother, although there are some key differences between the two. Alderman Mrs Beddows is the only woman councillor who has a mention in *South Riding* and education is amongst her prime interests. Mrs Alice Holtby was the first woman elected to the East Riding County Council, gaining her seat in a by-election in Cottingham resulting from an aldermanic appointment in February 1923. Her candidacy is promoted as resulting from her excellent local record of public service with no mention of party politics on behalf of her or her opponent. She has served on hospital committees and the Local War Pension Committee and is co-opted on to the County Council Insurance Committee.¹¹ At the time of her election, there are a few other women co-opted to various council committees, with one co-opted member, Mrs Eyre chairman of the mental deficiency committee.¹² After a month Councillor Mrs Holtby is joined by Mrs Southcott, also elected in an aldermanic by-election.¹³ Council records and her obituary show Mrs Holtby interested primarily in the care of the sick and vulnerable with membership of committees such as the Care of the Mentally Defective.¹⁴ Her commitment to the council is rewarded and in 1934 she is selected as the first woman alderman in the East Riding. Alice Holtby does warrant a brief obituary and there is some limited

¹¹ *Beverley Guardian* 17 February 1923 and 24 February 1923.

¹² East Riding of Yorkshire Archives and Records Service, (EYA) Minutes of the East Riding County Council (YE/352).

¹³ *Beverley Guardian* 10 March 1923.

¹⁴ *Beverley Guardian*, 01 August 1939. (A similar version appears in a scrapbook held by EYA (DDX 1305/32) and includes comments from Vera Brittain describing her affectionate character and vital energy – newspaper origins unknown).

coverage of her background in reporting her initial election. She does, however share one other characteristic with many other women who feature here. She resigned from the council in 1936, but neither council records nor the local newspaper make more than a passing reference to her resignation. She simply fades into obscurity, other than in the indirect references to her work in her daughter's fictional account of county life. Researching women councillors with a variety of lives make it difficult to label any one individual as typical, and yet in her experiences and interests Mrs Alice Holtby does represent a particular breed of women councillors who did survive well into the 1930s but who frequently go unrecognised in historical analysis that either examines how women participated in political life or focuses on the urban area.

It is in the fictional account of Alderman Mrs Beddows that we find the best representation of these committee women. She is there constantly, not quite in the foreground, but forcefully expressing opinions and influencing events. By the end of the story the *new woman*, the school head Sarah, recognises the value of her mentor and minder and saw the 'gaiety, that kindness, that valour of the spirit, beckoning her on from a serene old age'.¹⁵

Like several counties and county boroughs, the East Riding of Yorkshire did not build on the pioneering work of Alice Holtby and reached 1938 with just one or two elected women. Women were no doubt making an impact there with the determination exhibited by Alderman Mrs Beddows of *South Riding*. No doubt they also faced some of the practical difficulties she displayed in trying to attend far flung meetings and finding time to fit her attention to detail around family demands. As a middle-class full time alderman fictitious Mrs Beddows perhaps had a little more practical support than the often quoted councillor Hannah Mitchell, conscious that

¹⁵ Winifred Holtby, *South Riding*, p.589.

'even when men are willing for their wives to take on public work, they never seem to understand that this can't always be done between mealtimes'.¹⁶

The practical difficulties women faced in seeking election as councillors and then going about council business are though, only part of a hidden story. As important are those examples of success, of longevity and determination from a variety of class and political perspectives. Even though social standing may be as important as political activism in creating ambition there is a need to recognise the achievements of that small band of women who succeeded in breaking down barriers to stand on behalf of political parties. The extent to which women thrived in the intense political battles of London calls into question the suggestion, based on too limited information, that they preferred standing as independents.¹⁷

The common feature that links together these very diverse individuals includes tenacity and a public spirit, but also includes a common agenda of concern for family life. Perceived solutions to problems differed, but the drive to find solutions was unceasing. The language of separate spheres may have still dominated, stressing that women were needed because they had a special role. That focus on the domestic was still apparent, but as Winifred Holtby recognised, as everyday life became the central topic of the council agenda the old order was breaking down. Part of that change included the diverse ways in which women interpreted their new roles as citizens, sometimes rejecting the subordination of separate spheres but more frequently championing the value of home, health and welfare because of their special sphere.

Alderman Alice Holtby, rewarded for her dutiful voluntarism, epitomised the women of the old social order where respectable women could include elected

¹⁶ G. Mitchell, (ed.) *The Hard way up. The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel*, (London, Virago, 1977), p.203.

¹⁷ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999 Second Edition* (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 2000), p.58.

office as part of a package of obligation. Daughter Winifred took on the editorial role on *Time and Tide* just a few years after her mother was first elected as a councillor. She was to use her editorial role and her fiction to promote a different approach of feminist Labour politics that epitomised the change that was underway. Looking at mother and daughter, the lesson of this research is not that one supplanted the other, but that the approaches both represented continued to have influence on the lives of ordinary people through local government work well into the twentieth century.

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Councils covered by the study

London Boroughs

1. Battersea
2. Bermondsey
3. Bethnal Green
4. Camberwell
5. Chelsea
6. Deptford
7. Finsbury
8. Fulham
9. Greenwich
10. Hackney
11. Hammersmith
12. Hampstead
13. Holborn
14. Islington
15. Kensington
16. Lambeth
17. Lewisham
18. Paddington
19. Poplar
20. St Marylebone
21. St Pancras
22. Shoreditch
23. Southwark
24. Stepney
25. Stoke Newington
26. Wandsworth
27. Westminster
28. Woolwich

**County Councils
(England)**

1. Bedfordshire
2. Berkshire
3. Buckinghamshire
4. Cambridge
5. Cheshire
6. Cornwall
7. Cumberland
8. Derbyshire
9. Devon
10. Dorset
11. Durham
12. Essex
13. Gloucestershire
14. Hampshire
15. Herefordshire
16. Hertfordshire
17. Huntingdonshire
18. Isle of Ely
19. Isle of Wight
20. Kent
21. Lancaster/ Lancashire
22. Leicestershire
23. Lincoln, parts of Holland
24. Lincoln, Kesteven
25. Lincoln, Lindsey

26. London (LCC)
27. Middlesex
28. Monmouthshire
29. Norfolk
30. Northamptonshire
31. Northumberland
32. Nottinghamshire
33. Oxfordshire
34. Rutland
35. Shropshire/ Salop
36. Soke of Peterborough
37. Somerset
38. Staffordshire
39. Suffolk, East
40. Suffolk, West
41. Surrey
42. Sussex, East
43. Sussex, West
44. Warwick
45. Westmorland
46. Wiltshire
47. Worcestershire
48. York, East Riding
49. York, North Riding
50. York, West Riding

**County Councils
(Wales)**

1. Anglesey
2. Brecknockshire
3. Caernarvonshire
4. Cardiganshire
5. Carmarthenshire
6. Denbighshire
7. Flintshire
8. Glamorgan
9. Merionethshire
10. Montgomeryshire
11. Pembrokeshire
12. Radnorshire

Appendix One

County Boroughs

1. Barnsley	29. Eastbourne	57. Reading
2. Barrow	30. Exeter	58. Rochdale
3. Bath	31. Gateshead	59. Rotherham
4. Birkenhead	32. Gloucester	60. Salford
5. Birmingham	33. Great Yarmouth	61. Sheffield
6. Blackburn	34. Grimsby	62. Smethwick
7. Blackpool	35. Halifax	63. South Shields
8. Bolton	36. Hastings	64. Southampton
9. Bootle	37. Huddersfield	65. Southend on Sea
10. Bournemouth	38. Ipswich	66. Southport
11. Bradford	39. Kingston upon Hull	67. St Helens
12. Brighton	40. Leeds	68. Stockport
13. Bristol	41. Leicester	69. Stoke-On-Trent
14. Burnley	42. Lincoln	70. Sunderland
15. Burton-On-Trent	43. Liverpool	71. Swansea
16. Bury	44. Manchester	72. Tynemouth
17. Canterbury	45. Merthyr Tydfil	73. Wakefield
18. Cardiff	46. Middlesbrough	74. Wallasey
19. Carlisle	47. Newcastle	75. Walsall
20. Chester	48. Newport	76. Warrington
21. Coventry	49. Northampton	77. West Bromwich
22. Croydon	50. Norwich	78. West Ham
23. Darlington	51. Nottingham	79. West Hartlepool
24. Derby	52. Oldham	80. Wigan
25. Dewsbury	53. Oxford	81. Wolverhampton
26. Doncaster	54. Plymouth	82. Worcester
27. Dudley	55. Portsmouth	83. York
28. East Ham	56. Preston	

Pen Portraits of selected women councillors

**ADLER, Henrietta (Nettie),
Liberal (Progressive),
LCC 1910 – 1925 and 1928 – 1931.**

Nettie Adler gained her LCC seat in Central Hackney in 1910, the first opportunity for women to stand as candidates after legislation clarified their rights. Adler and Susan Lawrence were the two women elected. She had been co-opted to the council's education committee five years previously and had considerable experience as a school manager. Her social work and education experience reflected an orthodox and middle class Jewish background but her choice of politics played a part in disagreements with her father. Although her Liberal politics were declining in influence on the LCC she remained an influential figure herself and by 1922 had become deputy chairman of the council. Her skills and knowledge were also in demand outside the council where she worked as a JP with a special interest in juvenile delinquency. Her many national committees included the committee on wage earning children and the boards of many Jewish and non-Jewish charities. Although she stood down from the LCC in 1931 she remained a co-opted member of the Public Health committee until 1934, the year in which she was awarded the OBE.

SOURCES: Geoffrey Alderman, 'Adler, Henrietta (1868–1950)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57022>, accessed 23 Sept 2011].
Law, *Political Dictionary*, p.11.

**ARNOLD, Miss Alice,
Labour,
Coventry County Borough 1919 – 1955.**

Alice Arnold was born in the Coventry workhouse in 1881. Her parents moved between low paid and often seasonal jobs. Arnold worked in factories from the age of 10 and spent part of her early life in lodgings with a married sister. She joined the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) before World War One and was active in union organisation. Her successful council election in 1919 was union sponsored. By 1922 she was the only Labour member to retain her seat. She remained one of few Labour representatives during the 1920s and became mayor as Labour took control in 1937. Despite her strong socialist commitment and popularity with voters Hunt considers she remained an outsider in Coventry Labour politics. This was in part due to her single status and need to work alongside being a councillor, which meant she was distanced from the social activities of Labour married women. Local politics was also dominated by male skilled trade unionism.

SOURCE: Cathy Hunt, 'Everyone's Poor Relation': the poverty and isolation of a working-class woman local politician in interwar Britain', *Women's History Review*, (2007, 16.3).

**BROUGHTON, Ada,
Labour,
Bermondsey London Borough 1919 –
1922.**

Ada Broughton came to Bermondsey in 1918 having been active in the suffrage movement in the North-East. For three years she was chief organiser of the County of Northumberland British Women's Temperance Association. Although her time as an elected member of Bermondsey was short, Ada Broughton was a valuable member of the Labour team, and was chosen as an Alderman after her defeat in 1922. She was then appointed chairman of Maternity and Child Welfare Committee. She had previously acted as Labour group whip, and was known as a forceful speaker. At one stage she was local women's organiser of the ILP, going on to join the Labour Party Women's Advisory Committee and becoming secretary of the local women's section. She believed firmly in the political opportunities women gained through citizenship and in the role of women's sections in training women to understand power.

SOURCES: *South London Press*, 23 February 1934; *Bermondsey Labour News* October 1920 and March 1922. Southwark Local Studies Library, Bermondsey council minutes books, vol. 20 1919-20 and vol. 23 1922-23.

**COURTAULD, Katherine Mina,
Essex County Council, 1919 – 1935.**

Katherine Courtauld was one of a prominent local manufacturing family who were originally Huguenot refugees. Several members of the family were known as benefactors or for various forms of public service. Katherine joined the County Council with experience as a parish councillor (since 1894) and school manager. She was a successful farmer and her interest in agriculture influenced her work as a County Councillor. Katherine Courtauld was also involved in suffrage before her election, both as a committee member of the Women's Local Government Society and as Secretary of the North West Essex branch of the NUWSS.

SOURCES: *Essex County Standard* 15 March 1919. *The Essex who and where* (Benham and co, Colchester 1909). Essex Record Office, Minutes of Essex County council.

More pen-portraits are available in electronic format

Pen Portraits of selected women councillors

CRESSALL, Mrs Nellie Frances,
Labour,

Poplar Borough council 1919 – 1965.

Nellie Cressall started her married life in Limehouse founding a branch of the Independent Labour Party with her husband. Her political activism grew alongside her work on suffrage issues where she was influenced by Sylvia Pankhurst. Her remarkable political achievements coincided with raising eight children. When disputes over relief of the poor in Poplar led to councillors being served with writs and taken to jail Nellie was pregnant with her sixth child at the age of thirty-eight. As husband George was also to be jailed special arrangements were made for the children. All five women councillors were arrested together (Susan Lawrence, Julia Scurr, Nellie Cressall Minnie Lansbury and Jennie Mackay) and taken to Holloway. Public outcry and the imprisonment of pregnant Nellie eventually lead to release. She refused offers of release on health grounds unless her colleagues were also released. Despite her ordeal Nellie continued as a councillor for many decades and became mayor in 1943.

SOURCES: Noreen Branson *Poplarism 1919-1925 George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt.* (Lawrence Wishart, London 1984).

CUSDEN, Mrs Phoebe,
Labour,
Reading County Borough 1931 – 1947
then alderman until 1949.

Phoebe and husband Albert were at the heart of Labour politics in Reading from their marriage in 1922. Both were Poor Law guardians from 1919, and Phoebe failed to take a council seat in the same year. Albert was elected to the council, but she failed in early attempts. Born in Reading, her childhood involved several moves as her father looked for work using his skills as a farrier. She left home around the age of 14 to work for a village postmaster and enrolled in adult education classes given by Edith Morley. In 1908 she took civil service exams in telegraphy. Increasingly a union activist she found herself one of very few women delegates to the Trades Council and Labour Representation Committee.

As a Poor Law guardian Phoebe became vice-chair of the Infant Poor Committee and was dubbed 'The Red Woman' by opponents. She stood down as a Guardian to raise her daughter, but also found time to fight unwinnable Parliamentary seats. In 1931 she was elected to the council seat vacated by Edith Sutton. Her council interest was education, but with Labour in opposition for most of the period her work needed a campaigning style. She is credited with achieving the introduction of school milk locally. She became involved with the nursery school

movement and in 1933 she took on a part-time paid role, helping to turn the Nursery School Association into an effective campaign. Campaigning for nursery facilities was also part of her council work.

Education was at the heart of her Mayoral speech in 1946 which coincided with a short period of Labour control in Reading. Her pacifism and internationalism were to help shape her legacy, as in her Mayoral year she launched an appeal for support for children in Germany followed by an official fact finding trip to Dusseldorf. Regular exchange visits and practical support started a long lasting town-twinning. Her links continued after she left the council when her focus was increasingly on internationalism, primarily through the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She received a high civic award on her final trip to Düsseldorf in 1977 aged about 90.

SOURCES: Adam Stout *A Bigness of Heart, Phoebe Cusden of Reading* (Reading/Dusseldorf Association, Civic Offices 1997).

DAWSON, Miss Agnes,
Labour,
LCC 1925 – 1937.

Agnes Dawson progressed through the teaching profession from being a pupil teacher, to head teacher of two London infants' schools where she championed the cause of Montessori education. Her involvement in the non-militant suffrage movement helped create her campaigning style (Oram p.170). That led to her activism within teaching unions, initially within the NUT but then playing a leading role in the campaign for the creation of the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT). It was in this role that she sought election as a Labour member of the LCC, with London NUWT members supporting her financially to enable her to give up her head teaching role to concentrate on council life full time.

Agnes Dawson took on a powerful role as Chairman of the LCC Finance and General Purposes committee when Labour gained control of the LCC in 1934. In this capacity she was able to influence discussions on the marriage bar operated by the LCC which forced many married women to resign on marriage. Agnes Dawson applied considerable pressure on Herbert Morrison and the LCC leadership to bring about the reversal of this policy.

Sources: Hilda Kean, 'Dawson, Agnes (1873–1953)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004
[tp://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53678](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53678), accessed 26 Sept 2011].
Oram, *Women teachers and feminist politics*, pp.170-171.

More pen-portraits are available in electronic format

Pen Portraits of selected women councillors

**EMMETT, Mrs Evelyn,
Conservative
LCC 1925 – 1934 (then co-opted)
West Sussex County Council 1946–67.**

Educated at St Margaret's School, Bushey, in Hertfordshire, and at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Evelyn Emmett pursued her political career as a widow alongside raising four children. First elected in 1925 as LCC member for North Hackney. JP from 1936. She was county organiser in Sussex for WVS and from 1945 she was chair of the Sussex county probation advisory committee. National roles included chairing the Conservative Party Women's Advisory Committee and member of the Home Office Probation Advisory Committee. In the 1950s she was a UK delegate to the United Nations general assembly—one of the few women who were not members of parliament to hold such a position. In 1955 she fulfilled her ambition to enter Parliament, representing East Grinstead in Sussex.

SOURCES: G. E. Maguire, 'Emmett, Evelyn Violet Elizabeth, Baroness Emmet of Amberley (1899–1980)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50059>, accessed 24 Jan 2011].

**EVE, Fanny Jean (Lady Trustram Eve),
Conservative,
London County Council 1919 – 1931.**

Lady Eve combined her work as a London County Councillor with leading roles in the National Council of Women of Great Britain, first as treasurer then as president in 1933. Her Conservatism and church work gave rise to several posts including, from 1917- 1928 as chairman of the Conservative Women's Reform Association. She was actively involved in Conservative politics in Bedfordshire from 1919. Initially elected as LCC member for Hackney she represented South Kensington from 1931 where she was also involved in local charity work. She held a number of important roles on the LCC at an early stage, including being appointed chairman of Parks Committee in 1923.

SOURCES: *The Times* 02 February 1934 (obit.). Law, *Political Dictionary* p.61.

**GOWER, Mrs Nellie,
Liberal,
Monmouthshire County Council 1924 –
1937+**

Nellie Gower, the wife of Rev Goronwy Gower of Pontypool was the first woman elected to Monmouthshire County Council. She was also active herself in church life and Liberal politics, standing as a Liberal Parliamentary candidate in

Pontypool. Alongside her County Council work she was also a member of the Urban District Council and a magistrate. Charitable work included starting the Women's Corps of the local St John Ambulance Brigade and British Legion (Women's Section). Other activities included successful work in encouraging the training of women in domestic work.

SOURCES: *Western Mail* 15 December 1932, (Representative women of Wales series compiled as LC:92, Cardiff Central Library).

**HOWARD, Lady Mabel (Mrs Henry Charles Howard).
Cumberland County Council 1914 – 1922,
alderman 1922 – 1943.**

Lady Mabel Harriet MacDonnell was the second daughter of the fifth earl of Antrim. Her marriage to Henry Charles Howard extended her family relationship to include duke of Norfolk. The hostess and her husband would regularly entertain distinguished guests at Greystoke and her pursuits included a love of hunting, with cricket featuring regularly in the castle. She inherited her husband's seat on Cumberland County Council when he died in 1914. He had been County chairman. She was unopposed in 1919 and 1922, and then joined the aldermanic bench. Her County council work, driven by her social position was only part of her wide involvement in County life around Penrith. Although her husband was briefly Liberal member for Mid Cumberland he resigned over the question of Home Rule. Lady Howard was said to have a progressive outlook often supporting Labour members of the council. Her council interests spanned health, education and agriculture but she was equally influential in promoting District Nursing, the Red Cross. As President of the local Women's Institute she became an inspiring leader of the movement in Cumberland. Other women's organisations also benefitted from her patronage and enthusiasm, including the WRVS and the Girl Guides. Her elected role started as a Poor Law guardian and she played an active part in welfare work of a wide variety, including running a convalescent home and supervising other establishments for ex-servicemen during the Great War.

SOURCES: *Cumberland and Westmorland Herald*, 02 January 1943, 09 January 1943 and *Penrith Observer* 09 January 1943.

**KEELING, Miss Charlotte
Municipal Reform/ Conservative
Kensington London Borough 1912 – 1934
London County Council 1929 - 1934**

Charlotte Keeling already had over a decade of experience as a Poor Law guardian when first elected to Kensington council in 1912. She was to

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Pen Portraits of selected women councillors

dedicate her time to both and to local voluntary work. She remained an influential Guardian until the Board was abolished, working through the Guardians Women's Committee to deal with individual cases, maintaining moral standards and intervening in the cases of single mothers. Although several other women combined Poor Law and Council roles in Kensington (Amelia Hayne, Alice Carthew, Marie Fuller) Charlotte is acknowledged as providing a key link between the two. On the council she was promoted from chairman of Maternity and Child Welfare committee to chairman of Public Health Committee in 1922. Her political and charitable activities were equally extensive, the latter including over 30 years as a school manager and a place on the War Pensions Committee, along with work with the Red Cross. When narrowly defeated by Labour in the 1934 borough elections she was made Alderman, and combined this role with time representing Kensington on the London County Council until her death in 1935. A memorial plaque dedicated to her is to be found at St Mary Abbots Church, Kensington.

SOURCES: Kensington archives, KBC75, Parish of St Mary Abbots, Kensington, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Guardians* vol 12- vol25. Kensington archives, *Minutes of Kensington Borough council. Kensington News and West London Times*, 13 December 1935 (obit.), *The Times*, 11 December 1935 (obit.).

**LOWE Mrs Eveline Mary,
ILP/Labour,
LCC 1922 – 1946.**

Eveline Lowe was already established in public life in Bermondsey as a Poor Law guardian when she was widowed in 1919. Her husband George Carter Lowe worked alongside Alfred Salter in his progressive Bermondsey medical practice and the Lowes were at the centre of the development of the local ILP. Lowe was elected to the LCC in 1922 following three years as a co-opted member of Education Committee. She became chairman of Education Committee when Labour took control on in 1934. She was to go on to chair the LCC itself in 1939 during the jubilee year of the council, the first woman to take that role. Despite her pioneering role at a time when women had a good level of representation on the LCC her views on equality did not encompass any special treatment for women, putting efficiency before interests of gender.

SOURCES: David Howell, 'Lowe , Eveline Mary (1869–1956)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34609>, accessed 27 Sept 2011].

**MOSES, Miriam,
Liberal/ Independent,
Stepney Borough Council 1921 – 1934.**

Miriam Moses was the unmarried daughter of an immigrant tailor who also served on the council and board of guardians. When her father died in 1921 she stood for election in his former ward on Stepney Council. She was a popular choice with voters, and in 1931 was selected as the first female mayor in Stepney. Her council activity was combined with local practical work through organisations like the Children's Country Holiday Fund, the Whitechapel Tuberculosis After-Care Committee and Brady Girls' Club at Buxton Street School. Like her father before her she was also a guardian and active in local Jewish community life, where she campaigned for women's participation. In later life she was to found and become President of the League of Jewish Women

SOURCES: Sharman Kadish, 'Moses, Miriam (1884–1965)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/70162>, accessed 17 Feb 2011].

**OGILVY, Miss Diana Elizabeth Maria,
Independent,
Worcester County Borough 1929 – 1937+.**

One of three women who joined Worcester council at the same time and quickly made their mark. Diana Ogilvy had formerly been a Poor Law guardian, and her election coincided with the ending of Board responsibility. She was active in the Church of England Board for Moral Welfare Work. In November 1931, just two years after her election to the council she became the first woman mayor in Worcester, followed a few years later by her colleague Lady Atkins. When Diana Ogilvy was appointed mayor the 'historic occasion' was marked by the production of a commemorative 800 piece banqueting service for 100 persons by Royal Worcester Porcelain. Her mayoral year also included hosting a significant royal visit, with the Prince of Wales opening the improved road bridge and extended infirmary.

SOURCES: Worcester County Borough minute books 1929 – 1937; Worcester County archives record 899:749; *Berrows Worcester Journal* 26 October 1929.

**RIDLEY-SMITH, Mrs C (Emma Amy),
Municipal Reform/ Conservative
Westminster London Borough 1912 – 1934.**

The first woman elected to Westminster council, Mrs Ridley-Smith represented Knightsbridge St George ward until her death in 1934 at the age of 75. She had also been a member of the Board of Guardians. Her expertise in finance was recognised by the council who stated that as

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Pen Portraits of selected women councillors

chairman of the Rates and expenditure sub-committee 'she displayed qualities of firmness and fairness, tempered where the occasion demanded it, with clemency'. Her daughter Rosamund served as a member of the London County Council, whilst her husband had stood as a Conservative Parliamentary candidate.

SOURCES: Westminster local history library, minutes of Westminster council. *Report of deputy mayor* 12 October 1933 (p419). *The Times*, 20 September 1933. (obit.). *Westminster and Pimlico News*, 08 Sept 1933 (obit.).

ROYSTON, Mrs Elsie,
Labour,

Durham County Council 1925 – 1934.

Although Labour women had a high profile in County Durham, Elsie Royston was the only woman elected to the County Council before 1930. She was born in Scotland but raised her two children in Spennymoor. Mrs Royston already had experience of election to the Board of guardians. When she joined the County Council, she focused on education. Her work as a Guardian also led to her involvement in the detailed work of transfer when the Board was abolished. She was appointed alderman in 1934 after requests from the local women's section she had worked closely with.

SOURCES: *Who's who in County Durham* (Ebenezer Baylis and Sons, Worcester, 1936), Durham Archives CC/A1/1/25 Minutes of Durham County Council (January 1930), D/X/1048/1 Durham Labour Women's advisory council minute book. *Durham County News* 22 March 1934.

SALTER, Mrs Ada
ILP/ Labour

Bermondsey London Borough 1909 – 1912 and 1919 – London County Council 1925

Ada and husband Alfred Salter worked at the heart of the Bermondsey settlement, pursuing shared beliefs in socialism and pacifism. Initially active Liberals, they were to found the local ILP, with Ada initially elected to Bermondsey as an ILP representative. By the time she was chosen as the first Labour woman Mayor in the country (1922), Labour were on the way to long term dominance of Bermondsey council. Ada was able to pursue her desire for improving the local environment through the 'Beautification Committee'. Her desire for a greener local environment was as successful as limited local financial resources would allow, as was her drive to improve housing and maternity care. Interest in these issues eventually led her to vice-chairmanship of the LCC Environment Committee, and left a practical legacy in local parks. The Old English Garden in Southwark Park had been commonly known as 'Mrs Salter's

Garden' during her lifetime and was formally renamed the Ada Salter Garden in 1958.

SOURCES: Sybil Oldfield, 'Salter, Ada (1866–1942)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38531, accessed 24 Jan 2011].

SHARPE, Mrs Susan A.C.,
Conservative,
Portsmouth County Borough 1937 – 1953 then alderman.

When Mrs Sharpe came into political life in Portsmouth she was already well known locally, but unusually, not because of charitable work, but because of her former profession as a singer, through which she had taken part in concerts at the Guildhall. Those skills had also been evident earlier in her wartime charitable work entertaining. She was first elected in a by-election, and later suggested it was her husband, a retired naval officer and local engineer, who had persuaded her to stand. Her political role was already well established as president of her ward Conservative and Unionist Association. Once elected her work focused on the welfare of children and elderly people. When seeking re-election a year later with the threat of war making headlines she emphasised the need to spend on protecting the city from air raids rather than anything else. With women playing a limited role on Portsmouth council she found herself becoming the first woman to move a notice of motion in the council in 1953 – to oppose an unpopular day nursery. In the same year she became the first woman alderman in the city.

SOURCES: *Portsmouth Evening News* 28 October 1938, 15 July 1953, 11 June 1958.

SMITH, Lady Mabel,
Labour,
West Riding CC 1919 – 1928, then 1931 – 1933, Alderman 1928 – 1931 and post 1933.

The wife of Colonel William Mackenzie Smith and sister of the 7th Earl of Fitzwilliam, Lady Mabel was one of two women elected to the West Riding of Yorkshire council in 1919. Her career in Labour politics was a fruitful one, and in addition to her activities as a County Councillor she was to join Labour's National Executive Committee in 1932. She was influential in the growing WRCC Labour group from the outset, involved in election campaigning as well as policy development. She was well informed on education matters and contributed to the development of a progressive approach to education.

More pen-portraits are available in electronic format

Pen Portraits of selected women councillors

SOURCES: Doncaster archives, DS 36/1 records of WRCC Labour group 1919 – 1974, *The Times* 26 September 1951 (obit.), *Yorkshire Post* 03 March 1919.

**TABOR, Mrs Margaret,
Liberal,
Essex County Council 1931 – 1937, then
alderman.**

Margaret Tabor and her better known sister, Clara Rackham were both educated at Newnham College, Cambridge, and intensely involved with the suffrage movement. Both became Councillors, Clara in Cambridge, Margaret in Essex. When she was elected in 1931 Margaret Tabor had considerable experience in public life. She was also an author, with several publications reflecting her interest in art and church architecture, whilst others included biographies of pioneering women. She became president of Braintree and Bocking Women's Liberal Association in 1913 and was elected to the Braintree Board of Guardians in the same year. She was already a co-opted member of the County Education Committee. 1913 also saw her sharing a platform with her sister as part of local suffrage activity, where she also worked alongside Miss Courtauld, also to become an Essex County Councillor. Appointed as an alderman in 1937, she was to continue council work, focusing especially on education until 1949. Her experience included chairmanship of the education committee.

SOURCES: *Essex County Chronicle*, 21 and 28 February 1913, *Essex County Chronicle*, 2 May 1913, *Essex Weekly News*, 25 July 1913, *Essex Weekly News*, 12 February 1954 (obit). (from notes compiled by Janet Gyford, February 2005).

**TAWNEY, Miss Lily S.,
Conservative,
Oxford City Council 1918 – 1929 then
alderman 1929 – 1937 then co-opted.**

Miss Tawney was part of a well known family in North Oxford with a history of philanthropy and public service. A Poor Law Guardian who went on to chair the Public Assistance Committee she joined the City council in 1918 near the end of the suspension of elections. She was again uncontested in 1920 when the Women Citizens' Association in Oxford gave support to both Conservative and Liberal women. By 1926 when she fought her first contested election she headed the poll, a result attributed to loyal Conservative women canvassers. Lily Tawney was a founder member of the Oxford Council for Social Services which by the time of her death had a well established reputation for coordination of social work. Her charitable work in the Great War and developing social work in the early 1930's resulted in her appointment as the first woman mayor in

Oxford in 1933 when she was reputedly addressed as 'mistress mayor'. Although recognised for work with the poor and particularly on housing, unemployment and the provision of recreation space, she was also valued those with an academic interest in the city, as Chairman of Libraries Committee adding to sources of knowledge in the city.

SOURCES: *Oxford Times* 29 October 1920 and 05 November 1926; *The Oxford Magazine* 16 November; *Oxford Mail* 17 October 1947.

**TOWNSEND Mrs Mary Georgiana (Lady)
Conservative
Oxford City Council 1925 – 1967**

Both Mrs Townsend and her husband originated from Galway, Ireland. He was a prominent physicist based at the university. She joined the City Council at her third attempt – although both Liberal and Conservative interests had promoted successful women in Oxford at this time. Her council service lasted 42 years and included time as leader of the Conservative group and the council. She was three times mayor, serving two terms from 1935 after her potential successor was killed, and serving again in 1958 on the death of the sitting mayor. She also served as a magistrate and developed her initial interest in housing matters. Her interests and skills were wide ranging and one Oxford MP is said to have referred to her as 'Lady Town and Gownsend' on account of her ability to combine passion for the City with her university centred life. She died aged 96 having been made an honorary Freeman of the City.

SOURCES: *Oxford Times* 30 October 1925, 6 November 1925, 30 May 1986, (obit.)

**TRUBSHAW, Miss Gwendoline Joyce,
Carmarthenshire 1919 – 1937+**

Miss Trubshaw became chairman of Carmarthenshire County Council in 1937 and appears to be the first woman in England or Wales to take on that role. She was daughter of Ernest Trubshaw, manager of Western Tinplate works in Llanelli and lived comfortably in the family home for part of her time as a councillor. Her council activity was combined with a wealth of local social work with membership of several bodies at County and national level. She was awarded the CBE in 1920 for work as honorary secretary to the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association and became a DBE in 1938. Interests included Llanelli School of Art (chairman of governors) and West Wales Joint Board for Mental Defectives (chairman).

SOURCES: Dr Mary Auronwy James, Trubshaw, Dame Gwendoline Joyce, National Library of Wales, Dictionary of Welsh Biography on line.
<http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s2-TRUB-JOY-1887.html>
[accessed 04 April 2011]

More pen-portraits are available in electronic format

Pen Portraits of selected women councillors

**VICKERS, Mrs Katherine (Hon Mrs Douglas),
Conservative,
Westminster London Borough 1918 – 1944.**

The sister of Viscount Chetwynd, Mrs Douglas Vickers was influential in Westminster politics for over two decades. Her husband inherited the Sheffield firm of Vickers Ltd, initially cutlery but expanded into steel construction and armaments. Mrs Vickers was active in the Women's Section of the London Municipal Society alongside her council and charitable work. For three years she chaired Maternity and Child Welfare committee, focusing on this work. She also served on housing and valuation committees. She was a JP from 1931.

SOURCES: *West London Press*, 08 September 1944 (obit.). *The Times*, 25 November 1937.

**WIGAN, Miss Eleanor J.,
Kent County Council 1922 – 1930,
then alderman.**

Eleanor Wigan already had long standing experience of Kent County Council as a co-opted member of the education committee when she was first returned unopposed in 1922. She had first joined as a co-opted member when the education committee was formed in 1903, and also had experience as Guardian. The daughter of a local vicar, she had also been active in the work of the Parochial Church council and the County Nursing Association. She remained the only elected woman County Councillor in Kent until 1929. Her experience was valued, and she was vice-chair of education committee from 1928 – 1931. She was appointed alderman in 1929, a position she retained until 1945.

SOURCES: *Kent Messenger* 04 March 1922 and 11 March 1922.

E Melling *History of Kent County Council 1889 – 1974* (Maidstone Kent CC 1975).

**WRIGHT, Mrs Helen
Labour
Bolton County Borough 1929 - 1968**

First elected in a by-election in January 1929, Helen Wright was one of ten children in a local socialist family. Her early political career was with the ILP with some employment in teaching and secretarial work. By the early 1930's she was making her mark on Housing & Town Planning Committee, Education, and Public Health. Her hard work was renowned, and on her appointment as mayor in 1950 one paper suggested she had 'one of the best known phone numbers in Bolton'. By the time of her mayoralty she had been senior whip of the Labour group on the council and

chairman of education committee. Outside council she was a magistrate and served on the Lancashire mental Hospital Board. She had a national reputation for her work with the Holiday Fellowship providing accommodation and activity programmes for needy families. Despite an attendance record at council committees better than any other member she found time to be a keen gardener. She was created an honorary Alderman on 31 May 1968.

SOURCES: *Bolton Journal and Guardian* 26 May 1950, 17 February 1950; *Bolton News Chronicle* 23 May 1950; *Bolton Evening News* 23 May 1950.

www.boltonsmayors.org.uk/wright-h.html accessed 03 November 2009.

More pen-portraits are available in electronic format

Women councillors and candidates, selected London Boroughs

Key

Key	
X	Unsuccessful candidate
EU	elected Unopposed
E	elected
<EP	elected previous known byelection or pre-war election
B	beaten at election
S	stood down
D	died in service
A	Aldermanic service
EC>	elected with known later service

(those with more three or more election wins in bold)

source

Rallings and Thrasher collection

Lab – Labour

MR- Municipal Reform

Prog – Progressive

ALL – Alliance

CON – Conservative

COMM - Communist

Appendix 3

Women councillors and candidates, selected London Boroughs Bermondsey

Name	politics	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Stephens J	Lab	E	E	S				
Broughton A	Lab	E	B	A	A	D		
Gamble M	Lab	E						
Gledhill E	Lab	E						
Groves K	Lab	X		A	A	E	E	E
Salter A	Lab	<E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Bugnage E	MR	X						
Baker N	Prog/ALL	E	B					
Gregory E	MR	X						
Edwards R	MR	X		X				
Gale C	ALL		X					
Jagger H	ALL		X	E	E			
George E	Lab		E	E	E	E		
Langley J	Lab		E	E	E			
Thorpe L	Lab		E					
Wright K	Prog		X					
Nix M	Lab		E	E	E	E	E	
Brock S	ALL		X					
Humphreys N	Lab		E					
White E	Lab		X					
Newton A	Lab		X	E	E			
Randle E	Lab		X					
Virgo A	Lab			E				
Mason A	ALL			X				
Nicklin A	ALL/MR			X			X	
Powell F	Lab			E	E	E	E	E
Campbell E	ALL/MR/CON			X	X	X	X	X
Henrich M	Lab			E	E	X		
Baker E	ALL		X	X				
Amos S	Lab			E	E	E	E	E
Wallis A	ALL			X				
Woods E	ALL			X				
Payne K	ALL			X	X			
Norman A	Lab			X				
Stokes E	Lab			E	E	E		
Homewood M	Lab				E			
Witham M	Lab				E			
Shearing	ALL				X			
Purser	Lab				E			
Cox H	ALL				X			
Husk F	Lab				E	E	E	
Sweeney	ALL				X	X		
Fortescue A	Lab				E	E	E	

Women councillors and candidates, selected London Boroughs

Bermondsey (cont)

Name	politics	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Mallandian J	ALL				X			
Donovan J	Lab					E		
Coyle E	Lab					E	E	
Franklin L	Lab					E		
Bennett F	ALL					X		
Rouse E	ALL					X		
Hatcher A	Lab					E	E	
White L	Lab					E		
Hardy E	ALL/MR					X	X	
Merrells D	COMM					X		
Campbell F	ALL/MR					X	X	
Bray O	ALL					X		
Thackery	ALL					X		
Reed R	ALL/MR/CON					E	B	X
Bulwer E	ALL/MR/CON					X	X	X
Wilmott A	ALL/MR					X	X	
Bland C	ALL					X		
Scadeng	ALL					X		
Cobbold F	ALL					X		
Laker R	Lab						E	E
Ball F	MR/CON						X	X
Caney M	MR/CON						X	X
Hart J	MR						X	
Drewitt E	MR						X	
Smith R	MR						X	
Parkes E	MR						X	
Jeffreys B	MR						X	
Glasson L	Lab						E	E
Pitt A	Lab						E	
Green D	Lab							E
Snowdon J	Lab							E
Cushing M	Lab							E
Condon I	Lab							E
Budgen E	CON							X
Humphreys F	Lab							E
Card B	CON							X
Burrill V	CON							X
Watson D	CON							X
Wyllie H	CON							X
Pullar H	CON							X
Lowery M	Lab							E
Greenwood E	Lab							E
elected		6	7	11	15	15	12	13
total candidates		10	17	20	21	30	26	24

Women councillors and candidates, selected London Boroughs

Kensington

Name	politics	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Hayne A S	MR	<EP/EU	EU	EU	EU	S		
Brinton M D	MR	<EP/EU	EU	E	EU	EU		
Bentham Dr E	Lab	E	E	S				
Keeling C	MR	<EP	E	E	E	E	B	
Joseph M H	MR	EU	EU	E	S			
Fuller M	MR	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU	
Carthew A G	MR	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU	
Winter A H	MR	E						
Birks E A	Lab	X						
Guthrie G B	Prog	X	X	X				
Humphreys E C	Lab	E	E	S				
Percy K M	Prog	X						
Frere M	MR	E						
Davison S	Lab	X						
Jarrett A	Lab	X	X	X			E	E
Burton M K	MR	E	E	E	EU	EU		
Chitty J R	MR	E	E					
Brake B	Lab	X						
Wadley M W	Lab	X		X				
MacColl M H	Lab		X					
Spring-Rice M L	Prog		X					
Parker T	MR		X					
Drake B	Lab		X	X				
Pennefather E M	MR		E	E	E	E	E	
Kennard M	Lab		X					
Mitchell E I	Lab		X					
Piercy M L	Lab		X	X				
Laski F	Lab		X	X				
Cunnigham H M M	MR		EU	EU	EU	S		
Western M D	Prog			X				
Mosely C	Peo			X				
Cotton B A	Lab			X	X			
Pollock M	Lab			X	X			
Wise D L	Lab			X				
Fraser H	MR			E	EU	EU		
Goring-Thomas E	MR			E	EU	EU	EU	EU
Drysdale M	MR			EU	EU			
Beach C	Ind				X			
Beaumont F	Ind				X			
Maurice M	Ind				X			
Houston M	Ind				X			
Horsley E	Ind				X			
Price M	Lab				E	S		

Women councillors and candidates, selected London Boroughs

Kensington (cont)

Name	politics	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Percy A	MR				X			
Burns L A	Lab				X	X		
West K	Lab				X	X		
Glinwood G	Lab				X			
Wilson B	MR				EU	EU	EU	EU
Slee M	Lab					E	B	
Goodman M	MR					X	X	
Porlett A	MR					X		
Wild J	Lab					X		
Bradbury E	Lab					X	E	B
Owen B	Lab					X		
Wiltsher E	Lab					X		
Countess of Llimerick	MR					EU	EU	
Mellor I	MR					EU		
Gubbins R	MR						EU	EU
Burton M	MR						EU	
McLauchlan E	MR							E
Lockhart V	Lab							X
Fox G	Lab							X
Bosanquet L	MR							EU
Walford G	MR							EU
Worthington-Evans R	MR							E
Anderson E	Lab							X
Simeon J	Lab							X
Styles A	Lab							X
Palmer H	MR							EU
Elected		12	12	12	13	11	10	9
Total candidates		19	22	23	25	19	13	15

Appendix 3

Women councillors and candidates, selected London Boroughs

Poplar

Name	politics	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Mackay J	Lab	E	E	E	E			
Herbert E	ALL	X						
Scurr J	Lab	E	E					
March J	Lab	E	E	E				
Cressall N	Lab	E	E	E	E	EU	E	EC>
Phillimore C	MR		X					
Mudge E	MR			E	E			
Harris A	Lab			E	E	E	EU	EU
Stavers A	Lab			E	E	E		EU
Barnard E	MR			E				
Street M	Prog			X				
Lambert F	Lab			E	E		E	EU
Lockwood P	Prog			X				
Sadler L	Lab				X	EU	EU	EU
Coppen M	ALL				X			
Jones F	ALL				X	X		
Shepherd A	Lab				E	EU	E	E
Power M	Lab					EU		
Stadward E	Lab						E	
Sims E	Lab						EU	
Boutell C	ALL						X	X
Hanks A	ALL						X	
Doughty A	ALL							X
Evans A	ALL							X
elected		4	4	8	7	6	7	6
candidates		5	5	10	10	7	10	9

Women councillors and candidates, selected London Boroughs

Westminster

Name	politics	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Hon Mrs D Vickers	MR	EU	E	EU		E	E	E
R Dunn-Gardner	MR	E				E	EU	
Lady Edith Bradford	MR	EU	E	EU	EU	E		
Mrs A Ridley Smith	MR	EU	E	EU	EU	E		
Miss I F O Gascoigne	MR	E						
Hughes A	MR	E	E					
O'Sullivan H	MR	EU						
Odone F	MR		E	E	E	E	E	EU
Dutch	MR			E	EU	EU	E	
Graham E	Prog			X				
Bliss M	Prog			X				
Horne H	MR			E	E	E	E	E
Carlin M	LAB			X				
Starr K	LAB			X				
Harris H MBE	MR			EU	EU	E		
Mercer A	MR			E	E	E	E	E
Errington L	Prog			X				
Evans D	LAB				X			
Daines L	LAB				X			
Walker K	LAB				X			
Howard A	LAB					X		
Howard A	LAB					X		
Annesley C	LAB					X		
Biggs D	LAB					X	X	
Blacker D	MR							EU
Storrs C	MR							EU
Elected		7	5	8	7	9	6	6
Total candidates		7	5	13	10	13	7	6

Women County Councillors (English counties)

Bedfordshire		Amy	Walmsley
Bedfordshire	Mrs	L. B. M.	Fawcett
Berkshire	Mrs	E. M.	Bramwell Davis OBE
Berkshire	Mrs	V. E.	Benyon
Berkshire	Mrs	F. M.	Carteret-Carey OBE
Berkshire	Mrs	E.	Jarvis
Berkshire		H. L.A.	The Dowager Lady Mount OBE
Berkshire	Lady		Smith
Berkshire	The Hon	M.H.	Corfield OBE
Berkshire	Miss	W.	Toynbee
Berkshire	Mrs	J.M.	Taylor
Buckinghamshire	Mrs	A.J.	Broadbent
Buckinghamshire	Miss	M.A.L.	Grenfell
Buckinghamshire	Mrs	A.M.	Lehman
Buckinghamshire	Mrs	N.S.	Liston
Buckinghamshire	Mrs	B.H.	Boyce
Cambridge		Madeline	Adeane JP
Cambridge		Frances A. E.	Assheton JP
Cambridge		Elsbeth	Dimsdale
Cambridge		Jane	Andersen Scott
Cambridge		Lilian M. H.	Clark JP
Cambridge		Constance A.	Cochrane
Cambridge		Ellen	Briscoe
Cambridge		Mary	Carter
Cambridge		Clara	Rackham JP
Cambridge		Josephine R.	Wolf
Cheshire	Mrs	G.	Somerville
Cheshire	Miss	M.H.	Armistead
Cheshire	Miss	L.	Bromley-Davenport
Cheshire	Miss	A.L.	Bulley
Cheshire	Mrs	E.L.	Manbre
Cheshire	Lady	J.O.	Fildes
Cornwall	Mrs	A.M.	Blackwood
Cornwall	Miss	D.P.	Foster
Cornwall	Mrs	P.	Lanyon
Cornwall	Mrs	M.T.	Andrews
Cumberland	Lady	Mabel	Howard CBE
Cumberland	Mrs	C.F.L.	Thompson
Cumberland	Miss	D.J.	Hasell
Cumberland	Mrs	J.	Iredale
Cumberland	Mrs	Mary Isobel	Mason
Cumberland		Eleanor G.	Cain
Cumberland		Ethel	Appelby
Derbyshire	Mrs	M.	Ball
Derbyshire	Mrs	E.E.	Boam

Similar listings are available for other council types in electronic format

Appendix Four

Women County Councillors			
Derbyshire	Mrs	F.	Bourne- Wheeler MBE
Derbyshire		May	Cantrill
Devon	Mrs		Clifford
Devon	Mrs	J.M.	Phillips
Devon	Mrs	J.E.	Baker
Devon	Mrs	K.	Cartwright
Dorset	Mrs	Alice	Logan
Dorset	Mrs	Mabel	Mayo
Dorset	Mrs	K.R.	Balfour
Dorset	Miss	E.G.	Castleman-Smith MBE JP
Dorset	Mrs	A.	Comben
Dorset	Mrs	K.A.M	MacAndrew JP
Dorset	Miss	C.H.	Paterson JP
Durham	Mrs	E.M.	Royston
Durham	Mrs	S.	Mason
Essex	Miss	I.	Brown
Essex	Miss	K.M.	Courtauld
Essex	Miss	F.	Wilde
Essex	Mrs	J.H.	Lester
Essex	Mrs	C.B.	Alderton
Essex	Mrs	A.	Anderston
Essex	Mrs	C.C.	Chisholm
Essex	Mrs	E.M.	LeMare
Essex	Mrs	C.	Casterton
Essex	Miss	M.L.	Mathieson
Essex	Mrs	R.	McEntee
Essex	Mrs	M.	Sorensen
Essex	Miss	M.E.	Tabor
Essex	Mrs	B.W.	Williams
Essex	Mrs	L.F.M.	Evans
Essex	Mrs	I.M.	Husk
Essex	Mrs	E.	McAlister
Gloucestershire	Mrs	Minnie	Allen/ Landes Allen
Gloucestershire	Miss	C. L .	Ratcliff OBE
Gloucestershire	Mrs	M.	Hills
Hampshire	Miss	Ida	Chamberlain
Hampshire	Mrs	R.R.	Garrett
Hampshire	Mrs	R.S.	Madocks
Hampshire	Lady	Rosemary	Portal MBE
Hampshire	Miss	M.L.	Seymour
Hampshire	Mrs	Robert	Weir
Hampshire	Miss		Bather
Hampshire	Mrs	E.E.	Handcock
Hampshire	Mrs	I.R.	Humphreys-Owen
Hampshire	Mrs	E.A.	Weston

Similar listings are available for other council types in electronic format

Women County Councillors

Hampshire	Mrs Wilfred	Buckley
Herefordshire	Mrs D.E.	Dymond
Herefordshire	Miss M.M.	Armitage
Herefordshire	Miss N.K.	Ballard
Herefordshire	May R.	Dane
Hertfordshire	Miss M.B.	Blount
Hertfordshire	Miss E.E.R.	Bradford
Hertfordshire	Mrs G.E.	Attenborough
Hertfordshire	Mrs V.	Martin-Smith
Hertfordshire	Mrs P.	Fordham
Hertfordshire	Mrs Edith	Garrett MBE
Hertfordshire	Mrs M.C.	Fleming
Hertfordshire	Mrs A.E.	Wheelwright
Huntingdonshire	Mrs H.	Coote
Huntingdonshire	The Countess of	Sandwich
Huntingdonshire	Mrs L.	Scott- Gatty
Huntingdonshire	Mrs P.A.	Allen
Huntingdonshire	Mrs J.R.	Coote
Huntingdonshire	D.	Shepperson
Isle of Wight	Marion C.	Barton
Kent	Mrs M.M.	Deed
Kent	Miss E.J.	Miss E.J Wigan
Kent	Mrs A.J.	Chalmers
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs C.B.	Orme
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs K.M.	Fletcher JP
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs	Lomax
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Lady M.E.	Openshaw JP
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Miss C.	Whitehead JP
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs J.	Wilde, MA
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Lady A.F.P.	Worsley-Taylor JP
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs S.	Alker
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs A.	Bottomley
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs S.F.	McN Chapman
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs M.J.	Clepham
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Miss V.	Eastwood
Lancaster/ Lancashire	Mrs N.	Holland
Leicestershire	Miss E.M.	Warner
Leicestershire	Mrs A.G.	Marsh
Leicestershire	Mrs M.L.	Phillips
Lincoln, parts of Holland	Mrs E.L.	Mawer
Lincoln, parts of Kesteven	Mrs E.	Taylor
Lincoln, parts of Kesteven	Mrs L.	Basford
Lincoln, parts of Kesteven	Mrs S.A.	Barnes
Lincoln, parts of Kesteven	Mrs D.	Schwind

Similar listings are available for other council types in electronic format

Appendix Four

Women County Councillors		
Lincoln, parts of Lindsey	Ada C.	Baker
Lincoln, parts of Lindsey	Florence A.	Brackenbury
Lincoln, parts of Lindsey	Mrs A.M.	Piatt
Lincoln, parts of Lindsey	Margaret	Wintringham
Lincoln, parts of Lindsey	Mrs C.S.	Hooper
Middlesex	Edith.	How-Martyn
Middlesex	Mrs F.M.	Baker JP
Middlesex	Mrs G.	Barnes JP
Middlesex	Mrs M.M.	Fairfield JP
Middlesex	Mrs L.R.	Ithell JP
Middlesex	Mrs K.	Lovibond OBE JP
Middlesex	Mrs M.J.	Page
Middlesex	Mrs E.	Rhys JP
Middlesex	Mrs H.	Rothwell
Middlesex	Mrs B.S.	Rider
Middlesex	Mrs A.E.	Heath
Middlesex	Mrs M.C.	Mann
Middlesex	Mrs E.A.	Brooks
Middlesex	Mrs M.R.	Forbes
Middlesex	Mrs M.	Grey-Skinner
Middlesex	Mrs A.L.	Hollingsworth
Middlesex	Mrs J.D.	Lynch
Middlesex	Mrs E.M.	Squire
Middlesex	Mrs F.M.	Suggate Bsc MRSI
Middlesex	Dr Edith	Summerskill
Middlesex	Mrs A.M.	Weymark
Middlesex	Mrs M.E.C.	Dore
Monmouthshire	Mrs M.A.	Cooper
Monmouthshire	Edith L.	Clay
Monmouthshire	Mrs N.	Gower
Monmouthshire	Mrs M.A.	Booth
Norfolk	The Dowager Lady	Suffield,
Norfolk	Miss M.	Carr
Norfolk	Miss E.M.	Godfrey
Norfolk	Lady G.M.	Cook
Norfolk	Lady	Walsingham
Norfolk	Mrs E.M.	Gilbert
Norfolk	Miss M.	Cozens-Hardy
Norfolk	Mrs E.	Gooch
Northamptonshire	Miss Beatrice A.	Cartwright CBE
Northamptonshire	Mrs M.	Dallas
Northamptonshire	The Lady	Nunburnholme
Northumberland	Miss Helen	Aitchison
Northumberland	Mrs E.J.	Askwith
Northumberland	Mrs Helena M.	Fisher

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Appendix Four

Women County Councillors		
Northumberland	Miss	Constance H. Greet
Northumberland	Mrs	E. Handscombe
Northumberland	Mrs	Mary K. Middleton OBE
Northumberland	Mrs	M. Millar
Northumberland	Mrs	A. Allen
Northumberland	Mrs	G.P. Meikle
Northumberland	Miss	M. Taylor
Northumberland	Mrs	E. Veitch
Northumberland	Mrs	A.M. Wallace
Nottinghamshire	Mrs	B. Cox
Nottinghamshire	Mrs	A. Jeffries
Nottinghamshire	Mrs	K.L. Kayser
Nottinghamshire	Mrs	F.G. Stuart
Nottinghamshire	Mrs	C.A. Taylor
Oxfordshire	Mrs	S.B. Gillett
Oxfordshire	Mrs	M. Kettlewell
Oxfordshire	Miss	G.M. Ashurst
Oxfordshire	Miss	K.N. Dillon
Oxfordshire	Lady	Edmonson
Oxfordshire	Mrs	M.H. Hichens
Oxfordshire	Mrs	Alice Ward
Rutland	Miss	A.S. Brocklebank
Shropshire/ Salop	Miss	M.J. Rotton
Soke of Peterborough	Mrs	Palmer
Somerset	Mrs	Norah L.C. Hurle
Somerset	Miss	E.M.J. Barstow
Staffordshire	Mrs	C.E. Meakin
Staffordshire	Miss	Florence Thorneycroft OBE
Staffordshire	Mrs	M.J. Willetts
Staffordshire	Mrs	M. Powell
Staffordshire	Mrs	F.R. Deakin
Staffordshire	Mrs	E. Goodwin
Staffordshire	Miss	L. Hickman
Staffordshire	Miss	F.M. Lathe
Staffordshire	Mrs	S. Linney
Suffolk, East	Miss	A. Bernard
Suffolk, East	Mrs	E.A.M. Fison
Suffolk, East	Mrs	E.A. Haward
Suffolk, East	Miss	M.E. Short
Suffolk, East	Mrs	G. Wilson
Suffolk, East	Mrs	D.E.F. Hope
Suffolk, East	Miss	M. Mann
Suffolk, East	Mrs	A.M. Mitchell
Suffolk, West	Mrs	Fanny Marshall, JP
Suffolk, West	Mrs	I.S. Allen J.P.

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Appendix Four

Women County Councillors		
Suffolk, West	Miss Mary	Braithwaite JP
Suffolk, West	Mrs A.E.	Fairweather
Suffolk, West	Mrs A.F.P.	Glyn
Suffolk, West	Mrs E.P.	Greene JP
Suffolk, West	Mrs M.	Hitchcock
Suffolk, West	Mrs A.F.	Ramsay
Suffolk, West	Mrs J.	Sampson
Surrey	Mrs H.F.	Le Personne
Surrey	Mrs L.M.S.	Ede
Surrey	Miss E.M.	Hoole
Surrey	Mrs E.M.	Payne
Surrey	Mrs Grace E.	Skeats
Surrey	Mrs	Turton-Hart
Surrey	Mrs M.M.	Edwards
Surrey	Miss D.H.	Carver
Surrey	Mrs M.J.	Denny
Surrey	Mrs L.M.	de Worms
Surrey	Miss M.E.	Laurie
Surrey	Mrs C.	Randall
Surrey	Miss H.E.	Verrall
Surrey	Mrs H.	Walkden
Surrey	Miss D.	Weeding
Sussex, East	Mrs Christina	Meads
Sussex, East	Mrs E.	Richmond
Sussex, East	Miss Caroline G K	Scovell
Sussex, East	Mrs J.	Gow
Sussex, East	Miss A.E.	Hall
Sussex, East	Miss A.	Hudson
Sussex, East	Mrs C.M.	Scott
Sussex, West	Miss E.A.	Barnett
Sussex, West	Mrs Ellen	Chapman
Sussex, West	Mrs H.	Lintott
Sussex, West	Lady Muriel R.	Loder
Sussex, West	Miss Amelia E.	Payne
Sussex, West	The Duchess of	Richmond and Gordon CBE
Sussex, West	Miss Mary J.	Butcher
Sussex, West	Miss L.J.	Churchman
Sussex, West	Miss J.K.R.	Du Cane
Sussex, West	Mrs N.V.	Laughton
Sussex, West	Mrs M.E.	Lawson
Sussex, West	Mrs D.	Lloyd-Goring
Warwick	Mrs E.	Dykes OBE
Warwick	Mrs A.M.	West
Warwick	Mrs Eleanor	Melville
Warwick	Mrs A.M.	Hosking

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Appendix Four

Women County Councillors		
Warwick	Mrs A.H.	Moreton
Warwick	Mrs L.E.	Tibbits
Westmorland	Miss Mary E.	Noble
Westmorland	Mrs C.E.	Browne
Westmorland	Lady Maureen	Stanley
Wiltshire	Katie Josephine	Rogers
Wiltshire	Mary L.	Arnold-Foster
Wiltshire	Miss M.F.	Awdry
Wiltshire	Mrs J.C.	Pinniger
Wiltshire	Miss Katherine Janie	Stephenson CBE
Wiltshire	Lady	Hobhouse
Wiltshire	Mrs A.	Swanborough
Wiltshire	The Dowager Countess of	Radnor
Wiltshire	Lady Muriel	Coventry
Wiltshire	Mrs M.	Dale
Wiltshire	Mrs	Darling
Wiltshire	The Hon Lady Beatrice	Wickens
Wiltshire	Miss E.G.	Luce OBE
Wiltshire	Mrs R.	Scamell
Wiltshire	Mrs F.E.	Tonge
Worcestershire	Miss Catherine F.S.	Burrow
Worcestershire	Mrs Annie	Smith
Yorks., East Riding	Mrs A.	Holtby
Yorks., East Riding	Mrs A.K.	Southcott
Yorks., East Riding	Mrs	Wright JP
Yorks., East Riding	Mrs Gladys	Gow
Yorks., North Riding	Mrs C.S.	Turton
Yorks., North Riding	Mrs I.	Lonsdale
Yorks., North Riding	Mrs M.W.	Ringrose
Yorks., North Riding	Mrs I.B.	Shaw
Yorks., North Riding	Miss A.S.	Tindall
Yorks., West Riding	Lady Mabel F.H.	Smith
Yorks., West Riding	Miss Sarah E.	Cockshott
Yorks., West Riding	Mrs E.M.E.	Atkinson
Yorks., West Riding	Mrs M.	Heald
Yorks., West Riding	Mrs H.F.	Houldsworth
Yorks., West Riding	Mrs Jessie	Smith
Yorks., West Riding	Mrs Emily	Wragg MBE

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Appendix Five

LCC; Women councillors and candidates

Municipal Reform	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Lady Trustram Eve	E	E	E	E			
Mrs E Hopkins	E	E	E				
Mrs (Dame) Hudson-Lyall	E	E	E	E	E	X	
Miss R M Parsons		E					
Dr Adeline Roberts		E	E	E	E		
Mrs A Elliot		E	E	E			
Mrs Lankester		E					
Miss Rosamund Smith	X	E	E		E		
Mrs Dunn Gardner	X	E	E	E			
Miss Cazolet			E	E			
Miss J Hill			E				
Mrs E Emmett			E	E	E		
Mrs P Worsthorne			E	X	E		
Hon Lady Lawrence				E			
Miss Mary Smith				E			
Mrs M Goff			X	X	E		
Miss C Keeling					E	E	
Lady L J Cadman					E		
Dr Florence B Lambert					E		E
Mrs B Hornby						E	E
Mrs Gamble						E	
Miss Fulford						E	E
The Countess of Limerick			X				E
Miss J Vickers							E
Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan		X					
Miss Sturgess			X	X			
Dr Sophia Jevons				X	X	X	
Mrs M Glenn McCarthy				X			
Lady Amherst				X			
Mrs Mudge				X			
Miss E Macbeth				X			
Miss I Dowling				X			
Miss Bright- Ashford				X			
Mrs McTate					X		
Miss K Slattery				X			

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Appendix Five

LCC; Women councillors and candidates

Municipal Reform (cont.)	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Miss Grace Bateman						X	
Mrs N Runge							X
Mrs Christie							X
Dame Regina Evans							X
Mrs E Davies							X
Mrs W J O'Donovan							X
Total MR candidates (41)	5	10	14	20	11	7	10
MR women elected (24)	3	9	11	9	9	4	5

Labour	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Miss Margaret McMillan	E	X					
Miss Susan Lawrence	E	E	E				
Mrs Evelyn M Lowe		E	E	E	E	E	E
Mrs A Mathew			E	E	E		
Mrs Scurr		X	E				
Mrs Ganley	X	X	E	X	X	E	
Miss Agnes Dawson			E	E	E	E	
Mrs Hugh Dalton			E	E		X	
Mrs Ada Salter	X		E	E	E	E	E
Dr Stella Churchill			E	E	E		
Miss Ishbel McDonald				E	E		
Mrs Dollar				E			
Mrs Harry Day				E			
Mrs Adamson				E			
Mrs H Girling					E		E
Mrs R Keeling					X	E	E
Miss A Sayle			X	X		E	
Mrs A Gray					X	E	
Mrs A Crossman						E	
Mrs E Newman							E
Mrs Freda Corbet				X	X	E	E
Mrs L'Estrange Malone			X			E	X
Dr Esther Rickards				X		E	E

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Appendix Five

LCC; Women councillors and candidates

Labour (cont.)	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Mrs M O'Brien Harris					X	E	E
Mrs H Bentwich						X	E
Miss I Bolton						E	E
Mrs E.E. Bull				X			E
Miss A Sayle					X		E
Miss E M Lambert							E
Mrs M Felton							E
Miss M. M Whatley					X		E
Mrs C Jeffries							E
Mrs D Montefiore	X						
Mrs C.M Merrifield		X	X				
Mrs I M Lineham		X					
Mrs Emma Boyce		X					
Miss M Price		X					
Miss B Drake		X	X	X	X	X	
Lilian A Dawson		X		X			
Mrs Bertrand Russell			X				
Mrs A L Walton			X	X			
Mrs M S Douglas			X				
Mrs Joan Howson			X				
Miss N E C Jacob			X		X		
Mrs N Harrison-Bell			X		X	X	
Mrs K M Starr			X				
Miss M Carlin			X	X			
Miss J Stephens			X				
Mrs W M Gibson			X				
Mrs M Coleman			X				
Mrs H C Miall-Smith			X				
Miss E Richards			X				
Mrs Lankester			X				
Mrs Cook			X				
Mrs I Thomas				X			
Mrs A J Anstey				X	X		
Mrs P A Skinner				X			X
Mrs M H Godfrey				X	X		
Mrs E Howson				X			

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Appendix Five

LCC; Women councillors and candidates

Labour (cont.)	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Mrs E Beavan				X			
Mrs A V Holock				X			
Mrs H McNulty					X		
Blanch Radley					X	X	
Mrs P E V Hickinbottom					X	X	
rs W Horrabin					X		
Mrs A Hindell					X		
Mrs C M Wadham					X		
Mrs E Z Waddington					X		
Miss Burfoot					X		
Lady Frances Stewart					X		
Mrs E M Newman					X		X
Miss L Arnold						X	
Mrs B Fraser						X	
Dr Caroline Maule						X	X
Mrs B Aytron Gould						X	
Miss G Hill						X	
Mrs E Pearce						X	
Mrs A Wilson						X	X
Mrs A D Hillier						X	
Mrs D G Biggs						X	
Mrs J Wild						X	
Mrs P E A Smith							X
Mrs C R Ruddock							X
Mrs M C Young							X
Mrs E D Rhodes							X
Total Lab women candidates	5	11	28	26	29	29	25
Labour women elected (31)	2	2	9	10	7	13	15

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Appendix Five

LCC; Women councillors and candidates

Liberal/ Progressive	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Miss Henrietta Adler	E	E	X	E	X		
Duchess of Marlborough	E						
Mrs Nathan				E	E	X	
Miss Ida Samuel	X	X	X	X	E	X	
Iola Williams			X				
Mrs A P Baker			X				
Mrs E Alliston			X				
Mrs Edith Neville			X				
Miss A Hill			X				
Miss I Swinburne				X			
Miss A R Hungtington				X			
Miss E Martin				X			
Miss V Mathews				X			
Miss I F Homfry				X	X		
Miss C J Robinson				X			
Miss F L Joseph				X			
Miss E Edwards				X			X
Miss M Gibbon				X			
Miss G Moxham				X			
Miss A Hill				X			
Miss E G Bach					X		
Mrs U Warren					X	X	
Mrs W Paul					X		
Mrs L Buxton						X	
Total progressive candidates (25)	3	2	7	11	4	2	1
Progressive women elected (4)	2	1	0	2	2	0	0

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Appendix Five

LCC; Women councillors and candidates

Independent/other ¹	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Mrs Lamartine Yates	E						
Mrs Jessie Scriven		X					
Lady Frances Wheeler-Smith			X				
Mrs M Varron (Ind Lab)				X			
Miss Minnie Birch (Comm)				X			
Winifred Utley (Ind Lab)				X			
Mrs Helen Crawford (Ind Lab)				X			
Ellen Usher (Comm)					X	X	
Mrs A V Leicht (Comm)					X		
Miss M Moses					X		
Miss N W Macbeth (Ratepayers)					X		
Mrs K Duncan (Comm)						X	
Mrs J Massey						X	
Mrs Furse							X
Mrs Scott							X
Mrs A Brooks-Giggs (BUF)							X
Miss M Rose							X

	1919	1922	1925	1928	1931	1934	1937
Totals elected	8	12	20	22	18	17	20
(as % of 124 seats)	6%	10%	16%	18%	15%	14%	16%
Total candidates	14	24	40	61	48	41	40

¹ Unless otherwise stated 'other' candidates stood as independents. Ind Lab = Independent Labour, Comm = Communist, BUF = British Union of Fascists. 'E' = elected, X= unelected candidate.

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