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GIRLS' VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOLS IN LONDON:

A STUDY OF THE INTER-WAR YEARS

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
of the University of Greenwich for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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SYNOPSIS

The state education system of the inter-war years was characterised by the three crucial divisions of social class, ability and gender. It was the non-academic working class girl who was most disadvantaged by those divisions and who has been most ignored by educational policymakers and, indeed, by historians. That disadvantage was most apparent in the debate about vocational training for paid employment which marked these years. The controversy between the proponents of liberal and vocational education was of special significance for girls because of the frequently expressed argument that a girl had a single vocation - homemaking and domesticity. As the economy was restructured and women were drawn into the new consumer industries, the crucial dilemma of whether education should enable girls to enlarge their opportunities in paid employment or whether it should continue to orientate girls towards the domestic role had to be addressed. It is the educational policy and practices resulting from that tension between domesticity and productivity which this thesis will examine.

Its focus will be the elementary and technical schools of London. The London County Council adopted a consciously progressive technical education programme during the inter-war years. This local study will therefore elucidate trends in the policy, practice and experience of girls' vocational schooling. It will be suggested that policy reflected the co-existence of patriarchy and capitalism. Class intersected with gender to result in a situation where schools trained girls to be cheap, unskilled workers in certain women's trades. Educational policy was constrained by the desire to preserve conventional domestic roles intact and a belief that working class girls could be defined by their gender as a homogeneous group undistinguished by aptitude or ability. The assumption was made that girls would engage only temporarily in paid employment before returning to their true vocations as wives and mothers. Thus vocational schooling provides a concrete expression of inter-war gender ideology.

The Introduction sets out the theoretical framework upon which this thesis is based. Chapter Two will provide an examination of the political, economic and social context in which educational policy was made. The third chapter analyses domestic studies' courses, the most explicit formulation of how schools prepared girls for their adult role. Chapters Four and Five focus on the Junior Technical and Central Schools, illustrating how schooling within them epitomised assumptions, prejudices and ideologies about girls' education during the inter-war years.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1916 Edith Sellers conducted a survey amongst elementary schoolgirls about the calling they would elect by which to earn their daily bread if each girl was free to choose for herself. The answers she received were employment as clerks, typists, telephonists, dressmakers, shop girls and factory workers. Sellers commented:

Surely their choice of a calling in life is proof that there is something wrong somewhere, in our system of elementary education.¹

Two decades later Pearl Jephcott conducted a similar survey in London - and found that the majority of elementary schoolgirls, when considering adult life, had in mind the same types of employment - shop work, office work, domestic work and factory work. The girls had no sense of vocation because "the jobs are unworthy of being recognised as a vocation".² Yet in those intervening twenty years working class girls in London had been provided with technical education through the state school system. The two decades have been described as a "crucial moment of tension and possibility" in the development of vocational education for working class children.³ This thesis will suggest that although there were indeed crucial tensions and ambiguities in the development of girls' vocational education during this period, the aims and opportunities which evolved for girls from that schooling were narrowly conceived. Schooling perpetuated the situation in which girls were to remain locked in a vicious circle; the low wages found in appropriately female employment forced them into marriage and financial dependence on men while that position as dependants was in turn used to justify their low wages and lack of training opportunities. In short the training provided

¹ E. Sellers, "An Antediluvian On The Education Of Working Class Girls", The Nineteenth Century and After, 80, August 1916, p337

² A Jephcott, Girls Growing Up, London, Faber and Faber, 1942, p78

³ H Silver, Education as History · Interpreting Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Education, London, Methuen, 1983, p169.

for girls in London during the inter-war years illustrates clearly that "technical and vocational education are gender loaded".⁴

This thesis argues that the inter-war years were significant both for the development of vocational training within schools and for the re-working of gender beliefs which took place and which emerged in schooling. It is suggested that a study of technical education during these years is not only a point of entry to debates about social class differentiation in the educational system of the period but also into debates about gender.

By 1918 the discussion about the content and structure of education was already deeply enmeshed with a concern about the economic, industrial, demographic and moral health of the country. Throughout the inter-war period the debate about the extent to which vocational and technical education should be built into schooling revealed attitudes about the whole educational system and towards society at large. This agenda was particularly important for the education of working class girls whose vocation had been seen as traditionally, exclusively and naturally domestic.⁵ The crucial question was whether or not girls should be prepared to earn a living in paid employment. Educationalists, politicians, public servants and teachers remained ambivalent about what vocational schooling really meant for girls. Thus the tensions between productivity and domesticity cited by Braybon and Summerfield in relation to mobilisation for war, became apparent in educational policy.⁶ Philosophies about women's place in society were expressed in the aspirations and skills which girls were allowed to develop and the technical schools themselves became a concrete

⁴ J Purvis, Letter to The Times Educational Supplement, 17 10 86 p17.

⁵ Throughout this thesis vocation will be used in the broadest terms as meaning a preparation for adult life.

⁶ G Braybon, Women Workers in the First World War The British Experience, London, Croom Helm, 1981
P Summerfield, Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy In Conflict, London, Croom Helm, 1984

expression of inter-war gender ideology, incorporating all the ideology's inherent ambiguity and contradiction.

Within this broad theoretical framework the focus of this thesis will be the elementary and technical schools of London.⁷ The LCC was the largest and most progressive education authority in the country. Through the capital's schools for working class children an attempt was made to reconcile the debate of how far education should properly be preparation for paid employment in adult life and the conflicting demand that it should not be purely vocational. A local study of the London schools can, therefore, elucidate broader issues about attitudes towards and practice in vocational instruction during this period.

It will be argued that the vocational training schools did at least make partial recognition of the fact that most working class girls in London would have to enter paid employment on leaving school. It was recognised, in the words of the Ministry of Reconstruction that

the girl needs two-fold equipment. She needs to be prepared for wage earning as well as for domestic duties ... if the girl is to turn into a capable woman, she must be trained industrially.⁸

In preparing these girls for certain areas of the labour market the Elementary, Junior Technical and Central Schools therefore answered the need of the capital's economy. Yet the "needs" of men were also accommodated. Class and gender intersected in the skills which girls were taught. Assumptions were made both about girls' capacities and their limited time in the labour market which reinforced the already segregated job structure of London and the gender division of labour within the home.⁹

⁷ See Appendix A for an outline of the characteristics of the different types of schools.

⁸ Ministry of Reconstruction, Report of the Women's Employment Committee, Cmd 9239, 1919, p44.

⁹ Throughout this thesis the term gender division of labour has been used to denote the social construction of work relations rather than the biological category of the sexual division of labour.

Thus, in an era where aptitude and intelligence were increasingly being used to define children, the assumption was made that working class girls were a homogeneous group defined by their gender as a united group with limited employability. Girls were labelled as being only suitable for employment in certain unskilled, low paid women's trades, inherently unwilling and incapable of doing more since they were governed by their universal destiny of future motherhood. So the 1917 Report on Juvenile Education in Relation to Employment After the War, categorised boys by aptitude but girls by their gender.

The third group is composed of girls. In so far as girls are engaged in any of the occupations for which industrial or commercial training is necessary they will fall into one or other of the categories referred to ... but there remains a very large number engaged in domestic occupations.¹⁰

Throughout the inter-war years boys were increasingly educated for a range of occupations while girls were confined to preparation for limited areas of the labour market, all characterised by low pay, insecurity and lack of status. The main mechanism by which the schools contributed to this gender division of labour was by accepting the notion that females had certain inherent characteristics which made them particularly suitable for such secondary types of employment. In a phrase which sets the agenda for girls' technical education for the succeeding years the President of the Board, Lord Eustace Percy, summed up the situation:

Let us ask ourselves what opportunities for education we are offering to the boy. It is of boys and men that industry is mainly thinking and it will save complications if I confine myself to them.¹¹

¹⁰ Departmental Committee on Juvenile Education in Relation to Employment After the War, Cmd 8512, 1917, para 16.

¹¹ Board of Education, Education and Industry, London, HMSO, 1928.

This segregation was reinforced through the educational prescriptions arising from the diagnosis of the female state leading to a constant emphasis on domesticity. A girl's future social role as wife and mother was seen to shape her education in a way that a boy's future adult role did not. It has been suggested that the full flowering of the Victorian domestic ideology which is associated with Victorian Society, occurred during the inter-war years.¹² A study of the education given to working class girls in London during the inter-war years will suggest that was indeed true. Domesticity was redefined for working class women and from that redefinition emerged the ideal of the enlightened and fulfilled housewife. The sense of inevitability about the domestic role for girls remained as strong as it had been in the late 19th century. The certainty that girls were uniquely fitted for a single social role as wives and mothers legitimised a failure to consider their lives as workers outside the home.

The industrial life of women is, in general, a short one ... This makes them unwilling to spend much time on a course of training and disposes them to seek occupations where they can earn a good wage as quickly as possible ... Work in the factory is looked upon by most as a temporary career.¹³

Moreover the way in which education was promulgated for girls, ensuring a gender differentiated curriculum dominated by domestic subjects, sabotaged the possibility of full educational opportunities for girls in other areas of the curriculum. This not only denied them as wide an occupational choice as boys but also perpetuated power relationships within the home by insisting through a variety of messages that the way in which girls' education

¹² E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1984, p137.

¹³ A Study of the Factors which have Operated in the Past and those which are Operating now to Determine the Distribution of Women in Industry, Cmd 3508, 1929 (published 1930), p29.

was different from boys made it inferior.¹⁴ The end result was that power relationships in paid employment and the home were reinforced and perpetuated. Although most girls had to work in paid employment on leaving school, they were ultimately socialised away from the labour market and, indeed adopted the role of wife and mother as soon as it was economically feasible for them to do so. Thus the crucial moment of opportunity was lost.

Before analysing in detail the operation of gender in the vocational schools of inter-war London, it is important to examine the theoretical parameters guiding this research. Girls' schooling did not, of course, operate in a vacuum but was shaped by the power structures and ideologies of the time.

Gender has been of only peripheral concern in what has passed for the history of education. The neglect and distortion of working class girls' schooling has taken several forms. Some historians have assumed that their experiences were the same as those of their male counterparts.

The education of working class girls ... went side by side with that of boys. Working class girls were not, however, promoted up the educational ladder in the same way as boys.¹⁵

Other historians have ignored the fact that the gender differentiation in the experiences and outcome of state schooling has been as striking as the class differences which have long pre-occupied sociologists and historians of education in this country. The well established paradigm that class is a key issue in the English education system has tended to distort the fact that working class girls had to bear the double burden of their class and their gender in

¹⁴ This thesis will not focus on the wider issues of how girls' education was differentiated from that of boys such as through classroom interaction on girls, structure of schools, the psychological and biological arguments about girls' ability

¹⁵ J. Lawson and H. Silver, A Social History of Education in England, London, Methuen, 1973, p341

the schooling they received.¹⁶ The mainstream concerns of educational history are still seen to be increased working class access and the climb up the meritocratic ladder to Secondary Schools. Even today historical analyses of education marginalise the experiences of girls and women in separate sections, implying those experiences were totally divorced from the development of the system as a whole.¹⁷

The failure to consider girls' experience of vocational education and the determinants of those experiences in a capitalist patriarchal society have been even greater distorting omissions in past interpretations of the development of the state system. The traditional view that schools, in spite of their class basis of organisation, have offered opportunity structures for the able to escape their class position would never have had so much appeal if the fortunes of girls had been considered as thoroughly as those of boys.¹⁸ It has been assumed that vocational provision for girls has either been so minimal as not to be worth consideration or that, since girls were only being trained for their natural sphere of domestic work, no analysis was necessary. A recent work on training for skilled work within the textile and clothing industry considers apprenticeship and training without mentioning females, even though women formed the majority of the workforce in these trades and performed skilled jobs.¹⁹ The literature about education and occupational structures has focused almost exclusively on males. The entry of an individual into the occupation order and hence into a new class and status position has been portrayed as a function of the acquisition in schools

¹⁶ Silver has pointed out that there have, of course, been other historical silences in traditional analyses. See H. Silver, "Knowing and Not Knowing in the History of Education", History of Education, 22,1,1992

¹⁷ P. Gordon et al (eds), Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century, London, Woburn Press, 1991.

¹⁸ For a traditional view see N. Middleton and S. Weitzmann, A Place for Everyone, London, Gollancz, 1976.

¹⁹ C. More, Skill And The English Working Classes 1870-1914, London, Croom Helm, 1980

of knowledge and expertise disposable on the market. Economic success in employment has been viewed as being dependent essentially on the rational acquisition of technical and cognitive skills within schools.

More recently feminist historians have begun to challenge such interpretations. They argue that the structure and presentation of knowledge within the state education system has contributed to the social construction of gender and the perpetuation of the gender divisions of labour in paid employment and the home. They have shown that what constitutes educational progress for males will not necessarily apply for females. Much more research, however, remains necessary. Searching assessments of how changing ideas about girls and women affect the character and quality of girls' education are needed. Such arguments must become an established category of analysis in historical explorations of education if any real understanding is to be reached of the way in which schools prepare children for adult life. It is important that girls' education is examined in its own right rather than as an adjunct of an educational process designed for boys. State schooling must not be seen as a dichotomy between the privileged norm, i.e. the education of boys and an unprivileged deviation - the education of girls. In a capitalist and patriarchal society equal access to state educational provision is not enough if that access is to an education shaped and dominated by men and male assumptions about a woman's appropriate place.²⁰ There remains a "yawning chasm" in our understanding of the interaction of gender and schooling in a capitalist patriarchal society. Local studies can help to clarify and explain this.

In order to understand the ways in which schooling contributes to the gender division of labour it is important to investigate how and why segregation in male and female

²⁰ It is recognised that social construction of gender can disadvantage men and boys as well as women and girls. A Murcott, "REview of D. Attar, *Wasting Girls Time . the History and Politics of Home Economics*", *Gender and Education*, 5 1 1993, p110.

employment has developed. Educational policy and practice cannot be divorced from the position of women in a capitalist economy as waged and domestic workers. The debate between Marxist and feminist historians as to whether women's unequal position in the labour market can be explained more adequately by reference to the structures of capitalism or patriarchy has not been resolved.²¹ Socialist feminists have focused particularly upon the way in which women have been affected by the development of the capitalist mode of production. Such analysis depicts women as especially exploited workers for capital requires them to be producers of both children and male labour power within the family and to act as a low paid casual work force when they are required. Bruegal has argued that when production is booming and many consumer goods being produced, women may be temporarily released from the confines of the home to act as a reserve army of labour. The reverse, however, has not held true - namely when the economy is in crisis men have not re-orientated themselves to the domestic sphere to take more part in child rearing and domestic labour.²²

Alternatively the emphasis in so called radical feminism has been on the position of women vis-a-vis men. According to this analysis women work within the family not primarily for capital but for men. The domination of men precedes and underlies all other forms of oppression and hierarchies such as social class or race. Since the material basis of the female existence in a patriarchal society is unpaid work within the family, the prospect of it dominates women's lives even when they perform work outside the home. Thus any arrangement which threatens the performance of unpaid work by women within the family

²¹ This debate remains unsolved and feminist historians' attentions have turned somewhat to other, though related, issues. Considerable attention has been given to the "capitalism or patriarchy" question here because it remains so crucial to understanding the ways in which schools prepare girls for adult "work", yet is still often not addressed.

²² I. Bruegal, "Women as a Reserve Army of Labour", *Feminist Review*, 2, 1979

or which challenges men's high status places within the work force would be intolerable and therefore resisted.

The notion of patriarchy is necessarily complex. As Lown has observed, to talk of patriarchy is to enter a conceptual minefield.²³ It may be defined as a system of social relations based on male superiority and female inferiority which has supported and justified gender divisions of labour and the ideology of natural inequality. Some feminists such as Beechey and Hartman see the roots of patriarchy in the system of production, whereas others see it as rooted in biology.²⁴ One element of patriarchy in action has been the ready acceptance by working class men of women's lower status and strictly defined sex roles. Men have accepted the existence of the cheap labour force and have been reluctant to work for equal pay and opportunities as that would have meant acceptance of the idea that women were not primarily defined as wives and mothers.²⁵

In considering how these different theoretical perspectives feed into the process by which jobs become gendered and ascribed to one sex or the other, it has been noted that the most striking difference between men and women in the labour market - whether it is dominated by capitalism or patriarchy - is the work they do. To a great extent men and women are found in different spheres of economic activity and occupations, and within most occupations, are employed at different levels and with different work tasks. This gender segregation is a major cause of pay disparity between males and females. In her influential

²³ J Lown, "Not So Much a Factory, More a Form of Patriarchy. Gender and Class During Industrialisation", in E Garmarnikow et al (eds), Gender Class and Work, London, Heinemann, 1983

²⁴ H Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism. Towards a More Progressive Union", Capital and Class, 8, 1979 V Beechey, "Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production", Capital and Class, 3, 1977

²⁵ Braybon has argued that the First World War experience illustrated how change could rapidly occur if a national will was present and Government power utilised See G Braybon, Women Workers in the First World War, op cit

study Hakim has distinguished between two different aspects of segregation, horizontal segregation which refers to the concentration of women and men in different types of work and vertical segregation which refers to the concentration of men in higher grades and women in lower grades both within and between occupations and industries. Taken together these produce a substantial picture of inequality.²⁶ This thesis argues this is a situation in which schooling has acquiesced and contributed.

Both Marxist feminists and radical feminists have given explanations for the remarkable persistence of this segregation. For the traditional Marxist, gender divisions can be explained within the theory of class and the implication is that in a classless society gender divisions would disappear. This focus on the work sphere, however, neglects family relations and thus gender domination in the home is reduced to a by-product of class relations. Insufficient recognition is given in these analyses to the fact that men as a group, whatever their position in relation to capital is, profit from the inferior position of women in employment. Wage labour is not all in equal or identical relation to capitalism despite the common feature that it is sold for a wage. Individuals have different sorts of labour to sell - more or less trained, more or less mobile, more or less skilled and more or less continuously available.

Various related theories have been advanced. The human capital theory considers women's labour and job segregation within the orthodox framework of supply and demand. It is argued that employers select labour on the basis of human capital accrued in educational qualifications and skills. Since women typically possess less of each of these, they are less desirable to employers. This theory does not, however, explain the situation where women start with equal qualifications but fall behind men in the promotion race.

²⁶ C. Hakim, Occupational Segregation by Sex, London, Department of Employment, 1979

The so-called dual labour theory suggests that the labour market is in fact divided into two or more separate sectors between which it is hard for workers to pass. The primary sector is characterised by high status and high paid jobs while the secondary sector is characterised by bad conditions, low pay and low promotions. An ideal source of labour for the secondary labour market is that of women who form a perfect marginal group to be used as and when necessary.²⁷ Yet this does not explain why which certain occupations are staffed entirely by women.

Surely it is necessary to move away from such dichotomist theories? As Lown has so perceptively shown, a dual focus can encompass both the politics and practices of the labour market and family values.²⁸ The lower wages and double burden of domestic labour and paid employment of female workers cannot simply be viewed as by-products of a capitalist economic organisation just as they cannot simply be related to men's quest for dominance and power.

Increasingly feminist analysis has stressed the way in which inequality in the private domestic role has structured inequality in the public paid employment. Women's societal role results not just from the fact they bear children and take responsibility for caring and socialising those children whilst also performing free domestic labour on the basis of love and affection. These familial roles must also be related to women's work in the public sphere; sex roles within the family determine the divisions in the labour market.²⁹ Thus the

²⁷ This fits in with the reserve army of labour theory that capital requires a pool of labour to draw on in times of market expansion and to throw out in times of slumps. Women are particularly useful to form this function because they can return to the home with the minimum of disruption.

²⁸ J Lown, "Not so Much a Factory, More a Form of Patriarchy", op cit.

²⁹ Flax has pointed out that the family as historically constituted is oppressive to women and a primary source of the replication of gender power relations. See J. Flax, "The Family in Contemporary Political Thought: A Critical Review" in B. Elshtain (ed) The Family and Political Thought, Brighton, Harvester, 1982. Gittins has illustrated that labour in the home can have an exchange as well as home value. See D. Gittins, The Family In Question · Changing Households and Familiar Ideologies, London, Macmillan, 1985.

nature of women's participation in the employment market - and their schooling for that participation - needs to be seen in terms of the conflict of capitalism's desire for a cheap labour and the motives of males for keeping women under patriarchal control in the family not just through fear of competition in the work place but also because of their wish for a comfortable existence in the home.³⁰

It is essential that this interaction is understood in order to see the way in which separate male and female worker identities were constructed and redefined during the inter-war years. Any understanding must embrace both work and home, production and reproduction. These ideas are particularly important to bear in mind in a study of a period when, it is suggested, new accommodations were reached between patriarchy and capitalism in balancing the needs of the economy with those of men. A situation evolved whereby women could be employed cheaply in certain areas of labour, thus leading to the accumulation of more profit. When men, however, fought back claiming certain jobs should remain male, capitalism accommodated this and thereby deepened the segregation of the market. Thus the two forces colluded in maintaining power structures.

During these years women's employment diversified - but only in the low paid, low status areas of the labour market. There was no challenge to the idea that the economic function of women was both temporary and insignificant. It was a period during which employers' demand for cheap female labour pulled women in one direction while the resistance of male workers to competition and undercutting pushed them in another in the context of rapid technical change and mechanisation in industry. Meanwhile it was widely

³⁰ S. Dex, "Issues of Gender and Employment", *Social History*, 13,2,1988 S. Walby *Gender Segregation at Work*, Milton Keynes, OUP, 1988. It is important to recognise that the acceptance of the male role as provider is also a heavy burden.

claimed that women's distribution in employment was the natural result of their innate characteristics and inevitable destiny.

During these decades working class women were drawn in large numbers from domestic production to factory employment and thus many more became subject to the class relations of labour.³¹ Fundamental to this were the so called new industries which were based on the rapidly growing home consumer market. These new industries created a number of jobs which had no pre-existing gender connotations but within them women were very soon confined to the low status unskilled work.³²

Within such industries mass assembly line production grew enormously. Women's labour was crucial in the process of capital accumulation within these industries and the gender division of labour developed simultaneously with the introduction of these new labour processes. There was a tendency to use new sources of labour with all its attendant weaknesses i.e. young girls and women who had not previously been part of the labour market.³³ Glucksmann argues that the use of women within these industries was simply a way of extracting as much profit as possible and the argument that women were innately suitable to the various processes was blatant rationalisation.³⁴

³¹ For an analysis of general employment trends see Chapter 2.

³² For a discussion of redefinitions of skill see p22.

³³ Walby has argued one of the reasons why women were drawn into the new industries was the fact that men were less well unionised than in the old traditional occupations and therefore were less able to keep women out. Savage disputes this and argues that employers only used female labour when they were unable to obtain younger, cheaper workers. See M. Savage, "Trade Unionism, Sex Segregation and the State : Women's Employment in the New Industries in Inter-war Britain", Social History, 13.2,1988. S. Walby, Gender Segregation at Work, op cit.

³⁴ M Glucksmann, Women Assemble : Women Workers and the New Industries in Inter-war Britain, London, Routledge, 1990. She argues that the difference in the relations of production of the domestic economy and in commodity production constitutes a difference of a class nature and that women therefore have a class position of their own.

The notion of the family wage retained great credence. It was argued that men required sufficient income to provide for their entire family. This justified the lower wages of women for, should they be in paid employment, they would also be the economic dependents of men and therefore their income would remain secondary. As A.V. John has pointed out, the family wage was only ever an idea as it was based on assumptions about the permanency of the married state and men being willing to hand over their wages.³⁵ Nevertheless the way in which the notion regarded women as secondary bread winners certainly perpetuated inequality. The conditions were not created where women could make a genuine choice about whether they entered and stayed in the paid labour market.

Other ideological constructs shaped women's participation in the labour force. This was the period when relationships between parents and children, and parents and the state completely changed; there was, in Lewis' words, an invasion of the working class family. The state acted increasingly in the place of parents in assuming responsibility for training and instilling discipline and order. There was grave concern with motherhood as a social function and this led to a series of interventions, some of which challenged activities which had long been the prerogative of the working class woman. Maternal and infant welfare clinics, school medical officers and school dinners were all symbols of the maternalist state.³⁶ Interference on behalf of children could not occur without affecting the role of parents. Lewis argues that policy about family and working class women was formulated with the express intention of encouraging the male breadwinner/dependant wife - or more usually with the assumption that this form was correct and therefore presumed to exist. It

³⁵ A V. John, Unequal Opportunities : Women's Employment in England 1800-1918, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, p25. The Family Wage was an issue on which feminists were divided.

³⁶ By the early 20th Century the strong ideology of maternity fuelled by eugenic concern about the quantity and quality of the race made health and welfare a national priority.

is clear that policy makers did have a firm idea of what kind of family they wished to support.³⁷ Gittins believes that the growth of the state was an important factor in giving legal and ideological primacy to the needs of the husband and children via marriage and thus strengthening the duties and responsibilities the mother had to dependant children. This obviously limited married women's participation in the paid labour market as did more formal mechanisms such as the marriage bar.³⁸

Thus in this period there was a reinterpretation of the social model that was presented to the working class woman. Patriarchy proved to be a flexible model in which all male interests could be accommodated. For employers and manufacturers the utilisation of the values and practices of patriarchy could encourage the goodwill of key skilled workers while at the same time providing them with a supply of cheap and exploitable female labour which could be used or discarded as market forces dictated. Meanwhile the domestic ideology provided justification for strictly limited female employment. For the skilled worker, the model was supported because it protected his position in the hierarchy of employment and also provided comfort and authority in the home. For the unskilled worker the ideology re-affirmed his position at home whilst also protecting his wages.

There can be no doubt that patriarchy was a key factor during these years in denying women access to new areas of the economy. The War Cabinet Committee commented in 1918.

The prejudice of male workers must share the responsibility with the prejudice of the employer for the fact that the training of women is deficient ... In addition the influence of habit and custom, and "established expectations" have all combined both to relegate women to the less advantageously situated occupations, and to fix the occupational rates of women's trades at a distance

³⁷ J Lewis, "The Working Class Wife and State Intervention 1870-1918" in J. Lewis (ed) Labour and Love Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, p101.

³⁸ See Chapter 2

below the occupational rates of men's trades which bear no assignable relationship either to the efforts and sacrifices of the two sexes or to their output or value to the employer, or to their productiveness to the community.³⁹

Thus a situation was created in which men and women occupied entirely different areas of the labour market.

It is clear that in industry generally there are men's trades and women's trades and trades that employ both men and women : that, in these last there are men's processes and women's processes and processes which employ both men and women ... women get low wages when working at the bottom of industries which are mainly male and men get high wages when working at the top of industries that are mainly female.⁴⁰

This thesis will argue that this was a situation which vocational schooling accommodated and perpetuated.

Feminist analysis of education has become as embroiled as other feminist historical analysis in the so-called gender or class debate.⁴¹ Some historians have argued that, whilst acknowledging the disadvantages which girls suffered, it is important to recognise that class cuts across the heterogeneous grouping of girls. Working class boys were also disadvantaged by a system which gave primacy to the secondary academic schooling available in the main only to the middle classes.⁴² While it indeed is true that the educational opportunities available to both working class girls and boys were poor in comparison with those offered to other classes, it must also be recognised that when one examines the divisions between the

³⁹ Report of War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op cit, p20 and p267.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p21 and p267.

⁴¹ See K Flett, "Sex or Class The Education of Working Class Women 1800-70" History of Education, 18,2,June 1989

⁴² Whilst it is beyond the focus of this thesis to consider the wider issue of whether women can be incorporated into a class analysis since class definitions are mainly based on occupational differences between men, it is recognised that conventional terminology does pose problems. In this study the term working class will be used to refer to females whose men folk can be classified as working class on the basis of their employment and to women who were sole heads of working households

educational chances of girls and boys within the working classes, those differences are also significant.⁴³

As Purvis has pointed out, as members of the working class, girls were offered education which was sharply differentiated, segregated and inferior from that offered to middle class children - but as working class girls rather than working class boys they were also offered a schooling inferior to that of their brothers. As girls rather than boys they were prepared for low paid women's work in waged labour and unpaid women's work within the family.⁴⁴ Gender and class operate together and consciousness of class itself takes a gendered form.⁴⁵ It is necessary to recognise the inter-connected reproduction of both class and gender relations within schools and to aim to reach an integrated analysis which includes both class and sex dimensions.⁴⁶ Above all, feminist historians of education have recognised how ideologies about women's "place" in society at large are influential in determining the range of girls' educational experiences and the level of educational skills they are taught. A recurring theme of this analysis will be that female participation in wage labour and unwaged labour in the home as they affect schooling cannot be separated; there is a constant intertwining of the spheres of family and paid employment in educational policy

⁴³ Even P Gardner's seminal work does not address this issue P Gardner, The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England, London, Croom Helm, 1984

⁴⁴ J. Purvis, "The Double Burden of Class and Gender in the Schooling of Working Class Girls in Nineteenth Century England 1800-1870" p98 in L. Barton and S. Walker (eds) Schools, Teachers and Teaching, Brighton, Falmer, 1981

⁴⁵ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, Family Fortunes Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850, London, Hutchinson, 1987

⁴⁶ For a good example of this see the work of P. Summerfield, especially "Cultural Reproduction in the Education of Girls: A Study of Girls' Secondary Schooling in Two Lancashire Towns 1900-50" in F. Hunt (ed) Lessons for Life, the Schooling of Girls and Women 1870-1950, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987.

and practice.⁴⁷ Gender ideologies can act as a form of control through the images of females as women and as students which schools present. These ideologies pervaded the context and curriculum of girls' schooling during the inter-war years in London and in turn shaped their future participation in waged labour and family life.

Much theoretical analysis into the role of mass schooling in a capitalist economy has focused on the male experience. It has shown how schools are vital in reproducing an adequately skilled and diversified workforce and in the reproduction of the social relations of production attuning each generation of workers to behavioural norms.⁴⁸ The efficient division of the working population amongst occupations requires that there should be the right number of workers in each occupation and that the qualities of those workers should be as appropriate as possible.⁴⁹ The absence of analysis of girls' position within this structure is compounded by the problems of how females can be accommodated within studies based on male occupations and income levels.

The way in which schooling produces classed and gendered subjects to take their places in society is structured by the dual yet often contradictory forces of class and gender relations. It is only relatively recently that educational inequality based on gender divisions has been identified as a major characteristic of an educational system operating in a capitalist, patriarchal society. Most recently sociologists of education have begun to focus on patterns of female education and educational achievement, in an attempt to explain how and why girls

⁴⁷ Copelman illustrates how teachers in London inter-twined the two spheres of family and paid work. D. Copelman "Women in the Classroom Struggle : Elementary School Teachers in London 1870-1914, Unpublished Thesis, Princetown University Ph.D 1985.

⁴⁸ S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976
L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London, NLB, 1971

⁴⁹ J. Floud and A. Halsey, "English Secondary Schools and the Supply of Labour" in B. Cosin and M. Hales (eds) *Education, Policy and Society*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

are educated as they are and how schools enter into the process of gendering.⁵⁰ Schools play an essential role in cultural production and engage in the constant process of transmitting ideologies, values and attitudes so that the dominant social relations between the class, sexes and ethnic groups are maintained and perpetuated.⁵¹

The structural relation of the school experience to subsequent labour experience for girls is more complex and does not exactly replicate that of boys. Arnot has argued that the contradictory nature of women's position in society rather than being resolved through schooling, is more likely to be accentuated. She contends that capitalism gets the benefit of girls' education through the effects that women have on their families rather than effects on the girls themselves.⁵² Arnot believes that the view that women form a common class in relation to patriarchal domination obscures class differences between girls and the class basis of various forms of schooling. The ideology of femininity and domesticity has hidden the female class divisions within education.⁵³ Whilst education for different occupational status reveals in explicit form male class differentiation within the state schooling, domestic ideology has successfully led to a misrecognition of the way in which women are touched by the class nature of society.

⁵⁰ See P. Miller, "Education and the State : The Use of Marxist and Feminist Approaches in the Writings of Histories of Schooling", Historical Studies in Education, 1,2,1989.

⁵¹ M McDonald, "Schooling And The Reproduction Of Class And Gender Relations" in L. Barton et al (eds) Schooling, Ideology And The Curriculum, Lewes, Falmer, 1980. R. Deem, "Gender, Patriarchy And Class In The Popular Education of Women" in L. Walker and S Barton (eds) Gender Class and Education, Lewes, Falmer, 1983

⁵² M. Arnot "A Cloud Over Co-education . An Analysis of the Forms of Transmission of Class and Gender Relations" in L. Walker and S Barton (eds) Gender Class and Education, op cit

⁵³ M. Arnot "Male Hegemony, Social Class and Women's Education", Journal of Education, 164, 1, 1982.

Conversely Spender and Deem have argued that the education motto "education for life" takes on a specific meaning in the ideological climate of patriarchy.⁵⁴ Deem suggests that the inferior vocational education girls receive is one aspect of their subordination to men and suggests that a class based analysis ignores the fact that the gender division of labour has been maintained by and benefits men. Spender has commented

The model of education which passes as society's model is the model generated by men, based on men's experience of the world and women are required to be educated in a manner devised by men as befitting men.⁵⁵

The assumption is, therefore, that the male experience constitutes the human experience in education. Deem argues that the entire educational system reinforces patriarchal relationships of dominance. All girls have been taught skills to become wives and mothers but only a minority have acquired skills which enable them to do anything else; boys have been prepared for the labour market but have not been initiated into skills of fatherhood.⁵⁶

While patriarchy and capitalism may be distinct at an analytical level, in practice they intermesh in schooling as intricately as they do in the labour market. As David has commented, patriarchy and capitalism form a mutual - and often contradictory - relationship, reinforcing but also antagonistic. Schooling is an important site for their struggles and alliances.⁵⁷ The work of Cockburn, David and Wickham has illustrated clearly how in the context of entry into the labour market this is highly relevant. Wickham demonstrates that training received in schools is important not only as an entry requirement for young workers

⁵⁴ R. Deem (ed), Schooling for Women's Work, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

⁵⁵ D. Spender, "Education The Patriarchal Paradigm and the Response to Feminism" p158 in D. Spender (ed) Mens' Studies Modified, London, Pergamon, 1981.

⁵⁶ R. Deem, "Gender, Patriarchy and Class", op cit

⁵⁷ M. David, "Social Policy and Education Towards a Political Economy of Schooling and Sexual Division", British Journal of Sociology and Education, 2, 1, 1981.

but also because training - and the notion of skill it incorporates - helps to structure work differentiation between the sexes and thus stimulates the subordinate experience of women in the workplace. Whilst they have no access to training, girls are effectively excluded from many occupations.⁵⁸ Wolpe has made the important recognition that even if girls exactly replicated the training available to boys it is unlikely that they would get an equal place in the workforce.⁵⁹

A key element in this is the shifting meaning of the term "skill" and the way in which the status of skill is granted or denied to women's work. There has been increasing recognition that men have effectively created and controlled the notion of skill and that the definition of the term is therefore socially constructed. The award of the label of "skill" bears little relation to the actual amount of training or the ability required to do the job and incorporates subjective judgements.⁶⁰ As Phillips and Taylor note, skilled work has been almost by definition the work that women do not do.⁶¹ The assets which women bring to employment have been persistently devalued. A key theme of this study will be the way in which boundaries of skill were re-drawn during the inter-war years and that, as women entered various areas of employment, the lower value traditionally accorded to female labour ensured that the work was seen as losing status. Thus there was a shifting goal post whereby achievement in female areas remained degraded while the status in employment shifted to

⁵⁸ M. David "Towards a Political Economy of Schooling" op cit. A. Wickham "Gender Divisions, Training and the State" in R. Dale (ed) Education, Training and Employment, London, Pergamon, 1985.

⁵⁹ A. Wolpe, "Girls and Economic Survival", British Journal of Education Studies, 26, 2, 1978.

⁶⁰ C. Cockburn, Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change, London, Pluto Press, 1983. Work skill, especially in relation to industry, has traditionally been seen as craft skill and craft workers have been overwhelmingly male.

⁶¹ A. Phillips and B. Taylor, "Sex and Skill : Notes Towards a Feminist Economics", Feminist Review, 6, 1980.

male dominated fields.⁶² The exclusion of women from control over technology and machines has been one aspect of male power in the work place and has represented a form of gender subordination which has been created and perpetuated within the labour processes.⁶³ There can be no doubt that schools have played a key part in this process. Since the vocational ideology for girls has been linked not to waged work but to domesticity, girl pupils have not acquired the necessary transferable skills which could be used in various areas of the labour market.

As apprenticeship declined during the inter-war years the extent and limitations of female skill were redrawn. The Women's Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction argued that if skill was taken in its strict sense (i.e. to mean a man who could carry out a given complete job) it was "doubtful if such a person as a skilled woman exists". If, on the other hand, skilled was taken to mean the performance of certain routine operations within a job, there were many women who could "do skilled man's work".⁶⁴ The redefinition of both the potential and inherent limitations of female skill was reinforced in schools.

What are the reasons behind the different patterns of girls' and boys' training in schools? Has policy deliberately contributed to the difference or has schooling failed to help females break away from the discriminations of a sex segregated labour market? This thesis

⁶² It has recently been argued that this is exactly what is happening with technology in Europe - M. Wilson (ed), Girls and Women In Education - A European Perspective, Oxford, Pergamon, 1991.

⁶³ In her analysis of the contemporary printing industry C. Cockburn points out that there is no technical reason why women can't become printers as they have the necessary keyboard skills but male printers are antagonistic to this, see Brothers, op cit. Birnbaum has analysed the clothing industry in which machining was done by both sexes in the early twentieth century. Where it was done by men it was classified as skilled, where it was done by women it was labelled semi-skilled. When, in 1926, the Wages Council enforced a single basis for skill classification it was drawn up in such a way as to confirm male machinists as skilled, women as semi-skilled. The distinction cannot be rationalised in terms of the content of the work but arose out of the struggle of male workers to retain their status. B Birnbaum, Women Skill and Automation - A Study of Women's Employment in the Clothing Industry 1946-72.

⁶⁴ Report of the Women's Employment Committee, op cit, p13.

does not suggest that male capitalists have deliberately colluded in a process designed to support and sustain male domination in schools. Rather it is argued that one outcome of a society dominated by certain assumptions about the female role has been an education system the parameters of which are negotiated by those assumptions. This is especially so given that men have traditionally held the power to determine the boundaries of formal schooling for girls.

These themes and parameters were significant for large scale debate about the role of liberal versus vocational education in schools which took place in the inter-war decades. As Silver has pointed out, these years were marked by attempts to develop a curriculum which would lead the country to economic and social rejuvenation. He argues that there was a continuous search during the twenties and thirties for institutions and courses which would provide appropriate responses to the fact that Britain's industrial supremacy was obviously challenged. The view most commonly expressed was that technical education could take the place of apprenticeship. Psychological abilities as pre-dispositions for certain types of work would be discovered in pupils and that therefore education could become linked not merely to exclusion from the labour market but also entry into it. Since it was widely agreed that technical instruction was not really proper education at all it was felt that it was best postponed until the groundwork had been completed. Technical education should therefore follow an initial general education.⁶⁵ What was at stake, therefore, was the structure of the education system itself; attitudes to technical and vocational education related to attitudes about the total system.⁶⁶ This was undoubtedly a period when attitudes hardened and concepts congealed about the role of vocational education in schools. It was the most critical

⁶⁵ Although there were disputes whether this meant it followed on after elementary or secondary schooling.

⁶⁶ H Silver, Education as History, op cit, p157.

period in Britain for the fate of the concepts of liberal and vocational or technical in relation to schooling. Silver argues that a clarification of the issues in and around the 1920s is necessary for an understanding of the debates about the curriculum, about school and work, about education and the economy which have developed later in the century. He does not suggest the way in which the interests of girls materialised in this debate.

The pressures for vocational developments in the classroom were partly in response to changes in employment as traditional apprenticeship declined and new industries, requiring different types of skills, played an increasing role in the economy. There was also concern about foreign competition. In 1927 Findlay argued that modern education could revise the old principles of education in new forms.⁶⁷ The highly influential Percy Nunn wrote of the "acceptable and unacceptable" linkage between schooling and employment. According to Nunn, schools should not prepare for such trivial and transient occupations as box making for girls or policing for boys but should concentrate on such noble and dignified jobs as those of engineer, cabinet maker, builder or farmer.⁶⁸ Neither Nunn nor the Spens Committee which adopted his vocabulary suggested any such worthy employment for females.⁶⁹

In order to appreciate the debate it is important to understand the premise of the liberal ideal in education - although it had different emphasis and implications in both the elementary and secondary sectors. The centrality of the ideal was of prime importance to the development of the English education during the inter-war years. It came to be perceived as the necessity to concentrate on the general aspects of education first. Each child must

⁶⁷ J Findley, The Foundations of Education : A Survey of Principles and Projects Vol. II, The Practice of Education, University Press, 1927, p323.

⁶⁸ T P Nunn, Education · Its Data and First Principles, London, Edward Arnold, 1920, p204-5

⁶⁹ For a full discussion of the Spens Committee, see Chapter 2. Nunn was both a member of the Hadow and Spens Committees.

receive a broad base of knowledge which imbued mental training. Only then could this be followed by specialisation in the form of more academic education, training for a profession or the civil service or actual instruction in work related skills such as typing or carpentry.⁷⁰ This study will show that there was a clear gap between rhetoric and reality; a great deal of purely practical work was performed in the schools. Nevertheless crucially the ideal persisted and underpinned all discussions of technical education during these years.

Technical education has always been on the fringe of the educational structure in this country despite the frequent insistence of politicians since 1914 that it has a crucial role to play in the economy.⁷¹ The accusation that Britain has never had an efficient system of technical training is familiar and the country's patchy economic performance has been seen to be due to an inadequacy in the type of technical education provided.⁷² The failure to develop technical education in the early decades of the century has been described as a great lost opportunity of education.⁷³

The way in which the state has promoted technical and vocational education during the twentieth century does, indeed, appear to be contradictory. In spite of various initiatives there has not been any attempt to alter the pre-existing structure of the system which places a primacy on the liberal academic ideal. Summerfield and Evans have recently argued that the fundamental definitional problem concerning technical education during the twenties and thirties was the relative importance within it of theory and practice. The implications of this

⁷⁰ See F Hunt, Gender and Policy in English Education 1902-44, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p116-18 for a discussion of the liberal ideal.

⁷¹ This is, of course, still the case today See Conclusion.

⁷² See, for example, M Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980, Cambridge, CUP, 1981, p132-5. M Sanderson, Educational Opportunity and Social Change in England, London, Faber, 1987.

⁷³ M Sanderson, Educational Opportunity and Social Change in England, London, Faber, 1987, p60.

relationship were far reaching for, if technical education was mainly theoretical, it could be subsumed into a refined liberal education.⁷⁴ The liberal versus vocational controversy was, therefore, of particular significance for working class girls because of the frequently expressed arguments that girls had a single vocation - that of homemaking. Moreover the insistence that any part of schooling which might be considered as practical preparation for working life had also to be recognisably educational was hard to mesh with the form in which vocational preparation emerged for girls.

That form was constituted by domestic lessons. In the elementary sector as a whole vocational education emerged as practical work. The notion that vocational education should be confined to the elementary sector fitted in with the assumption that the working class pupils of that sector did not have the ability to tackle a more academic curriculum. The intellectual capacity of all but a gifted few who were able to climb up the scholarship ladder was equated with their social status. It was therefore assumed that working class children needed a practical and vocational bias in their schooling. Nevertheless the whole hierarchy of the educational system was underpinned by the assumption that practical subjects were educationally inferior to the purely intellectual. Unfortunately for girls, if practical subjects themselves had a hierarchy, domestic subjects were at the bottom of that ladder.⁷⁵

It will be suggested that the increasing emphasis on domestic subjects for girls called into question the notion of the liberal/general education which was supposed to apply before any vocational specialisation. By 1918 the principle of differentiation in the curriculum had already become eradicably established and enshrined in the elementary curriculum. The

⁷⁴ For definitions see P W Musgrave, *Sociology, History and Education : A Reader*, London, Methuen, 1970, Chapter 5. P Summerfield and E Evans (eds) *Technical Education and the State since 1850*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990, Introduction.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 3.

inter-war period was an era in which the details of that curriculum were refined and expanded. The way in which this emerged was as a training for girls which was purely utilitarian and based on an adult role as home labourer. It was a training which was entirely antithetical to the valued principle of liberal education. As Hunt has argued of the secondary sector during this period, educational policy posited an increase in the emphasis on a girl's role rather than on her career. That role was the universal domestic role which was brought constantly into conflict with the "normal" - or the boys' curriculum. The technical education of boys was the norm by which girls were judged, measured and seen to be deviant. For a boy, technical education came to mean manual skills training and a broad general basis of education which would equip him for participation in the new economy and may allow him to climb up the employment ladder. For girls it became preparation for the social role of wife and mother and a limited industrial training for the low paid, unskilled work they would actually perform in the factory or workshop. The assumption was that training girls as skilled workers would render them unfit somehow to become proper wives and mothers. For boys there was no uncertainty as to whether training as citizens and workers would render them automatically unfit to function as husbands and fathers. Thus vocational and technical education during the inter-war years became highly gendered.

Recently Hunt has shed the first light on the implications of the liberal versus vocational debate for girls' schooling. Focusing on policy making at national level, she argues that the state of domestic subjects generally in the elementary sector during the 1920s must be regarded as "settled" and that a gendered curriculum was firmly established in contrast to the debate in the secondary sector.⁷⁶ She argues that the Board had a "relaxed attitude" towards differentiation and bias in the Elementary Schools, citing as evidence a

⁷⁶ F Hunt, *Gender and Policy*, op cit, p125

discussion document relating to the new Central Schools as evidence in which it was accepted that there should be a domestic bias to the curriculum.⁷⁷ The crux of her argument is that during the first four decades of the century the "stated aims of education for girls in both elementary and secondary Schools were shot through with inconsistencies and ambiguities".⁷⁸ She argues that the traditional aim of domesticity was warring with a reluctance to relinquish the truly educational aspects of schooling i.e. the liberal curriculum of knowledge for its own sake. The "resulting tension", Hunt suggests, "had practical repercussions for policy in girls' schooling". Policy was "marked by muddle".⁷⁹

This analysis does not seek to differ from Hunt's basic premise; contradictions and ambiguities were indeed rife in attempts to school working class girls - in London as much as anywhere. This specific local study will firstly attempt to give some concrete expression to the problems Hunt has cited and will, in doing that, stress that greater emphasis must be given to the practical domestic vocational training which working class pupils received in schools during these years. Whatever statements may have been made about the importance and paramount position of liberal education, in practice Elementary Schools taught girls a specifically "vocational" education but it was a vocation based in the home rather than in the labour market. Since Hunt's spotlight of analysis is mainly trained on the secondary sector and since she uses gender rather than class as the central organising thread to her work, she is not concerned primarily with the Elementary Schools. Gender differentiation was much more explicit in the elementary sector but there was none of the latent anxiety about the principle which was then manifesting itself in the secondary sector.

⁷⁷ Ibid p126

⁷⁸ Ibid p6

⁷⁹ Ibid, p7.

Hunt has suggested that by the 1930s the Board of Education was attempting to dissociate the teaching of practical subjects for both sexes in the elementary sector after the age of 11 from any hint of vocational training.⁸⁰ She maintains that the underlying premise of the curriculum in both elementary and secondary sectors was that of the liberal ideal although different emphasis and applications were placed on it. This ideal became a belief in education for its own sake, a belief in a broad general knowledge. The tenacity of the liberal ideal in Secondary Schools has long been acknowledged but in 1904 it was new for the elementary sector.⁸¹ This thesis argues that in London the liberal ideal was very much compromised in practice for girls in the elementary sector and was indeed corrupted by a blatant insistence on utilitarian preparation for adult life.

As Hunt rightly points out, whatever vocational instruction was actually given in reality, it is still significant that policymakers thought that they were giving a liberal, broad education. A Board of Education document in 1938 asserted that

... the aim of the public Elementary School is to provide for children up to the age of 14 or 15 a sound general education free from any specific vocational bias. It is true that a good deal of practical work is included in the curriculum, particularly for senior scholars, but these activities are included for their educational value and no attempt is made to provide any pre-employment vocational training.⁸²

The contradiction was that the practical instruction given to girls was irredeemably vocational as, indeed, it has always been in practice. The Victorian liberal ideal had, of course, long

⁸⁰ Ibid p63 Hunt cites what Eustace Percy was to call a "rather sickly distaste for vocational education" which, she argues, was to become apparent even in elementary schools although the effect on curriculum and ethos seem to have been fairly muted Hunt refers to a Memorandum of 1937 - "Education in the Country", which called for rural senior schools to include a variety of practical subjects but which laid stress on the educational value rather than the vocational Hunt does accept that in practice vocational training was provided in practical subjects lessons

⁸¹ F. Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p117. See Morant's Introduction to the Code of Regulations for Public Elementary Schools, pp 1904, LXXV p8

⁸² Quoted in F. Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p117 : ED 46/199, Memorandum submitted by the Board of Education to the Interdepartmental Committee on Nursing Services, 1938.

been ultimately vocational as it envisaged an adult professional career for males. There was a tacit understanding that schooling was ultimately about preparation for a career but as the notion of a career for women was still a very radical concept in the inter-war period, attempts had to be made to accommodate the confusion.⁸³ Gender differentiation and, indeed, social class thus cut across and sabotaged the liberal ideal so that vocation for girls became a preparation for the domestic role; schools were used as a channel to perpetuate a girl's social function of domesticity.

The way in which all these ideas will be explored is through a study of the vocational schools of London during the inter-war years. The focus will be on the elementary sector where vocational training, as outlined above, was held to be especially appropriate.⁸⁴ A local study of the education policy of the capital will provide a perspective on the social and educational diversity which emerges from any detailed empirical study of schooling. London had, by far, the most innovative education policy of the inter-war years and was repeatedly referred to in reports as leading the way as far as technical and vocational education was concerned. Thus the London County Council developed various initiatives in this field.⁸⁵ It is recognised that provision in the capital was, therefore, wider in scope than in many areas of the country. Whatever the boundaries of what was on offer to working class girls in terms of schooling or employment opportunities in London, elsewhere there were even stricter limitations. Nevertheless this local study will illustrate trends and policies in

⁸³ Hunt has made this point in relation to secondary schools, finding an increasing emphasis on the secondary girl's role rather than career. That role was, of course, a domestic one.

⁸⁴ Where illustrations have been given or recourse had to school records, examples in the main have been taken from the schools of Central and South London. This decision was taken for practical reasons as it was impossible for research to encompass all areas of London.

⁸⁵ The London County Council will hereafter be referred to as the LCC.

education which, although perhaps not so apparent elsewhere, are illustrative of the way in which vocational schooling was perceived for girls.

Opinions differ widely on the extent to which education was truly decentralised in these years and the extent to which educational decision making was directed from the central authority, the Board of Education, or by local authorities.⁸⁶ It does seem clear, however, that London was more proactive than most local authorities, particularly in the elementary sector, a factor at least partially explained by the capital's economy and by the shifting political affiliations on the LCC. Decision making, of course, differs in status; decisions about broad educational practice as against curricula practice at a school level are obviously of differing significance. In education there are various levels of policy formation and decision making; different groups organise policy, implement and interpret it. Policy makers at all levels, moreover, respond to prevailing attitudes and social pressures, to economic exigency and lobbying. Structural policy creates the framework of education and is embodied in legislative acts; Median policy refers to decisions about educational practice such as the content of the curriculum. Structural policy allowed enormous scope for input from civil servants, inspectors and officers at local level, all acting under pressure from groups such as teachers or psychologists. There are many dimensions to the picture, complex relationships between politicians and civil servants, between administrative civil servants and inspectors, between inspectors and teachers which create levels of policy and practice in English schooling.⁸⁷

Moreover, at classroom level, there remains the enormous power of individual teachers to put into practice or to interpret independently policies prescribed for them.

⁸⁶ More consideration is given in Chapter 2 to the relative power of the Board and the LCC in formulating policy in London

⁸⁷ Inspectors tended to be recruited from ranks of teachers

Traditionally schools and teachers have had a good deal of autonomy in putting the curriculum into practice in this country. There has been the inevitable constraint of examination preparation but classroom independence has remained. During the inter-war years curricular guidance came in a series of circulars collected in the Handbook of Suggestions.⁸⁸ The Board of Education had to rely on its Inspectorate to ensure standards set out therein were met and payments of grants justified.

The general intention in policy making was to provide an appropriate education for children. There was much confusion of appropriate with intellectual ability, particularly as this was complicated by the assumption class could be equated with intelligence. Similarly policy makers faced - unconsciously - confusion about gender appropriate schooling. In formulating policy officials, politicians and teachers faced the reality that the day to day lives of girls and boys, men and women were different and a variety of social, cultural and economic conditions disallowed the sexes from living on the same terms. This was a powerful disincentive to attempt to remedy these inequalities through education.

At whatever level of policy making and practice, women were under-represented. They were entirely excluded from the bands of senior civil servants and were separate and inferior beings within the Inspectorate. Women teachers were not held in high esteem and their opinions were only considered necessary for views on girls' education where it differed from boys.⁸⁹ For most local education authorities as a whole during these years girls'

⁸⁸ See Chapter Two The Suggestions were revised piecemeal from 1905, were republished in 1923, 1927 and 1937 during the inter-war years and became a "Bible" for the elementary teacher See M. Lawn "The Spur and the Bridle", Journal of Curriculum Studies, 19,3,1987.

⁸⁹ It is outside the scope of this study to include detailed analysis of the role of women in policy making at either Board or local level For the former see F. Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit. Research into the role of women in local government during the inter-war period is still needed but was beyond the practical parameters of this research

schooling was not really an issue in that it was not controversial.⁹⁰ That would, indeed, seem to be the case in London where major educational debate did not centre on girls' education. Nevertheless significantly a number of policies were developed about girls' technical education and the way it should be taught in the various institutions that comprised the elementary sector.⁹¹

I shall firstly examine the context in which policy making and practice in girls' vocational schooling occurred. The experiences of working class girls in education cannot be understood without reference to the wider context of their lives in paid work and the home, or to the various political and economic pressures of the period or to the prevailing ideologies about women's place in society - all of which determined in part the aims, images and realities of the ways in which working class girls in London were taught to be women.

Chapter Three will then examine the domestic courses in Elementary Schools which provide the most precise and explicit formulation of schools' preparation of girls for their adult role. In a phrase which might serve as an agenda for the whole inter-war period and for this study the Chief Woman Inspector commented in 1934 that the "domestic arts have the advantage of being both vocational and non-vocational".⁹²

Although this study is primarily about the education girls received for paid employment it is impossible to analyse such education without recognising the all

⁹⁰ F Hunt, *Gender and Policy*, op cit, p109 The most notable feature, she argues, is the sheer uniformity and predictability in local authorities response to the question of how different the curriculum for girls should be

⁹¹ The new departments and schools which emerged after reorganisation with a break at 11 were sometimes called senior schools or departments - See Appendix A. In this study I will focus on the education received by girls aged 11-14 whether in elementary, re-organised schools or specific training schools

⁹² ED 10/152, Paper U 6(13) Oral Evidence of Miss A G Philip, Chief Woman Inspector of the Board, 23 2 34, p8.

encompassing power of the domestic ideology within girls' education and the effect that had on their options in the labour market.

Any schooling or training girls might receive for paid employment was shaped and constrained by the philosophy that all girls did have a domestic vocation; any legitimate aspirations for their education had to be tempered by the need to prepare them for this. Working class girls' imagined capacities and assumed needs for domestic training, it will be argued, shaped all the schooling they received and reinforced a sex-specific curriculum. By the late 1930s a leading Board of Education official could claim that, for girls, "domestic literacy" was to be addressed with the same urgent necessity as mental literacy should be addressed for boys - for girls "becoming proficient in the three Cs - catering, cooking and cleaning" was seen as the ultimate aim of all education.⁹³ Such a philosophy was, of course, not novel. The new characteristic of this period, it will be suggested, was the formalisation of a subject exclusively for girls; the creation of a curriculum area that was deemed worthy for only girls to study for a considerable portion of their time in school. During the inter-war years it was no longer a question of whether or not a girl should be excluded from the educational process, the debate was no longer about whether a girl should be taught domestic subjects. What was at stake was the refining of the curriculum differentiation which reflected the new ideology of femininity.⁹⁴ In effect the schools were to become both teachers and judges of domestic performance.⁹⁵

It has increasingly recognised by historians that the apparent naturalness of women performing domestic labour - both in and outside the home - belies the complexity of social

⁹³ ED136/109, Some Notes on the Teaching of Domestic Skills, S H Wood, 28 9.37, p4.

⁹⁴ Domestic subjects during this period are, therefore, a classic example of how knowledge has been constructed by society.

⁹⁵ See D. Attar, Wasting Girls Time : The History and Politics of Home Economics, London, Virago, 1990.

conditions, pressures and ideologies which have forged and maintained that role.⁹⁶ The gender specific qualities supposedly fitting women for the domestic role in turn have been used to denying their ability to perform other roles in society. At the same time this has been used as justification for the perpetuation of the accepted power structure within the family. The cult of domesticity has strengthened, perpetuated and formalised existing sexual divisions within society and, although this phenomenon has until very recently not been analysed by historians, this is as true of the inter-war years as of the more researched late 19th century period. One channel through which the ideology was conveyed was the Elementary School domestic course. Domestic subjects lessons were not only about the practical task of teaching various domestic skills but also about the indoctrination of girls in the habits of femininity, docility and subordination which marriage and maternity were likely to require of them.

The inter-war years are significant in this respect in that during the period domestic subjects were institutionalised in the curriculum in a way that was to affect girls' education for many years. A systematised training in household tasks was established at every level of formal education. The domestic subjects curriculum accommodated and perpetuated the changing ideology of femininity and accepted the need to at least partially prepare girls for economic survival - but it simultaneously was built on the assumption that the working class woman's proper sphere remained in the home where she would create the comfortable and stable environment in which her menfolk could live. The ideal of the fulfilled, efficient housewife was thus imposed. This was particularly important as it was during these years that the re-organisation of schools took place placing specific emphasis on the education of

⁹⁶ As Lewis has pointed out, while reproduction and lactation provide a functional basis for the domestic sexual division of labour, it does not follow that women must also have responsibility for childcare. See J Lewis, Labour and Love, op cit, p2-3

those over 11.⁹⁷ Thus through the domestic subjects course the curriculum in Elementary Schools became more differentiated, the older the girl became; as the 1927 Suggestions for Teachers stated "as the years pass on the gulf between the boys' and girls' courses rapidly widens". The girl was increasingly prepared for her adult domestic role.⁹⁸

Since domestic subjects were exclusively taught to girls during these years and since they took such a large amount of time in the girls' day, their existence affected the access a girl had to other areas of knowledge. As Attar has argued, the existence within the state system of a separate subject for girls has had an impact on education as a whole; marking out one area of knowledge for girls inevitably marks out the rest of the curriculum in degrees of suitability for girls and boys.⁹⁹ The impact of this segregation, as will be shown, was that the girls studying domestic subjects were implicitly and explicitly denied access to other areas of education and their concomitant benefits or rewards.¹⁰⁰

The question of women's paid employment cut across the subject of domestic studies in schools. If, as was increasingly accepted, working class girls had to be trained for at least a temporary episode in the labour market, they should be prepared for an appropriate area of employment. Domestic service answered this need; it was an extension of a woman's role in the private sphere of the home and thus made the departure from the ideology that females should remain out of the labour market more palatable. If girls became servants their wage

⁹⁷ See Chapter 2

⁹⁸ Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers, London, HMSO, 1927, Introduction.

⁹⁹ D Attar, Wasting Girl's Time, op cit, p27.

¹⁰⁰ This influence continues to be felt in girls' education today for, since gender was so inherent in the formation of the subject, the gender stereotyping cannot simply be removed by granting boys access to it or changing the name of the subject. The place of Home Economics in the curriculum is still a subject of debate as the National Curriculum evolves in the early 1990s. See, for example, J Greenhaigh "Home Economics and the National Curriculum, Modus 7,4, May 1989 and EOC, Equal Opportunities in Home Economics, Manchester, EOC, 1983.

labour would remain hidden in a suitable sphere and they would acquire skills which could easily be transferred to the home and their "true" destiny.

Moreover the way in which domesticity and femininity was taught - involving the creation of a comfortable context and supportive environment in which men and boys could exist conveyed subtle messages about the sexual division of labour and power within the home. In the training of the country's future wives and mothers, there was a striking correlation between the nation's interests and needs and those of males.

This was also the case in the Junior Technical and Central Schools which will be the subjects of analysis in Chapters Four and Five.¹⁰¹ Silver has recently commented that it is a common feature for British educational history that problems such as that of the liberal versus technical result in new institutions.¹⁰² As existing educational establishments either fail to adapt or adapt slowly or inadequately, new institutions are created - often of lower status which protects and even enhances the status of the existing schools - namely the Secondary Schools. The development of the Junior Technical and Central Schools during this period was one such mechanism, diverting pressure away from the academic Secondary Schools and solving the question of whether practical instruction really was of suitable educational status for secondary and largely non working class children.¹⁰³

Both types of school in London were very much products of their time and, indeed, met their demise soon after the inter-war period drew to a close. The Junior Technical and

¹⁰¹ The curricula of these schools will be analysed. The curriculum is a promising area of exploration in educational study as it shows how philosophies of education are translated into practice at policy level.

¹⁰² H. Silver, *Education as History*, op cit, p156. Other new educational institutions which developed in this period were day continuation schools, evening and commercial institutes and juvenile instruction centres. Since these did not provide compulsory schooling for the age group 11-14 they will not be examined in this study.

¹⁰³ Very little historical attention has been devoted to these new institutions. Therefore in both Chapter 4 and 5 there will be brief descriptions of the Junior Technical and the Central Schools at the start of each Chapter before attention is turned to their gender dimensions.

Trade Schools were to provide for certain pupils from Elementary Schools a continued general education combined with preparation for a specific trade. They were to train a nucleus of skilled workers for the needs of the capital's economy. For girls this materialised as training in traditional women's work, overwhelmingly in the needletrades. The Central Schools similarly were to provide for their more academically minded pupils a general education with a certain vocational "bias" - either commercial or industrial, which would prepare for employment. Although these schools trained pupils primarily for a new area of employment - clerical office work, the education given ensured women were slotted in at the lowest level of the employment hierarchy, their work marked by the traditional characteristics of female participation in paid labour - insecurity, low status and low pay.¹⁰⁴

The schooling provided in both types of institution had similarities. The education given to girls was highly gender specific and limited the employment opportunities of ex-pupils to areas of the labour market defined as stereotypically female. Although both types of school were intended to provide preparation for paid employment, that preparation for girls was defined, shaped and curtailed by ideological assumptions both about girls' ability and their future role in society. Even in these specifically vocational schools, a working class girl's future social role as domestic labourer, wife and mother limited her schooling, her attainment of marketable skills and future opportunities in the labour market. Philosophies about the appropriate role of women in the home and in paid employment redefined the "skills" and aspirations girls were given.

¹⁰⁴ Although pupils did not enter Junior Technical schools until aged 13 or 13½ (rather than at 11 as in central schools), they will be examined first in this thesis. This decision has been taken because the education provided in the Junior Technical schools was more similar to that in the elementary schools. Moreover contemporaries perceived the trade schools as being lower down in the educational hierarchy than the Central Schools.

Thus in both Junior Technical and Central Schools the liberal ideal was lost for girls. It was increasingly accepted and encouraged that boys' Junior Technical and especially Central Schools would develop along liberal pseudo secondary lines. The curricula became more academic and a broad general education was given. There was no such possibility in girls' Trade Schools which imparted to their pupils utilitarian and functional training in workshop practice thus providing a ready supply of workers for the industries of London. It was not the intention that Central Schools should override the carefully defined parameters of basic training in office skills. Significantly, however, as will be shown, in practice the teachers and clientele of the schools ensured that girls' schools too developed along more liberal lines and did open up some new avenues for working class girls.

The experiences of working class boys and girls in each type of school were thus different in terms of the expectations held out for them and the opportunities open to them. This did not go unnoticed by all contemporaries. The Nation Union of Women Teachers, a feminist union of teachers, recognised the discrimination which they believed female pupils suffered.¹⁰⁵ It is significant that there was criticism from contemporaries of the gender dynamics of vocational schooling. There is always a danger in historical analysis of not being sufficiently aware of the ideological constraints of the period under study. I shall, therefore, incorporate the criticisms and resistance of these women teachers to gender differentiated education. The feminist teachers saw the role of state schooling in perpetuating women's oppression. They worked against this promoting an alternative vision of the potential of girls' schooling. It was an ideal connected to their wider feminist ideology and to their fight to achieve total equality for women.

¹⁰⁵ Hereafter "NUWT". The NUWT, although a relatively small union, was vociferous in championing the rights of girls to equal opportunities in education. Until recently the Union has been a forgotten pressure group.

The views of the teaching profession are especially important since this group had the task of translating policy into practice. It is always problematic to discover how far teachers accepted the ideologies underlying policy and put them into practice effectively and/or unquestioningly. This thesis suggests, however, that the NUWT were virtually alone in challenging underlying assumptions and sought to translate this protest into the way they performed their duties.¹⁰⁶

It is important not to exaggerate the "radicalism" of the dissent. As Turnbull has pointed out, our own need for strong female models in the past can blind us to the reality and lead us to see protest where it does not exist.¹⁰⁷ Most teachers, even in the NUWT, accepted that it was desirable for girls to function in the domestic sphere. Nevertheless these women did believe that girls' vocational training was being organised and practised on fundamentally different lines to that of boys and was thus adversely affecting female pupils' adult lives.

Whatever the intentions, criticisms and practices of policy it is, of course, another problem to quantify the cumulative and collective effects of school life on the girl pupils themselves. Education plays a crucial part in shaping children's perceptions of themselves and the options open to them. Even though it is just one aspect of socialisation if it reinforces the message being given outside the classroom walls, it is doubly powerful. This is particularly so in the years of adolescence. Although children at an early age internalise important elements about different gender roles, it is latent or early adolescence which is a crucial period as notions of feminine and masculine roles are classified, reinforced and redefined in adult terms.

¹⁰⁶ For an examination of how other unions reacted see F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p97-115.

¹⁰⁷ A Turnbull, "Women, Education and Domesticity; A Study of the Domestic Subjects Movement 1870-1914", Unpublished Thesis, Polytechnic of the South Bank, PhD, 1983.

The ways in which the girls internalise and react to these messages about female roles in employment perpetuate divisions within occupational choice. As Shaw has pointed out, although little is still known about the process of occupational choice, a great deal is known about the adjustment of female ambition and aspirations to the social and economic reality they seem to face.¹⁰⁸ There may, of course, be discontinuities between the definitions and lessons in femininity and masculinity that girls learn at home and at school. The pattern of gender socialisation is not a smooth process but ridden with contradictions which girls have to resolve themselves. Research has shown how girls make sense of their experiences within the constraints of class and gender positions by using definitions of femininity as an escape route and turning indeed to find "fulfilment" in domesticity. As a strategy of survival they create "sanctuaries" for themselves - and early marriage becomes a means of achieving adulthood and social status. Their failure to acquire other than domestic skills at school is legitimised because they are girls and they therefore turned to domesticity and motherhood inverting the hierarchy of productive and domestic labour presented to them - while leaving unchallenged the hierarchy of male over female.¹⁰⁹ Their resistance in accepting marriage and motherhood is in at least partially resisting the occupational route mapped out for them of unskilled, low status employment. The particular version of vocational schooling working class girls received pushed them into a situation there they freely chose their own subordination and headed towards dependence on a male wage.

Although it is not the main focus of this study to show that this was what happened after girls left school in London during the inter-war years, the research of Roberts and

¹⁰⁸ J Shaw, "Finishing School . the Implications of Sex Segregated Education" in R. Barker and S Allen (eds) Sexual Divisions in Society, London, 1976.

¹⁰⁹ A. McRobbie, "Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity" in Women's Studies Group (ed) Women Take Issue : Aspects of Women's Subordination, London, Hutchinson, 1978.

Summerfield in other areas of the country has shown that this was indeed the case. There is no reason to believe that it was otherwise in London.¹¹⁰ In an attempt to discover how the pupils related their vocational education to the reality of their lives a number of women who grew up in London during the inter-war years were interviewed for this study.¹¹¹ Although the women talked in general about their childhood and early employment, the focus of our conversations was their memories of school.¹¹²

Some comments should be made about the value and potential of oral history as a methodology for historians. Whilst undoubtedly an important source for rediscovering individuals' experiences and perceptions of their lives, oral material suffers from inherent deficiencies in the same way as any other historical form.¹¹³ Oral history does indeed give access to a range of information rarely documented and entry to the testimony of people, particularly women, whose experiences are not normally recorded. The notion of "giving a voice to the voiceless" has been a strong impulse in the development of the methodology. Similarly it has been argued that the practice of oral history gives the historian a chance to direct attention to the "fundamental common things of life" by the ability to pick themes in the light of importance to the field of research rather than remaining at the mercy of available documents. Moreover, oral and written sources are not mutually exclusive and spoken

¹¹⁰ See, for example, E Roberts, "A Woman's Place", op cit P Summerfield, "Family, School and Work Girls' Education and Employment in Lancashire 1900-50", unpublished paper.

¹¹¹ Fifteen women and one man were interviewed. Since some of the women requested anonymity I have called each interviewee by their first name only. Some published autobiographical material has also been incorporated into the sections which examine how girls experienced schooling. The decision to group all oral evidence together towards the end of Chapter Three and Five rather than to interweave it in discussion of policy was taken to emphasise the dichotomy between theory and practice, the intentions and realities of girls' schooling

¹¹² This study is about education and I have not, therefore, included details about the paid work the women actually went on to perform.

¹¹³ Oral History has, of course, had the important effect of revitalising debates about the methodology and theoretical formulation which lie behind the analysis and interpretation of most forms of historical evidence

records can crucially aid interpretation by revealing the context in which the written documents were compiled.

Oral evidence is, of course, not direct access to the past but to memories which have inevitably been affected by the present. This offers the advantage of being able to reconstruct the past from a larger vantage point and of being able to interpret early events in the light of subsequent developments. The evidence is collected within a changed culture and is therefore not vulnerable to the biases or pressures of the periods which produced it. However, oral evidence is shaped by the bias of the time in which it is collected and it is this subjectivity which has raised the most questions about the fallibility of oral history as a tool. Oral testimony is a record of perceptions, not a recreation of events and this has lead some historians to argue that it may be employed as a source only if corroborated by documentary sources. Lummis, for example, has suggested that unless oral history can "collect useful information about the past as opposed to present states of mind" the argument for practising oral history largely disappears.¹¹⁴

Yet this subjectivity can be one of the great values of oral history. The speaker's subjectivity, inevitably that of a particular social group, class and gender, revalues how people think and make sense of their lives. It reveals not just what people did but what they wanted to do, believed they were doing and what they now think they did. In the words of Passerini, oral history is

preeminently an expression and representation of culture and therefore includes not only literal narrations but also the dimensions of memory, ideology and subconscious desires.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ T Lummis, Listening to History, London, Hutchinson, 1987, p13

¹¹⁵ L. Passerini, "Work, Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism", History Workshop Journal, 8, Autumn 1979, p84

The problems of memory lie at the heart of the debate about subjectivity in oral history. Questions relate to how memory can suppress - consciously and unconsciously - whole chunks of experience and to how any memory is inevitably refracted through layer and layer of subsequent experience and reconstructed through time. Yet these characteristics of memory can be turned to advantage; by looking at how memory operates over time by contrasting individual and collective memory and by examining the so called "mystery of subjectivity" the fallibility of memory may be tackled. As John has pointed out, the recognition and revelation of what individuals' memories have made of the past can permit investigation of the ways in which people's perception of past time interact with the present. It is this utilisation of dynamic interaction of the past with the present that lies at the heart of the potential of oral history.¹¹⁶

Feminist historians have been at the forefront of developing this new methodology as they have recognised the openings into women's past which were hitherto inaccessible. The use of oral history can reveal the unique experience of women whose presence is not marked in any formal documentary sources but it can also go further than simply recovery. Much of the historical evidence available on women's lives in the past are accounts of their behaviour refracted through the eyes of men. Oral history allows women's perceptions and interpretations of their own lives to come forth and permit the female perspective to be seen alongside that of men. Feminist history and oral history come together to alter understandings of the everyday lives of women in the past and show how gender shaped those women's lives. Particular insights have been developed, for example, into the relationship of home and work. Gittins has demonstrated how artificial the division is

¹¹⁶ A.V. John, "Scratching the Surface . Women, Work and Coalmining History", *Oral History*, 10,2,1982.

between paid employment and the domestic economy for women for "the words work and family are wholly inadequate in understanding the way of women's lives".¹¹⁷

Oral history has offered new insights into how women perceive, respond and cope with prevailing forms of femininity. Nevertheless the use of oral history in reaching the understanding of women's pasts does present unique problems. Research has shown how women tend to recall the familiar and personal aspects of their past lives while men stress employment and public lives. Similarly women can use a different form of language to describe their past concentrating on the impersonal collective and general terms while men repeatedly use "I", recounting their lives as a series of self-conscious acts. Awareness of these characteristics can help the historian to use certain tools of investigation and methods of interviewing and analysis to penetrate the perceptions of women as expressed by their memories.

Oral history has not been widely used in examinations of educational policy in practice.¹¹⁸ Very little is known about how ideologies in schooling were actually transmitted in the classroom and received by pupils. Oral history is, therefore, a resource of great potential for educational historians particularly as schooldays, a routine and repeated experience, tend to be recalled in detail. Although formal education is only one aspect of socialisation into accepted adult roles, oral testimony can illustrate how messages conveyed in the classroom interact with a child's whole environment in forming a women's subjectivity. It can provide evidence of how in practice schools socialised girls for particular niches in the occupational and hence class and gender structures.¹¹⁹ It can reveal how

¹¹⁷ D Gittins, "Women's Work and Family Size between the Wars", *Oral History*, 5,2,1977.

¹¹⁸ The one exception is the work of Summerfield. See, for example, P. Summerfield, "An Oral History of Schooling in Lancashire 1900-50 · Gender, Class and Education", *Oral History*, 15,2,1987.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

females perceived their vocational training in terms of its appropriateness to them as girls and in relation to future marriage. The memories of the women interviewed illustrate not only the complex route by which they were socialised into adult roles but also the importance or lack of importance they attached to the messages conveyed to them in schools.

Other sources used for this research are more traditional. For national policy and debates, for official dicta and less formal exchanges, the papers of the Board of Education, located in the Public Record Office, have been examined. The London County Council Education Officer's files form the basis of the source material on girls' schooling in London. These include the papers of the Elementary and Higher Education Sub-Committees and Inspectorate Reports on individual schools. Various contemporary journals and newspapers were also consulted, particularly The Times Educational Supplement.

The archives of the National Union of Women Teachers are extensive but as yet only partially catalogued and have been scarcely used by historians.¹²⁰ The Journal of the Union, The Woman Teacher, has also been employed in this attempt to discover the extent to which education did or did not become the "strongest weapon" of girls in inter-war London.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Items from the Archives have been referred to by the box number in which they are stored. At the time of writing, cataloguing had recommenced and I have, given therefore, where possible, the box number of the new location.

¹²¹ The Woman Teacher, 7.11 19, p50. The NUWT referred frequently to education as a girl's strongest weapon.

**A WORLD RUNNING ON NORMAL LINES: THE POLITICAL, SOCIAL
AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF EDUCATION
DURING THE INTER-WAR YEARS**

In 1919 the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction posed a question:

Assume the peace is signed, that transition has taken place and that the world is running on normal lines - what work will there be for women to do? And what work is it desirable that they should do?... There may be work which women could do, with immediate economic advantage to themselves and the nation : and yet it may be work which enlightened statesmanship would consider unsuitable.¹

This chapter will examine what indeed did happen when the world of inter-war Britain began to run on normal lines. What work did women do? It will be argued that far from the War having an emancipatory effect on women's employment and indeed on their domestic lives, during the inter-war years women returned to their traditional role in the paid labour market and in the home. The corollary of this was that girls were educated for such roles - and indeed when they temporarily entered the labour market at fourteen, fifteen or sixteen, were already conditioned to believe that their paid work would be short-term. It will be argued that the immensely powerful ideological climate of domesticity and motherhood was the context in which this process occurred, a context that was also shaped by uncertainty about gender roles and fear of conflict between the sexes. It was indeed this conflict to which the Women's Employment Committee was referring in its reference to "enlightened statesmanship" - for it was accepted that the vested interests of the male workers was one of

¹ Ministry of Reconstruction, Report of the Women's Employment Committee, op cit, p4.

the chief factors in preventing women entering new spheres of paid employment. As the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry commented:

The long continued exclusion of women from nearly all the best paid occupations has been largely the result of the assumption that these occupations were the sacred preserve of men... the vested interest of the male had always to be protected against new rivals of the other sex.²

Thus the influences of habit, custom and established expectations combined to relegate women to less advantageously situated occupations and to fix the occupational rates of women's trades at a level far below that of men's trades.

This chapter will also examine the complex combination of other pressures - political, economic, administrative and ideological which necessarily shaped educational policies towards vocational instruction during these years. Historians have frequently failed to recognise the inherent dangers of writing educational history without understanding the context in which such policy is made. This has resulted particularly in misunderstandings about the inter-war years which have been dismissed as a period of stagnation in state schooling, an impasse between the Acts of 1918 and 1944.³

Educational policy of these years was, however, intimately bound up with political, economic and social necessities and must be judged as such.⁴ The inter-war environment was characterised both by a harsh economic climate and by changes in social and political attitudes to schooling - all of which determined the nature of development of policy as much

² War Cabinet Committee Report on Women in Industry, op cit, p265 The importance the Government attached to this report's verdict that it had kept its promise to preserve wage levels is evident from the attempt made to stop Beatrice Webb issuing her minority report. The majority Report concluded that most women had not in fact done men's work in wartime but that when they had taken over a particularly job they had achieved about two thirds of his level of output. Beatrice Webb argued that although women had been doing men's work, they had not received men's pay.

³ Gilbert, for example, excludes education from his study of inter-war social policy altogether since "there is little to write about", B Gilbert, British Social Policy 1914-39, London, Batsford, 1970, Preface.

⁴ It is intended, therefore, to give a detailed examination of the political, economic and social background of policy in this chapter

as prevailing gender ideologies did. This was particularly so in the capital for not only did London undergo huge economic changes during this period but its education authority, the LCC, had to battle constantly against the financial constraints of the times.

The inter-war period in Britain was not one of unmitigated gloom but rather a period of contradictions, a period of "extreme change and struggle".⁵ The deeply entrenched view of the period as one of persistent economic stagnation and political failure has been reinterpreted to take account of the several well-defined fluctuations in levels of economic activity during these years, fluctuations which had a direct effect on the administration in power's ability or readiness to make cuts in education or alternatively to consider reforms. In the immediate post-war years a considerable boom took place before a severe down-turn in 1920. The economy was burdened by an over-commitment to the old staple export industries - coal, shipbuilding and iron which were essential to the pre-1914 economy and to war production but which could no longer provide the foundations of prosperity.⁶

Structural economic problems were intensified between 1929 and 1931 as severe financial crisis swept through America and Europe culminating in Britain in the devaluation of sterling and the abandonment of the gold standard.⁷ The depression reached its trough in 1932 and thereafter a modest revival took place in the so-called new industries - electrical appliances, chemicals, cars, food and drink, tobacco and transport formed a development block in the economy. Since production of these did not require geographical proximity to natural resources they tended to be based where engineering, technical and scientific skills and markets were readily available - in the South East and the Midlands. The black spots

⁵ J Klugmann, "The Crisis of The Thirties · A View From The Left", p13 in J Clark (ed), Culture and Crisis in Great Britain In The Thirties, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1979.

⁶ D Aldcroft, The British Economy Between The Wars, Oxford, Phillip Allan, 1983 discusses this in detail

⁷ P Fearon, The Origins And Nature Of The Great Slump 1929-32, London, Macmillan, 1979

of the 1920s - the North, Wales and Scotland became the deeply depressed regions of the 1930s.⁸ Any analysis must thus acknowledge the very wide regional variations in the health of the economy and recognise the complex relationship between overall growth and pronounced cyclical swings.⁹

Average wage earnings for those in employment went up between the wars although the fact remains that between 1923 and 1939 the official unemployment rate never fell below 10%.¹⁰ The existence of long-term mass unemployment, of course, played a large part in determining the character of the period. The significant new characteristics of the inter-war years were the extent and duration of unemployment - and the fact that the skilled workers were badly hit. The differential regional impact of unemployment is also notable - in June 1932 the rate of insured unemployed was 22.4% for Britain as a whole but it was 12.9% for the South and Midlands and 28.5% for Wales, Scotland and the North of England.¹¹

The impact of unemployment on skilled workers, a relatively new feature, was significant. In June 1931 some 30.5% of all unskilled workers were unemployed compared

⁸ See B W E Alford, Depression And Recovery - British Economic Growth 1918-39, London, Macmillan, 1972, p23

⁹ For a full discussion see H W Richardson, Economic Recovery In Britain 1932-39, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976.

¹⁰ B Alford, Depression And Recovery, op cit, p29. Yet despite the suffering undoubtedly arising from large scale unemployment, a remarkable feature of the inter-war climate was the lack of popular dissent. The most infamous protest of the period, the General Strike, developed as much from the ineptitude of the politicians and TUC leaders as from the spontaneous protest of the working class. The strike's failure and resulting Trades Disputes Act effectively crippled the union movement for many years. For a full analysis see B Schwarz and M Langan, Crises In The British State, London, Hutchinson, 1985.

¹¹ S Constantine, Unemployment In Britain Between The Wars, London, Longman, 1980, p18. Few aspects of policy between the Wars have attracted more attention than the measures taken by Governments to deal with the issue of unemployment. Analysis of such strategies is beyond the scope of this investigation but it is important to note that no political party departed from the economic orthodoxy of the time when in office. See J Stevenson, "The Making of Unemployment Policy 1931-35" in M Bentley and J Stevenson, High And Low Politics In Modern Britain, Oxford, Clarendon, 1983.

with 14.4% of all skilled and semi-skilled labour.¹² Mechanisation increasingly rendered obsolete the division between skilled versus unskilled work. New work processes and tools in effect redefined skill and the ability to make products by hand ceased to be as universal as it had been. Accuracy and precision became the order of the day.¹³

While people living in areas of high unemployment experienced dreadful financial strain and often dire poverty, the standard of living of the majority of the population was rising gradually and that is certainly true of London. New light industries were causing the South East and the Midlands to become centres of prosperity and affluence. Community structures were altering rapidly in these areas partly as a result of the large scale growth of bus and tram services and also because of the large scale development of suburbia. One important result of the changes was a swing of population to the South East. The boom in the building trade also made it possible for more working class families to live in suburban housing estates in the South and by 1921 over 22% of London's workforce lived outside the County.¹⁴

During the nineteenth century the London economy had been based on a number of industries such as the manufacture of clothes, printing, publishing and furniture. The Port of London was the premier port of the world and the services of banking, insurance and finance made the capital a major international trading centre. Changes in the economy

¹² G Routh, Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-79, London, Macmillan, 1980, p126-7.

¹³ For a full discussion see D Thoms, "Technical Education and the Labour Supply in England Between the Wars. Some Non-Qualitative Observations on Costs and Benefits," The Vocational Aspect of Education, XXVIII, 1976

¹⁴ J Stevenson, Social Conditions in Britain Between the Wars, London, Penguin, 1977, p177. The provision of LCC housing encouraged this. In Lewisham rents in 1930 ranged from 12s 1d for a 2 room flat up to 21s 5d for a five room house plus kitchen and bathroom. While Local Authorities had built more than 1,000,000 new houses by 1935 and claimed to have re-housed about four fifths of all slum dwellers, there was an increase in the housing shortage between 1921 and 1931 because of the increase of separate families which was still greater than the increase in the housing.

affected the London labour market during the early decades of the twentieth century although the typical industrial unit remained small. The City was becoming an area of offices rather than of offices and workshops. A major trend was the siting of administrative offices of the new larger enterprises in Central London - usually away from the point of production, as, for example, those of ICI and Phillips. There were also changes in the way that business was organised - industrial plants, commercial organisations, insurance companies and banks were amalgamating and becoming larger.¹⁵ In 1914 the number of limited liability companies were 6,762 while by 1939 it was 162,470.¹⁶ Many of the growing new industries were based in Greater London. The location of the new industries was deliberate - close to the markets and within easy reach of cheap labour. Between 1932 and 37 five sixths of Britain's new factories were built in Greater London and one third of extensions to existing ones.¹⁷

The traditional view that the First World War had a liberating effect on the position of women both in the domestic and in the paid labour market is informed by more than a little wishful thinking. The belief that by a series of voluntary complementary manoeuvres men and women happily resumed their pre-war places also represents a naive interpretation of the re-adjustment in the employment market which took place in the immediate post-war years. Zimmeck has argued that de-mobilisation was not so much a relaxation into normalcy

¹⁵ W Ashworth, An Economic History of England 1870-1939, London, Methuen, 1960, p353.

¹⁶ Ibid, p354.

¹⁷ For the concentration of new industries in London see the Royal Commission on the Geographical Distribution of the Industrial Population, The Barlow Report, 1939-40 Employers' evidence to Barlow reiterated the search for supplies of unskilled and adaptable semi-skilled labour See Barlow, op cit, Minutes of Evidence, 1937-9

as an attempt to re-create it by force.¹⁸ Any emancipatory effect that the War may have had on women's employment patterns was jeopardised by the perception of women's limited capacity as workers which was institutionalised into the processes of dilution and substitution. Their work was acknowledged as temporary and governed by the consideration of others' special roles. Almost as soon as the War ended women were encouraged to forget their wartime experiences in the employment market and return to normality as exemplified by domesticity.¹⁹

The labour market was, of course, already strictly segmented during the first decade of the twentieth century, women being confined to overwhelmingly low paid and low status jobs. The ideology that the working class woman's role was ideally in the home had already become well established and, indeed for many skilled working men, a non-working wife had become a status symbol. Trade unions readily adopted the idea that wives should devote themselves to the comfort of their husbands for not only did the non-working wife cease to compete with men in the labour market but she also provided a comfortable retreat for the hard working man.²⁰ Females who were in paid employment worked overwhelmingly in the needletrades and textile industries and in domestic service - which was by far the largest employer of women.²¹

¹⁸ M Zimmeck, "Get Out and Get Under. The Impact of Demobilisation on the Civil Service in Britain 1918-32", p1 in G Anderson (ed) The White Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers since 1820, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988.

¹⁹ Thom argues that women accepted and used the constraints imposed upon their labour through their unions. See D Thom, "The Ideology of Women's Work in Britain 1914-24 with special reference to the NFWW and other Trade Unions", Unpublished Thesis, Thames Polytechnic, PhD, 1982

²⁰ D Thom, "Women's Employment in War Time Britain" in J Winter and R Wall (eds) The Upheaval of War, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988. Thom points out that the increasing demand for minimum wage levels fixed by Trade Boards of Fair Wage Agreements also emphasised the social determinants of women's work

²¹ In London during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries married women workers were concentrated in laundry and cleaning jobs.

Despite the granting of the franchise to women over the age of 30 in 1918 the social and economic mechanisms structuring and controlling the fabric of women's work both in the home and in the labour market remained virtually untouched in the aftermath of war. For most working class women during the inter-war years, paid employment was still low paid, secondary and undertaken to assist the family exchequer rather than for its own sake.²² A formidable ideology of motherhood continued to stress the importance of child bearing and child rearing. Any assessment of women's paid employment during the inter-war years reflects on the realities of these experiences.

Recruitment of women into industry was an easy task once the war had broken out for wages were much higher than previous earnings in traditional women's work. The Board of Trade estimated that by 1916 100,000 women had left domestic service to enter industry while the net increase in women workers employed outside the home comparing July 1914 with the end of August 1918 was about 1,200,000.²³ It was accepted by the Government that the de-mobilisation of all workers and soldiers would cause problems as hundreds of thousands of women would lose their war-time jobs.²⁴ The situation for women in employment did indeed deteriorate rapidly. Not only did soldiers return to their own old jobs but women were also displaced by men who had never served in the Forces as it became increasingly unacceptable to employ women in "men's work". A brief post-war boom which had enabled some women to hold jobs in engineering, shops and transport was succeeded by

²² It could, of course, be argued that working class men worked largely for the same reason.

²³ Board of Trade Increased Employment of Women During the War in the UK, 1919, p.16 quoted in S. Pennington and B. Westover, A Hidden Workforce - Home Workers In England 1850-1985, London, Macmillan, 1989, p127.

²⁴ The Ministry of Reconstruction set up two bodies - the Civil War Workers Committee and The Women's Employment Committee to focus on the de-mobilisation of women in particular and their possible post-war unemployment problems. The former decided that preparations must be made to help women to return to their former employment or to the home. A scheme for an out of work donation was planned paying 24 shillings a week to men and 20 shillings to women.

a slump in 1920 so that by July 1921 the rate of female employment was higher than that of the males. Some training schemes for unemployed women were set up but these were all in dressmaking or housecraft. Life was made worse by the fact that the out of work donation was reduced after six months and then replaced altogether with National Insurance related dole. Married women fared particularly badly. On the one hand they were discriminated against by the National Insurance benefit as they had to have been in work and paying insurance stamps immediately before the War to be eligible. On the other hand they were excluded from most of the new Government training schemes which were set up. Thus women were systematically pushed off the Unemployment Register. Even the Chief Inspector of Factories admitted in 1919 that:

Interesting work is being taken out of their hands, and they are steadily being forced back into the routine of their hitherto normal occupations.²⁵

In spite of the temporary challenge of War and all the expectations that had been aroused, the next two decades saw a continuation of the pre-war attitudes to and practices in women's employment. Some change occurred in work patterns as women moved into the so-called new industries such as commercial services, food, drink, tobacco, chemicals, vehicles, transport, engineering and metalwork. The expansion of women's employment, however, took place within a sex segregated pattern and the jobs women took in these new industries was almost universally semi-skilled or unskilled. Moreover large numbers of women continued to be employed in domestic service and in the old "women's trades" of textiles and the needletrades. The general picture was that although the number of women

²⁵ Chief Inspector of Factories Report, 1919, p.9

in employment expanded a little, the trend was towards their containment in the narrow sectors where work was labelled appropriately female.²⁶

In numerical terms the 1931 Census shows a slightly higher proportion of women in paid employment nationally in 1931 than in 1921 - 34.2% as opposed to 33.7%. The female participation rate - the percentage of the population of working age in the labour force - was, however, lower than in 1911. Women remained a fairly constant percentage of the working population during the period - in 1911 women formed 29.6% of the working population and in 1931 constituted 29.7%.²⁷ The needletrades and textiles contracted drastically during the first few months of war and this trend continued although this area of employment still included the highest percentage of women in manufacturing nationally. The biggest employer of women had always been domestic service and, although there had been a steady decrease since 1901, in 1921 it still accounted for 32.5% of the female workforce.²⁸ By 1931 34% of the female workforce nationally were in domestic work.

Women's wages were generally much lower than those of men. In 1931 women's average weekly wages were half those of the male rate in most industries.²⁹ Girls under 18 earned half as much again. Adult female earnings of 30 shillings for a 48 hour week

²⁶ Braybon and Summerfield point out that despite the Sex Discrimination Removal Act of 1919 the number of women who entered the profession remained pitiful - there were only 82 women dentists, 21 women architects and 10 women chartered accountants in 1928. The vast majority of professional women were either teachers or nurses. See G Braybon and P Summerfield, Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars, London, Pandora, 1987, p138

²⁷ W Ashworth, An Economic History, op cit, p192

²⁸ The Census Category included employees of restaurants as well as char women and laundry workers. Of the 400,000 domestic workers who entered munitions factories, only 125,000 returned to service. See A G Pigou, Aspects of British Economic History, London, Macmillan, 1947, p19.

²⁹ N. Branson and M. Heinemann, Britain In The 1930s, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, p145. At the outbreak of war the average female industrial wage was one third of the average male industrial wage.

were officially fairly standard in 1935.³⁰ A TUC survey of the new industries found that in virtually all jobs women earned 7d to 8d an hour while men earned between 10d and 1s per hour.³¹

The picture in London was similar to the national situation. In 1931 approximately 1.4 million women over 14 were employed in industry compared with 1.1 million in 1921 in Greater London. These included to the nearest thousands, 20,000 in chemicals, 64,000 in metals and jewellery, 167,000 in clothing, 67,000 in food drink and tobacco, 263,000 in commercial and finance and 448,000 in personal service.³² A very large proportion of the national total of servants were employed in the Greater London area.³³

The number of women employed in needletrades in the capital increased slightly between 1921 and 1931 and this remained an important area of female employment. There was a dramatic expansion of clerical work for women in London.³⁴ Heavy pressure was placed on females in the capital as elsewhere to enter all types of domestic work.³⁵ Many girls entered shop work. Women also continued to work in traditional factory work such as

³⁰ P P , 22nd Abstract of Labour Statistics, Cmd 5556, 1922-36, HMSO, 1937.

³¹ Cited in M Savage, "Trade Unionism, Sex Segregation and the State", op cit, p215.

³² The Census of 1931, Industry Tables, Table C, p730.

³³ H Llewellyn Smith (ed), The New Survey of London Life and Labour, P S King and Sons, 1930-33. The New London Survey was undertaken in 1928 by the London School of Economics in a comparison with Booth's earlier survey. The survey was concerned with changes in the material social and cultural conditions of the London population as well as focusing on industries. This vast study is an invaluable resource. It will be referred to hereafter as "The New London Survey". For a further discussion of the changing characteristics of service and servants see Chapter 3

³⁴ For a full discussion see Chapter 5.

³⁵ See Chapter 3. In 1921 Labour Exchanges became able to refuse out of work donation to anyone who had been a servant in the past. Later the same year when the unemployment insurance scheme was extended domestic servants were excluded, unemployment being thought to be impossible in their case. See J Lewis, "In Search of a Real Equality. Women Between the Wars", p213, in F Gloversmith (ed) Class Culture and Social Change, A New View of the 1930s, Brighton, Harvester, 1980.

biscuit baking, sugar confectionary and jam making, tin box making and the tea industry.³⁶ Thus women provided an army of unskilled workers exhibiting all the features of a marginal workforce.

Although there was no undermining of the crucial designations of men's and women's work, there was some shifting of the allocation of jobs between men and women. Women moved in large numbers into the so called "new light" industries. Their numbers rose in such industries as food, drink, tobacco, distribution, engineering, metal, gas, water, electricity and transport in absolute terms as well as a proportion of the work force. These were the years in which there was a massive capital growth in these industries and with this came changes into assembly line production and new technology. Glucksman has argued that women as workers in these industries were crucial to such changes and part of the large scale drive for profits.³⁷ Although such new industries only accounted for approximately half to three quarters of a million out of a total working population of 5.5 to 6 million women, women did account for 27% to 29% of the total workforce in these industries and far more in those industries in which women were particularly concentrated. In very general terms women accounted for 43% of all semi-skilled manual workers and 37.5% of all factory operatives between 1924 and 1935³⁸ Thus they were far from a marginal section of the industrial workforce in this new area of the economy. As previously pointed out, such new processes brought with them a new sexual division of labour requiring fewer skilled but more semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The semi-skilled category was wide, ranging from the

³⁶ For a full discussion see J Ryan, "Developments in the Employment of Women in Lewisham and Deptford in the Inter-War Years", Unpublished Thesis, University of Kent, MA, 1981.

³⁷ M Glucksmann, Women Assemble, op cit.

³⁸ These statistics are given in M Glucksmann, "In A Class of Their Own? Women Workers in the New Industries in Inter-war Britain", Feminist Review, 24, Autumn 1986.

skills of machine operator and assembler to the universal miller, internal grinder and automatic feeder. All of these jobs were done by women, the common features being speed, dexterity and concentration. Women were expected to operate machinery without having any understanding of how it worked whilst men retained control over the technical processes. The same picture is repeated in all new industries adopting mechanised production methods such as food processing, the transport industries, ready made clothing and electrical engineering.³⁹

There were other significant characteristics of the female labour force during these years. Paid female labour remained mainly young and single. The difference in the roles of single and married women and attitudes about those roles hardened as it became increasingly socially unacceptable to try to combine paid employment and marriage. This was true of both the new and old industries. In textiles 76% of women workers in 1921 and 68% in 1931 were under 35 while in the three new industries of metals, electrical apparatus and scientific instruments approximately 90% of workers in both 1921 and 1931 were under 35. The national figures for all occupied women in 1931 showed that 77% were single, 16% married and 7% divorced or widows.⁴⁰ Of women working in 1931 77% were single and 72% were aged between 15 and 34.

The percentage of married women working in 1901 was 6.3% while in 1931 it was 4.8%.⁴¹ There was a variety of formal and informal pressures which prevented married

³⁹ For a full discussion see J Ryan, "Developments in the Employment of Women", *op cit* Chapter 5 and M Glucksmann, "In A Class Of Their Own?", *op cit*

⁴⁰ The Census of 1921, Occupation Tables, Table 2, London, 1924 and The Census of 1931, Occupation Tables, Table 3, London, 1924.

⁴¹ Census data does not reveal women's part time or seasonal work thus making it more difficult to quantify the extent of married women's work. The proportion of married women in the labour force rose slightly from 13% to 16% of all women in paid work between 1921 and 1931

women working ranging from the prevailing cult of domesticity to the marriage bars which were in operation in many areas of the labour market.⁴² There were, of course, also inevitable practical difficulties. It is not surprising that given such obstacles that only 16% of working women were married by the early thirties but this average masks regional and industrial variation. In Greater London the figure was nearly 40% above the national average, a figure which may be explained by the predominance of the new and weakly unionised consumer industries.

Marriage rates went up during the inter-war years while the birth rate fell. Gittins has analysed two factors affecting marriage variables - sex ratios and economic factors.⁴³ There were certainly more women than men in the population between 1891 and 1921 but through the next two decades more equality was achieved, particularly in the younger group, largely due to decreased migration. Marriage was increasingly celebrated at a younger age - especially by the late thirties. Gittins has given several explanations for the increase in marriage rate - citing particularly the prevailing ideology of domesticity as one reason why young girls chose to marry sooner.⁴⁴ Increasing numbers of married women would have been able to seek work because of the sharp drop in the birth rate reaching a record level of 14.8 between 1931 and 1940. Wilmott and Young suggest that the decrease in family size would have prompted many women to look for work had it been available and had society seen it as permissible for married women to seek employment.⁴⁵ Summerfield has pointed

⁴² For a full discussion see J Lewis, "In Search Of A Real Equality", *op cit.* The rate for widowed women dropped, an important factor being the introduction of widows' pensions.

⁴³ See D Gittins, Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure 1900-39, London, Hutchinson, 1982

⁴⁴ Chapter 3 will suggest how messages about the desirability of marriage were conveyed in schools.

⁴⁵ M. Wilmott and P Young, The Symmetrical Family, New York, Pantheon, 1973, p 104 provide a full discussion of the discouraged worker theory - the theory of the effect of unemployment on participation rates. Neither this nor its converse - the added worker theory which posits a response whereby a married woman has to go to work because her husband was unemployed has been tested for this period. It is clear

out that, in spite of rising marriage rates, the ideology of female dependence was contradictory for during the years 1921-39 over one fifth of all women did not marry and most of those would have needed to be in paid employment through their adult lives.⁴⁶

Some characteristics of women's employment continued unchallenged. Pennington and Westover have shown how homework, a traditional area for married women's work, may have declined during these years but certainly did not disappear. The New London Survey concluded that a large number of home workers in the textile industries were women married to an unskilled labourer using their work to supplement the family wage. The overall decline in the demand for casual labour in, for example, the London Docks, was an important motivating force for married women to take in sewing. The New London Survey found, however, that about half of home workers were single women and solely dependant upon their own earnings.⁴⁷

Thus women occupied a secondary role in the labour force. Whether in the older women's trades of needlecrafts or in the so-called new consumer industries women tended to be low skilled and untrained.⁴⁸ There was an unquestioning assumption that women were only suited to unskilled or semi-skilled work, were able to tolerate monotonous and repetitive tasks, had nimble fingers to perform intricate repetitive tasks and were unwilling to undergo training to become skilled because of their eagerness to return as soon as possible to their true roles as wives and mothers. Their attitude and economic dependence made their

that many married women during this period, however, have had to work to supplement the family wage as and when necessary See also D. Werneke, "The Economic Slow Down And Women's Employment Opportunities", *International Labour Review*, 117, January/February 1978, p 41-2.

⁴⁶ P Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, op cit, p13.

⁴⁷ H Llewellyn Smith (ed), *The New London Survey*, op cit, Vol II, p309 S Pennington and B Westover, *A Hidden Workforce*; op cit, Chapter 8.

⁴⁸ There were, of course, a number of skilled women workers in the textile industries, a stereotypically female trade, but these decreased in numbers as the industries declined.

commitment to paid labour secondary and transient. All these assumptions were to emerge in policies concerning working class girls' technical education.

Official reports about women's employment during the inter-war years drew all these conclusions. The Women's Employment Committee set up by the Ministry of Reconstruction produced an extensive report in 1919 as did the Board of Trade. There was also a War Cabinet Committee on women in industry. A further study ten years later about the distribution of women in industry is similarly revealing.⁴⁹ As Jane Lewis has pointed out of child and maternal welfare policy, all policy makers operated within rigid boundaries of an accepted framework of ideas and values.⁵⁰

The assumption that the natural dexterity and tolerance of women fitted them to perform assembly line factory work was particularly strong. The Ministry of Reconstruction was certain in 1919 that:

repetition work will increase in extent; and as it increases there will be found a body of capable and quick-witted, deft handed, self reliant women ready to run intricate machines to produce what the modern world requires.⁵¹

In 1929 this was expressed in a less positive way. The report on the distribution of women in industry stated that although the work performed by women in the light metal trades was dull and monotonous they seemed perfectly contented:

the light repetition requires little training, is immediately remunerative and is preferred by women to work which requires a long course of training. On the other hand, it is a blind alley unsuitable for men.⁵²

⁴⁹ This was instigated after various claims by feminist organisations, particularly the Open Door Council, that the restrictions placed on women's employment by the Factories Acts were hampering female participation in the labour market.

⁵⁰ J. Lewis, The Politics Of Motherhood, London, Croom Helm, 1980, p18

⁵¹ Report of the Women's Employment Committee, op cit, p13.

⁵² A Study of the Factors op cit, p24

It added:

it will have been noted that the marked feature in connection with women's employment as compared with men's is the tendency for women to be found in the unskilled processes⁵³

An additional advantage of female workers was that they were a peculiarly cheap form of labour for "the tendency of women to leave on marriage means that women who are beginning to earn good wages are constantly replaced by young girls at a much lower wage rate".⁵⁴ There was a general acceptance of the fact that "the comparative cheapness of women's labour has been an important factor in establishing their present position in industry".

There was also a clear acceptance of the fact that men would "naturally" take all skilled work - an assumption which was also to emerge in educational policy. It was reported of the light metal trades that although the number of women had been increasing

The whole tendency in the light metal trades is towards simplification of processes and as the need for acquired skill or craftsmanship is eliminated and replaced by the simple work of a routine character, the work tends to be transferred from men to women or young persons.⁵⁵

The 1929 report explained that women were excluded from processes for two reasons, either because the work was highly skilled or because it was of a heavy nature.⁵⁶ In the really skilled parts of the work for which a training was required, there were practically no female workers. On the other hand in light core making, in light repetition machining, in assembling and warehouse processes, women were almost exclusively employed.

⁵³ Ibid, p29

⁵⁴ Ibid, p14

⁵⁵ Ibid, p13

⁵⁶ Thus ignoring the fact that women's traditional work in textiles and laundry was both heavy and dirty

All the reports on women's employment made repeated reference to the fact that "in considering women's labour the relation of work to the duties which fall to them as mothers and home makers are necessarily to be borne in mind".⁵⁷ The War Cabinet on Women In Industry in 1918 reported that a woman's expectation of marriage made her a less valuable worker in many occupations since it made her less ambitious and enterprising and also tended to make employers and educational authorities look upon her work as temporary. It had to be admitted that the existence of the expectation of marriage was a "natural disability".⁵⁸

Yet it was also recognised that women could acquire skills, if given the opportunity.

The Women's Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction reported that:

there is no sex hindrance that stands in their way; their brains are quick, their hands dexterous; their power of application great. But up to the present they have not acquired it. They have not, for reasons which are historical and social. These have disappeared or are disappearing; education and training will then do the rest.⁵⁹

It was repeatedly recognised by both Government Committees and witnesses before them that the training of women and girls could change their position in employment:

Training of women is a question both difficult and important. Facilities for training of women in pre-war times were limited and inadequate, partly no doubt owing to the extremely limited range of occupations open to them but also undoubtedly because of the conflicting ideals prevailing with regard to the education of girls and to the somewhat indifferent attitude of public opinion towards education and training of women workers.⁶⁰

The report concluded that "the fact that a woman is trained to be a skilled craftswoman is not only a gain to herself but to the community in that through the fuller development of her powers she attains a more complete sense of citizenship and is a more valuable member of

⁵⁷ Report of the Women's Employment Committee, op cit, p6

⁵⁸ War Cabinet Committee Report on Women in Industry, op cit, p71.

⁵⁹ Report of Women's Employment Committee, op cit, p12.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p43

society, while if she does not marry and has to return to work she has the means to do so within her power."⁶¹

Immediately after conflict ended the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry recognised that

Good training is the factor which comes next to good health in increasing the value of women in industry. The removal of all educational disabilities of women and the provision of equal facilities for technical training and apprenticeship [are] urged.⁶²

In 1929 little seemed to have been achieved.

the industrial life of women is, in general, a short one ... this makes them unwilling to spend much time on a course of training and disposes them to seek occupations where they can earn a good wage as quickly as possible. For the same reasons, the managers are unwilling to train up workers for skilled occupations if they are likely to lose them when they have become really useful.⁶³

There was also some recognition in these reports of one of the barriers to the extension of women's employment into new areas, the opposition of the male trade unions. There was remarkable consistency in male attitudes towards women's paid work even during the exceptional period of war. Although it was only the unions in the munitions industries which had a formal agreement with the Government about the way in which female labour would be used and then replaced in these factories, employers in other trades often willingly dismissed women immediately after the War because of the pressure from unions.⁶⁴ The 1929 enquiry into women's work acknowledged that one of the main causes of the distribution of women was custom i.e. trade union restrictions and relatively low rates of pay

⁶¹ Ibid, p45

⁶² War Cabinet Committee Report on Women In Industry, op cit, p170

⁶³ A Study of the Factors, op cit, p29

⁶⁴ See D Thom, "The Ideology of Women's Work", op cit

to women. The purpose of restriction was to protect male workers from the competition for jobs and the threat of undercutting perceived in the employment of women - a key argument often used in the family wage debate. The determinant of the success of the restriction was therefore the degree of control which male workers had over the labour processes. This itself depended on the strength of trade union organisation and the level of unemployment. Male union organisers continued to dismiss women's labour as a separate category earning separate rates.⁶⁵ It can be argued that the reason why there were higher proportions of married women in industries such as textiles and the pottery industries was because male prejudice ensured that women were confined to certain processes within these industries. They were thus protected from the intrusion of women. In the hosiery industry, however, women were removed from the primary knitting processes between the wars by the action of hosiery unions, forbidding them to work on certain knitting frames and were increasingly confined to making up garments, a development justified on the grounds that the jobs such as cutting, mending and machining required female dexterity.⁶⁶

The 1929 enquiry concluded that the rising numbers of women in industry illustrated that protective legislation did not have the effect of restricting women's employment. It thus ignored the negative effects of the depressed wages in the sectors of industry where women were concentrated as a result of exclusion from others and the fact that legislation restricting women's hours had led to their removal from certain industries.⁶⁷ The fact that statutory

⁶⁵ Lewenhak gives a full discussion of trade union policy towards women during these years. Strategy of male dominated unions towards female membership was either to deny it altogether as in the case of the Amalgamated Engineering Union or to try to recruit women, arguably in order to subsume their specific interests to those of men. S Lewenhak, Women and Trade Unions. An Outline History of Women in the British Trade Union Movement, London, E Benn, 1977.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p213.

⁶⁷ Legal restrictions on women's industrial employment during these years were limited to their exclusion from work with lead and from underground work in the mines. The 1937 Factory Act laid down a minimum 48 hour week and prohibited Sunday work. The legislation on working hours was riddled with

legal restrictions on women's employment were actually fairly limited suggests that a more important determinant of women's concentration in unskilled low paid occupations was the numerous agreements on trade practices between the unions and employers which effectively simply closed sectors of industry to women. Such "agreements" were also to be seen in the relations between unions and education authorities.

The hostility of male unions to female participation was widely recognised. The Women's Service Bureau told the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry in 1918:

a chief cause of women being paid at lower rates than men was the conventional view that women ought not to work ... It is certainly the case that in the past there has always and everywhere been a tendency on the part of men to rate lowly the services of women.⁶⁸

It was generally agreed that "the prejudice of male workers must share the responsibility with the prejudice of the employer for the fact that the training of women is insufficient". The War Cabinet Committee concluded with a plea for

the agreement of the Trade Unions to new processes that are suitable to women being thrown open to them, possibly on the understanding that they should be definitely excluded from other processes not suitable to them and should enable any difficulty that exists with regard to technical instruction to be removed.⁶⁹

As will be shown, this was to prove a forlorn hope. Throughout the inter-war years, the restriction of women's labour resulting from Trade Union action accentuated the tendency of the "concentration of women's labour within a comparatively narrow field".⁷⁰

Thus the picture of women's employment during the inter-war years suggests an uneasy compromise between capitalism and patriarchy. There was a growing demand for

let out clauses permitting the employment of women when pressure of work required it.

⁶⁸ War Cabinet Committee Report on Women in Industry, op cit, Appendix.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p171.

⁷⁰ S Anthony, Women's Place in Industry and the Home, London, Harrop, 1932, p51.

women's labour but female workers remained concentrated in a few stereotypically female occupations and industries in which the work was dubbed appropriate, women's work was considered unskilled and paid at a discriminatory rate. Although women probably did not experience overall as high rates of unemployment during the depression years as did men, their employment tended to be more irregular and their rights to benefit when out of work were often denied.⁷¹ The hostility of male unions to women's employment contributed to this pattern as did assumptions about what women were inherently capable of doing. The context of all these developments was a society in which there was an overwhelmingly powerful ideology of domesticity - an ideology which was fuelled by the atmosphere of gender uncertainty at the time.

It is only recently that historians have begun to try to analyse the climate of sex war which emerged during the inter-war years.⁷² As Hunt has pointed out the evident concern of psychologists, sociologists and others to explore and define sex differences in the face of a continuing failure to find definite evidence of innate distinctions between men and women suggests an unease about the way society was working and an uncertainty amongst men about their own self perception.⁷³ This can, of course, be partially explained by the experience of unemployment which denied many men what had been seen as the fundamental part of their masculinity - paid labour and the ability to support a family. Zimmeck argues that the Government contributed to the stirring up of antagonism in its policies towards female

⁷¹ The Anomalies Act of 1931 passed with virtually no opposition from Labour or the Unions effectively prevented married women from claiming unemployment benefit.

⁷² See, for example, S Kingsley Kent, "Gender Reconstruction After the First World War" in H L Smith, British Feminism in the Twentieth Century, London, Gower Publications, 1990.

⁷³ F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p28-40 includes a full analysis of these concerns.

unemployment⁷⁴ whilst Kingsley Kent suggests that the vastly different experience of men and women during war at home and at the Front created an almost insurmountable barrier between men and women.⁷⁵ Sexual conflict and polarisation between the sexes provided one of the few means by which the massive and unprecedented political economic and social upheaval occasioned by war could be represented. This development certainly seems to have had a significant impact on the thinking of those involved in theorising about the relations between men and women - physicians, sexologists, psychiatrists and feminists.⁷⁶

Such antagonism was first to be seen in the hysterical campaign in the media which took place in the immediate post-war years. The daily press complained incessantly about women trying to hold on to jobs which were rightfully those of men. Hysteria was to re-emerge repeatedly during the inter-war years, particularly at times of economic depression. Attacks on women were two edged; firstly that they should not be performing men's jobs and secondly that they should not be unemployed because there were plenty of domestic jobs available to them. One of the ironies was that women were even criticised for taking jobs that were defined as stereotypically female and therefore appropriate employment. A News Chronicle headline in 1934 criticised women for taking clerical jobs with the headline "Better pay and smarter clothes for women : unemployment and patched pants for men".⁷⁷

Alexander has made the telling point that the epithet "feminine" was used to denigrate the new consumer industries. Although part of the explanation lies within fear of cheap labour, the denigration of the feminine was surely evidence of deeper levels of unease.

⁷⁴ M Zimmeck, "Get Out And Get Under", op cit

⁷⁵ S. Kingsley Kent, "Gender Reconstruction", op cit

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Cited in W Holtby, Women and a Changing Civilisation, London, Bodley Head Ltd, 1934, p100

Alexander points out that since it is through the division into masculinity and femininity that human identity is formed and that sexual desire and reproduction is organised, any disturbance of that division necessarily provokes anxiety. Labour is one element of the division between men and women, a division which had been proved to be unstable by the War.⁷⁸

Whatever the deeper levels of analysis of such sex antagonism, one concomitant was the increasing emphasis on sex difference and therefore on domesticity. Removing women from their war time jobs back to the home so as to eliminate competition with men for work was regarded as one way to assure, as Strachey put it, that everything would be as it had been before.⁷⁹ The resolution of the conflict through marriage and domestic harmony appeared to ensure a return to social peace. Single women were visible reminders of the War and feminism therefore became linked with instability and conflict. Thus a vast array of literature about masculinity and femininity and about male and female sexuality was built up. A gender system of separate spheres based upon theories of sexual difference and a new emphasis upon motherhood provided the parameters within which a return to normality could be effected.

Thus the ideology of domesticity became dominant during the inter-war years and, as will be shown, had a powerful effect on girls' education. The ideology was founded on the essential importance of woman as guardian of her children's health and welfare. As such, her prime role was that of dependant reproducer rather than of independent producer, and the family became her natural habitat. The glorification of home and family was a central tenet of the ideology, as increasingly the family became an isolated and self-sufficient

⁷⁸ S Alexander, "Becoming A Woman in London in the 1920s and 1930s" in D. Feldman and G. Stedman Jones, Metropolis London Histories and Representations since 1800, London, Routledge, 1989.

⁷⁹ R Strachey, The Cause, London, Virago 1978 reprint, first published 1928, p370-1

unit within the community. The strength of this ideology obviously varied according to economic circumstances, marital relationship and occupation but it was undoubtedly a fundamental part of the notion of being a girl and woman during these years. Many elements fed into this ideological construction. As consumer production extended into new fields, the family, and women in particular, became the central market necessary to capital accumulation. Some of the goods and services traditionally produced by women in the home such as laundry services and clothes were now easily available as commodities to be bought. New goods were as varied as vacuum cleaners, preserved foods and wirelesses. In many ways, therefore, women were now more useful, or seen to be more useful to the economy, as unemployed consumers than as active producers. The family centred culture was possible because of the rise of the standards of living for those in employment.⁸⁰ The growth in the home market resulted in an increasing amount of advertising and commercialisation, most of which was concentrated on the family and the home. To expand this consumer industry in the home market it was therefore essential to promote the ideal of domesticity, home improvement and family life - an integral part of which was, of course, the concept of woman as housewife and mother. The construction of the ideal home became increasingly prevalent and increasingly significant. It was appropriated in different ways by middle class and by working class women but even for working women, the 1930s in particular were the decade in which the realisation of the domestic ideal, for some, at least, became partially attainable. A central tenet of this ideal was that of a positive alternative to woman as wage earner - woman as skilful and fulfilled housewife.⁸¹

⁸⁰ It has been estimated that the amount of money spent on food before the First World War was 58% of all retail sales but by 1939 the proportion was 47%. W Ashworth, *An Economic History*, op cit, p341

⁸¹ For further discussion see Chapter 3. The other side of the coin was the gloomy caricatures often given of career women who chose not or were not able to obtain that domestic ideal

The ideology materialised in many ways. Both White and Pugh have analysed the power of women's magazines which expanded dramatically in both quantity and readership during these years. Almost without exception the new magazines dedicated themselves to upholding the traditional sphere of feminine interests and were united in recommending a purely domestic role for women. Between 1922 and 1939 nine new monthly magazines were established and many more new weeklies - three of which were to become immensely popular - Woman's Own, Women's Illustrated and Woman. The magazines contained advice on budgeting, housekeeping and child rearing and served to elaborate the already powerful notion of domesticity.⁸² Such women's magazines were not, of course, new but the significance of their inter-war developments was the central constant emphasis on anticipating the delights of home life. While such magazines were primarily aimed at the middle classes they were probably read by many working class women.⁸³ Significantly when magazines did mention paid employment, they made it clear that it was acceptable for girls only in the period before they married and preferably as a route to marriage. Often they hopefully drew attention to the jobs in which it was felt to be most likely that a girl would meet a satisfactory husband. Tinkler has shown how leisure reading for girls conveyed similar messages to adolescent girls.⁸⁴

⁸² C White, Women's Magazines 1693-1968, London, Michael Joseph, 1970, M Pugh "Domesticity and the Decline of Feminism 1930-1950" in H L Smith, British Feminism op cit

⁸³ There was also a rapid development of publications aimed at working class women such as Secrets, Miracle and Glamour. In these the emphasis was on romance leading to marriage. Gittins suggests that the division of the two types of magazine into working and middle class may be misleading and it may have been that they were aimed at two different groups of women divided by marital status. See D. Gittins, Fair Sex, op cit, Chapter 2.

⁸⁴ P Tinkler, "Learning Through Leisure . Feminine Ideology in Girls' Magazines 1920-50" in F Hunt, Lessons for Life, op cit.

This literature was of course prescriptive and it cannot be assumed that women necessarily followed the advice given. It can be argued that the women bought the magazines for the fiction or the recipes without subscribing to the message contained therein. However the magazines are illustrative of the prevailing climate in which working class women had to exist. Given the various other messages they were receiving about their limited role in paid employment it is hardly surprising that there is evidence of little resistance to this designation of a particular role to women.⁸⁵

The strength of the ideology of domesticity has been cited as one reason for the so-called failure of inter-war feminism. Most recently Banks has argued that the feminist movement was operating in an extremely hostile environment.⁸⁶ More positive interpretations of the widespread efforts of the many inter-war feminist organisations have now started to emerge.⁸⁷ The dichotomy between the equal rights wing of the movement and the feminists who demanded accommodation of the differences between men and women has over-simplified the lens of analysis. Significant for this thesis is the fact that feminists - including those in the NUWT, had to operate within a society powerfully conditioned by

⁸⁵ Lewis has pointed out the importance of trying to understand the perceptions of working class women themselves if any understanding is to be reached of how the domestic ideology actually affected the working class family. It is important not to characterise working class girls and women as victims of an imposed culture. It is reasonable to conclude that very many must have derived a sense of self worth from the efficient performance of what they would see as their domestic duties. Working class wives' activities probably narrowed as many traditional working class neighbourhoods fractured and more and more moved to the new housing estates, particularly in the South. Lewis points out that while this may on one hand, have made everyday domestic routines easier, there was the much heralded discovery in 1936 of the suburban neurosis which related directly to the loss of purpose in the lives of these women. J Lewis (ed), Labour and Love, op cit, Introduction.

⁸⁶ O. Banks, The Politics of British Feminism, London, Edward Elgar, 1993.

⁸⁷ See, for example, the papers in H L. Smith, British Feminism in the Twentieth Century, London, Gower Publications, 1990. For a discussion of the involvement of the NUWT in a flourishing feminist movement see S King, "Our Strongest Weapon : An Examination of the Attitude of the NUWT Towards the Education of Girls 1918-1939", Unpublished Thesis, University of Sussex, MA, 1986.

acceptance of the domestic niche for women. It is hardly surprising that tensions and differences sometimes arose about the level of acceptance of the framework of domesticity

Both the main political parties were aware of this rich vein of domesticity. As Pugh has pointed out, politicians in Britain tended to support what were apparently pro-women measures for non-feminist reasons while resisting more radical demands. Most of the legislation of the period (such as the Guardianship Act and the Matrimonial Causes Act) enhanced the status of mothers thus encouraging women to view motherhood as a woman's primary function. In the Labour Party policy for women was epitomised by house building programmes, plans for the food supply and child health - policies which would bring dividends during the Second World War. Thane has pointed out that Labour women emphasised the need to enhance society's valuation of motherhood thus assuming that most working women would wish to continue to make the centre of their lives the home.⁸⁸

The central tenet of this ideology of domesticity was, of course, the repeated emphasis on motherhood as a woman's ultimate vocation. During this period the State increased what was seen to be the bounds of parental responsibility through its concern for the physical welfare of children. Parents were increasingly obliged to care for their children in particular ways and co-operate with the State in rearing the young.⁸⁹ The condition of a child's health, hair and dress were the ultimate measure of a mother's success in her neighbourhood. The importance of child caring and rearing healthy children as the one essential female role in society was emphasised almost continuously at all levels. Successful womanhood became virtually synonymous with successful motherhood.

⁸⁸ P Thane, "The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism 1906-1945" in H L Smith, British Feminism, op cit

⁸⁹ See M David, The State, The Family and Education, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980

Concern about infant mortality and the falling birthrate as well as about maternal mortality grew.⁹⁰ Although infant mortality declined continuously during the inter-war years, the population decreased as fertility rates dropped.⁹¹ The average family size dropped from 5 children in 1900 to 2 by 1940. The question became crucial when, in the mid 1930s, it was projected that by 2033 England and Wales would have a population no greater than that of the County of London in 1936.⁹² The middle classes were the first to limit family size and although the working class were not far behind, because of the gap class differentiation widened until 1924 before contracting again. Contemporaries did not, however, know this and fears were expressed that the middle class would not reproduce itself. Dismay at the falling birth rate was entangled with concern about the quality of the population, a debate which also profoundly affected women.⁹³

Thus a number of very powerful ideological constructs defined girls' and women's place in the inter-war society. It was in this ideological context as well as in the economic milieu of the inter-war years that educational policy was made. Increasingly there was perceived to be a clear link between employment or rather unemployment and education.

All of the characteristics which were seen to shape women's position in paid employment did, of course, also influence the position of girls in the labour market. A special report on London in the 1921 census found that:

⁹⁰ The Government issued five reports on death in childbirth between 1924 and 1937

⁹¹ For a full discussion of this phenomenon and the complex reasons for it see D Gittins, Fair Sex, op cit.

⁹² Beveridge went on the radio in order to persuade people to fill in a family form to help demographers get an accurate picture and the Population Statistics Act of 1938 was passed so a check could be kept on population trends. See J. Lewis, "In Search of a Real Equality" in F. Gloversmith, Class Culture and Social Change , A New View of the 1930s, Brighton, Harvester, 1980.

⁹³ For a discussion of the eugenics movement in relation to motherhood see J. Lewis, The Politics of Motherhood, op cit.

Girls are leaving school and going mainly into factories, work shops, warehouses and shops. The proportion engaged in domestic service is only about half what it becomes in middle and later life.⁹⁴

This pattern seems to have set the agenda for the girls' employment during the inter-war years. Despite the great unpopularity of domestic service many young girls continued to have no option but to enter this as a form of paid labour, particularly as in period of economic depression family pressure to contribute to the domestic budget had a special edge. A very large number of girls in London also went into factory work which was seen by one social commentator to have a particularly negative effect on them - "most girls become thinner, lose their colour and vitality during their first six months at the factory".⁹⁵ Many girls in London entered the new industries. In Greater London girls accounted for 18% of total women in 1930 but constituted 25% of women operatives in electrical engineering.⁹⁶ Writing in 1937, Gollan estimated that more than half of workers in electrical engineering were under 21 and drew attention to the Ministry of Labour Reports of 1933 and 1934 which noted how rationalisation increased the demands for girls whose suppleness of fingers made them more suitable than boys for certain occupations.⁹⁷ The association between low wages and young female labour comes over clearly in the New London Survey. It pointed out that apprenticeship was unnecessary as girls were able to learn most of the processes in 2 or 3 months in many of the factories in London.⁹⁸ Formal apprenticeships for girls were virtually non-existent although dressmaking, millinery, tailoring, embroidery and some large

⁹⁴ Census of 1921 of the Administrative County of London, Report on the Occupation of Females, p 35

⁹⁵ D Collier, The Girl In Industry, London, Bell & Sons, 1918, p39.

⁹⁶ M. Glucksman, "In a Class of Their Own", op cit, p26-7.

⁹⁷ J. Gollan, Youth In British Industry, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1937, p237

⁹⁸ H. Llewelyn Smith (ed), New London Survey, op cit, Vol 11, p165-6.

shops paid girls a lower wage whilst they learnt their trade.⁹⁹ In dressmaking girls could be put through a four year learnership in the workshop.¹⁰⁰

The negative beliefs about even young females' attitudes to employment are apparent in analyses of girls' positions in the labour market. The Pilgrim Trust reported:

The girl of 14 tends to drift into the most remunerative employment immediately available, keeping the alternative of marriage always in view and hoping that she will sooner or later be freed from the fulfilment of her function in industry.¹⁰¹

The Women's Employment Committee recognised that the girl needed to be prepared for wage earning as well as for domestic duty:

With comparatively few exceptions any girl leaving the public elementary school in all large industrial centres becomes a wage earner in the widest sense of the word ... if the girl is to grow into a capable woman, she must be trained industrially.¹⁰²

Yet the Report observed that the uncertainty of the girls' future made such training very difficult. It was only too tempting "for both the girl and her parents to take some blind alley occupation in order to earn good money with the chance of marriage providing for the future". In 1929 the girls themselves were blamed for their limited outlook in defining their industrial life.

Work in the factories is looked upon by most as a temporary career ... for this reason they tend to seek the easily learned repetition work and apt to lack the enterprise and ambition which would make such work seem irksome.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ R Strachey, Careers and Openings for Women, A Survey of Women's Employment as A Guide for Those Seeking Work, London, 1935, p98-9. See also, Apprenticeship and Skilled Employment Association, The Handbook of Trades for London Girls and How to Enter Them, London, Longmans Green, 1914.

¹⁰⁰ H Llewelyn Smith (ed), New London Survey, op cit, Vol 11, p.13.

¹⁰¹ The Pilgrim Trust, Men Without Work, London, 1938, p231. This was a study of the effects of long term unemployment.

¹⁰² Report of the Women's Employment Committee, op cit, p44.

¹⁰³ A Study of the Factors, op cit, p29

The instinctive apathy of young females was often blamed for their failure to use educational facilities to better themselves in employment. A survey of technical education in 1926 found

even when the authority is willing to make ample provision that the response of girls ... is not so good as that of boys.¹⁰⁴

It was admitted that one reason might be the call of home duties but girls were also perceived as lacking the crucial "motive impelling boys and youths in large numbers to attend technical schools in their spare time - that of ambition".¹⁰⁵

The welfare of adolescent girls and boys, and particularly of young wage earners, gave rise to intense concern and scrutiny from educationalists and moralists in the early years of the twentieth century. After the concern in the mid nineteenth century for the plight of children in factories and penal institutions, the focus of attention was switched to the youths whose roles in the labour markets was thought to have such serious industrial and social consequences as to constitute "a boy labour problem".¹⁰⁶ This concern continued through the inter-war years as fears escalated that adolescents were growing into adulthood ill prepared for employed work and incapable of performing the elementary duties of home life and citizenship. The easy availability of blind alley and uneducative employment seemed to be producing workers who were undisciplined, casual and fickle.¹⁰⁷ This tendency was, of course, accelerated by the War. The Lewis Committee's Report on Juvenile Education

¹⁰⁴ A Survey of Technical and Further Education in England and Wales, 1926, p68.

¹⁰⁵ Trade Schools on the Continent, 1932, para 9.

¹⁰⁶ Cyril Jackson for the Poor Law Commission, Report on Boy Labour, Cmd 4632, London HMSO, 1909; R A Bray, Boy Labour and Apprenticeship, London, Allen Unwin, 1911.

¹⁰⁷ The inclusion of compulsory day continuation education in 1918 was one bid to retain control over adolescents. See H Hendrick, "A Race of Unskilled Labourers", History of Education, 9,2,1980.

after the War cited the immorality and short sightedness of treating adolescents as factory fodder and of providing only blind alley labour for them. The Report pointed out that not only were the 14 year olds likely to be given blind alley work but they were also likely to be dismissed as soon as they reached the age of warranting an adult wage.¹⁰⁸

It seems that educational plans aiming to solve the problem had a three-fold aim. These were the guidance of the individual characters of the young, the fostering of adaptability in a young workforce which would reduce the likelihood of unemployment and therefore stabilise family life and the promotion of good citizenship.¹⁰⁹ While adaptability was a significant term in this debate - as, indeed, it was in the development of technical educational policy, its precise nature was never defined. Most participants in the debate appreciated the complex causes of juvenile unemployment, but most agreed that personal characteristics were predominant factors. This led to the optimistic idea that education could be a solution. The complexities were reduced to a simple equation that better education would prevent youth unemployment for the educated worker who would be, by definition, intelligent and adaptable to changing circumstances. Young workers were to have a trained intelligence, a general handiness and resourcefulness; they were to display the ability to grapple with unfamiliar conditions, the facility of applying one's mind and one's knowledge to what one had to do.¹¹⁰ The adaptable worker would be able to undertake any kind of unspecialised work and move between production processes. This was, of course, a critical

¹⁰⁸ Departmental Committee on Juvenile Education in Relation to Employment After the War (The Lewis Report), 1917, London, HMSO, Cmd 8577

¹⁰⁹ H Hendrick, "A Race of Unskilled Labourers", op cit This article gives no attention to the plight of girls within this situation

¹¹⁰ R Bray, Boy Labour and Apprenticeship, op cit, p210 and 214

consideration in view of the fact that the workforce was being de-skilled and therefore the demand for the future was for efficient but mobile workers by the million.

There was concern for the morally and socially damaging effect of these unskilled machine jobs on boys. It was feared that if they were kept for too long on one machine and not given the chance of reaching an understanding of the potential of new technology they would become disillusioned and ill-disciplined. What was, therefore, required was not so much an acquisition of specific skills as a general adaptability to technological innovation. A machine which induced monotony would not cultivate intelligence so unless there was initial careful training in the schools, the repetition of a single task would reduce the worker to the level of a machine.¹¹¹ Thus adaptable workers were those who could work with machines without being alienated and who displayed application and initiative.¹¹² Many who participated in the continuation school debate were equally disturbed by the thought that without the benefit of adaptability the working boy would find himself in the unskilled labour market with all its attendant dangers and would consequently be unable to enter proper relationships. This would, of course, have a debilitating effect on political and social consensus.

This problem was believed to have particular relevance in London where there were huge numbers of youths and a very large blind alley sector. Sir Cyril Cobb MP and one time Chair of the LCC Education Committee claimed in 1919 that ill-discipline would be a

¹¹¹ Ibid, p211.

¹¹² Hendrick points out that one focal concern of this debate was the constant reference to the working class family, an institution which, it was recognised, was not impervious to the consequences of unemployment and casual labour. See also J Brown, "Social Control and the Modernisation of Social Policy 1890-1929" in P Thane, *The Origins of British Social Policy*, London, Croom Helm, 1978, p128. He argues that after 1908 the central moral values were those of maintenance of family obligation and the need to work.

great problem amongst young people. This was particularly so because so many adolescents had earned high wages during war time:

owing to conditions arising out of the War our juvenile population had acquired certain definite notions of independence because they had been earning high wages and they were largely uncontrolled by home influence.¹¹³

In the debate the future role of the young male adolescent within the home was certainly not forgotten:

we must not forget the man in the labourer...he is the autocrat of the home, the father of the family and, as a voter, one of the rulers of the empire.¹¹⁴

In the immediate post war years girls were seen to form a marginal part of this "boy labour" problem. The War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry reported in 1918 that war had accelerated the increase of girls working under the age of 18.

The work of girls...has been largely uneducative. They had been much more often repetition workers at high piece rates than learners at low wages. The scant training will militate against the advantageous future employment of the youthful war workers, especially the girls, of whom a greater proportion than of boys are being discharged as a result of the cessation of war industries. A considerable addition to the number of unskilled women workers arising from the taking into industry and other occupations of these young girls during the war would tend to keep down women's wages, an evil which should be mitigated by the training of these girls as domestic servants.¹¹⁵

The sentiment that the situation would be much alleviated if girls simply gave up their jobs in industry and went back to more appropriate lives was frequently expressed. In an influential book edited by Findlay, Shelley wrote

¹¹³ The School Master, 26.4.19, p658. For a full consideration of the juvenile employment bureau and the juvenile after care committees which were part of London's solution to this problem see D St John, "The Guidance and Influencing", op cit, p210-13.

¹¹⁴ R Bray, Boy Labour and Apprenticeship, op cit, p216.

¹¹⁵ War Cabinet Committee Report on Women in Industry, op cit, p107.

all that seems on the surface necessary is for the girls to go back to their homes and for the youths to pick up on employment or go back to the position of learners before the War.¹¹⁶

The Journal Education reported the comments of Sir Basil Compton, lately of Scotland Yard; "the ages from 14-18 have been so productive of trouble that I have sometimes regretted that all girls between those ages had not been put to sleep by the state and allowed to grow quietly and harmlessly into womanhood unseen by the world".¹¹⁷

There was some recognition that girls were suffering from the same ill effects that boys were - but there was little sympathy for the girls' situation. Matthias wrote in Findlay's compilation that

the long hours worked in the factory, the necessarily unskilled character of the work, makes for a monotony that is soul killing. Real interest is lacking to a great extent, so that time is made to pass more quickly by encouragement of illicit interests. Monotony is at the root of the indecent talk and questionable stories which go round the workroom...it is easy to see that the girl by way of reaction will seek strong and crude pleasure.¹¹⁸

Edith Sellers, who so often commented on young adolescents during this period, laid the blame firmly on the girls themselves rather than on their situation. She commented that girls were cherishing the idea of revolution and that she had even seen some English Tommies "who were being pursued by girls spring into an omnibus for safety."¹¹⁹ Girls apparently showed their irresponsibility in a different fashion from boys. Girls were more aggressive

¹¹⁶ J Shelley, "From Home Life to Industrial Life", p20 in J Findlay, The Young Wage Earner, op cit

¹¹⁷ Education, 14 3 1924

¹¹⁸ E Matthias, "The Young Factory Girl", p84-5 in J Findlay, The Young Wage Earner, op cit.

¹¹⁹ E Sellers, "Boy and Girl War Products: Their Reconstruction", p74, The Nineteenth Century and After, Oct 1918

than boys and were "prone to go out of their way to find someone to kick".¹²⁰ Not surprisingly Sellers blamed the mothers for this situation.

Indeed when there was concern for these young girls, it was expressed in terms of the damage that was being done to the future mothers of the nation. The concern was therefore for the nation rather than the individual girls. Matthias commented that

no society has the right to condemn the future mothers of the race to an eight or ten hour day of stamping out tin cans or of pressing and packing black lead with a sock to cerebrums in the way of a weekly gymnasium class or a story telling lesson.¹²¹

Shelley echoed these sentiments

we see that the national morality between the wars depended largely upon the home being the centre of life and thought of the future mothers of the nation. We see that the present generation of adolescent girls has lost hold to a great extent of her influence.¹²²

His solution was to restore in the girl's heart worship of the goddess of the family hearth so that she would fulfil the eternal demand of the instinct of motherhood of which the home was the shrine.

Women's organisations in their evidence to the Committee of Women in Industry immediately after the War reiterated this problem and argued that training was therefore just as important for girls as it was for boys. The Women's Service Bureau commented that the overcrowding of girls into unskilled and semi-skilled blind alley work was the result of "the lack of sound education and specialised training".

Not only is the general standard of education lower, but it is seldom thought desirable to give a girl a long and expensive training (which may be

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ E Matthias, "The Young Factory Girl", op cit, p87

¹²² J Shelley, "From Home Life to Factory Life", op cit, p22.

interrupted by her marriage) or unnecessary to fit her for a trade or profession...All this results once more in the overcrowding of girls into unskilled and semi-skilled work, and is a contributing cause to the fact that many occupations needing specialised training are at present closed to them.¹²³

HMI Miss Cunnington of the Technological Branch pointed out to the Committee the marked tendency of girls to leave skilled trades even if they had entered them between the ages of 16 and 20. Yet ten years later The Times reported a meeting of employers who had been discussing the use they made of the young female labour in the printing industry. The great advantage of taking girls into blind alley jobs was that they could still afford to keep them when they became adults, at least temporarily.¹²⁴ The employers felt that since girls would be released on the wings of matrimony "the chances are that the technical instruction of girls will not bring in as high an economic return as the instruction of boys".

So in discussions of the juvenile unemployment problem very little was done to alleviate the situation of young girls. Rather blame was placed on them for the fact that their lower paid labour was being substituted for that of boys in supervising certain machines. The Report of the Committee on Education in Industry in 1928 reported that "the beginning of adolescence is a difficult time for boys and the reaction to enforced idleness may then be serious".¹²⁵ Although it was proposed that training centres should be set up to help the boys no such solution was proposed for girls despite the evidence that the girls did value the scanty facilities for training available.

¹²³ Evidence of the Women's Service Bureau to the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, op cit, Appendix, p37

¹²⁴ The Times, 4 12 28, reported in S Anthony, Women's Place in Industry and the Home, op cit, p42.

¹²⁵ Report of Committee on Education and Industry, 1928, para 93.

we understand that in one important industrial area when the unemployment centre for girls was about to be closed the girls themselves offered to subscribe a penny a week in order to keep the centre open.¹²⁶

Very little research has taken place into juvenile unemployment during the inter-war years and that which has been conducted tends not to focus on girls.¹²⁷ The extension and duration of juvenile unemployment is difficult to quantify.¹²⁸ Estimates suggest that from the late 1920s up to 1938 there were at least 100,000 unemployed 14-17 year olds each year, fairly evenly distributed between boys and girls. The juvenile labour force transference scheme attempted from 1928 to ease the maldistribution of workers although the belief that the birth rate trends would reduce the surplus of labour prevented further more radical action. The plan was to transfer young workers from the areas suffering the deepest economic depression but in practice it resulted in thousands of youngsters being shipped into domestic service which was deeply unpopular. Juvenile Unemployment Centres which had been set up immediately after the war were renamed and by January 1934 there were 72 Juvenile Instruction Centres for boys, 26 for girls and 26 mixed ones catering for roughly 17,000 youngsters.¹²⁹ The Act of 1934 introducing labour camps for some unemployed made attendance at the centres compulsory for the young. Proposals to lower the minimum age of unemployment from 16 failed during the 1920s to attract sufficient support to promote legislative action but the decision in 1934 was taken to reduce the minimum age of entry into

¹²⁶ Ibid, para 77.

¹²⁷ See for example, D Simms, "Juvenile Unemployment Programmes in England and Wales 1909-72", unpublished thesis, 1982, University of Southampton, MPhil

¹²⁸ Comprehensive registration was introduced in 1934. In 1936 Schairer commented that "there is more exact information about the number of pigs and calves in the country than about the number of juveniles unemployed". Dr Schairer "Education and the Vocational Crisis", Yearbook of Education, 1936.

¹²⁹ These so called "dole schools" appear to have taught girls overwhelmingly domestic lessons but are beyond the subject of this study.

insurance to 14 and to compel local authorities to provide courses for all unemployed insured juveniles.¹³⁰

Predictably assumptions which underlaid the anxieties of those involved in policy making for adolescent unemployment marginalised the experience of girls. Their future domestic role was seen to preclude any concern with their long term economic prospects. There might be moral panics about their sexuality, promiscuity and pregnancy but the exploitation of girls in blind alley work was held to be less serious because there was a constant stream of girls passing out of employment into marriage. They, therefore, were not faced with the same need to receive an increased wage on adulthood.

Within the LCC priority was certainly given to the social and economic transition of young men. In 1923 it was suggested that London pass a bye-law raising the school leaving age to 15.¹³¹ The Permanent Secretary to the Board commented

the bye-law presumably would apply to girls as well as to boys but what evidence is there of special deterioration among girls between 14 and 15 owing to unemployment? It is believed that a large proportion of girls who leave the elementary school at 14 stay at home to help their mothers until they are 15 or 16... we would just be wasting a large amount of money on the wrong group.¹³²

A meeting eventually took place with Cyril Jackson who had made the proposal. He agreed that he would "rather see the girls at home".¹³³

¹³⁰ W R Garside, "Juvenile Unemployment and Public Policy Between the Wars", Economic History Review, II, XXX, 2, 1977; R Pope, "Education and the Young Unemployed", Journal of Further Education and Higher Education, 2.2.1978

¹³¹ The 1918 Education Act gave local authorities the power to do this.

¹³² ED24/1349 Juvenile Deterioration in Consequences of Unemployment: Proposal to make a Bye-Law raising the School Leaving Age to 15, Selby Bigge, 29.1.23. Permanent Secretary Selby Bigge commented that the additional cost had been estimated by the LCC as £200,000.

¹³³ ED24/1349, Note of Meeting with Mr Jackson, 8.2.23.

The question of whether the school leaving age should be raised was intricately linked with juvenile unemployment throughout the inter-war years. From the mid 1920s many Labour MPs who had hitherto shown little interest in educational matters were suddenly drawn into discussions of advancing the leaving age as a weapon against unemployment. The industrial advantages of withdrawing 400,000-500,000 juveniles from the labour market seemed tempting.¹³⁴ The Labour Party fought the 1929 General Election on raising of the school leaving age as the solution to unemployment. Educationally the debate was seriously flawed, for in all proposals, adolescents with evidence of an offer of beneficial employment would be allowed to leave school before the age of 15.¹³⁵ By 1935 there were already ten local authorities which had a leaving age of 15. These had taken advantage of the clause in the 1918 Act which permitted local authorities to pass a bye-law raising the leaving age to 15 but each of those local authorities operated a system of beneficial exemption and had exemption rates of between 79-96%. It had been estimated that the 1936 Act would have led to a national proportion of exemption amounting to 85% and that in reality the leaving age for most children would have remained at 14.¹³⁶ In fact the day the 1936 Act was due to come into force was the day war broke out and thus action was postponed.

The First World War had contributed to a significant change in general attitudes towards the value of schooling. Education was part of a pent-up, passionately felt demand for drastic change and an angry refusal to return to pre-war conditions. There was a desire

¹³⁴ R Barker, *Education and Politics*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1972, p58; M Parkinson, *The Labour Party and the Organisation of Secondary Education 1918-65*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970. Public support for raising of the school leaving age was a complete reversal of previous policies for the majority of the Labour Party.

¹³⁵ Simms points out that by 1935, when the National Government committed itself in its Election Campaign to raising the school leaving age, the proposal also provided for a system of beneficial exemptions whereby children could be removed from school when they were 14 if it was shown that the employment for which they were destined was beneficial.

¹³⁶ See D Simms, "Juvenile Unemployment Programmes in England and Wales", *op cit*.

to compensate for the suffering that had taken place and undoubtedly this was a vital factor in the acceptance of the Act of 1918.¹³⁷ In the meritocratic atmosphere of the inter-war years education was perceived as the crucible of a better society and this continued to underlay educational debate even in times of the most severe recession. The concern for stability and social control within this period also prompted the state to view education as something more than a financial burden. There was a perceived need to meet reasonable aspirations for better education - and this was recognised not only as an influence on votes but also as an opportunity to influence young minds especially, of course, in times of youth unemployment.¹³⁸

A corollary of this new attitude was the recognition by the major political parties that education had become an electoral asset. Although educational debate was never in the front line of high politics there are significant examples of politicians making a bid for support in terms of educational policy. The Labour Education Advisory Committee stressed to the first Labour Government of 1924 that education was now a vote catcher and was a means of winning middle support in the electorate. Similarly in the aftermath of the General Strike the Conservative Prime Minister Baldwin specifically referred in public to education as a means of promoting democracy and in 1929 just before the General Election announced:

one of the strongest bonds of union between men is a common education and England has been the poorer in that in her national system of schooling she has not, in the past, fostered this fellowship of the mind.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ D W Thoms, "The Emergence and Failure of the Day Continuation Experiment", History of Education, 36, Spring, 1975

¹³⁸ B Simon, The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-1940, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978, p123

¹³⁹ Ibid, p149.

There were strong elements of consensus in educational outlook between the Conservative and Labour Party but there were also distinct differences in opinion. It is clear that the majority of opinion in the Conservative party continued to view secondary education as unsuitable for the mass of the population.¹⁴⁰ They wanted to preserve the distinct academic character of secondary grammar schools and emphasised vocational teaching in the elementary sector as a totally separate part of the education system. However, despite this support for the status quo, Jefferys has shown that during the 1930s there was an imperceptible shift in outlook to the belief that all should have the opportunity of at least some form of post primary schooling. It was this shift which paved the way for the passing of the School Leaving Age Act in 1936.¹⁴¹

More attention has been paid to the educational standpoint of the Labour Party.¹⁴² Barker argues that the Labour Party sought fairness within the existing system rather than wholesale reconstruction.¹⁴³ Simon, however, has argued that Labour did offer a consistent and radical alternative although he too acknowledges that Tawney, who was the main educational philosopher of the Left at this time, did not threaten the traditional role of the secondary grammar school but rather saw a variety of secondary provision as the way forward. He thus failed to recognise the problems of parity of status. Although Labour

¹⁴⁰ A remarkable political feature of the period is the consolidation and hegemony of the Conservative Party. Conservatives formed or predominated in Government for 5 of the 7 inter-war General Elections. See M. Pugh, The Tories and the People 1880-1935, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985

¹⁴¹ K Jefferys, "The Educational Policies of the Conservative Party 1918-44", Unpublished Thesis, University of London, PhD, 1984

¹⁴² The two minority Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929-31 consciously attempted to demonstrate their capacity to govern and remained parliamentary

¹⁴³ R Barker, Education and Politics, op cit, p137-8.

certainly did not seek a complete transformation of the selective school system, the party distinctly adopted a policy of opportunity as official policy.¹⁴⁴

Whatever political restraints existed, both parties were constrained by the economic context in which they had to operate. Education was as much a creature of economic circumstance as any other area of social policy during these years. The percentage of the national budget devoted to education during the inter-war years never reached the proportion of 1913-14. Simon maintains that it was the ultimate power of the purse in education which prevented the development of a more egalitarian system and which ensured the power of the Board of Education over local authorities during these years. Conversely Sutherland argues for the impotence of the Board since there were no financial carrots to offer to authorities. The Board was thus powerless to intervene.¹⁴⁵

By 1920 the concept of spending on education as a contribution to a new post-war world was already being challenged. In December of that year a decision was taken to completely halt spending on educational development and thus full scale economies were already underway before the Geddes Committee was appointed in 1923. Its proposals set the course for economy drives which were to remain the central plank of policy for the next twenty years, although the suggested cut of £18 million from the education budget was reduced to £6.5 million. Similarly education suffered in the recommendations of the Committee on National Expenditure set up in 1931, the May Committee. Cuts totalling £43 million were agreed and significantly a means test was introduced for the parents of

¹⁴⁴ B. Simon, The Politics of Educational Reform, op cit.

¹⁴⁵ G Sutherland, Ability Merit and Measurement: Mental Testing and English Education 1880-1940, Oxford, Clarendon, 1984, p270. B. Simon, The Politics of Educational Reform, op cit, p286 et seq.

secondary school pupils who had formerly had free places. Budgetary expenditure on education was a fairly constant £42 million throughout the inter-war years.¹⁴⁶

Both Labour and Conservative Education Ministers had to operate under the constraints of Chancellors who gave education a low priority. Wood, later Lord Halifax, Conservative President of the Board 1922-4 and 1934-6 faced a battle with the Exchequer over the obligations of the Treasury to pay a percentage of all LEA spending rather than a block grant. Percentage grants had been introduced in 1918 and were a recurrent source of contention between the Board of Education and the Exchequer. Lord Eustace Percy had to battle with Chancellor Winston Churchill throughout his term of office. Labour Ministers were similarly constrained. MacDonald, on offering Haldane office in 1924, commented that a great deal might be accomplished in education but "no large expenditure would be possible".¹⁴⁷ Chancellor Snowden constantly urged "all practicable economies" on Trevelyan during the Labour administration of 1929 to 31.¹⁴⁸

Eugenicism also affected outlooks on education. Although there were staunch opponents at the Board, the so-called environmentalists who argued that the intellectual qualities of the wage-earning classes were not inherently inferior, eugenicism did permeate the consciousness of some policy makers.¹⁴⁹ The uncritical acceptance of intelligence testing is partly attributable to the grip of the eugenic lobby.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Simon includes tables illustrating expenditure levels. B Simon, The Politics of Educational Reform, op cit

¹⁴⁷ Lord Haldane, a Liberal, refused this office and eventually became Lord Chancellor.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in B. Simon, The Politics of Educational Reform, op cit, p149

¹⁴⁹ For a full discussion see R Lowe, "Eugenicists, Doctors and the Quest for National Efficiency : An Educational Crusade 1900-39", History of Education, 8,4,1979.

¹⁵⁰ In 1929 President of the Board Percy commented "I have always been violently opposed to compulsory sterilisation, but, quite frankly, I don't quite know what my feelings are about the legalisation of voluntary sterilisation" ED 50/124 Percy to Riddell, 6.5.29

The main educational debates of the period were thus the raising of the school leaving age and selection for and equality of access to secondary schooling. The chief organ of consultation for the Board was the Consultative Committee. The Committee was highly esteemed during the inter-war period and its 1926 report on "The Education of the Adolescent" (the Hadow Report) determined the line and action in educational policy in regard to the whole problem of post-primary education for the rest of the inter-war period.¹⁵¹ The Hadow Committee recommended the ending of the system whereby advanced education for those over 11 remained the preserve of the middle classes who could afford to pay for secondary schooling and the small number of working class children who gained access to the secondary schools by the scholarship examinations.¹⁵² The only provision for others over eleven was to remain in the elementary school to the age of 14 or, in a small number of cases apart from in London, to go on to a Central or Junior Technical School which did not have parity of status or provision. These recommendations were interpreted in a conservative way by the Board but the so-called "Hadow re-organisation" did take place. Elementary school children left elementary school at 11 and went on to a so-called "Senior" school if they could not obtain a place at any of the other higher status institutions.

The second major Consultative Committee report of the period was the so-called "Spens" Report. Its terms of reference were to examine all post-primary education other than that administered under the elementary code. The Report was severely critical of the

¹⁵¹ For an early history of the Consultative Committee see F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p67. Board of Education, Consultative Committee, The Education of the Adolescent, London, HMSO, 1926 will hereafter be referred to as "The Hadow Report".

¹⁵² In 1907 the Liberal Government had required that 25% of places in maintained secondary schools should go to elementary school entrants. Fees continued to be charged by secondary schools throughout the inter-war period

academic nature of the Secondary Schools and argued that the curriculum of these schools needs to be brought into closer contact with practical life. It made a call for a single code of regulations to cover all schools which catered for children over the age of 11 - a proposal not welcomed by the officials of the Board who did not share this view of a system of secondary education for all. They wished to maintain the elitist position of the secondary grammar school.¹⁵³

The other major report of the Consultative Committee during this period - the Report on the Differentiation of the Curriculum for Boys and Girls Respectively in Secondary Schools was published in 1923 and provides a useful comparison with the arguments of this thesis.¹⁵⁴ This investigated the desirability of curricula differentiation for academic boys and girls. The report displayed confusion over conflicting evidence from psychologists about intelligence and aptitude suggesting that the similarities between girls and boys demanded a common curriculum whereas differences in emotion and temperament demanded curricula differentiations. The Committee's recommendations were that there should be two main aims for children in schools - to earn their own livings and to be useful citizens. For girls there was a third aim to become the makers of homes. Similar considerations, albeit with considerable class variations, were to influence educational policy towards vocational and technical education of girls in the elementary sector.

So where did technical education fit into the State education system of the inter-war years? Cotgrove describes the inter-war period as something of an anti-climax after the

¹⁵³ See G Savage, "Social Class and Social Policy The Civil Service and Secondary Education during the Inter-war Period", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18,2,1983. Board of Education, Consultative Committee, Report on Secondary Education with Special Reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools, London, HMSO, 1938 will hereafter be referred to as "The Spens Report".

¹⁵⁴ For a full study see F Hunt, *Gender And Policy*, op cit, p129-31. Board of Education, Consultative Committee, *The Differentiation of the Curriculum for Boys and Girls Respectively in Secondary Schools*, London, HMSO, 1923.

achievements in technical education of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁵⁵ There can be no doubt that technical education was facing something of an identity crisis because of the changes taking place in industry during these years. It had long been, in the words of the President of the Board, Stanley in 1935 the "Cinderella of the service".¹⁵⁶ During the inter-war years it had to compete for resources with the Hadow re-organisation plans and later with efforts to prepare for the raising of the school leaving age. Whatever role was perceived for technical education, it is important to remember that the main priority of many involved in education was to maintain inviolate the academic curriculum of the secondary schools.¹⁵⁷ In whatever way technical education was promoted, no attempt was made to alter the pre-existing structure of an education system which placed a premium on academic liberal education.

During the early 1920s there were two schools of thought about how technical education should materialise. Some favoured part-time continuation education from 14 to 16 while others argued for full-time post-primary education with a technical content from 11 to 14 - or 15 and eventually 16.¹⁵⁸ As Bailey points out, Tawney was perceptive enough in 1925 to see that circumstances had already altered sufficiently to change the terms of the debate away from continuing day release from work to a solution in which full time education had to be the main crucible of technical education. This was in line with the Hadow Committee's recommendations that Junior Technical School courses should be

¹⁵⁵ S Cotgrove, Technical Education and Social Change, London, Allen and Unwin, 1958

¹⁵⁶ Education 16.12.35

¹⁵⁷ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the educational status of technical education

¹⁵⁸ See B. Bailey, "Technical Education and Secondary Schooling, 1905-45" p106-7 in P Summerfield and E Evans (eds) in Technical Education and the State Since 1850, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990

encouraged. During the 1920s the policy of the Board relating to Junior Technical Schools was unchanged although in 1926 the regulations were incorporated into the New Regulations for Further Education.¹⁵⁹

There was undoubtedly a lamentable lack of central strong direction from the Board on technical education. The national enquiries about the relationship between education, industry and commerce were initiated by the President of the Board, Percy, and suggest a belief in the value of planning. The reports in practice, however, were more propaganda to promote a relationship with employers than attempting to lead trends. There was even non cooperation from other government departments. In 1927 Percy asked the Board of Trade to enquire into the training needs of employers and was refused. There was no consideration of how the Board's control of capital expenditure could be used to balance supplies.

Since the main aim of policy of both parties during the 1930s was the extension of the secondary system, this did little for technical education. This deification of scholasticism had unfortunate results and intensified the traditional inferiority attached to craft and manual work which led parents to hanker after scholastic careers for their children. According to Abbot, Chief Technological Inspector, the growth of Secondary and Central Schools tended towards an intellectual stratification of the population of a more definite kind than had ever existed.

Very little action was taken, thereafter, until 1934 when the President of the Board of Education, Lord Halifax, presented a memorandum to Cabinet called Future Educational Policies. This memorandum recognised that for the General Election of 1935 the National Government would have to present to the electorate a comprehensive programme of

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter 4.

educational development.¹⁶⁰ The arrival of the new President of the Board Stanley in June 1934 made no change to the decision already taken that a Cabinet Committee on educational policy would be set up. This was to focus on the raising of the school leaving age but would inevitably touch on technical education. Stanley recognised that the provision in technical education lagged behind that of the standard of our competitors in international trade and therefore decided that a general survey should be instituted of the "really bad conditions". Work began on the survey and in November 1935, the month of the Government's election success, R.S. Wood, then Head of the Technological Branch, prepared a review of the information received so far. The general conclusion was one of inadequacy of accommodation and equipment. Only London was deemed to have a strong record of technical development since the First World War. There was a clear lack of any systematic technical provision throughout the country - no doubt arising from the absence of any statutory requirement upon local authorities to provide education other than the elementary.

Thus the so-called "T Drive" began giving the Board's technological branch responsibility for a policy initiative for the first time since its inception 35 years before. In December 1935 Stanley announced that the Government was proposing to assign £12 million expenditure on technical education, half of which was to be borne by central Government. Circular 1444 stated that "there is no part of our education system which is of greater national importance than Technical education since a comprehensive and up-to-date supply of Technical schools is more than ever essential to our success in the competition for international trade".¹⁶¹ Thereafter progress was evaluated at 6 monthly intervals. Yet few developments emerged. These were years of rising costs and prices in the building industry

¹⁶⁰ See B. Bailey, "The Development Of Technical Education 1934-39", History of Education, 16, 1, 1987 for a full discussion of the "T Drive".

¹⁶¹ Circular 1444, Educational Reform : The National Government Programme, 6.1 36

and budget planning was thus a very uncertain exercise. Education Authorities had other competing priorities as well as increasingly urgent Government measures for re-armament and defence. In October 1938 the Treasury circulated Government departments on the need for economy in civil measures. The Board decided that the technical education survey could be claimed to assist national defence and therefore continued. It was clear, however, that the drive was losing momentum. Wood and Savage suggested to the President Stanhope that the Government would have to act if technical education was not to be downgraded even further. A draft Cabinet memorandum was prepared suggesting special financial assistance to local authorities to stimulate technical education and eventually a memorandum, "The Development of Technical Education", dated 1st March 1939, was produced recommending that the grant for building technical colleges be increased to 75% from 50% for a limited period.

The memorandum never reached Cabinet. The Treasury prevailed upon the Board to postpone circulation since economy was the order of the day. The President of the Board argued that improved technical education was a national necessity and eventually the Chancellor agreed in principle to the request for additional expenditure. Work could now begin on the preparation of a Circular to authorities about the availability of extra money. That Circular was, of course, never issued and in December 1939 the technical education papers were put away in the hope that they would be needed again after the War. There was little to show for the previous four years' attempts to establish an adequate system of technical education through the country.

In London, however, the situation was rather different for there was a long tradition in the capital of promotion of technical education.¹⁶² The London County Council was very different from other local education authorities. The well organised party structure at County Hall meant that educational policy was marked out along Party lines in the Council Chambers. The Education Committee was the only Committee which met in public and to which reporters were allowed. The tendency towards a well defined policy was strengthened by the electoral system of the LCC whereby the whole Council was dissolved every three years and new members elected. With the three year term it was easy to have a long term policy. Increasingly through the inter-war years, LCC elections became of major significance on the political calendar.

Educational policy seems to have been formulated in a complex way. Many important issues at County Hall appear to have been settled informally between party leaders before they ever reached Council Chambers. Moreover, there were eight Committees which dealt with education and much was thus decided by these behind closed doors. The independence of the Education Committee was limited by its relationship to the Council as a whole and particularly to the Finance Committee, the main aim of which in many of the inter-war years was to keep rates down. The gross expenditure by the LCC on education rose sharply to £14 million in 1921-22. There was a drop and then an acceleration in 1925. In 1930 expenditure was £30 million and throughout the period during which the Municipal Reformers held power up to 1934, education accounted for between 38% to 42% of the Council's budget.

The LCC Education Committee also had the benefit of a professional education officer and was one of the few authorities to have its own inspectorate. After 1919 there was a

¹⁶² See A Saint, "Technical Education and The Early LCC", in A Saint (ed) Politics and the People of London: The LCC 1889-1965, London, Hambledon Press, 1989.

Chief Inspector, a Chief Woman Inspector, four Divisional Inspectors and 39 other inspectors.¹⁶³ It is hard to isolate the relative importance of the elected members and the professional officers in the construction of policies. There can be no doubt that the three education officers of the inter-war years - Blair, Gater and Rich - had significant influence for all were highly individual and opinionated men. Through sheer pressure of work, the Education Committees had to rely heavily on these officers' recommendations. Thus it is possible to isolate the influence of Blair in the development of Central Schools, Gater in the failure to raise the school leaving age and Rich in the quelling of enthusiasm for multi-bias schools in the late 1930s.¹⁶⁴

During the inter-war years the two parties holding power at County Hall were the Municipal Reformers or Conservatives and the Labour Party who once they had captured the LCC in 1934, never lost it again. The Labour Party pursued its own objective of equality of educational opportunity primarily by seeking to widen access to and improve standards of provision in the existing system of post-primary schooling. Only in the late 1930s did it seriously consider more fundamental reforms. London Secondary Schools remained overwhelmingly the preserve of the fee paying middle classes immediately after the First World War. Nearly 75% of pupils at this time were fee payers and for those unable to pay, a narrow scholarship ladder enabled some 2,000 or so a year to enter the 70 plus secondary schools aided or maintained by the LCC. Most scholarship entrants were drawn from the lower middle classes and skilled working classes. For those unable to reach the top rung of

¹⁶³ The Organisation of Education in London, LCC, 1919.

¹⁶⁴ For a full discussion of the power of Education Officer Blair, who was the mentor of both Gater and Rich see D. Thoms, Policy Making in Education: Robert Blair and the LCC 1904-24, Leeds, University of Leeds Press, 1980.

the ladder, some 5,000 pupils annually were accepted for a place at one of the 51 Central Schools.¹⁶⁵

The LCC acknowledged that many of the Secondary Schools still admitted fee payers who would have been considered unsuitable for secondary schooling had their parents not had the money to pay for it. The Municipal Reformers on the LCC defended the system claiming that if it raised admission standards for fee payers they would merely transfer elsewhere to private schools and the result would be the creation of a two tier system of secondary education. There were other problems. Although the LCC planned its level of secondary provision on the basis of 10 places per 1,000 of the population, a target set in 1909, there were in practice enormous variations across London. The level of places ranged from an average of 2.7 places per 1,000 in the poorest inner City boroughs to 15.7 and 18.8 respectively in the predominantly middle class Wandsworth and Lewisham.¹⁶⁶ In the early 1920s a young research worker, Kenneth Lindsay, carried out a sociological study of secondary schools. He found that in England and Wales as a whole, 9.5% of elementary school leavers went to secondary schools but in London only 6.4% went. On Lindsay's analysis some 40% of the fathers of grammar school pupils were skilled workers, 35% came from official and clerical workers and 10% were shopkeepers. In proving the social class basis of the secondary education he helped to feed the Labour minority on the LCC with new ammunition.¹⁶⁷ In a comparative study based largely upon Lindsay's research, Barbara Drake, a co-opted member of the Education Committee, claimed that low levels of secondary

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter 5.

¹⁶⁶ M Richardson, "Education and Politics : The London Labour Party and Schooling Between The Wars", in A Saint, Politics and People, op cit.

¹⁶⁷ K Lindsay, Social Progress and Educational Waste, London, 1926. Lindsay was later to enter Parliament and served as Parliamentary Secretary at the Board in the immediate pre-war years.

provision in London compared with other parts of the country meant that elementary schoolchildren were at a great disadvantage in the capital.¹⁶⁸ This was to be the main focus of Labour's criticism of the educational policy of the Municipal Reformers. Although a fall in the birth-rate enabled London to approximate the ratio of places to child population to the average of the country as a whole by the 1930s, the intellectual stratification between the secondary system and advanced education in the elementary system remained absolute. The principle of secondary selection for all those capable of benefitting as set out by the influential Cyril Burt, the Council's Educational Psychologist, did not seem to operate in practice.

When demand for Government economies surfaced at the end of the short post-war boom between 1920 and 1921 the Municipal Reformers on the LCC eagerly responded. The Council quickly passed a resolution suspending all education expenditure financed from the rates unless it qualified for a 50% Board of Education grant and during the next 18 months the Council introduced a programme of economies. Among the most substantial was a ban on married women teachers which was not lifted until 1935, an increase in secondary school fees, the abolition of compulsory continuation schooling and a 50% cut in the school meals budget.

At the forefront of opposition to this activity in London were the National Union of Women Teachers. The NUWT urged parents at every school to form a Committee - although the effectiveness of these Committees as an organised pressure group seems to have been limited. Teachers were one group of middle class professionals the support of which Herbert Morrison, the dominant labour politician in London during these years, was partly

¹⁶⁸ B Drake, "London Education", London News, August 1927, p2.

anxious to enlist.¹⁶⁹ Constituency Labour Parties grew in strength in the capital throughout the 1930s but London did not support Labour MPs on a national level. In parliamentary terms Labour were little better represented by the capital in 1939 than they were in 1924. In 1931 they retained only 5 seats. Although the radical London Teachers Association was expelled from the London Labour Party in 1927 following a purge of all Communist influenced bodies, the National Association of Labour Teachers became an important and influential body in the capital.

When the Hadow Report was first published in 1926, Education Officer Gater claimed that LCC policy was already in line with the recommendations and argued that the further development of post-primary provision in London continued to be constrained by financial and administrative difficulties. This response was echoed by a majority on the Education Committee. The Committee rejected as too costly the proposal that there should be parity in levels of staffing and equipment between the different types of post-11 schools. Nevertheless by 1931 a considerable amount of organisation and development had taken place under the impetus of the Council's three year programmes which began in 1925. The provision of 25 new elementary schools and the modernisation of others meant that overcrowding in elementary classes had been significantly reduced whilst secondary provision had also expanded with the construction of 12 new schools and the modernisation of 25 others. In fact re-organisation had actually begun in London in 1924 before the publication of the Hadow Report. Nevertheless during the 1930s it became clear that the reorganisation had failed to achieve a marked improvement in the quality of provision for those over 11s who

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of Labour's bid for middle class support during these years see M Clapson "Localism, the London Labour Party and the LCC Between the Wars" in A Saint, Politics and People, op cit; T Jeffery "The Suburban National: Politics and Class in Lewisham" in D Feldman and G Stedman-Jones (eds) Metropolis London, op cit

were not successful in winning a place to a different level of schooling.¹⁷⁰ At the time of the May Report of July 1931 further economies were demanded and the LCC cut its education budget by £1.5 million. Inevitably there were reductions in the level of scholarship grants and postponement of a new buildings. The legacy of these cuts contributed largely to Labour's election victory in March 1934 - for the Labour Manifesto gave priority to spending on education, housing and the poor, promising a more efficient management of affairs and expansion of educational opportunities.¹⁷¹

During the next few years the Labour Party in power had two main objectives - to increase the level of secondary school provision and to secure improvement in the standards of elementary schools. Plans were made to build new secondary schools in South East London and modernise elementary schools. The General Purposes Sub-Committee resolved in favour of raising the school leaving age to 15. It was accepted that there would be chaos if London went ahead alone and therefore the Government was urged to nominate an appointed day for the whole country. Education Officer Rich responded defensively. He showed how the London elementary school role had decreased by some 50,000 between 1914 and 1932 and how it was expected to decline still further by 1940. Secondary and Central School places had risen from just over 60,000 in 1920 to 83,000 in 1933 to 34. He also referred to the progress of the Hadow reorganisation through which about 100,000 pupils were already in reorganised Senior Schools and he defended Central Schools for the distinctive contribution they made. Rich estimated that 15.7% of each age group entered the

¹⁷⁰ The weaknesses of the senior schools became so marked that in 1939 a special Report was prepared by the Council's Chief Inspector which set out many criticisms including that the curricula lacked breadth and depth and was unsuited to modern conditions. See EO/PS/1/15.

¹⁷¹ On Morrison's advice an Education Research Group was established under Tawney to examine the problems of London education. The NUWT were represented on this.

Central Schools, 15.4% entered Secondary Schools and 3.7% entered Junior Technical Schools in London.

The inter-war period was an important stage in the evolution of relationships between the Board and the LCC. There was frequent frustration and irritation on both sides, particularly after the election of a Labour Council in 1934.¹⁷² Generally the Education Committee saw the Board as obstructive and interfering, as Mr. Pincombe stated.

Some of us think that the Board of Education is not treating the County Council right ... many of us see that it is not right for the Board of Education to interfere in the detailed administration of schools.¹⁷³

The Board was similarly negative about the LCC

Elsewhere in the country HMI can have close relations with the Education Authority but in London there are numerous members who are or who think they are education experts ... London questions are too large and too involved with political considerations.¹⁷⁴

Inspectors were warned that they would need good manners and tact to cope with the LCC's personnel. In fact in technical education policy there was generally less friction than in other fields.

By the twenties the LCC had developed its own classification of institutions which provided technical education - there were aided polytechnics, other aided technical institutions, LCC maintained technical institutions, evening institutes and day continuation schools. Education Officer Blair and Chief Inspector Spencer shared a strong interest in technical education from the early days of the LCC, as did Blair's protege Rich, who was head of the technical division between 1928-33 and then became Education Officer.

¹⁷² Various instances of tension will be cited throughout this thesis

¹⁷³ LCC Education Committee Minutes, 11 12 23. This quarrel was about reductions in staffing

¹⁷⁴ ED 23/269 Some Notes on the Problems Connected With Inspection of Elementary Schools in London, 17 10 25.

Nevertheless both Municipal Reformers and Labour party politicians on the LCC came into conflict with the Board of Education about expenditure on technical education. There was, of course, constant pressure from the Treasury to cut costs and in 1931 the Permanent Secretary informed Local Authority representatives that in the case of technical schools these schools would only be approved if they were regarded as essential to the needs of industry and commerce. It does seem, however, that in many cases the Board was prepared to be more flexible about technical education policy, particularly from the mid thirties, than in other areas. In 1934 Pelham informed the President of the Board that in relation to technical education

We have throughout adopted a more generous attitude and have been prepared to sanction any proposals likely to prove of immediate benefit and importance to industry and commerce.¹⁷⁵

There was an awareness that London under Labour would certainly wish to increase spending on education. It was reported within the Board in 1934 that

London are obviously assuming that the slump is over and we are faced with the alternative of either relaxing Circular 1413 and facing the risks of such a relaxation or a public quarrel with the LCC.¹⁷⁶

Regular meetings between Board Officials became accepted procedure for discussing allocation to London's technical education. Since much of the preparation for the proposals was done in conjunction with the Board Inspectorate it seems that Council schemes would usually suffer little modification. Nevertheless the Board was able to exercise effective pressure in some instances - for example in the revision of fee structure in technical institutions shortly after the Labour party took control in 1934. Education Officer Rich

¹⁷⁵ ED24/261 - Pelham to President of the Board, 17.4.34.

¹⁷⁶ ED24/1261, Ainsworth to Pelham, 9.10 34.

enlisted support from the Board of Education when the new Labour majority on the LCC wished to revert to 1931 fees in technical institutes. Lowndes inquired why London managed to obtain such a low proportion of fees and income from technical institutions. The answer was apparently undue liberality in remissions of fees:

This and the fact that the LCC would now be governed by Labour majority rather support the policy of trying to hold on to the gains which have been achieved... for us to put to them our own figures would, I think, at this stage be a mistake in tactics as it would enable London to criticise our figures and not give us the tactical advantage of criticising theirs.¹⁷⁷

The Board continued to pressurise on this until the Council revised fees in 1936.

The LCC met constant problems with the attitudes of employers. Although it is virtually impossible to generalise about employers' reactions to technical education, they were on the whole defensive about the economic situation and the LCC never succeeded in convincing London employers of the need for training. It is clear from both national and reports within London that employers did not want large scale vocational training but rather a good sound basic education. The findings of the Malcolm Committee of 1928 suggests that the only change during the late twenties and thirties was that employers asked for more sophisticated general education incorporating, perhaps, an industrial bias in history and geography.

Generalisations about the response of the unions are equally difficult.¹⁷⁸ By the late twenties they appear to have become less antagonistic to the concept of technical education which earlier had been confused with the rationalisation and scientific management. There were fears that the more versatile adaptable worker would obviously be more efficient and

¹⁷⁷ ED55/67, Lowndes to Wallis, 9 3 34.

¹⁷⁸ See Chapter 4.

that the profits would go the employer rather than to the worker.¹⁷⁹ Patriarchy clearly interacted with capitalism as is shown in February 1921 in President of the Board Fisher's comment to a deputation from the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC:

I entirely agree with the view which I think is widely and strongly held in certain organised bodies that it would be very undesirable that the education of boys and girls between the ages of 14 to 16 would be too exclusively technical.¹⁸⁰

The NUWT were in no doubt about the importance they attached to the work of the Education Committee whether in technical education or in other fields of schooling. In 1922 the Union urged members to concentrate their energies on securing the return of Liberal and Labour members even though the NUWT was not officially affiliated to any Party. In 1923 it was agreed that the prestige and influence of the Union would be greatly increased by a teacher representative on the Council and Miss Dawson, a Southwark elementary teacher, was chosen as the candidate to stand in North Camberwell. The Woman Teacher reported endless efforts by members to ensure that Miss Dawson was successful. She indeed was and felt that her election had

Pushed forward a little bit of feminist principles and proved how necessary it is to have a woman teacher on a great governing body like the LCC.¹⁸¹

Miss Dawson was unstinting in her efforts over a decade. She eventually became Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and waged a constant battle against the marriage bar. She also worked tirelessly to promote nursery education. Even she admitted that she worked hard. The Council met weekly on Tuesday at 2.30 p.m. while the Education

¹⁷⁹ ED 46/15, Memorandum of TUC Deputation, 10 2 1921

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ The Woman Teacher, 29 1 37 p165

Committee also met every Wednesday at 2.30 p.m. Various sub-committees met each morning. She had to attend meetings of the Labour Party and report monthly to her constituency base. She also included heavy reading on her agenda.

At Miss Dawson's retirement in 1937 great accolades were heaped upon her by Sir George Gater, the former Education Officer and Herbert Morrison. She had, by then, been a member of the Council for 12 years and Morrison commented that he had come to the conclusion that she was "alright". The members of the Committee sang "I know a lady sweet and kind" to Miss Dawson and then a feminist play called "Dropping the Baby" was performed.¹⁸²

Thus a huge variety of factors created the context in which educational policy towards girls' vocational training was formulated. Economic constraints and political necessities imposed limitations on the way in which education could be developed. At the same time ideologies about a woman's place in society, in paid employment and the home, determined the way in which schools were perceived as preparing girls for adult life. The industrial and economic situation in London which defined the employment opportunities available to these girls also fed into the situation. A complex inter-mingling of these phenomena and currents created a situation in which, in the words of Tawney,

Whether or not, in fact, a woman's place is in the home, a girl's, even more than a boy's and far more than a man's, is obviously the factory.¹⁸³

¹⁸² The Woman Teacher, 26.3 37, p224 On Miss Dawson's retirement Miss Whateley was elected as representative of the Union

¹⁸³ R Tawney, The School Leaving Age and Juvenile Employment, London, Allen and Unwin, 1934 p8.

"THE THREE Cs" - CATERING, COOKING AND CLEANING FOR
SCHOOLGIRLS IN LONDON

In 1937 S H Wood lamented that "it is only in heaven (where however they neither marry nor give in marriage) that one could expect housewives to be so saintly as to take the prospective brides of the community into their homes as domestic learners" and thus prepare girls for their future role in life.¹ Some replacement, therefore, for that "real apprenticeship" had to be sought - and that substitute was to be found in the classroom. It materialised in the form of the ubiquitous domestic subjects course which every elementary schoolgirl over the age of 11 was to follow during the inter-war years. It was through these lessons that the pervasive and persistent ideology of domesticity would be indoctrinated into young working class women, thus preparing them for their future destiny as the wives and mothers of the race. Schools would provide a "practical training for the work which ultimately the vast majority of women will be called upon to do - namely that of managing a household of their own".²

Although the inter-war years did not witness a radical change in the teaching of domestic subjects, there was a subtle shift in form. The practical domestic curriculum became a formalised part of every schoolgirl's life, conveying definite messages about femininity and gender specific employment. Since it was taught exclusively to girls, the subject epitomised and encapsulated all the ambiguities inherent in attempts to define a girl's vocation within the broader liberal and vocational debate.

¹ ED 136/109, Some Notes on the Teaching of Domestic Skills, S H Wood, 28.9.37, p7.

² ED 46/293 Memorandum on Domestic Workers, The National Union of Conservative and Unionist Association Central Women's Advisory Committee, 9.2 38, p2

The *modus operandi* which evolved to reconcile these tensions about a girl's vocation was one in which new economic, social and ideological pressures were accommodated in the definition of domesticity which was conveyed to girls. Girls' legitimate educational aspirations were seen to be framed by their inevitable ultimate role as unpaid domestic workers. A girl's home life thus came to shape her education in a way that was not the case for boys. Within the school hierarchy, moreover, domestic subjects clearly slotted in on the very lowest rung of the ladder; the perfect interception of gender and class in the ubiquitous domestic lesson meant it was doomed in terms of educational status.³ If practical subjects were perceived as being of lesser educational merit than liberal academic subjects, domestic lessons were most certainly at the bottom of the second hierarchy. The message was that the subject of which girls were most in need was of little true value. The message was conveyed in a number of ways : in the fact that they had to pay for the materials they used, in the inadequate facilities provided and in the low standing of their domestic teachers. Moreover, since the care of home and family was unwaged labour, and outside the infrastructure of production, it was regarded as being of no economic worth. Thus girls spent a great deal of time being taught subjects that were of no "real" value in a society in which economic production held primary status and men held economic power.

Class intersected with gender in schools' definition of the female domestic role. The domestic performance which working class girls were to be taught during this period was to be judged by the class specific expectations of the middle class policy makers. Gender definitions are, of course, not only class specific but may be a form of social control if imposed on children of another social class. A key theme of this chapter will be that the

³ In secondary schools less able (i.e. less academic) and less middle class girls tended to take domestic science.

"state of the nation" notions which Dyhouse and Davin have persuasively shown shaped domestic subjects teaching in the late 19th century period, continued to dictate policies through the inter-war years.⁴ The teaching of practical cookery, practical needlework, practical infant care was primarily about ensuring that the working class housewife was taught how to perform her womanly work "properly" i.e. thriftily and uncomplainingly. The real justification for domestic subjects, despite educational philosophies used to disguise this, was the "lion in the path of improving the ordinary household" - the lazy woman who suffered from a lack of interest in her chores and a complete apathy about feeding her family.⁵ The background to this philosophy was a belief in the decay of home life caused both by the working class housewife's rebellious disinclination to perform her tasks and by her "desire" to seek employment outside the home. The root of the educational problem was that "wives will not sweat and slave as they used to".⁶

To overcome this evil the endless domestic lessons would be the apprenticeship of the ordinary girl to prepare her for her profession of homemaker. These lessons were to be the equivalent of boy's apprenticeship for paid employment, they were to constitute the female version of the practical boys' handicraft lessons of the inter-war years. Indeed, domestic subjects were, according to HMI Miss Manley, to form the bedrock of every working class

⁴ A Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood", *History Workshop Journal* 5 Spring 1978, C Dyhouse, "Social Darwinistic Ideas in the Development of Women's Education in England 1880-1920", *History of Education*, 5, 1, 1976, C Dyhouse, "Good Wives and Little Mothers, Social Anxieties and the Schoolgirl's Curriculum 1890-1920", *Oxford Review of Education*, 3, 1, 1977.

⁵ ED 136/109, Instruction In Cookery, R.S. Wood, 13 9 37, p4

⁶ Ibid, p3

girl's education for "no other subject can quite take the place of housecraft as a means for all round development".⁷

The question of women's paid employment outside the home cut across the subject of domestic studies in schools. One half of the equation was that, since more working class women were supposedly taking paid employment, they were no longer inclined or able to teach their daughters housewifely duties. The second half was that if the working class girl was, as was now increasingly accepted, to work certain periods in paid employment she must be prepared for suitable jobs - i.e. domestic jobs. Although the working class female, had, of course, always worked in paid employment, the inter-war period was unique in its debate and emphasis on how the adolescent, even the working class adolescent, should be trained for work. It is quite clear that educational policy accepted implicitly that the working class girl would experience a period of paid employment. This period was usually characterised in policy maker's discussions as the years between 14 and 20.⁸

The context of the intersection of domestic lessons and paid employment was, of course, that of the national "crisis" about the shortage of servants. It will be suggested that, in London at least, there was a third underlying theme to add to the dual purposes of inculcating the working class woman with class specific feminine qualities and teaching her practical domestic abilities - that of preparing her for paid employment in domestic work which developed skills which could then be transferred to the home. This objective was not only implicit in the case of the teaching of the ordinary girl in school but also made explicit in the form of home training schools which emerged in London. The most domesticated girls

⁷ ED 24/1445, Memorandum on the suggestion put forward by the Education Committee of the LCC that the teaching of Domestic Subjects should be transferred from the Public Elementary Schools to the Day Continuation Schools, Miss Manley, 19.5.21, p3

⁸ This age range emerged clearly in the debate of the late 1930s about the role of cooking in the elementary curriculum. See p136-9.

were to attend these schools at an age when they were, according to HMI Miss Cox, "trainable and ripe for vocational study".⁹ Ironically, since domestic courses were almost guaranteed to occupy the lowest level of status on the knowledge hierarchy, through the domestic training schools an attempt was made to "re-skill" the art. It was suggested that domestic subjects were technical subjects to be taught to particular domestically orientated working class girls.

This type of advanced domestic training would, of course, incidentally help solve the servant problem and assuage unease in society about the disarray in gender relations believed to have been caused by the war.¹⁰ Yet it was a policy heavy with contradictions for, despite the alleged inherent aptitude of all girls for domestic tasks, young women during this period did not want to go into this type of employment. Domestic service continued to be low grade, low status employment and any training did not prevent servants being slotted in at the very bottom of the new inter-war economy. Thus policy disadvantaged girls both educationally and in the labour market. Not only did the sheer amount of time spent on domestic tuition dilute girls' general education but the emphasis on this as preparation for paid employment also denied females the route which working class boys could take of training for skilled work with all its concomitant rewards.

Ultimately, the class specific policy aiming to prepare future domestic workers for labour both in and outside the home "failed". As ever the discrepancies between aim and practice in schooling predominated. The new inter-war ideology of femininity and domesticity undoubtedly took root, but its preachers were primarily the media and magazines of the period. In spite of all efforts, London girls turned away from domestic service as a

⁹ ED 136/109, Note HMI Miss Cox, August 1937, p7.

¹⁰ See Chapter 2.

form of employment, preferring the better paid factory work and clerical jobs.¹¹ Moreover, even the attempt to teach the working class how to feed their families in the way that the middle class thought they should, failed reducing the President of the Board of Education to say in 1937 that the teaching of cookery "was a waste of time and, incidentally, millions of the taxpayers' and ratepayers' money."¹²

In this chapter I shall firstly give a description of the domestic studies teaching in London during this period, showing how the capital had been a pioneer of the subject in the early years, but increasingly fell into dispute with the Board about the way in which the subject should be taught. I shall then focus on policy at the National and London level, elaborating on the themes outlined above. It will be shown that, whatever rhetoric surrounded the aims and importance of domestic subjects, it remained the poor relation of the elementary curriculum - underfunded and exploited through the pressure to make the subject pay for itself.¹³ This will be followed by an examination of the contemporary critique which was offered, both by teachers and parents, of the subject and some analysis made of the impact of these lessons on the girls who suffered them. The second part of the chapter will focus specifically on the domestic training schools of London, which epitomised all the assumptions, prejudices and the ideologies about domesticity during the period.

The teaching of domestic subjects during the inter-war years has received remarkably little attention from historians. Most recent works on the subject ignore the period almost entirely or conclude at 1918 assuming, apparently, that the subject changed very little during

¹¹ It was non London girls who actually formed the majority of the capital's young domestic labour force during this period. Often rural girls or those from deeply depressed industrial regions came or were brought to the capital and were prepared to take any form of employment.

¹² ED 136/109, Note Stanhope to Parliamentary Secretary, 27 /7.37.

¹³ This first part of the chapter will focus on national as much as LCC policy in this area in order to provide a context for the discussion of the capital's domestic training schools.

the succeeding two decades. No attention has been given to the continuities in ideology with the pre-war years or to the connection between the domestic lesson and paid employment. Even Dyhouse in her seminal work on the English schoolgirl's curriculum leaps in a paragraph from 1918 to the post-Second World War period.¹⁴ There are various reasons for this neglect. As several historians have noted, the secondary schools rather than the elementary schools were the site of the struggle between feminists opposed to the intrusion of domestic economy in the curriculum and those who advocated it.¹⁵ Hunt has shown how the secondary schools continued to be the venue for the most ardent debate about the subject during the inter-war years, particularly since several influential officials at the Board of Education firmly believed in the necessity of the secondary school girl receiving a knowledge of domestic subjects so that she could become an intellectual companion to her husband.¹⁶

Yet it was in the elementary school that the vast majority of girls undertook domestic tuition. The two early detailed accounts of domestic subjects teaching present a favourable account of it. The first written by Ailsa Yoxall in 1913 was commissioned by the Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects, ["ATDS"]. The second was by Helen Sillitoe in 1933.¹⁷ Their favourable interpretation of the good work done in raising working class

¹⁴ C Dyhouse, "Towards a Feminine Curriculum for English Schoolgirls: The Demands of Ideology 1870-1963", Women's Studies International Quarterly, 1, 1978. Purvis does at least mention the junior housewifery and home training schools but makes no analysis of them. J Purvis, "Domestic Subjects since 1870" in I Goodson, (ed), Social Histories of the Secondary Curriculum, Brighton, Galmer, 1985.

¹⁵ C Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up in late Victorian and Edwardian England, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981; C Manthorpe, "Science or Domestic Science? The Struggle to Define an Appropriate Science Education for Girls in Early 20th Century England", History of Education, 15, 3, 1986.

¹⁶ F. Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p65. Although this study does not concentrate on the secondary schools, it should be noted that the Regulations for Secondary Schools of 1905-1906 had required for the first time that the secondary school girls be taught "practical housewifery" and by the First World War the principle of differentiation in this area of the curriculum was firmly established in the secondary school sector.

¹⁷ A Yoxall, A History of the Teaching of Domestic Economy in Great Britain, Bath. Chivers, 1913, republished 1965, H Sillitoe, A History of the Teaching of the Domestic Subjects, London, Methuen, 1933. Sillitoe was an HMI from 1904, having been on the Executive Council of the ATDS before that.

living standards through the subject went unchallenged until the work of Dyhouse and Davin in the late 1970s which examined for the first time the way in which the ideology of domesticity was promoted and remoulded into educational practices during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whilst agreeing with the early interpretations that the development of domestic economy was aimed at imposing a middle class version of family values and functions, Dyhouse analysed the role of the subject in preparing the working class woman for her primary social role as a wife and mother (and servant). Digby and Searby have argued that, in this context, elementary schools were acting as "agents of social control" since "bourgeois aspirations and middle class ideas of domestic respectability were presented to the working-class schoolgirls in their elementary-school domestic instruction."¹⁸ Dyhouse has also argued persuasively that strong ideological pressures about the future of the nation emerged to bolster traditional arguments for the need to foster concern in women about their domestic and maternal duties, a concern that was "being rephrased in terms of social Darwinistic assumptions about evolution and social progress".

While Dyhouse and Davin have tended to present women as passive recipients of this teaching, dictated by a male controlled state, more recently Turnbull has shifted the emphasis to examine the role of women in the development of the subject.¹⁹ She has stressed the role of middle class women in defining a sex specific area of the curriculum, arguing that domestic subjects lessons cannot be perceived simply as a method of social control or patriarchal imposition. She argues that these women perceived an opportunity to develop a professional role for themselves during the late nineteenth century and suggests that they

¹⁸ A Digby and P Searby, *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth Century England*, London, Macmillan, 1981, p 47 Digby and Searby define social control as cross cultural transformation They also stress the ambivalence about the extent to which this schooling was designed to turn out well trained servants

¹⁹ A Turnbull, "Women, Education and Domesticity: A Study of the Domestic Subjects Movement 1870-1914", Unpublished Thesis, Polytechnic of the South Bank, Ph D 1983

created a female educational bureaucracy built on the separate sphere doctrine and their private domestic role.²⁰ As Prochaska and Copelman have pointed out, middle class women involved in philanthropy were used to training servants and saw it as an area of life where they had expertise.²¹ Such efforts necessarily had contradictory results on female emancipation overall for their impact on the majority of women was minimal. They can nevertheless be seen as an attempt by women to establish a place for themselves through domestic subjects within society. Turnbull also argues that the operation of the domestic subjects syllabus in elementary schools during the late nineteenth century can have had very little effect, in practice. It was so badly planned that it can hardly have ensured that every girl became a resourceful housewife.

St. John has made a particular study of the guidance and influencing of girls leaving London elementary schools during the early twentieth century. In her chapter on teaching domestic subjects she argues that whatever attempts were made to mould girls' futures, the schools came a very poor second to the influences of home where mothers and neighbourhoods provided powerful imperatives for attitudes and conduct. She argues that domestic subjects in L.C.C. schools were not vocational in the wage earning sense but increasingly practical, and in war time, patriotic.²²

²⁰ See also A Turnbull "Learning For Womanly Work : the Elementary School Curriculum 1870-1914, in F Hunt, Lessons for Life, op cit.

²¹ D Copelman, "Women in the Classroom Struggle", op cit. FK Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in 19th Century England, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979.

²² D St John, "The Guidance and Influencing of Girls Leaving School at Fourteen: A study in the content, methods, and contradictions in this process based on the girls' departments of the London County Council maintained elementary schools 1904-24", Unpublished Thesis, Institute of Education, University of London, Ph D, 1989, Chapter 3.

Domestic subjects did, of course, have a long history in the elementary state school system.²³ In 1862 needlework had become a compulsory subject under the Revised Code and in 1870 the Education Department added theoretical domestic economy as a class subject. By 1874 it had become a grant earning subject and in 1878 became a compulsory specific subject for girls. In 1882 cookery became grant earning and in 1889 laundry. In 1897 housewifery entered the Code and by 1900 had also become grant earning. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the debate about the appropriateness of domestic subjects in the girls' curriculum had already been settled. The Elementary Code was revised in the 1900s and inclusion of practical work in the elementary sector sanctioned.²⁴ The Board of Education stated that it was especially desirable to include practical domestic subjects in Higher Elementary Schools and its Annual Report of 1904-1905 emphasised that there should not be a common curriculum for boys and girls in such establishments, girls requiring some practical training for home duties.²⁵ In 1908 the Report once again emphasised the need for older girls to follow domestic subjects and laid stress on the importance of providing combined Domestic Subjects courses.²⁶

The emphasis by the late nineteenth century, therefore, had become increasingly one on the practical nature of the domestic crafts rather than on their theoretical elements. The 1912 Suggestions for Teachers stressed the practical value of sewing as well as its educational value in training the hand and eye. It is particularly difficult to establish how

²³ See A Turnbull, "Learning her Womanly Work", op cit, N Ball, "Practical Subjects in Mid Victorian Elementary Schools", History of Education, 8,2,1979; K Bailey "Plain and Nothing Fancy; HMI and School Needlework in the 1870s", Journal of Educational Administration and History, XVIII, 1, 1986

²⁴ The Building Regulations from 1902 included provision for cookery and laundry rooms, PP 1902, LXXVIII, p809.

²⁵ PP 1905, LIX, p5.

²⁶ PP 1908, LXXXII, p330.

much time girls actually spent in the classroom on practical preparation for their adult domestic world but there is some suggestion that towards the nineteenth century girls in London were spending up to a quarter of their school hours practising needlework.²⁷ Partly due to pressure from teachers, this was reduced in 1895 and by 1904 the Board had stipulated that a maximum of four hours per week should be spent on this subject. Although it is by no means clear that the London School Board had been unanimous in its desire to include practical domestic arts in the elementary schools during the earlier years,²⁸ by the turn of the century the capital could claim that all girls were being instructed in the domestic crafts.

The real push towards the formalisation of the domestic crafts in the curriculum came as a response to the 1904 report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration. The report, revealing unhealthy and undernourished recruits for the Boer War, heightened the obsession with "national efficiency" in early twentieth century Britain. As discussed earlier, the rate of population growth had slowed down significantly by the early 1900s - particularly amongst the middle classes - whilst infant mortality rates remained high. Eugenists warned about the decline in the quality of the national stock.²⁹ Such concerns led to the setting up of the Inter-Departmental Committee, the report of which laid great emphasis on the ignorance of working class women, their disinclination towards domestic duties and the decay of urban family life. Various schemes were suggested to remedy these deficiencies in women and particular emphasis was laid on the training of girls

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ A. Yoxall, A History of the Teaching of Domestic Economy, op cit, p14 claims that the LSB postponed fifteen times the motion "it is desirable to promote a knowledge of plain cookery and of household operations connected therewith as part of the elementary education of girls" before it was accepted in 1874.

²⁹ C Dyhouse, "Working Class Mothers and Infant Mortality in England 1895-1914", Journal of Social History, 3, Winter 1978

to perform both infant care and domestic duties.³⁰ The report emphasised that if domestic subjects were to be taught in elementary schools they should be of the most basic and practical kind. There can be no doubt that this had an influence on the Board of Education, and in particular on Morant, then Permanent Secretary at the Board.³¹ The newly appointed Chief Women Inspector Maude Lawrence was immediately asked to prepare a report on the teaching and organisation of cookery in schools.

Mention should be made of the female domestic subjects inspectorate at the Board of Education for it was at this juncture that Morant made provision for the systematic and regular inspection of domestic subjects in elementary schools. Although not all women inspectors accepted the importance of domestic subjects in the curriculum, they remained as a group committed to the promotion of the subject.³² They inspected domestic subjects only and many of them had solely a domestic studies diploma as qualification.³³ Morant felt that this lowered the prestige of women inspectors as a whole and his concern led to the appointment of Miss Lawrence as the first Chief Woman Inspector in 1904.³⁴

³⁰ For details see C Dyhouse, "Good Wives and Little Mothers", op cit p23, R Bayliss and C Daniels "The Physical Deterioration Report of 1904 and Education in Home Economics", History of Education Society Bulletin, 41, Spring, 1988.

³¹ Morant dispatched Alice Ravenhill to report on domestic science teaching in the USA. This report was published in 1905 followed by a series of others about training for home duties in other countries. For Morant's educational philosophy see P Gordon and J White, Philosophers as Educational Reformers, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p146-53.

³² See P Gordon "Edith Deverell, An Early Woman Inspector", History of Education Bulletin, 22, 1978.

³³ By 1913 there were 19 women inspectors of domestic subjects, A Yoxall, "A History of the Teaching of Domestic Economy", op cit, p15. Throughout the inter-war years domestic subjects lessons were inspected by women although there was occasionally a situation where a male District Inspector had to step in. CWI Miss Wark was concerned about this and issued a Memorandum including "hints" for the male Inspector who was told to request a mannequin parade or ask how many different dishes could be made from batter! See ED22/143/545.

³⁴ F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p59.

Her report on cookery in 1907 was damning - the state of the teaching in the subject across the country of the whole was "appalling". Morant, in the Foreword to the Report, referred to the "very bad state of things" the "drastic changes" that were needed, the "serious waste of public money" and the "futile waste of time and teaching power".³⁵ He hoped that the series of new regulations contained in the Code of 1906 would effect a significant improvement - the courses were to be much more carefully structured, the interval elapsing between demonstration and practical sessions was to be shortened and "elaborate" and "theoretical" instruction was to be avoided. He stressed that, although classes should never be reduced to training for domestic service, they ought to be designed to ensure that girls, through repeated practice of a few practical tasks, would be ready to undertake the various duties which fell to a lot of women.³⁶

There does, indeed, seem to have been a great improvement in the teaching of the subject by the time of Miss Lawrence's next report in 1912.³⁷ This heaped praise on the transformation and the quality of instruction that was being given to girls, particularly in basic practical training, and made special mention of the development of a new form of domestic subject - the combined housewifery course.³⁸ Practice in London was "excellent".³⁹

³⁵ Special Report on the Teaching of Cookery to Public Elementary School Children in England and Wales, London, HMSO, 1907, Prefactory Memorandum. The Report was written in 1906, published in 1907.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ General Report on the Teaching of Domestic Subjects to Public Elementary School Children in England and Wales, London, HMSO, 1912. The urban poverty and ill health revealed by the welfare reforms of 1906 to 1911 had strengthened concern about the subject. The well known work of Doctor (later Sir) George Newman, Chief Medical Officer at the Board on infant mortality also heightened awareness.

³⁸ Ibid, p5

³⁹ Ibid.

There was, however, a far more complicated background to this rosy picture for between 1910 and 1912 the Board of Education and the LCC were locked in battle about the quality of domestic subjects provision in the capital. The background for this was Education Officer Robert Blair's concern about domestic subjects teaching in the capital. Blair was clear about his aim and priorities. He stated categorically to Inspector Miss Jones in 1905 that "thrift should be the basis of all operations". In writing the syllabus she should have in mind:

that the object of the instruction is not to make cooks or laundresses or housemaids, but managers of a home, mothers if you like. The idea that sooner or later most girls will have a home to manage must not only dominate the general character of the syllabus but must influence every operation and every detail of study.⁴⁰

This was the impetus for the development of domestic studies in the capital in the first decade of the 20th century. Although HMI Miss Lawrence's report of 1907 was generally critical, London escaped the worst of the condemnations. By 1910 however, Blair was engaged in bitter correspondence with Permanent Secretary Selby Bigge about the way in which domestic subject courses were being run. The Board of Education favoured a scheme with a heavy concentration of domestic subjects at the end of a girl's school career while the LCC were intent on a three year progressive course and had adopted a scheme in 1906 whereby a girl should attend a domestic centre for half a day a week for three years. Throughout the inter-war years in London, the vast majority of domestic subjects teaching took place in domestic centres to which classes of girls from elementary schools would be sent for a certain period each week. As far as the Board was concerned, the problem was that London was not applying the regulation that only girls over the age of 12 should be

⁴⁰ EO/GEN/1/70, Blair to Miss Jones, undated, probably 1908.

permitted to attend the centres. Instead the authority was allowing all the girls of any particular class in an elementary school to attend lessons.⁴¹

The background to this was the tension, mentioned in Chapter Two, between the newly emerged LCC Education Committee and the Board of Education. It is clear that the officials at the Board of Education felt considerable irritation at what they regarded as the Council's consistently uncooperative attitude in, for example, reducing class sizes. From 1908 onwards Selby Bigge made a particular point of investigating the educational system of London very closely trying to find sources of criticism - and the domestic subjects dispute clearly fits into this equation. It is impossible to tell to what extent Education Officer Blair co-operated with Selby Bigge behind the scenes and provided him with background information to use against the LCC committee members but the tone of the letters concerning domestic teaching certainly suggests that there was an air of "staging" about them.⁴² Nevertheless, the lengthy and detailed exchange reveals clearly the thinking and practice about domestic subjects at both national and London level. Selby Bigge conveyed to Blair in 1910 his belief that the London Education Committee only wished to create an organisation which should be most effective in bringing domestic subjects within the reach of the greatest number of girls - although he was "not sure that this has always been the attitude of your authority". He added:

⁴¹ The Board would not pay a grant for domestic subjects unless a girl was over 12, for laundry and cookery unless she was aged 11. The Board also insisted girls completed a course in household management during their last two years at school.

⁴² Blair's motivation seems to have been a desire to force the Education Committee into action on various issues. He definitely seems to have provided the Board with information so that they could put pressure on London about school accommodation which took over as the expression of antagonism after the domestic subjects issue; Selby Bigge admitted "since 1908, however, we have been investigating the educational system of London very closely, and have been able conclusively to demonstrate the inefficiency of their arrangements as regards special instruction in Domestic Subjects". ED14/150 Selby-Bigge to Morant 31 10 11. For further discussion see D Thoms: Policy Making in Education, op cit.

You quite frankly admitted that there was a good deal of confusion and disorganisation in the work as it is at present in London I am not, however, quite sure whether you realise to the same extent as we do the extent to which the London Scheme actually fails to carry out the intentions with which it was devised.⁴³

London's aim of providing a three year domestic course was simply too ambitious. Selby Bigge commented that the teachers in the elementary schools were not co-operating in the true spirit of the enterprise but were just aiming to clear out as much of their class as possible when the domestic studies lesson came around. It did not much concern them whether the children were making the best use of the time.⁴⁴ Selby Bigge admitted that the problem of successfully organising and administering the three year programme course in London was extraordinarily difficult and therefore it seemed clear to the Board that the priority should be on providing a thorough training during the last two years of schooling rather than the last three.

Our inspectors urge and it seems to us to be sound doctrine, that the old [sic] backward child should have the preference as regards Domestic Instruction not only over the younger and brighter child but probably over the bright child of the same age.⁴⁵

He also challenged Blair's recent idea that Chief Woman Inspector Miss Lawrence should try to re-organise London's scheme, claiming that the "suggestion - which rather reminds me of the offer made by Elijah to the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel - is impracticable⁴⁶". Selby Bigge was unconvinced that London was so essentially different

⁴³ EO/GEN/1/70, Selby-Bigge to Blair, 29 11.10.

⁴⁴ Domestic centres were meant to take a maximum of 18 pupils. Since an elementary school class might include over fifty girls the class could be disrupted three times a week.

⁴⁵ EO/GEN/1/70, Selby-Bigge to Blair, 29 11.10.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

that it required a peculiar organisation for Domestic Instruction and suggested that the capital's authorities recognised that they should no longer receive any grant for the "underage" girls being sent to the domestic centres.

Further correspondence showed the sheer inadequacy of the system as it was operating in practice in London. Although some girls might actually be receiving a very large amount of domestic instruction during the last three years of their school life, there was no logic or continuous progression through the courses. It seemed to be very much a matter of accident in which order the children took courses. Most inspectors found that girls were taking the first simple course three times - or repeating the second course in their final year - or taking the most advanced course before they had even taken the basic course.

The matter was debated endlessly within the LCC by the Schools Sub-Committee, later to become the Elementary Schools Sub-Committee. Educational Adviser W M Garnett explicitly stated that the members of the Committee should not use the same rationale for girls as they did for boys when analysing manual training. The boys' course was conducted not with the view that it should be utilised in future livelihood but because it developed general intelligence and all round ability. Domestic Training differed because

it must be considered, even in the elementary schools, in a two-fold aspect - namely its directly utilitarian importance in addition to its educational value... From a utilitarian point of view it is desirable that practical work in domestic economy should be postponed until the latest possible date in the girl's school career consistent with the assurance that the girl will not escape the training by leaving school.⁴⁷

He thus agreed with the Board's proposition that it was not practicable to have a three year system.

⁴⁷ EO/GEN/1/70, Report W M Garnett, 30 9.10.

Blair accepted that one of the main reasons why the three year scheme had been adopted in 1905-6 was that it had been felt that the existing centres system had to be retained, using buildings erected by the late London School Board. It would be far too costly to try to transfer the teaching of a combined household management course to the schools themselves. The proposal in 1905 had been that thirty new centres per annum should be built although it, in fact, appears, by 1910 only 10 new centres had been built in the past four years. Nevertheless efforts were made to change the organisation over the next few years and a further report by Garnett in 1914 referred to pilot schemes in some educational divisions of the capital in which 13 year olds were given shorter, more intensive periods of training.⁴⁸ By 1922 Blair reported that the LCC aimed at giving every girl one half a day of instruction for two years which would amount to approximately 250 hours for each girl.⁴⁹

It seems clear, however, that the capital's enforced continued use of the Domestic Centre system hampered developments in the inter-war years and remained a source of great contention with the Board of Education. In the lengthy debate in the late thirties about why London was suffering from such a shortage of domestic subjects teachers the Board saw the root of the problem as being the unpleasant conditions pertaining to teaching domestic subjects in the capital and the old premises and inadequate facilities of many of the London Centres. Even Miss Bright of the LCC was forced to admit "that many of the centres were very depressing".⁵⁰ Board Officials argued that the Council should be made aware of the

⁴⁸ EO/GEN/6/79 "Instruction in Domestic Economy", Report by the Educational Adviser to the Education Committee and Sub-Committees 21 2.14; EO/GEN/6/15, Memorandum from the Education Officer to the Elementary Education Sub-Committee on Continuous Periods of Instruction at Domestic Economy Centres, 3.2.14.

⁴⁹ Annual Report of the Education Officer, 1922. ED86/50, Notes for Interview with London on 4th October, unsigned

⁵⁰ ED86/50, Interview Memorandum, 4 10 35.

need to accelerate the provision of domestic subjects in schools instead of in centres. Yet in 1932 the overwhelming amount of domestic instruction was still being given in centres rather than in schools as was the case throughout the rest of the country.⁵¹ It seemed that the capital was "now in the position of so many pioneers; it has been left behind in the general upward trend of standards of accommodation and more backward authorities, stirred at last into activity, have come in on the crest of a wave."⁵²

It should be noted that both the Board of Education and the LCC Education Authority only ever made suggestions during the inter-war period as to the content of domestic subjects lessons. They did not attempt to prescribe an exact curriculum or dictate how much time was devoted to it. As White has pointed out, a seminal feature of the history of curriculum development in this country occurred when the Elementary Code of 1926 made a decisive break with past practice and the detailed formulation of the elementary curriculum was placed with the school authorities.⁵³ One consequence of this individualism has been the extraordinary variety of curricular patterns which, up until the late 1980s, have been found in schools.⁵⁴ This change was partly to do with the balance of power between the Board and local education authorities and the important change that took place after 1918 when expenditure on education increased the focus of control from the Board to the Treasury. It was recognised that in practice a strategy of control over education through the curriculum

⁵¹ Ibid. Table showing increase in number of domestic subjects teachers in regular employment in maintained public elementary schools and centres in England and Wales.

⁵² Ibid, Holmes to Finny, 22.7.35.

⁵³ J White, Towards a Compulsory Curriculum, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p3

⁵⁴ The National Curriculum of the late eighties is therefore a radical departure

was less effective than control through expenditure.⁵⁵ Throughout the inter-war years, therefore, the Board and the LCC only made suggestions as to the contents of girls' domestic lessons. The LCC made this explicit in 1934 when the Education Officer stated:-

Needlework is included in the curricula of all girls' schools and the tendency in senior girls schools is to give increasing attention to this subject, but it is not the Council's practice to prescribe the time to be devoted to the various subjects of the curriculum, complete freedom being allowed to head teachers, subject to the approval of the District Inspector.⁵⁶

Thus the LCC might recommend a minimum of time which should be devoted to a subject; for example, in 1933 in the memorandum Handicraft in Senior Girls' Schools, it was suggested that a minimum of 90 minutes weekly should be devoted to the subject. It would never, however, actually dictate this. Similarly, the Board's influence on the curriculum was exercised through the Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers which, from 1926, in line with the development above, eliminated all mention of curriculum requirements in elementary schools.⁵⁷ The Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and later the Handbook of Suggestions are important for the tone they suggest in terms of national and local outlook on domestic subjects teaching. Lawn has argued that the Handbook carried as much weight as if it were mandatory given the power of the Board over the educational purse.⁵⁸ Nevertheless the fact that the curriculum was not dictated, of course, makes the problem of

⁵⁵ White has suggested that the Board's change of stance in 1926 was a subtle form of political control since, by allowing schools to develop their own curricula, it would be more difficult for a future socialist government, in 1926 a real possibility, to manipulate the content of education to their own advantage.

⁵⁶ Report of the Education Officer, 1934

⁵⁷ The Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers were published in various editions and with slightly modified titles until 1927 when they appeared as The Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others Concerned in the Work of Elementary Schools This was revised in 1937.

⁵⁸ M. Lawn, "The Spur and the Bridle", op cit.

deciphering what went on in the classroom, the difference between theory and practice, even more difficult.⁵⁹

The Education Act of 1918 made it the duty of each local education authority to include in the school curriculum "practical instruction suitable to the ages, ability and requirements of the children" and to organise courses of advanced instruction for the older and more intelligent children, including those who stayed at such schools beyond the age of 14. Section 48 of the Act defined practical instruction as "instruction in Cookery, Laundry Work, Housewifery, Dairy Work, Handicrafts and Gardening and such other subjects as the Board declare to be subjects of practical instruction." The Board of Education reinforced this by stressing that they anticipated that all the domestic arts should be welded into the unified subject of Housecraft; "There can be no truer national service than the training of girls in the public elementary schools in the essential knowledge of housekeeping".⁶⁰

Thus, as Miss Manley stated, Housekeeping was to be an integral part of the elementary education for girls.⁶¹ By this time the LCC had 439 domestic subjects centres and proposed in its scheme of July 1920 to provide another 35 centres to meet the additional accommodation of 6000 more places in order that every girl should receive 200 hours teaching in the subjects before leaving a public elementary school⁶². This plan soon, however, brought London into yet more dispute with the Board of Education. As the economic recession of 1920-21 began to bite, the suggestion was put forward that the

⁵⁹ See P Gordon "The Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers Its Origins and Evolution", Educational Administration and History, XVII, 1, 1958. This article stresses how "enlightened" the Suggestions were but pays no attention to those concerning domestic subjects

⁶⁰ Annual Report of the Board, 1917-18, cited in A Turnbull "Learning her Womanly Work", op cit, p63

⁶¹ ED24/1445, Memorandum HMI Miss Manley, 19.2.21, op cit, p1.

⁶² Ibid p7.

teaching of domestic subjects should be transferred from the elementary schools to the newly instituted Day Continuation Schools.⁶³ There was immediate consternation at the Board, particularly since it was felt that London was once again trying to assert its independence. Chief Inspector Richards stated adamantly that he found it difficult to separate the problem of London from that of the country as a whole; the plan which the LCC was suggesting would have revolutionary implications and reactions throughout the educational system in a startling way. He felt that to agree with the suggestion would be to "pay too heavy a price to meet the temporary political exigencies of the London County Council".⁶⁴

CWI Miss Wark was even more concerned about the effect of the proposed move on the teaching of the subject itself. She argued that the introduction of the subject while the girl was still in the elementary school gave her a clear indication of the close connection between school and actual life. This was essential.

because of the character of the homes in which the majority of girls who come to PESs (sic) live, they must depend entirely for good standards of living on work done in connection with Domestic Subjects instruction in school... I am strongly of the opinion that there ought to be some teaching of this subject in PESs (sic) even if we regard the work as merely preparing the girls to be good housewives.⁶⁵

Long before CWI Miss Wark's comments the argument that working class women were failing their families and the nation through their inability and lack of inclination to

⁶³ This idea had been considered before in 1918 and rejected ED24/1445, Note CWI Miss Wark to Permanent Private Secretary 20.5 21.

⁶⁴ ED24/1445 Memorandum C I Richards 12 5 21; see also ED90/68 Blair to Board 14.11.22, The same tensions arose in 1922 when Education Officer Blair suggested to the Board that the movement of the population from the central districts of London to outlying suburbs had put greater pressure on domestic subjects accommodation and thus requested their permission to increase the numbers permitted in domestic subjects classes from 18 to 20 plus CWI Miss Wark insisted that 20 was the largest that could be instructed in a class on educational grounds. Miss Maudesly conducted a survey and came up with the conclusion that the Board could not approve lessons for laundry work of over 20 girls where there was only 1 copper in the room as was the case in all the London Centres.

⁶⁵ ED24/1445 CWI Miss Wark to Permanent Secretary Selby Bigge, 20.5 21, p2.

perform their domestic duties had already taken root within the educational system. Women were seen to be the victims of their own ignorance and ineptitude. They were, therefore, in need of the salutary influence of well-trained daughters who in turn needed to avoid the mistakes their mothers had made. Dyhouse has analysed the late nineteenth century middle class assumptions which fed into this ideology. These were firstly, that poverty could be cured through thrift and careful housekeeping, secondly the Victorian ideal of the woman's mission as spiritual and moral guardian of the home, and thirdly the dimension of the discussion that inevitably arose from the desire of the middle class for a ready supply of well-trained servants.⁶⁶ Thus, many of society's ills could be cured if working women were taught to cook sheep heads instead of raspberry buns⁶⁷ and if the veritable day of terror in the working man's home - washing day, which "turned the house upside down" - could be remedied by systematic instruction in schools.⁶⁸ An added dimension of this, it might be argued, was one of disciplining the workforce, for if the working classes learnt to blame themselves for their domestic misery rather than any external agency, they were less likely to seek redress for it.

Until now there has been no examination of how these themes endured into educational policy during the inter-war years. The working class housewife during the twenties and thirties was seen to be as great a failure as ever in fulfilling her duties and school instruction viewed as necessary to remedy this deficiency. The argument for the necessity for home training had, of course, inherent contradictions since the volumes of criticism directed at housewives suggested little faith in the quality of the training they had

⁶⁶ C Dyhouse, "Towards a Feminine Curriculum", op cit, p300-301.

⁶⁷ E Sellers, "An Antediluvian on the Education of Working Class Girls" op cit, p347.

⁶⁸ A. Yoxall, "A History of the Teaching of Domestic Economy", op cit, p19.

received at school and apparently "lost". Yet the power of this ideology was enormous, and was continually referred to at both a national and local level during these years. There was a constant emphasis on the need to train girls for their future roles in the home in order to ensure that the working class did not degenerate into even more squalor. The criticisms heaped on women were many:

the cooking in many working class households is both extravagant and unwholesome. The food on which a working man and his family exist is often unsuitable and improperly cooked; and there is no doubt that much of the alleged physical deterioration may be attributed to this cause.⁶⁹

One social commentator suggested that working class wives had no more idea of cooking than of piloting an aeroplane and served "rump steak, roast beef, mutton and pork" every day "whether the man is there or not".⁷⁰

Yet such criticisms ignored the appalling difficulties many working class women faced in trying to feed their families when family income hovered at subsistence level.⁷¹ It seems that many women were ingenious in developing strategies to secure the nutritional welfare of their families.⁷² The findings of the Women's Health Enquiry were that poverty remained the prime controller of food preparation and nutrition. Large numbers of the population were too poor to buy enough of the right kinds of food necessary to maintain good health.⁷³

⁶⁹ Women's Industrial Council, Technical Education of Women and Girls at Home and Abroad, 1904, p 46.

⁷⁰ E Sellers, "Wilful Waste, Woeful Want" The Nineteenth Century and After, March 1916, p 678.

⁷¹ Even if the family was not at subsistence level, the higher rents of new Council estates gave women additional problems in solving the eternal food/rent equation

⁷² E. Roberts "Women's Strategies 1890-1990" in J. Lewis Labour and Love, op cit

⁷³ M. Spring Rice, Working Class Wives, London, Penguin, 1939, p 155

As far as educational policy was concerned, however, the state, through schools, was to take over the role of the deficient mother, as HMI Miss Manley commented in 1921:

formerly a girl had the outlet for her natural activities at home, and the chance of some instruction from her mother, who in her turn had a home life rather than a factory life. With the introduction of compulsory education coupled with the changes in industrial conditions, it became necessary to make up to the girl what the school deprived her of at home.⁷⁴

This theme was picked up by R S Wood, Principal Assistant Secretary of the Elementary Branch at the Board in 1937:

a certain decay of home life has set in. Daughters no longer get a domestic training in the home, and the home is becoming more and more simply a place to use as a necessary convenience for carrying on a life outside. The art of home-making has become domestic drudgery.⁷⁵

A key factor in this mission was the need to educate the "girls at the crucial right stage of development when they most needed such training". There was all sorts of confusion about exactly which age that was. It was generally deemed, as HMI Miss Cunnington commented, that girls in their last year or two at elementary schools were very useful to their mothers at home and so should be learning during these years processes which could be practised at home.⁷⁶ HMI Miss Manley agreed that at the age of 11 to 12, elementary school girls were having to help in the home and that it was therefore essential to give some definite teaching at that stage for otherwise they would be "divorcing the girl's school from her real life and failing her"... "the right stage would seem to be the age at which the girls begin to help the mothers at home".⁷⁷

⁷⁴ ED 24/1445, Memorandum Miss Manley, 19 5.21, op cit

⁷⁵ ED136/109, Instruction in Cookery, R S Wood, 13.9.37, op cit

⁷⁶ ED24/1445 - Domestic Subjects in Day Continuation Schools, HMI Miss Cunnington, undated

⁷⁷ Ibid, Memorandum Miss Manley 19.5 21, op cit.

Yet the Inspectors admitted that domestic subjects were far from foremost in the minds of adolescent girls. They certainly had little desire at that stage to become a perfect housewife. There was the crucial contradiction that, although girls supposedly had "inherent aptitude" and a "natural desire" to perform housewifely domestic duties, all the evidence suggested instead a distinct lack of interest. HMI Miss Manley expressed all the tensions inherent in the policy when she wrote:

the instinct of housework and the natural activities associated with the ordering of a home is one that exists in all young girls... If no provision is made for the development of this side of the girl's nature the inclination to do work of the kind dies.⁷⁸

The assumption of gender-specific qualities naturally inclining the girl towards the female private domestic sphere did not tie in with the fact that young girls apparently saw domestic subjects as a particularly unpleasant way of spending time. This is hardly surprising given that most working class girls would have been very familiar with the domestic drudgery of the home.⁷⁹ Policy makers had to cope with the reality that "after much bitter experience, the domestic qualities with which Nature is popularly supposed to endow all women" were not always sufficient of themselves to ensure both proficiency and pleasure in the performance of domestic tasks.

The same theme emerged in the late 1930s when Lord Stanhope briefly became President of the Board of Education.⁸⁰ Here was a President of the Board who had an interest in domestic subjects - or rather, as it was commented behind his back, his wife did.

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Girls would also have been bombarded with many romantic notions of life through the increasingly popular cinema. In comparison domestic work can hardly have held much appeal

⁸⁰ B Simon, The Politics of Educational Reform, op cit, p280

Hunt has described the investigation and debate which took place in the Board of Education between 1937 and 1938 "as a final push towards status enhancement".⁸¹ I would argue that it has to be seen in far more basic terms - it was a great outpouring about the continued failings of the working class housewife to live up to all expectations and a concrete expression of all the contradictions inherent in a policy which was attempting to train women for their domestic role.

The impetus to the great debate was Lord Stanhope's correspondence with his friend Lord Rowallan, who happened to be the Chairman of Brown & Polson (sic) - the makers of cornflour. Brown & Polson had taken it upon themselves to develop a cookery club for their customers and the evidence which had emerged, according to Lord Rowallan, was that the ordinary housewife had no idea about planning or cooking a meal.⁸² The President, after much correspondence with his friend, concluded that the British housewife was in serious decline:

I have been much impressed by my short period of office as President of the Board of Education with the fact that so many young women of all classes lack that fundamental knowledge of cookery and catering for a family which is so necessary both to domestic happiness and to health.⁸³

He even commented that he knew from his own experience that standards of home management were lamentably low!⁸⁴ If an elementary girl was spending 200 hours a year learning to perform her household chores but was then "forgetting all she learnt" because she

⁸¹ F Hunt, *Gender and Policy*, op cit, p132

⁸² ED136/109, Rowallan to Stanhope, 14.6.37. The President admitted that there would be "a pretty kettle of fish" if any publicity were given to the fact that a request for information of this kind had been made to a particular firm by the President of the Board.

⁸³ ED136/109, Stanhope to Kingsley-Wood, 27.10.39.

⁸⁴ Ibid, Note of Meeting, 21.7.37 Presumably Lady Stanhope was not privy to such comments!

did not have any inclination to do such work, the conclusion had to be reached, said the President, that the teaching was a waste of time and money.⁸⁵

Stanhope therefore instigated a committee of inquiry into domestic subjects in the public elementary sector. Officials were sent to work.⁸⁶ Over and over again their memoranda revealed that the education girls were receiving in schools was of little practical use. The root of the problem according to CWI Miss Philip was fourfold:

1(a) There had probably never been a tradition in this country of the thrifty household cookery associated e.g. with the French housewife: (b) It is notorious that English people are content to tolerate bad cooking and catering: (c) During the last 20 to 30 years there had been a major tendency for girls to take up outside work and not remain at home: (d) The art of home life tends to be regarded as a necessary convenience for carrying on our life "outside". Homemaking is regarded as "domestic drudgery."⁸⁷

Yet everybody was reluctant to actually implicate the teaching of domestic subjects the girls were currently receiving. Rather blame was laid on the girls themselves who, on leaving school, took no further interest in cooking until matrimony was approaching "or had come over the horizon, by which time they had forgotten all they had learnt at school".⁸⁸ There was a belief that there was no "carry over" in the teaching of domestic skills, that girls did not transfer the lessons into adult life. R S Wood commented;

⁸⁵ Ibid, Stanhope to Marris, 27 7 37

⁸⁶ Interest was increased with the publication of the Orr Report which found 30% of the population undernourished. See F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p132 referring to JB Orr, Food, Health and Income quoted in S Glynn and J Oxborrow, Interwar Britain op cit, p36.

⁸⁷ ED 136/109, Memorandum on Cookery, CWI Miss Philip, undated [June 1937?]. Miss Philip went on to state that she found it hard to believe that Brown & Polson's cookery club books were really the vade macum to good and happy housekeeping for "they seem to be wholly crambe repetita when crambe equals cornflour"

⁸⁸ ED 136/109 Memorandum of Meeting, 21 7.37 p2. Officials also seem to have felt that women were so aware of their own ignorance they would be too embarrassed to attend lectures and demonstrations.

I do not think that we can look for any material "carry over" of practical ability in the preparation of well-ordered meals from the training given in those early years to the later age when the girl becomes a young woman and a housewife. Indeed, I should expect less carry over in the domestic science of the girls than in the handicraft of boys. There is a "feel" for tools and materials which experience suggests can in some measure be acquired in early training and which is never entirely lost by those who have any "tool sense" at all, but, I think there is no corresponding feel when we come to the handling of pots and pans⁸⁹

S H Wood picked up the same theme:

Cooking is an adult accomplishment ... it is obvious that this adult accomplishment cannot be taught to the average girl before she is 14 years of age in such a way that she will be able to reproduce it, like a rabbit out of a hat when she is 20 ... no young man is expected at 20 years of age to take up, and be competent at, some skilled occupation the elements of which he learnt up to 14 and promptly ceased to practice after that age. Why should girls be expected to perform this miracle?⁹⁰

Thus amid great concern Circular 1480 was sent out to local authorities pointing out the fundamental contribution towards national well-being which would be gained if women had a better understanding of cookery. It was suggested that authorities attach special importance to promoting it in the new housing estates where families were starting a new life. A major "propaganda" campaign was planned; there would be films for the cinema, speeches by the Presidents, wireless programmes⁹¹ and an appeal to that most effective lever of securing female interest - a demonstration to women of how they could maintain their feminine charm through personal hygiene and proper feeding - of others!⁹²

⁸⁹ ED136/109, Instruction in Cookery, R S Wood, 13 9 37, op cit.

⁹⁰ Ibid, Some notes on the teaching of domestic skills, S H Wood, 28.9 37, op cit.

⁹¹ Ibid, HMI Miss Cox pointed out there was little use in broadcasting wireless talks at a time in the morning when few housewives were able to sit down and give proper attention to the subject - Note HMI Miss Cox, August 1937

⁹² ED 136/109 Instruction in Cookery - R S Wood, 13.9.37, op cit

Unfortunately the interest of the local education authorities did not match that of the President. Stanhope's reign at the Board of Education did not last long and by early 1938 Earl De La Warr had become President. By this time very few responses had been received about the situation in each area. Holmes therefore wrote to the new President outlaying the "blame" for the initiation of the campaign on Lady Stanhope and suggesting that it would now be appropriate to drop the whole scheme.

During his short stay with us Lord Stanhope, largely instigated thereto by Lady Stanhope took two steps to improve the standard of cookery local education authorities generally do not share Lord Stanhope's keenness on cookery.⁹³

If girls and women did really see their role in the home as being "distasteful drudgery" something more was needed to revitalise the practice of female chores. During the inter-war years a new perspective was placed on the domestic subjects course through the development of "enlightened housewifery". Repeated attempts were made to accommodate new notions of femininity and self respect through the honourable art of "homecraft". The working class girl was to be taught to find fulfilment and satisfaction within the home, a process which would implicitly hopefully quell any desire to work outside the home.

As the enlightened housewife organises her work to minimise drudgery and avoid waste of time, the domestic subjects class should set a high standard in this direction. The cultivation of a happy and intelligent attitude in home affairs should be impressed upon the girl by constant suggestion and example.⁹⁴

Part of the development in this direction was the concentration on home making as a unified "art" rather than on the separate components of cookery, laundry work etc. Miss Bright of the LCC commented that:

⁹³ ED 46/293 Holmes to President 7 3.1939. The scheme was indeed quietly dropped.

⁹⁴ Handicraft in Senior Girls' Schools, London, LCC, 1933, p3.

There is now a growing conviction that home making cannot be taught with reality in the watertight compartments of cookery, laundry work and housewifery. In order that housecraft may be seen by the child as a unified activity, it is essential the various home occupations should be taught in one room or department, fully equipped for the purpose.⁹⁵

The aim was to put an end to the "fallacy that neither special aptitude nor much brainpower is necessary for a good wife".⁹⁶ It was through this unified subject that the girl could often "find herself" as in no other.⁹⁷

The context to this new aspect of domestic teaching was the alteration in prevailing notions of femininity as examined in Chapter One. More specifically it was the huge developments in the practice of housework which provided the impetus for the ideology that household work was not just about getting through necessary chores.

The vast majority of homes were wired up for electricity by 1939 although the purchase of many of the new domestic appliances was confined to the better off. By the mid-1930s, maids expected hoovers, irons and even washing machines - and advertisements enticed them with electric equipment saying that the job would only involve light work. There was, however, enormous class and regional variation in commodity production and consumption. A complex equation existed whereby middle class women became the main consumers of goods produced by working class women precisely because they could no longer find domestic servants, the young working class women much preferring assembly line factory work. In addition, working class higher wages enabled them to buy at least some of the labour saving goods. Domestic labour was thus undergoing an enormous change. This was not only caused by the availability of consumer commodities but also affected by the

⁹⁵ The Teaching of Housecraft, Miss Bright, 1937, Appendix to the Report of the LCC, 1937.

⁹⁶ A Yoxall, *A History of the Teaching*, op cit, p46.

⁹⁷ ED 24/1445, Memorandum Miss Manley, 19.5.21, op cit, p3-4.

reduction in family size discussed in Chapter Two. It was a two-fold equation in that the goods substituted for women's labour as in the case of ready-made bread and clothes or aided it as in the case of an electric cooker or water heater.

Domestic technology does not, of course, necessarily reduce the amount of time spent on domestic labour as standards of home care rise and new tasks are found to replace the others. Housework is, in Oakley's words, "an infinitely expandable task".⁹⁸ Yet the basic developments of the inter-war years, the ability to turn on a cooker without lighting a fire and cleaning up all the dirt produced, the ability to get hot tap water without lighting a fire or carrying it from room to room in heavy containers; the ability to buy bread without getting the ingredients, mixing the dough, lighting the range and clearing up afterwards had a huge impact on women's lives. By 1938 gas cookers were owned by 68% of all families and most working class families could at least rent an electric cooker. By 1939 77% of those with electricity owned an iron, 27% had vacuum cleaners (though most of the working class did not have carpets) and 18% owned electric cookers.⁹⁹

The alterations in domestic labour affected classes differently. To the middle class the changes tended to mean managing a household without servants, for working class women it meant the possibility of engaging in paid employment more continuously - or perhaps for longer. On the other hand, in order to participate in the fruits of this domestic revolution women needed a high enough income to buy the goods and often had to enter paid employment to do that. It must, however, be remembered that by 1938 it had been estimated that 9,000,000 still performed basic housework unaided.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ A Oakley, The Sociology of Housework, London, Harmondsworth, 1974, p111

⁹⁹ M Glucksmann, Women Assemble, op cit, p241.

¹⁰⁰ Political and Economic Planning, The Market for Household Appliances, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1945, p26.

A further factor in this, particularly relevant to areas of London, was the increasing provision of better infrastructure of homes - sewage disposal, wiring for electricity, the supply of gas and water on tap. The provision of such facilities in working class homes is again marked by enormous regional variation,¹⁰¹ but in urban areas of expansion most had inside lavatories and running water by the 1930s.¹⁰² This made an enormous difference to everyday life as Doris Hounslow recounted when describing the move of her family from Bermondsey to the Downham Estate in Lewisham.

When we first moved out to Downham we used to invite all our old friends from Bermondsey down for the weekend to stay ... It was a big attraction then, our friends would be thrilled to bits with our lovely new house and so were we. We'd give them a guided tour, first they wanted to go upstairs and look at the bathroom and toilet, because nobody had got one you see, and they couldn't get over how lovely it was.¹⁰³

A correlation of the new home and the equipment within it was the development of the new ideal of the housewife. The housewife was perceived to be the creator of the perfect home environment, a facilitator of happiness and calm within the home. Hall has suggested that the cult of femininity, with the married woman firmly in the home, was reinforced by the portrayal of housework as a meaningful and fulfilling activity in itself. This was a development which, incidentally, served to boost the profits of the construction, electrical

¹⁰¹ In depressed areas there were still taps in the streets until the Second World War.

¹⁰² M Glucksmann, Women Assemble, op cit, p243 In 1917 the Women's Housing Sub-Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction was asked to examine housing design with special reference to the convenience of the housewife

¹⁰³ Doris Hounslow quoted in G Weightman and S Humphries, The Making of Modern London, 1984, London, Sidgwick and Jackson, p142.

and other industries.¹⁰⁴ Housework was not a chore, but a form of creativity, an emotional expression of love and maternal instinct.¹⁰⁵

As discussed above, the creation of the image of the new housewife was the result of a complex interaction; it was both an ideological construct resulting as a reaction to the supposed greater independence women had achieved in paid employment during and after the war and a reality developing from the reconstruction of an economy geared towards domestic consumption. The success of many of the new industries and therefore of the new centres of capital accumulation "relied on the housewife being a reality and not simply an ideal".¹⁰⁶

This ideological construct was certainly apparent in educational policy. Both the Hadow and Spens Reports seized on the new definition of the housewife as a skilled, self fulfilling role in life. The Consultative Committee in 1926 commented:

We consider that courses in housecraft should be planned so as to render girls fit on leaving school to undertake intelligently the various household duties which devolve on most women. The courses should be arranged in such a way as to make the girls realise clearly that due thought for themselves and their homes is essential to health, and that an ordered knowledge of home management will increase the general well being and comfort of themselves and of every member of the household. They should also be shown that on efficient care and management of the home depend the health, happiness and prosperity of the nation. Distaste for the work of the home has arisen, in great measure, from the fact that housecraft has not been generally regarded as a skilled occupation for which definite training is essential, and it has too often been practised by those who, through lack of training or through undeveloped intelligence, have been incapable of performing it efficiently and of commanding the respect of their fellows. Greater efficiency in the housewife would go far to raise her status in the estimation of the community. Trained intelligence combined with technical skill would develop in her a

¹⁰⁴ C Hall, "Married Women at Home in Birmingham in the 1920s and 1930s", *Oral History*, 5,2,1977 and "The History of the Housewife" in E Malos (ed), *The Politics of Housework*, London, Allison & Busby, 1980

¹⁰⁵ Glucksmann has argued, following the work of Cowan, that the new ideal of the housewife developed early in the USA but followed in this country after the First World War

¹⁰⁶ M. Glucksmann, *Women Assemble*, op cit, p241.

sense of proportion and enable her to economise time; it would prevent her sinking into the domestic drudge.¹⁰⁷

The Spens Report set out in detail how broad and stimulating a housecraft course could be.

A brief consideration of the matters involved in the intelligent management of a household shows how wide these courses may be. Personal health and hygiene, including first aid, cooking, sewing, cleaning, laundry work, ventilation, sanitation, heating, lighting, water supply, the furnishing and decoration of rooms and the use of various appliances, together require a wide range of knowledge in which simple mathematics, elementary general science and art are obviously essential. Furthermore, a background of history and literature and a considerable vocabulary are essential to enable the pupil to make full use of the many books, magazines and pamphlets published specially in the interests of the home. Outside the home women are intimately concerned with a number of social services, and they are no less concerned than men to give thought to general matters which may affect the country as whole ...¹⁰⁸

Teaching suggestions sent to teachers in London emphasised the need for the lessons to "inter-weave all the separate branches of housecraft as they are in fact in a woman's home life."¹⁰⁹ The aim should be to teach the girls to look ahead, "as a good housewife should", to think carefully about the "source and action of dust" and to understand how the thrifty housewife could save time and energy by "careful forethought, prudent outlay and judicious economy",¹¹⁰ Only then would the girl recognise that the harmonious working of her home depended on her skill and ideals.¹¹¹ Through this the girl would find real satisfaction. It was even suggested that such lessons should be introduced in the nursery school so that the child would learn

¹⁰⁷ The Hadow Report, op cit, p234

¹⁰⁸ The Spens Report, op cit, p286 These two quotations have been given in full because of the educational significance of the Hadow and Spens Reports.

¹⁰⁹ Suggestions for Teachers, 1927, op cit, p370.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p375 and p378

¹¹¹ Suggestions for Teachers, 1937, op cit, p310

to keep himself neat and clean, and to understand the necessity for co-operation and unselfishness in his life as one of a group of people that need to be happy. In addition to these general forms he takes his part, in so far as he is able, in serving and clearing away meals, learns to carry plates, use utensils, brush the floor and fold a cloth...these social activities are often combined by the child himself in dramatic play in which he pictures himself as the centre of a household, cleaning, laying meals, looking after children and generally experimenting in the domestic arts.¹¹²

The discussion about the training of a good housewife revealed all the ambiguities in hand in the teaching of domestic subjects - was it a liberal subject, enlightening and broadly educational? Was it a vocational subject, preparation for the realities of adult life? If girls were naturally inclined to the domestic role why did they become such poor practitioners of the craft? As discussed in the Introductory Chapter, the separate spheres of vocational schooling defined for girls and boys during these years consisted mainly of gender based practical instruction. This was an area of the curriculum in which it was seen to be specifically necessary to separate the sexes. An instruction to inspectors in 1927 stated

If numbers suffice, separate schools for boys and schools are preferable. Apart from any question of the desirability of separating the sexes it is easier to provide for their own needs. Effect provision of practical instruction can be made more easily and cheaply.¹¹³

Throughout the inter-war years, despite all the rhetoric about fulfilling housewifery, the emphasis in the teaching of domestic subjects was on their becoming more practical, more basic and more related to ordinary household chores. This illustrates that for girls at least the liberal ideal had no relevance in the elementary sector. Yet the educational ideology and pressures of the time made it necessary to "dress" the subject up as something more than

¹¹² Ibid, p295. Although the child is referred to by the masculine pronoun, there is no suggestion that boys should take these courses

¹¹³ ED 11/169, Instruction E 137, 29 9 27.

pure tuition in routine tasks, as something akin to the handicraft subjects which supposedly imparted to boys a whole range of skills and intellectual tools. This is clear in the Hadow Report's classification of the strands of instruction which could be deemed to be of vocational nature - for boys there were humanistic, scientific and manual strands whilst for girls there was the domestic. Yet whatever labels were attached, the reality of the situation was that domestic lessons became a matter of practical proficiency "attained by repetition of processes until good performance has become so much a matter of habit as to be almost automatic".¹¹⁴

This issue emerged clearly in London in the early 1920s debate about the proposed removal of practical instruction to the Continuation Schools.¹¹⁵ On behalf of the male elementary population HMI Richards was horrified for, he said, the suggestion implied the view of the functioning of an elementary education which was contrary to all that the Board had been arguing for in the past 20 years. The Board had continually extolled the virtues of practical education as a means of giving an outlet to the reservoirs of ability in all children. It was essential to find a way of exciting the boys' interest in creativity in practical work for "if we deprive the boys of this outlet for their energies we can give them no compensation".¹¹⁶

The situation for girls was seen in an entirely different light. Although CWI Miss Wark commented that "domestic subjects is for girls what handwork is for boys and there is no other subject taught to girls in PE Schools (sic) which has similar value", the aim of the instruction was entirely different from that of boys. There was no sense of creative

¹¹⁴ Suggestions for Teachers, 1937, op cit, p298

¹¹⁵ See p130-2

¹¹⁶ ED 24/1445, Memorandum HMI Richards, 12.5 1921, op cit.

development. What the girl learnt in her classes could immediately be put into practice usefully in cooking and cleaning. The practical subject had proved over and over again, according to Miss Wark, advantages for girls which did not emerge in theoretical subjects. Every girl had a "home of some sort" and their interest in household affairs needed to be awakened as soon as possible.¹¹⁷

The same stark contrast was apparent in LCC Policy in the mid 1930s. A memorandum on Handicraft in Senior Boys Schools talked of the many and varied forms of the subject which the boys could undertake - woodwork, metal work, basketry, leather work, textiles and pottery¹¹⁸. Such subjects would strengthen self-respect, cultivate outside interests and give unlimited opportunity for cultural training in the widest sense; above all they would stimulate boys through practical activity to manual pursuits which would be transferred to their employed lives.

The tools, materials and atmosphere of the School workshop bring boys face to face with what to them is "real work" the boy becomes a workman engaged on a job.¹¹⁹

The situation in girls' subjects was very different. The memorandum on Girls' Handicraft began on a positive note incorporating a plea for giving practical subjects more prominence in the curriculum and considering whether other crafts apart from domestic subjects might be valuable for girls. The traditional message was, however, soon re-asserted. Domestic subjects and needlework should naturally and properly take their place as practical subjects for girls although, the report admitted, more liberal treatment could perhaps be adopted¹²⁰.

¹¹⁷ ED 24/1445 HMI Miss Wark to Selby Bigge, 20 5.1921, op cit, p2

¹¹⁸ Handicraft In Senior Boys' Schools London, LCC, 1933, Introduction.

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ The Memorandum justifies this by saying that it will refer to needlework as needlecraft throughout the Report!

It suggested that weaving, basketry and fabric dying could sometimes be added to the curriculum. Domestic subjects could become a broadly educative form of handicraft appealing to the constructive element in girls which should naturally be directed towards home building.

A course of instruction in domestic subjects should lead the girl to realise that a trained intellect applied to the needs of everyday life will increase the comfort and well being of the family in the community. It should result in a development of sensitiveness to physical environment and in the formation of habits which make for personal and domestic hygiene. Through practical education it should lay the foundation of manipulative skill and should encourage initiative, resource and discrimination in every day affairs ... it should suggest to the girl the value and privilege of service in the home and to the community.¹²¹

The continuing inherent tension about whether domestic subjects could be treated in other than a purely utilitarian way was apparent in the debate about cookery in the late 1930s.¹²² R S Wood might claim that cooking was a liberal art, and that its intention was not to just turn out competent cooks. The instruction was "a medium of general education". Yet his colleague S H Wood commented during the same month that cooking was a technical accomplishment and there would be difficulties in teaching it in any institution providing a liberal education.¹²³

Whatever attempts were made to suggest otherwise, in practice in the classroom the emphasis in the inter-war period was overwhelmingly on the practical aspects of domestic subjects - and in none more so than in needlework. Needlework in London had been severely criticised by the Board in 1913 for a range of deficiencies ranging from insufficient

¹²¹ Handicraft in Senior Girls Schools, op cit, p2

¹²² See p136-9

¹²³ ED 136/109, Instruction in Cookery, R S. Wood, 13.9 1937, op cit. Some notes on the teaching of domestic skills, S H Wood, 28 9 1937, op cit

equipment to failure to equip the girls to mend efficiently.¹²⁴ The LCC responded quickly with an experimental scheme which was based on each girl having access to a pair of scissors, each school having a sewing machine, each pupil making two garments a year during 3 hours of instruction a week. It was felt that cutting out would make the girls more self-reliant and encourage thrift and hygiene.¹²⁵ The scheme seems to have been judged as a success and Sellers, in her attack on the neglect of mending through the country in 1916, specifically exempted London.¹²⁶

As Turnbull has pointed out, there had been a long tradition of needlework epitomising the most feminine of qualities - docility, patience and thrift. It is clear that some of the early pioneers in London saw the value of the subject in dampening the spirits of girls and instilling refinement.¹²⁷ For the working class women who were to find employment in factories during the inter-war years such standards of conduct were hardly to be of much use but the belief that needlecrafts were peculiarly feminine endured.

Whatever the implicit message, however, the emphasis in the classroom was on elementary sewing to use in the home, an essential skill for all women. In 1912 the Suggestions for Teachers commented that it was a matter of shame that any girl "could reach woman's estate without practical knowledge of what use she could make of a needle."¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Report by the Chief Woman Inspector on the Teaching of Needlework in Public Elementary Schools, London, HMSO, 1913.

¹²⁵ EO/GEN/6/15 Report of the Education Officer, 21.1.14

¹²⁶ E Sellers, "An Antediluvian", op cit, p338.

¹²⁷ See A Turnbull, "Women, Education and Domesticity", op cit, Section 2 chapter 5 Needlework could thus cut across class boundaries as a quintessentially feminine pursuit.

¹²⁸ Suggestions for Teachers, 1912, op cit, p121

It is however equally impossible to deny that most people have two hands and that a women who cannot use her hands has deliberately neglected one side of her development.¹²⁹

The 1913 Report stressed the most basic of skills - the practical mending of garments brought from home. Nothing should be deemed too bad to mend as long as it was clean and therefore mending should be coordinated with the local wash day. If a school had a sewing machine the girl would be taught to use it; she would then have more time to practice making and mending and would thus be "a better equipped person for the duties of her own home".¹³⁰ The 1933 memorandum on Handicraft in Senior Girls' Schools stressed that needlecraft was a desirable part of the education of every girl whatever her future life. Lessons must be based on a limited budget so that women would be able to provide themselves and their families with clothes.¹³¹

In 1931 the Education Officer received enquiries from a number of firms about the amount of time devoted to plain needlework in schools. His reply stated that the teaching of needlework had never been omitted from the elementary school syllabus and he estimated that at least 50% of the time was spent on plain needlework, with 10% on cutting out, 20% on embroidery and 20% on knitting - which was also viewed as a crucial part of the working woman's life.¹³²

¹²⁹ Circular 719, The Teaching of Needlework in Secondary Schools, Nov 1909.

¹³⁰ LCC Rule 189(a) stated that garments could not be brought to a laundry centre if there had been an infectious disease in the house during the previous six months. Education Committee Minutes 17.7.27. In 1923 an investigation was begun by the women Inspectors on the actual position of needlework in schools. The inspectors were warned that they should pay particular attention to the practical work produced, enquiries must be made with great discretion and "avoid any appearance of treating needlework as a special subject isolated from the general school Curriculum", ED 22 98/234, 17.1.1923.

¹³¹ A Report on the Teaching of Needlework, op cit, p7.

¹³² ED 11/273 Education Officer to Haylett of Saward Baker & Co 12.3.31; The female inspectors were very keen on knitting and lamented their own inability! It was seen to pose a special problem for nervous children for whom needles had a bad effect - ED 11/273 Miss McCall to Miss Philip 1.2.1936.

The most explicit statement of the traditional and unchallenging curriculum provided in London schools was given in 1930 by Divisional Inspector Ballard, Chairman of a Committee of Inspectors on Handicraft in Elementary Schools.¹³³ It was, he said, quite clear that needlework had the first claim on the timetable in girls' schools and was worthy of taking up a large amount of time.

In the matter of handicraft, the established position of needlework disturbs the balance between the two sexes. Needlework is the only craft that has never been omitted from the elementary school syllabus. It has taken up to 2 or 2½ hours a week of a girl's school time for the last 100 years or more. And it continues to do so. It thus relieves the girls' school from the necessity of first choice and at the same time, restricts the variety of manual pursuits. The practical outcome seems to be that the total time of time devoted to handicraft in girls' schools is considerably more than in boys.¹³⁴

The only deficiency that Ballard foresaw in the boys' curriculum was the over-emphasis on decorative aspects of handicraft but he was generally impressed by the "sincere" way in which "genuine crafts" were taught to boys.¹³⁵

It was recognised, however, that needlework had other damaging effects. Teachers were told that the subject could lead to nervous strain and that tight sewing or knitting might be distress signals rather than wilful faults.¹³⁶ The Report of the Medical Officer in 1935 came to the conclusion that "the taking of sewing lessons under bad conditions of lighting which girls were compelled to undergo and which the boys escaped, was one of the chief reasons for the great loss of visual activity in girls".¹³⁷ Menzies, the Medical Officer,

¹³³ EO/PS/2/12, Report of a Committee of Inspectors on Handicraft in Elementary Schools, January 1930.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p3.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p2 Thus the over decorated handle of a teapot would hinder the housewife if she had to clean it with a toothbrush each day

¹³⁶ Suggestions for Teachers, 1937, op cit, p293.

¹³⁷ Report of the Medical Officer to Elementary Education Sub-Committee 10.7.35 The Fourth Annual Report of the London Central Spectacles Committee found three times as many girls than boys suffered from serious visual defects once they had started attending school, 31 12.24.

wrote to the Education Officer again the following year stressing that rules requiring permission to give lessons in artificial light were being ignored and that the teaching of sewing was placing "a greater strain upon the eyes of girls than any other subjects". The readiness to take action on this was certainly lacking. The Chief Inspector was asked in 1938 ... "the sleeping dog has awakened, do you wish to argue a case or let it sleep again?"¹³⁸

St. John has suggested that needlework was not vocational in the wage earning sense in London elementary schools. The way in which the craft was seen as a training for employment for girls in Junior Technical Schools will be examined in detail in Chapter 4 but there are certainly suggestions that it was also seen as such in the Senior Elementary Schools. In 1934 the Consultative Committee on Needle Trades commented that, in view of the increase in the trade and the shortage of workers,

we are of opinion that more time should be devoted to needlework by children in the elementary schools in order that they may become interested in the needle trades and desirous of making these trades their vocation.¹³⁹

The Education Officer responded that needlework was included in the curriculum of all schools and that the tendency in the senior schools in the years immediately before leaving for employment was to give more attention to the subject.¹⁴⁰ The same theme occurred a few years later when the Wholesale Fashions Trades Association suggested that the public elementary schools should devote more time to preparing senior girls for entry into their trade. Various memoranda were exchanged within the Board of Education. The Inspectorate were generally agreed the opportunities in this trade were good¹⁴¹ but that there would be

¹³⁸ EO/PS/2/12 Memorandum to Chief Inspector, 11.10.38

¹³⁹ Elementary Education Sub-Committee Agenda, 16.10.1934

¹⁴⁰ Report of the Education Officer, 9 10.1934.

¹⁴¹ ED 11/273, Jenkins to Burrows, 15 10.1942.

"snags" on the elementary side since technical training was intended to be given primarily in the Junior Technical Schools.¹⁴² Mr Rokeling reported that the Board of Trade felt that "there is a general feeling amongst the employers that the existing needlework classes in the PESs (sic) are not producing an "immediately useful type of girl" - by which he meant girls who could make themselves useful in the trades concerned without further training.¹⁴³ In his report Rokeling argued that the whole subject of whether the girls in their last year at school were getting the right kind of general needlework instruction to prepare them for work ought to be studied.¹⁴⁴ H M I Miss Hammond agreed that the Suggestions for Teachers were not sufficiently modern in this respect and the whole question should be considered again.¹⁴⁵

There had long been tension amongst proponents of domestic subjects about whether they should restrict the contents of lessons to the living conditions of the pupils or rather whether they should teach the "proper" way to do things. There was an awareness that the school could become a creator of "divine discontent" if girls constantly compared what they saw in the classroom to the reality of their homes.¹⁴⁶ During the early twentieth century the Board stressed relevance at all costs and was severely critical of schools' inability to understand the apparatus that might be available in a working class home.¹⁴⁷ In London Education Officer Blair pointed out that there was little point in teaching the cleaning of the

¹⁴² Ibid, Burrows to Williams, undated

¹⁴³ Ibid, Notes of Interview on 2 12 42, unsigned.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, Rokeling to Wallace, 3 12 42

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, HMI Miss Hammond to Rokeling, 12 12 42.

¹⁴⁶ Education Vol 23, 13 3.34 p168 "Report of Miss Pillow's Lecture" cited in D. St John, "The Guidance and Influencing", op cit, p89.

¹⁴⁷ Special Report on the Teaching of Cookery in Public Elementary Schools, 1907, op cit, pxiv

sitting room to a girl who had never seen one!¹⁴⁸ Blair told a conference of domestic teachers that the test ought to be: "Can you go into nineteen twentieths of working men's homes and conduct that home better than the women now there?"¹⁴⁹

The media supported such lofty aims, The Daily Telegraph reported favourably the principle that all lessons should bear some relation to the actual needs of the children's homes. The report then described a lesson in which pupils were observed arranging lozenge-shaped pieces of toast on the dish; "The youthful cooks exercised their ingenuity in devices of lines and stars across the meat".¹⁵⁰ The visitor left with a feeling "that the whole system was marked not only by practical commonsense that could not fail to be of guidance to the future housewives and mothers".¹⁵¹

The Hadow Report of 1926 picked up the theme of the necessity of using the equipment and materials available in home conditions.¹⁵² During the 1930s general hints were given to domestic teachers recommending that their first action should be to find out the average wage of the neighbourhood and avoid using materials beyond the means of the people.¹⁵³ Yet in practice it seems very doubtful whether the aim was achieved. In a report of the performance in a cookery exam of intending teachers HMI Miss McCall observed that far too much stress had been placed on expensive apparatus: it was no good discussing the relative values of soft and dry soap if expenditure on cleaning materials had

¹⁴⁸ EO/GEN/1/70 Blair to Miss Skillman, undated.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, Unmarked Newspaper report of Annual Conference of Domestic Science Teachers at London University, 28 5 10

¹⁵⁰ Daily Telegraph, 28 12 07

¹⁵¹ Ibid Blair seems to have been furious at this report, feeling that self-advertisement denoted lack of refinement, EO/GEN/1/70, Miss Jones to Blair, 31 12 07.

¹⁵² The Hadow Report, op cit, p235

¹⁵³ ED 11/249, Memorandum 3598/2, 29.12 37.

to compete with that on food. She commented that in the average working class home "there is little comfort to be derived from the possession of tea serviettes". She also found it difficult to believe that the student teachers had ever prepared a dish of tripe!¹⁵⁴

Similarly at the height of the debate about cookery teaching President Stanhope was told that lessons were generally useless if the girls returned to homes, even on the new housing estates, where there was no equipment.¹⁵⁵ Ironically when the provision of materials in schools was the subject of a Circular in 1937 the charging of pupils for ingredients was justified by the fact that to instruct them properly in nutrition, materials need to be used which would be unknown in the home or would be regarded with disfavour.¹⁵⁶

In the late 1930s a survey was undertaken about exactly what sort of provision was being offered in schools. The London schools all reported that concentration in the curriculum was given to preparing luxury items which would sell easily such as tea cakes.¹⁵⁷ The emphasis was on aspects of housework which would have been irrelevant to the ordinary working class girl such as the planning of laundry and practising posture while performing tasks. The schools' responses also reported the use of electric irons and airing cupboards. The girls illustrated their notebooks by cutting out pictures of such apparatus¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ ED86/15 - General Report on the Theory of Cookery Exam, December 1927, General Report on the Theory of Laundry Work Exam, Summer 1928.

¹⁵⁵ ED136/109 Rowallan to Stanhope 14 6 37

¹⁵⁶ Administrative Memorandum 158, "Provision of Materials for Practical Instruction in Elementary Schools", 3.2 37, p2

¹⁵⁷ See p170-172 for a further discussion of the pressure to sell the products of lessons.

¹⁵⁸ ED 11/249 See for example the responses of Paragon Senior Girls Council School, Southwark and of Coopers Lane Senior Middle School, Grove Park

The gap between school theory and home practice was epitomised by the school flat. These flats had their genesis in the housewifery centres of the early century¹⁵⁹ and increasingly became a key part of provision in London. Reports of domestic subjects teaching during the inter-war years reiterated constantly the joys of the school flat even though the equipment the flats contained were very different to those found in the girls' homes. The great advantages of the flat were summed up by the LCC's eulogy of the Domestic Arts:

it places the child in a setting which may associate order and beauty with the material realities of her everyday life in such a way as to bring her school and her home into intimate contact. The housewifery flats have, in this way, a special value by connecting the ideal with the girls' sense of reality and stimulating a desire for improved conditions in their own homes. There is reason to believe that vivid and joyous impressions of this kind may be recalled in later years, long after the memory of actual housecraft lessons have faded.¹⁶⁰

Miss Bright was frequently moved to superlatives on the subject. The school flat would provide training in poise and posture; manipulation without spoiling the furniture brought in physical training. Art would be taught in the beauty of the flat, learning to judge measurements would bring in science. Another lesson to be learnt was hospitality, the receiving of guests, while conversation with friends and fellow workers gave training in the use of good English. Finally civics entered into flat management as one had to deal with the gas man, the dustman and the electrician.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ A Yoxall A History of the Teaching of Domestic Economy op cit p.21 she reports that some of the more innovative authorities such as Glamorgan created home making centres fitted up as an artisan dwelling in which teachers lived during the week to make the lesson seem more realistic! Yorkshire had a travelling van which served as a cookery centre p24.

¹⁶⁰ Report of the Education Officer, 1937, Appendix The Newsom Report of 1963 also praised school flats in such terms - See D Attar

¹⁶¹ The Woman Teacher, 21 9.37.

There was also the recurrent message that repeated lessons would instill in the female pupils the right attitude with which to reinforce the sexual division of labour in the home. Miss Pyecroft, Organiser of Domestic Economy in London, had commented that "the motive of our domestic economy schools is to provide capable housewives for London workmen".¹⁶² The replies to the surveys sent out to schools about provision emphasised that lessons included the service of dinner and tea to the family, including the notion that the woman of the family should always come last in the sharing round of the family's diet.¹⁶³

The same theme was very strongly expressed in a report of 1936 in which a survey of craft work reported that women had little leisure for such activities because their family duties were long and arduous. When they did frequent the men's club for one afternoon a week, this was "a very real sacrifice on the part of the men". The report lamented the chaos which was to be found after women had used the premises, the furniture was all awry in that "curiously forlorn confusion which comes when women try to push heavy things about and soon give up" There was the recurring problem of child care: unemployed men sometimes took a turn at home to look after the young and this was a "service which does credit to the men" but "the care of young children is often beyond the man's power, for all his goodwill and sometimes the goodwill is just not there".¹⁶⁴

So responsibility for the family's young remained with the women. Yet if working class women made bad wives, they allegedly made even worse mothers. The shift in discussion about infant welfare from the mortality of the young to conditioning for maternity

¹⁶² EO/GEN/1/70 Miss Pyecroft to Blair 12 9 24

¹⁶³ ED11/249 Replies of Survey, op cit Attar has commented on the recent debate about the emphasis on the home in domestic economics and the way in which this will re-enforce the whole cycle of deprivation in family relationships - D. Attar, Wasting Girls' Time, op cit, p41

¹⁶⁴ ED46/293 Survey of Craft Work in Women's Clubs, Miss Durst 30 1 36

has been well chronicled by Jane Lewis.¹⁶⁵ In 1906 Dr George Newman (later Sir) had published a tract called "Infant Morality : a Social Problem" in which he laid the blame for infant death on the neglect and ignorance of working class women - although he had problems in showing a positive relationship between the two variables of female employment and infant deaths. His suggested remedy was an improvement in girls' education for motherhood for he felt that too much intellectual interest had "spoiled girls". St John has examined in some detail the events which culminated in the 1910 Circular, A Memorandum on the Teaching of Infant Care and Management in Public Elementary Schools. She argues that by 1909-1910, concern was such that Dr Janet Campbell drafted a memorandum which was heavily revised with input from both Newman and Morant.¹⁶⁶ The Memorandum laid enormous stress on individual responsibility for infant health although it did not, however, seem to incorporate explicitly eugenic or social darwinistic ideas. The emphasis on training girls to be mothers was clear.

It cannot be doubted that in directly preventing the death of infants and in contributing to the healthy rearing and upbringing of young children, few factors are likely to be more important than the education and training of older girls in public elementary schools in the science and practice of infant care and management.¹⁶⁷

Environmental conditions as a cause of sickly children were quickly dismissed and the emphasis once again was placed on practical training integrated into the curriculum as part of the course in personal and domestic hygiene. The Memorandum made little reference

¹⁶⁵ J Lewis, The Politics of Motherhood, op cit, chap 2. As Dyhouse has pointed out, the great fear behind the debate about the biological weaknesses of women and the psychology of adolescent girls, was the fear not that they would cease to be able to bear children if over exerted but that their changing lives would disincline them to do so and thereby damage the population. The fall in infant mortality rates after 1900 coincided with the spectacular growth in the infant welfare movement. See C Dyhouse "Social Darwinistic Ideas", op cit, p44; for a detailed discussion.

¹⁶⁶ D St John, "The Guidance and Influencing", op cit, p117.

¹⁶⁷ Memorandum on Infant Care and Management, Circular 758, HMSO, 1910, p1.

to the reality of the pupils' lives, many of whom would be caring for younger siblings. The teacher must at all times remind the girls of the need to use knowledge "acquired" in lessons in their homes and ensure that the use of a large doll as the baby did not cause the lessons to degenerate into "make believe".¹⁶⁸ The LCC circulated the Memorandum and agreed to provide equipment and sanction courses although there is little evidence that by the outbreak of the First World War many schools were teaching the subject.¹⁶⁹ The propaganda and pressures of war led to National Baby Week in July 1917, an exercise to raise women's consciousness of their role as mothers but school records and inspectors reports make very little mention of the subject.¹⁷⁰

By the time of the First World War Newman's insistence upon maternal ignorance as the major cause of infant death was becoming increasingly under attack as variations in distribution of deaths suggested he was underestimating environmental and epidemiological factors. Nevertheless blame continued to be placed on mothers. Prior to the war working class mothers had generally been regarded as better parents than their idle or drunk husbands. In the years of large scale unemployment men were less actively blamed for personal failure while the education of the mother was seen to be crucial.¹⁷¹ In understanding the condemnation of social investigators it is important to remember that working class wives' criteria of respectability and mothering often did not match those of the commentators.

¹⁶⁸ D St John has suggested that the memorandum was well received although it is very hard to tell to what extent it was put into practice. In 1916 the Board reissued as Circular 1940 the Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report of 1914 which again blamed habits, customs and practices amongst working women for the deaths of children rather than external surroundings.

¹⁶⁹ A bill requiring all Public Elementary Schools to teach infant care to girls over 12 introduced by Addison MP, was defeated.

¹⁷⁰ LCC Education Committee Minutes 1914, p325-6. For National Baby Week see D. St John, "The Guidance and Influencing", *op cit*, p125-7.

¹⁷¹ By the late 1940s attention had shifted to the mother's responsibility for the emotional as well as physical wellbeing of the child

Infant welfare inspectors deplored the amount of time women spent cleaning or trying to earn through taking in washing rather than devoting attention to infants. What constitutes a good mother varies between class and social prescription; some working women may have felt, for example, that to devote time to providing basic commodities through taking employment was not neglect but the reverse.¹⁷²

The inter-war years, however, did not witness the withering of educational interest in the subject of infant care. In 1925 the Memorandum of 1910 was revised and reissued. There was a clear shift in emphasis in that it stressed that girls should visit nurseries rather than have lessons within the school. The change can be partly explained, in London at least, by the growing number of nurseries in the capital. Another explanation may be found in the papers relating to a deputation sent by the National League for Health, Maternity and Child Welfare to the Board in 1923¹⁷³ at which Lord Onslow represented the Minister. There was great concern at the Board before the deputation's arrival that the representatives might urge the teaching of the subject to all older girls in elementary schools. The female Inspectorate were uneasy since they believed that it was a subject better taught by older married women of whom, of course, there were very few in the schools due to the operation of the marriage bar.¹⁷⁴ In fact, the deputation began by praising the work in the London day nurseries which demonstrated to girls how healthy babies would be if cared for in the right way. Onslow, clearly relieved, painted a rosy picture of the situation, stating that a large proportion of elementary girls already attended a course although he admitted the fullest

¹⁷² See J Lewis, Labour and Love, op cit, Introduction

¹⁷³ This was an umbrella organisation for eight organisations such as the National Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality and the National Society for Day Nurseries - see ED11/150

¹⁷⁴ ED 11/150 Note to Phipps 2 6.23; unsigned

of these only amounted to six lectures. It was obvious that "the mothers of the next generation ought to know more about the care of children".¹⁷⁵

Although Onslow hesitated to express his opinion on the rival claims of the doll and the real baby, he acknowledged the difficulties of the situation for teachers.

I think it is a matter which has to be approached - I am speaking now from the elementary point of view - with a certain amount of tact because it is rather different from Arithmetic and History. When the child comes home and tells its mother how to bath the baby perhaps it may receive a certain amount of incredulity as to its superior knowledge ...

The deputation was told that the Board would undertake to update its "Suggestions" for teachers to include mothercraft since it was most necessary that all girls should be taught this.

Miss Wark, Chief Woman Inspector, was delegated to seek information from her women inspectors about the situation in various areas. She stressed the need to find out how much co-operation took place at the local nurseries and welfare centres and how long the courses offered were.¹⁷⁶ In 1925 the newly revised Circular was issued emphasising, as mentioned above, the need to co-ordinate and co-operate with local nurseries and extending provision to secondary schools. The Circular stipulated, however, that there was no contemplation of compulsion.¹⁷⁷ The response from the LCC was positive; it reported that 11 day nurseries were already training young girls and another 21 were willing to co-operate, a situation which was far better than in the provinces.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Ibid Lord Onslow's address

¹⁷⁶ Ibid Memorandum Miss Wark, 18 9 23.

¹⁷⁷ D St John, "The Guidance and Influencing", op cit, p131 argues that one of the reasons that the lack of compulsion was the fear that young girls would start to ask about sex and child birth.

¹⁷⁸ ED11/150 Memorandum G554 suggests that there were only 11 nurseries throughout the rest of the country engaged in this sort of scheme

The following year Miss Wark investigated the scholarship scheme in operation in London whereby six awards were made annually to girls, initially for one year but renewable for up to four. Her report stressed how the LCC tried to select girls who would really benefit but significantly benefit was quantified vocationally, ie in terms of the paid employment the girls might ultimately receive. Miss Wark reported favourably that three ex-scholars had gone on to train as nurses and one was training as a nursery school teacher. The training course seemed to have had a clear medical basis and indeed Miss Wark lamented that domestic subjects were "a bit thin" in the curriculum.

There is little evidence of progress nationally although the Handbook of Suggestions in its section on Health Education was of the opinion that the benefits of teaching girls over 12 in child care management could scarcely be exaggerated. It is very difficult to establish exactly how many schools incorporated infant care into the curriculum - as Inspectorate reports or school log books rarely make mention of any. The survey of domestic provision in schools in 1937 suggests that child care was often included in the general housewifery course for up to a maximum of six lessons - the girls were taught to bath a baby and wash a baby's clothes - but the survey did not refer to girls visiting nurseries or centres. It does seem that a hygiene course was more frequently taught, the Chief Medical Officer believing that the school bath, notoriously unpopular with girls, was a good agent for such lessons.¹⁷⁹

In the late thirties HMI Miss Horniblow reported that the majority of girls were not interested in a course of child welfare and she was doubtful if she could find 300 girls out of a school population of 80,000 who would be prepared to do a year's course in this. She noted that the subject was being taught in some Senior Schools but that in London it would be difficult to find schools which would serve as practising grounds for intending teachers

¹⁷⁹ LCC Education Committee Minutes 23.3.21.

of mothercraft.¹⁸⁰ This situation seemed little changed by 1940 when the number of verminous children revealed by evacuation raised the whole issue again. Apparently "inspectors were by no means agreed that this teaching in mothercraft was desirable or practical with girls of elementary school age".¹⁸¹ Another deputation arrived at the Board, this time from the National Association of Maternity and Child Welfare Centres and for the Prevention of Infant Mortality.¹⁸² Once again the general tone of the discussion was that the blame still lay entirely with the mothers.

Some mothers regard it as natural for children to be verminous, they regard the absence of vermin comparable with the absence of rats from a sinking ship and conclude that the child could not be well.¹⁸³

It seems that HMI Miss Hammonds felt that girls of elementary school age were too immature for this sort of lesson and Savage, Chief Inspector, agreed although he did tell the Deputation that they were preaching to the converted so far as the need to teach girls to be mothers was concerned. HMI Charles suggested something along the lines of the "safety first" campaign that was currently running in which all children received a visit from a policeman! The meeting does not seem to have been productive in practical terms for a whole year later a draft letter was composed to Dr Housden who had led the deputation stating that the Board felt that the best way to foster maternal skill was through health education.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ ED46/293, HMI Miss Hornblow to S C I. Savage, 23 4.37.

¹⁸¹ ED11/243 HMI Miss Hammonds to Burrows, 28 1.41.

¹⁸² ED11/264 - Memorandum E554/9, 10.1 40.

¹⁸³ Ibid, Notes of Discussion with Representatives of the NAOM and Child Welfare Centre, unsigned, 16.1 40.

¹⁸⁴ ED11/243, Draft letter to Housden, 5.3.41

It is, perhaps, surprising that the teaching of infant care did not become compulsory in schools. It must, however, be remembered that there was a strong emphasis throughout these years on educating the mother through clinics, schools for mothers and nurseries. The first government grants to schools for mothers moulded the educational character of the infant welfare movement and it may be assumed that policy makers saw this as a more effective channel of communication. Although the strength of the social assumption that women would stay at home militated against day care during this era, there were many nurseries in London which were seen to be "more of a home than a school."¹⁸⁵ It was believed, moreover, that since domestic aspects of life occupied so much of the girl's time they would be more effectively taught about childcare once their years in compulsory education were over.

If the principle of a differentiated curriculum is accepted the natural concomitant is that all subjects be modified to accommodate such difference and this, indeed, is exactly what happened during the inter-war years.¹⁸⁶ One of the most oft repeated themes of policymakers was that domestic subjects should be integrated in the curriculum to be part of the overall pattern of a girl's education and thus differentiated standards of achievement in all subjects could be sanctioned.¹⁸⁷

Other subjects were certainly thought to require different approaches for elementary girls. Circular 867 in 1912 on the teaching of arithmetic gave attention to "domestic

¹⁸⁵ LCC Education Committee Minutes, 11 7.28.

¹⁸⁶ Gender differentiation even affected perceptions of truancy - Digby and Searby have shown that while, by 1900, it has been estimated that 87.78% of those under 12 were on the school register only 72.12% were in average daily attendance. A Digby and P Searby, Children, School and Society, op cit, p31. A Davin has shown that the truancy of girls was far more accepted in London than that of boys.

¹⁸⁷ Hunt has argued that if the girls' curriculum was to be dominated by gender difference it must either become a curriculum as norm minus, with certain elements removed or a boys' curriculum as norm plus in which case additions would be added to cater for domestic role preparation. Hunt contends that in the elementary sector the first case predominated, in the secondary sector the latter. F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p125.

arithmetic", girls should give more attention to home based calculations evolving around shopping and housekeeping. In 1925 the Board investigated arithmetic in the elementary schools again and, citing the better performance of boys in the subject, suggested that one factor was the lack of time girls had for the study of numbers since they spent so much time doing needlework.¹⁸⁸

The NUWT participated vigorously in this debate. In 1924 publicity was given to the fact that in London boys were achieving significantly higher marks than girls in junior county scholarship examinations. The Woman Teacher pointed out that if the relative time spent by pupils on the subject was added up, it was not surprising that the girls came out badly.

It is interesting to note that in the earliest age group where the time spent in arithmetic is equal, the girls' average would be 115.3 if the boys were 100 ... if the system gave equal facilities to girls the disparity would no longer exist.¹⁸⁹

Ten years later the situation had not improved. Miss Phipps observed that if the girls spent so many hours on needlework and domestic work while the boys studied maths, the girls could not possibly attain the same standard; "this, however, is not in the minds of logical people proof of a lack of aptitude in girls for mathematical subjects".¹⁹⁰

The fact that girls spent a great deal of time anticipating their adult role through needlework and thus were denied access to other lessons had been recognised in 1914 when a Board of Education "Memorandum on the Teaching of Science in Certain Elementary Schools in London" showed that girls spent 2½ hours a week more on domestic subjects than

¹⁸⁸ The Teaching of Arithmetic in Elementary Schools, London, HMSO, 1925, p11.

¹⁸⁹ The Woman Teacher, 20 6 24, p284

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 14.2 36, p177

boys did in handicraft.¹⁹¹ Hunt has shown that in the secondary context perceptions of differential ability between the two sexes was used to justify the reason why girls failed to achieve in scientific subjects and mathematics. It was argued that girls reached their limits in these subjects early on and would, therefore, in mixed schools hold the boys back. No account was taken of the extra time spent on domestic subjects or the evidence which psychological testing was producing at the time.¹⁹²

All subjects were to be treated differently as the Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers stipulated: "difference of sex must also affect to some extent the treatment of many ordinary subjects in the curriculum". Thus, for example, experience showed that courses in arithmetic and geography required considerable modification to serve the needs and interests of girls. Purvis has pointed out that domestic themes could also be taught under the disguise of citizenship, emphasising domesticity through links with family and community. The teaching of citizenship through domestic subjects implicitly suggested that for the female, the term citizen was synonymous with that of housewife.¹⁹³ The process of gender stereotyping was also underlined by reading books which encouraged girls to be self sacrificing, domesticated and moral.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ The National Federation of Women Teachers pointed out at this stage that while the girls did 2 hours needle work, boys often did more arithmetic plus applied arithmetic and geometry in their handicraft lessons. The School Mistress, 17 9.14, p462 See D St John, "The Guidance and Influencing", op cit, p101.

¹⁹² In 1909 the Regulations for Secondary Schools permitted girls over 15 to drop all science and all maths except arithmetic if they took domestic science F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p123.

¹⁹³ Thus the responsibility for cleanliness in the home could lead on to lessons to responsibility for orderliness in public parks, J Purvis, "Domestic Subjects since 1870", op cit, p155 referring to the Association for Education in Citizenship, Education for Citizenship in Elementary Schools, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1939, p114.

¹⁹⁴ B Wells, "Reading between the lines Girlhood, Girl's Magazines and School Textbooks 1900-1930", Paper given at History of Education Conference, December 1992

The role of science had particular relevance for domestic subjects. The debate about the correlation of science and domestic subjects in the secondary school had a long history. Manthorpe has shown how the movement to link science to domesticity met opposition from science teachers and by 1918 had largely failed.¹⁹⁵ It seems that from the very early days of elementary state schools science for girls had been taught in relation to the home. In 1919 a Report on Science Teaching in London revealed the generally poor state of the subject and pointed out that laboratory work was degenerating into something akin to working out cookery recipes. The clear association with domestic processes continued, however, and sharpened the distinction with boys' lessons. In 1938 the LCC reissued the memorandum on Handicraft in Senior Girls Schools in London which portrayed an intimate association between Domestic Subjects and Science - and English, History, Geography, Arithmetic, Hygiene and Art. The survey of practice in schools in the late thirties asked how domestic subjects were linked to science and repeatedly schools responded by referring to lessons on the composition of water and soap, on lessons about the conduction of heat and the design of the Christmas cake.¹⁹⁶

The lack of status of domestic subjects was conveyed in a number of other messages to girls. The emphasis on the utilitarian aspect of the subject stretched to the preparation of school dinners of which there had been a huge increase during the First World War. This was a constant source of tension between the LCC and the Board of Education for the Board felt it was "not necessarily true that girls, whilst cooking meals, were learning to cook". HMI Miss Manley argued that girls probably spent the entire lessons preparing vegetables -

¹⁹⁵ C Manthorpe, "Science or Domestic Science?", op cit

¹⁹⁶ ED11/249 Boys' lessons were rather more exciting ED 22/203/380, refers to a science lesson in a senior boys school in 1937 in which an explosion took place The teacher lost three fingers whilst demonstrating how to make a bomb to explode in the playground He mixed the chemicals in an envelope and surred them with a piece of chalk before the explosion!

although LCC Inspector Miss Cade tried to re-assure her by arguing the meals wouldn't be very big as the children didn't have large appetites!¹⁹⁷

This subject received a considerable amount of attention in the press, much of it favourable. The Daily Mail felt that it could be seen as "killing two birds with one stone" by making little girls in cookery classes prepare the meals for children who had to be fed. An LCC expert had suggested that it was better seen as making two plants grow from one seed.¹⁹⁸ The Star, however, felt that the preparation of basic ingredients was not a creative exercise.

It must be obvious to the meanest masculine intelligence that a potato does not lend itself to experiment like an egg...an egg is adventure all the way through.¹⁹⁹

By the early 1930s there was increasing awareness at both the Board and County Hall that domestic subjects teachers were avoiding London. The preparation of dinners was seen as the main objection for "the preparation of meals for necessitous children imposes a heavy strain on the teachers and the teaching".²⁰⁰ London was the only authority to use the schools extensively to provide school lunches and, indeed, only three or four authorities in the whole country used the schools at all. In London nearly 200 domestic centres were used by the mid thirties for this purpose providing 3500 dinners daily. Teachers were given no free period to compensate for the lack of a lunch hour and the fact that they were doing two jobs. The LCC was apparently alive to the objections of the system and in 1934 an organiser of school meals was appointed. The Education Officer justified the arrangement, however,

¹⁹⁷ ED96/68, Note of Interview, unsigned, 12.1.21

¹⁹⁸ EO/GEN/1/70, Article Daily Mail, undated.

¹⁹⁹ The Star, 20.5 21

²⁰⁰ EO/TRA/1/14, Note of Conference with Board of Education Officers, 4.10 35

by saying that it gave reality to the cookery teacher's teaching and that it removed the difficulties of disposing of the food at the end of the lessons.²⁰¹ The Board of Education officials pointed out the restrictions imposed by routine work and washing up. In fact it seemed that in practice the teacher often had to cook herself in order to get the meals done for dinner time. Moreover accommodation was quite unsuitable for eating the meals since centres had the sloping desks! Miss Bright was forced to admit the provision of 30 meals in a centre designed for sixteen girls threw a lot of strain on everybody but the real problem, as the LCC officials told the Board in October 1935, was economic.²⁰²

The situation appeared to be even worse in reality when the LCC Elementary Sub-Committee reported on the Board's criticism. Although teachers had been told to make use of the school's cleaner to help them, there were apparently many instances when the teacher responsible for teaching a lesson to a class of twenty 11 year olds was also responsible for the provision of thirty dinners at the same time. If a house or cookery lesson was taking place in the morning a "teacher has frequently to conduct a laundry work lesson and at the same time herself prepare the necessary children's dinners".²⁰³ The only suggestion the Elementary Sub-Committee could come up with was that the number of dinners each centre prepared should be reduced and that the work for them should fall mainly on the senior girls. There was an excellent advantage, it was claimed, in that the experience gave the senior pupils a chance to use realistic quantities of food for the needs of the average family - which

²⁰¹ EO/TRA/1/14 Report of Elementary Sub-Committee 4 2 36

²⁰² Mr Bennett said that the Council were proposing to spend £160,000 on the reconstruction of old schools and it was questionable whether much could be done in providing feeding centres or better premises for domestic subjects in the near future. ED 86/50, Interview Memorandum, 4.10.35.

²⁰³ EO/TRA 1/14, Report of the Elementary Sub-Committee, 4.2.36, op cit.

presumably did not amount to thirty - and teachers would "often say that they prefer the inconvenience of meal preparation to the anxiety of the disposal of food by sales."²⁰⁴

The domestic teacher did indeed have this further concern of balancing the books. Domestic subjects faced another handicap in that the LCC required them to be self-financing even though Section 37(1) Education Act 1921 stated that pupils and parents should not be required to provide materials or implements necessary for the subjects taught in public elementary schools. This was particularly true of needlework and from the early post-war years it seems that lessons concentrated on making garments that would sell easily. There had been almost a tone of relief amongst LCC officials when the new scheme for teaching needlework was adopted in 1914 because this concentrated on making garments rather than sewing samples etc.

The 1907 Report on Cookery stated explicitly that "there can be no question that the efficiency, and therefore the practical value, of the instruction is seriously impaired by the obligation to produce a satisfactory balance sheet."²⁰⁵ By 1921 the Education Committee of the LCC was hoping for 91% recovery on cookery lessons and 83% on needlework.²⁰⁶ The trend continued into the late 1930s when a survey of schools in connection with cookery lessons referred repeatedly to the need to cover the expense of the ingredients from sales.²⁰⁷ A note from HMI Miss Harrison pointed out that pastries and cakes were the

²⁰⁴ Ibid During the late 1930s the President of the Board and senior HMIs seem to have accepted the fact that in the new senior schools lessons were being used to produce meals for the canteen See ED 136/109, 21 7 37.

²⁰⁵ Special Report on The Teaching of Cookery, 1907, op cit, p16.

²⁰⁶ LCC Education Committee Minutes 10.3 21. Even unemployed girls in Juvenile Unemployment Centres had to pay a contributions towards materials - see ED20/1349.

²⁰⁷ ED 11/249, Replies of Survey, op cit

most prominent feature of the lessons and teachers admitted frequently their teaching was entirely influenced by the need to sell goods.²⁰⁸

Circular 158 in 1937 concerning the Provision of Materials for Practical Instruction illustrates the concern which had developed about this matter. The impetus behind it seems to have been the fear that Irene Ward MP would "return to the charge" on this point unless action was taken but the Circular in its final form did not even consider a modification of the system.²⁰⁹ It suggested expenditure on materials should as far as possible be recovered from sales and applauded the bringing of materials from home which removed the difficulties of sales although did cause problems in lessons if each girl brought whatever her mother happened to have in the larder! The remedy suggested was that authorities made a definite annual allowance for particular practical subjects.²¹⁰

HMI Miss Cox had ventured a more radical scheme by suggesting that towards the end of each girl's domestic subjects course the authorities should allow 6d per girl per lesson for twelve lessons to enable them to prepare actual meals.²¹¹ HMI Mr Ainsworth greeted this with some horror saying that this would cost some £80,000 per annum and that £680,000 per year was already being spent on domestic teachers for the schools. The plan was quickly abandoned.

The low status of the subject was both created and compounded by the low status of domestic subjects teachers, of whom there were approximately 500 in London by the late

²⁰⁸ ED 136/109, Note HMI Miss Harrison, August 1937

²⁰⁹ Circular 158, Provision of Materials for Practical Instruction in PES, 3.2.37.

²¹⁰ The Circular pointed out that the supply of materials for woodwork and metalwork presented fewer difficulties - the boys did not have to pay!

²¹¹ ED 136/109 ARA (Ainsworth) to Permanent Secretary.

1930s.²¹² Domestic Subjects teachers' position in the school system epitomised the fact that the subject was very much the poor relation of the entire curriculum. Increasingly during the inter-war years authorities accepted that the teachers were at a great disadvantage in London by their isolation in the centres, by the appalling equipment and by the requirement to cook the school dinners.

The low ranking of domestic subjects "instructresses" was already established by the outbreak of war.²¹³ The 1912 report on Cookery reported the isolation in the centre for the young female teacher who must "stand or fall alone",²¹⁴ while the LCC 1913 punishment code specifically forbade the domestic subjects teacher to use the cane.²¹⁵ This isolation meant that the domestic subjects expert received little respect from ordinary teachers, "London's system does not operate to encourage school teachers to take much interest in their domestic instruction."²¹⁶ A corollary of this lack of trust was that the domestic subjects teachers had a "regrettable lack of faith in the teachers of ordinary subjects."²¹⁷ The 1937 survey of domestic subjects asked to what extent the teacher was considered to be a member of staff. All the London schools in their replies referred to the fact that, if the lessons took place in a centre, the female teacher was not part of the body of the staff.

²¹² There is need for a full study of the domestic subjects teaching profession, both of the qualities that were required and of the differentiation that was instilled in the training courses but it is beyond the parameters of this study to attempt a full analysis. There were approximately 4,000 domestic teachers throughout the country during these years See ED 86/50.

²¹³ A Turnbull has pointed out how the London School Board insisted on calling the women instructresses rather than teachers A Turnbull, "Women Education and Domesticity", op cit, p165.

²¹⁴ General Report on Teaching Cookery, 1912, op cit, p6

²¹⁵ The School Mistress, 27.4 16, p54

²¹⁶ EO/GEN/1/70, Selby Bigge to Blair, 29 11 10

²¹⁷ ED 86/15, Report on Principles of Teaching Examination, Summer 1928

It has already been mentioned that London, by the late 1920s, was having a great deal of difficulty in recruiting domestic subjects teachers. In 1935 Board officials pointed out to the LCC that the appalling premises, the lack of recognition, and the hatred of the centre system, whereby London appointed teachers to centres rather than to the schools, were the root of the problem. The most unpopular centres in Deptford, Poplar and Shoreditch were staffed by probationers and supply teachers since no other qualified teachers would apply to work there.²¹⁸ Other local authorities tended to appoint domestic subjects teachers to schools even if they actually operated within centres.²¹⁹ HMI Miss Peel commented on badly ventilated and crowded rooms which had no hot water supply and inadequate sinks, the lack of lavatory accommodation for teachers and the lack of the ability to do any advance work in the centre system; she concluded that in London "Domestic Subjects is not really a school subject".²²⁰ No solution was reached although ironically it was hoped that the recent decision to remove the ban on married women teachers would produce more supply teachers to cope with the problems.²²¹ The Elementary Education Sub-Committee justified the system by saying that London had been pioneers; while the teacher might be lonely and might prefer to be part of the school, centres were now being grouped together to take pupils from 3 to 8 schools so she would have plenty of contact with children in the future.²²²

²¹⁸ ED 86/50, Assistant Education Officer to Board of Education, 12 7.37

²¹⁹ London had an annual wastage of about 50 - 60 domestic subjects teachers a year which was very high.

²²⁰ EO/TRA/1/14 The debate had begun by the consultative committee of headmistresses complaining about the lack of permanent teachers at the Deptford Centre.

²²¹ *Ibid*, Internal Memorandum, unsigned 4/10/35.

²²² *Ibid*, Report of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, 4.2 36, *op cit* D Attar, *Wasting Girls' Time*, *op cit*, p78 points out that home economic teachers remain on the margin of school staff, with low status and a feminine identity

There was also concern about poor quality of the teachers. London would only take teachers who had received a C+ grade or above in their teaching practice, C representing average capacity. HMI Miss McCall, when examining student teachers' papers, frequently pointed out the very low standard reached, particularly in needlework. She was driven to despair in 1928 by the fact that so many of the students did not remember that Peter Pan collars were only suitable for the young and were certainly not suitable for the mature figure of bust size 42 inches - as had been stated in the question. Miss McCall felt that a dress of knee length would look absurd on women of this size and some students evidently considered a person of this size must be abnormal and gave the back length longer than the front".²²³ This contrasted starkly with the praise which examiners often heaped on handicraft trainees. Due to its stipulation of the C+ grade, only 50% of domestic graduates from colleges were even interviewed by London.

There was no indication that the situation had improved by the late 1930s. The majority of London's domestic subjects teachers still operated from within the centres. Although it had been anticipated in 1926 that the intention of the Authority was to abandon the centre system of teaching in favour of making it an integral part of the school course, there is little to suggest that this had happened. As schools were increasingly reorganised on "Hadow" lines with a break at 11, from 1933 the LCC once again aimed to give instruction for half a day a week for three years.²²⁴ An NUWT survey suggests that once schools were reorganised with a break at eleven, older girls did indeed spend more time on domestic lessons.²²⁵ Although there was a rapid increase in the number of practical rooms

²²³ ED86/50 Internal Memorandum, Mann to Miss Bright, 4 10.35.

²²⁴ EO/TRA/1/14 Report of Elementary Education Sub-Committee 4 2.36, op cit. By 1932 82% of schools in London had been reorganised Annual Report of the LCC, 1932

²²⁵ NUWT Box 26b, Domestic Subjects Questionnaire

in schools after 1928, most of these seemed to have been used for boys' handicraft lessons and the isolation of the centres continued.²²⁶

There were other sources of criticism of the teaching of domestic subjects. The most vocal opposition came from the NUWT. If the subject really did raise standards of home life, they argued that it followed that boys should take the subject too. The NUWT continued to push for such provisions throughout the inter-war years and, although very little was done, mention of boys cooking was not quite the anathema that one might expect. In 1907 the report on Cookery Teaching had noted that there was provision in the 1901 Code to allow boys in seaport towns over 12 to be given a grant to take the subject - although few took advantage of this.²²⁷ In 1912 Maude Lawrence thought that "the demand for cookery instruction for boys will require considerable attention in the near future"²²⁸ on the ground that she had heard the report of five boys clamouring to join a class. It appeared that they were boy scouts and that a scout of the "second class" needed to know how to cook meat and potatoes in a tin pan while those of the first class needed "quite advanced things" like porridge and soup.

Burstyn has argued that at the root of the debate about whether boys should take domestic subjects was an unspoken fear about masculinity, a fear revolving around the fact that men might be expected to take over responsibility of the housework.²²⁹ When Miss Tidswell asked Dr Ballard of the LCC if it would not be a good thing for boys to learn

²²⁶ There were 44 practical work rooms in elementary senior schools in 1928, 115 in 1929 and it was proposed to increase this to 800 by 1932, Annual Report of the LCC, 1929

²²⁷ Some Local Authorities did set up classes for boys. See H Sillitoe, *A History of the Teaching*, op cit, p106 The classes were, of course, limited to seaport towns as they were seen as preparation for navy cooks.

²²⁸ General Report on the Teaching of Cookery, 1912, op cit, p8-9.

²²⁹ J Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, London, Croom Helm, 1980, p169

domestic subjects, his "only remark was that there was not time", a reply which the NUWT felt seemed "very weak".²³⁰ Ballard's was a view commonly held. The School Master, in response to a resolution by the National Council of Women in 1938 that domestic subjects should become part of the school life of schoolboys, argued that the subject had no appeal for boys and "to force it onto the timetable is to turn it at once into a crank subject."²³¹ In 1933 the NUWT passed a resolution calling for a more equal preparation for future home life between boys and girls which could be achieved by the giving of instruction to boys on the simple elements of domestic subjects.²³²

The suggestion that boys should be given domestic lessons in exactly the same form as girls was official NUWT policy throughout the inter-war years and was consciously a challenge to the traditional sexual division of labour within the home and to the acceptance of housework as inevitably the task of women. They challenged;

The assumption that the male worker is always to have someone to do such work for him but that the female worker is expected to do two jobs, the one at lower pay than the worker and the other for no pay at all.²³³

In 1920 The Woman Teacher pointed out that, "War has taught us that boys and men can do many things they used to think must be done for them".²³⁴ If boys were taught home duties they might learn to be less careless in making household work, and see that "they are not necessarily a higher order of beings than their sisters."²³⁵ Thus these feminists wanted

²³⁰ NUWT, Box 26b, A Report of the Annual Conference of the Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects, E Tidswell, undated [1930]

²³¹ The Schoolmaster, 27.7 38. It appears that by 1939 there were 13 schools providing domestic subjects classes for boys, including one school for the partially sighted, Rich to Miss Dedman, 11 3.39.

²³² NUWT Annual Conference Report 1933.

²³³ NUWT Box 26a, The Motor, 16 4 41, p200, Article by Miss Walmesley

²³⁴ The Woman Teacher, 2 1 20, p115

²³⁵ Ibid.

housework to become a shared responsibility between the sexes, a point to be learned at school. This might be seen as "revolutionary", an article in The Woman Teacher agreed, but then "so were votes for women, sea bathing, central heating and free education once!"²³⁶

It is significant that there was thus a contemporary perception that domestic lessons at school perpetuated the gender division of labour in the home. The NUWT argued that

the tendency in the home to place almost the whole burden of domestic work on the girls is fostered by a curriculum that limits the teaching of homecraft to girls alone.²³⁷

These women perceived a complex interaction between gender uncertainties within society and wider economic and social change.

Society is so organised that few men are thoroughly satisfied with their relations with others ... A sense of inadequacy and inferiority is the price the individual has to pay for the specialisation and mechanisation of work. The individual looks round for some relationship in which he can feel entirely adequate or even superior. Many men feel this kind of satisfaction in their attitude to their wives and family. Here, in the home and in their social recreations, they are the dominant party.²³⁸

The feminist teachers argued that the system was self-perpetuating and that mothers and sisters were responsible for the "spoiling" of boys who then grew up expecting to have all domestic chores done for them. It was mothers who "allow the boys to make as much dirt and litter as they like, and expect the girls to clean up after them."²³⁹

²³⁶ Ibid, 1 10.39, p7 See also 16.2.23 and 23.2.23.

²³⁷ Ibid, 26 10 28

²³⁸ Ibid, 14 2.36.

²³⁹ Ibid It was felt that America was giving a magnificent lead in this direction and that American boys appeared to be less spoilt than boys from other countries. NUWT Box 26b. Report from Housecraft, 1930 on the Fourth International Congress of Domestic Economy 1927.

The NUWT argued continually against making domestic lessons compulsory for all girls from an early age;

We protest against, we quarrel eternally with the view that girls in an elementary school are necessarily doomed to become household drudges and that they should be sidetracked into this position while they are still at school.²⁴⁰

Their quarrel was not with domestic subjects per se but with the facts that the lessons did not form part of a broad general education and that they took so many hours in girls' short school lives. These years were "educationally precious" to girls and should be spent covering far more important subjects than the daily round;

We must not forget that these girls equally with the boys will be responsible for the government of their country in after life. How much more essential then that some understanding of these responsibilities should be given.²⁴¹

The NUWT abhorred the fact that "a girl's whole education is coloured with the idea that her only concern is with the home and domestic duties."²⁴² They felt that undue emphasis on domestic training for girls only was an undesirable departure from the equal standards of education set up in 1870 in elementary schools and argued that if the practice persisted girls would continue to be "severely handicapped" in the attainment of higher education.²⁴³

The Union also totally rejected the prevalent assumption that girls were innately suited to do domestic subjects.

²⁴⁰ The Woman Teacher, 20 4 28, p216

²⁴¹ Ibid, 30.9 27, p5.

²⁴² Memorandum to the Departmental Committee on the Teaching of Domestic Science in Public Elementary Schools, NUWT, undated, [1938]

²⁴³ Ibid

The idea that girls can be taught cooking merely by preparing a series of meals has its roots...in the fallacy that cooking is an "instinct" with women and they only need a general guidance to become efficient cooks. We have to urge that cooking must be taught on strict scientific lines and not in the haphazard way which is inevitable when the teaching is subordinate to the necessity for preparing a meal.²⁴⁴

The NUWT pointed out that many girls had a permanent aversion to cleaning floors and ironing. The Union accepted that limited domestic economy lessons did have some value in raising the standard of home life and indeed periodically conference resolutions called for the subject to be made compulsory - for both sexes. If lessons were so important it was quite obvious, these feminists argued, that there should be "Equal preparation for home life as between boys and girls by the giving of instruction to boys in the simple elements of domestic subjects such as needlework and cookery".²⁴⁵ Similarly girls should learn about woodcraft, electricity and engines.²⁴⁶

Yet the women teachers of the NUWT were themselves in an ambivalent position, as sometimes appears in their arguments about domestic lessons. Given their feminist beliefs about changing women's positions in the home and in employment they did not want to contend that a career had to be an alternative to marriage. Yet their own lives did seem to suggest an incompatibility between employment and family life since most were unmarried, whether from choice or not. Thus occasionally there is a suggestion in the NUWT's arguments that technical education would make a girl a better wife and mother. "Give a woman a good training no matter in what sphere and she will have a greater chance of

²⁴⁴ NUWT Box 26a, Miss Froud to Miss Wade, 14.10.25.

²⁴⁵ The Woman Teacher, 19.1 34, p374.

²⁴⁶ NUWT Box 26a, The Motor, p200, Article by Miss Walmesley, op cit

success as a home maker".²⁴⁷ This confusion was part of these women's own experiences in a hostile society.

The NUWT feminists did not regard domestic labour as inherently inferior employment. They argued that the status of domestic work in society should be raised and "receive its due socially and economically". Their complaint was based on the recognition that contemporary society perceived housework as low paid, stereotypically women's work and that "the low valuation attached to women's work in the home has had its effect on women's work outside the home".²⁴⁸ The Union welcomed facilities for training in domestic employment as an "honourable, remunerative career" although they consulted with the ATDS about an endeavour to eliminate the idea of service from the subject and to show that lessons could be regarded as of educational and commercial value to the child.²⁴⁹ The teachers stressed that, given the existing status of housework, forcibly directing girls towards it at school imposed "an unfair handicap on girls' education as compared with a boy for future wage earning employment".²⁵⁰

In one form of employment only the stress on domesticity was not a handicap - and that was domestic service. Historians have frequently commented that the domestic subjects teaching in the schools had the additional "advantage" of preparing girls for domestic service despite the frequent denials expressed by policy makers on this point.²⁵¹ St John has

²⁴⁷ The Woman Teacher, 12 5 22, p244 The London Unit of the NUWT published a best-selling cookery book by A J Spinster which was frequently advertised in The Woman Teacher

²⁴⁸ The Woman Teacher, 13.1.28, p114

²⁴⁹ NUWT Box 26a, General Secretary NUWT to Miss Buck, 24 5.28.

²⁵⁰ The Woman Teacher, 19 1 23, p122

²⁵¹ Little attempt, however, has been made, even by feminist historians, to examine exactly how that process occurred. It has always been assumed that the connection was implicit rather than explicit. A Turnbull, "Learning her Womanly Work", op cit, p95 points out that early pictures of housewifery centres show pupils in caps and aprons - the perfect image of the compliant servant

argued that service by the early twentieth century was not a primary employment option for school leavers in London and it is, indeed, clear that by 1916 there had been a clear drop in the number of young girls who were taking up this form of employment. A survey by the Women's Industrial Council in 1916 made this point and it was confirmed by special report on the 1921 census in London.²⁵² Historians have long accepted that part of the change in occupational distribution taking place in women's employment during the inter-war years was the steep decline in domestic service. There are problems in quantifying the extent of that decline because the Ministry of Labour only included in their employment figures those in insured jobs - which did not include servants. The invisibility of women's work was thus reinforced. Until 1934 statistics were only collected for those aged 16 and over thereby excluding a huge number of 14 to 16 year olds who were in employment.

It is important to recognise, however, that service did remain an important form of employment for girls and women during this period. The WIC report showed that 1,359,359 women and girls were still employed as indoor servants along with 54,260 men and boys - and thus it remained the largest form of female employment in the country.²⁵³ In London domestic service remained an important form of women's employment although increasingly women and girls worked as "dailies" rather than living in. The increasing number of institutions - hospitals, hotels and hostels - meant that cleaning remained an important part of daily life in the capital. Between 1901 and 1921 the number of indoor female servants in the County of London had fallen from 242,000 to 157,000²⁵⁴ but there had been an increase by the time of the census of 1931. The number of female indoor

²⁵² CV Butler, *Domestic Service An Enquiry by the Women's Industrial Council, London 1916, and Special Report on 1921 Census, Women's Employment.*

²⁵³ These were figures based on the 1911 census.

²⁵⁴ M Glucksmann, *Women Assemble*, op cit, p246

domestic servants had risen by 15% to 1.1 million.²⁵⁵ A very large number of the national total in 1931 were servants in Greater London. The New Survey of London analysed returns, however, and suggested that less than a quarter of that number overall were natives of London and an even smaller proportion were in the lowest age group of 14 to 16. The servant population was becoming older, young women of 15 to 25 accounting for nearly all of the large decline between 1901 to 21. This has been explained by the lure of factory employment. Ryan has illustrated this phenomenon in her study of Deptford and Lewisham which reveals a large shift towards other occupations, even during the period around 1931.²⁵⁶ Gittins has shown that young girls who did enter service left to marry - at an earlier age than other occupational groups.²⁵⁷

Other reasons have been advanced for the cause of this phenomenon. McBride suggests that the raising of the school leaving age meant that fewer young girls were available - and those who were available had more education.²⁵⁸ On the demand side the decrease in the size of the middle class family meant that fewer nursemaids were needed while the modernisation of home equipment, discussed earlier, enabled the middle class housewife herself to conduct some of the chores of the home. Nevertheless employing even a "daily" remained part of the elaborate status system of respectability of the middle classes. The phenomenon cannot be explained by broad generalisations about demand and supply. Glucksmann makes the important point that the altered composition of the middle class during these years was significant; the new professional class were not as affluent as the

²⁵⁵ This was to be a temporary trend as there had been a huge decimation of the numbers by 1951.

²⁵⁶ J Ryan "Developments in the Employment of Women in Lewisham and Deptford", op cit.

²⁵⁷ D Gittins, Fair Sex, op cit, p80

²⁵⁸ T McBride, The Domestic Revolution, London, Croom Helm, 1976.

business people of the late 19th century and thus could afford fewer servants. Figures suggest, indeed, that the families that would in the past have employed a residential servant were those most likely not to have one during the inter-war years.²⁵⁹

The conditions of employment for servants certainly changed: if they did live in, conditions were better, free time increased and wages rose - although a housemaid in London during the inter-war years would still be earning less than £50 per annum. Non-residential work gave the women flexibility to define their work hours whereas in the past they had been expected to work as long as necessary. As discussed in Chapter Two, there was undoubtedly an increased demand for young female workers in shops, factory and offices and thus the nature of domestic service had to change if any girls were to be recruited at all.

There has been increasing interest on the part of feminist historians in the role of domestic service as a form of wage relation within capitalism and the effect on women's paid employment within the capitalist economy. Glucksmann stresses the differences between domestic service employment and capitalist wage labour; domestic labour was neither bought as a commodity nor in order to produce commodities. Being in service was, therefore, a servile relationship of direct personal dependence on an employer. Glucksmann argues that working in a factory was a more "progressive" form of employment for it integrated female work into the "circle of commodity production and consumption". It also extended the wage economy into the working class with the concomitant effects on class relations. Glucksmann argues that the fact that the middle class no longer employed the working class as servants meant that the two classes were no longer in the relationship of employer and employee.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ M Glucksmann, Women Assemble, op cit, p251. The New London Survey confirms that the servant population dropped least in the wealthiest areas.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, Chapter 7

The Women's Industrial Council tried to explain the constant undersupply and unpopularity of this form of work and made apparent the huge difference between the perception of the employers and employees on the subject. Servants referred to the hated uniforms, the lack of liberty and loneliness, the social stigma of this type of employment, the appalling conditions; mistresses believed that it was the ideal form of employment. Some mistresses blamed elementary education for the unpopularity of the work

I have invariably found that the more education, the worse the servant ... I consider the Council education has ruined girls for service, and caused them to be ambitious beyond their capabilities.²⁶¹

The early unpopularity of service had predated the First World War and had already been noticed by contemporaries in the late nineteenth century. Awareness increased drastically in the immediate post-war years and caused enormous consternation amongst social commentators. Service was such a deep rooted part of social class life that even feminists such as Vera Brittain argued simultaneously for increased entry into service whilst stressing that status should be raised so that it became seen as a beneficial type of employment for women.²⁶² The media joined in with the clamour of concern. The Times argued that the happiest working class homes were those in which the wife had at one time been a servant.²⁶³ The Daily Telegraph maintained that servants would be "better wives to their husbands - or if modern taste rejects that old fashioned idiom - they will know how

²⁶¹ C Dyhouse "Working Class Mothers", op cit, p26.

²⁶² The servant problem was a constant theme for many women novelists in this period. See N Beaumann, A Very Great Profession · The Woman's Novel 1914-39, London, Virago, 1989, p102 and p108.

²⁶³ The Times, 8 5 19, 4 8.21, 14 4 28, 18 4.25.

to set about it in a proper way."²⁶⁴ Such was the concern that two national reports on the shortage of servants were published.

Both committees preparing the reports found that the lack of social status of service was a problem as was the fact that the girls had to purchase their own uniforms while men servants were given an allowance. Yet the real root of the problem, both reports stressed, was that domestic work was a skilled profession and as such required training but that such training was not being provided. The Ministry of Reconstruction's Women's Advisory Committee commented on the "totally inadequate amount of facilities for training" and that one of the root causes "that has led to the present low status of domestic service as an occupation is a lack of provision for means of training as will enable a girl to become a skilled worker".²⁶⁵ There was a need to train the intellect of the girl so that she would appreciate the skilled status of her work.²⁶⁶ Similarly in 1923 the Committee appointed "to enquire into the present conditions as to the supply of female domestic servants" found that:

domestic service is a highly skilled occupation. The evidence we have heard leaves no doubts in our minds that the most important question in connection with the solution of the domestic service problem is that of training since it appears to be universally admitted that the standard of home teaching among all classes has greatly depreciated. Although, theoretically, many people consider that all women are potential domestic workers, in practice there is such a strong reluctance to employ untrained women or girls.²⁶⁷

The solution posited by both reports was that schools should provide training for girls.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ The Daily Telegraph, 30 4.19.

²⁶⁵ Ministry of Reconstruction, Report of the Women's Advisory Committee on the Domestic Service Problem, Cmd 67, 1919, p7.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p55

²⁶⁷ Ministry of Labour, Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the present conditions as to the supply of female domestic servants, 1923, p10

²⁶⁸ The committee did not, however, address the key issue of the wages and hours of servants. Dr Marion Phillips withheld her signature over this argument since she believed the major cause of the problem was wages and conditions. There was a continued failure to organise the industry into a trades union.

The national enquiries were not the only bodies which believed that training for domestic service was the route through which the "crisis" could be solved. Domestic training was the only form of instruction offered in the infamous "dole schools" and it was official policy to encourage unemployed women and girls into service. The transference schemes set up by the Ministry of Labour during this period to deal with the young unemployed transferred girls out of areas of the highest unemployment into domestic service jobs in cities. It is clear the Board of Education took the question very seriously.

Officials in London were well aware of the problem. Miss Sanders reported that girls did not go into service because it was "looked down upon as a profession". A survey of London schools in the late thirties stressed that girls lacked understanding of the pleasures that could be gained from housework in good conditions. Several headmistresses reported that the parents wanted their daughters to have a trade for future life, particularly in case their husbands were ever out of work. The Headmistress of one school observed "Parents look upon service as something derogatory ... they belong to the type that speaks of the servant of slavery and they would rather be a machinist out of work than responsible servants in work".²⁶⁹

The concern of the Board of Education about girls refusing service as employment was made apparent as late as Spring 1938 when the Central Women's Advisory Committee of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations sent a confidential memorandum on domestic workers to the Board.²⁷⁰ The report argued that domestic work provided an essential service for the needs of a nation and furnished a practical training for the work which ultimately the vast majority of women would be called upon to do. The

²⁶⁹ ED 11/249 Replies of survey, op cit

²⁷⁰ ED 46/293, The National Union of Conservative and Unionist Association's Central Womens Advisory Committee, Memorandum on Domestic Workers, 9.2.38, op cit, p1.

schools were still not providing "sufficient" preparation. The delegation argued that if the school leaving age was raised more time should be devoted to domestic subjects in schools and that, indeed, if schools devoted more energy to lessons, much would be done to "raise the status of domestic work" in the eyes of girls.²⁷¹

The report is important less in its content than as an example of the many references to this subject in the Board of Education papers. Officials at the Board chronicled in detail the large amount of publicity which surrounded the so called servant crisis.²⁷² The delegation of the Conservative and Unionist women was also significant for its response from the Board. The President immediately dispatched Private Secretary Marris to survey existing provisions in Elementary Schools. Principal Assistant Secretary of the Elementary branch, R S Wood, was himself confused about whether the schools were training girls to be servants and asked HMI Miss Horniblow whether it was "safe to assume that practically nothing is being done in this direction "²⁷³ Wood said that, as he understood the situation, very few girls would wish to extend their full time schooling with a view to domestic service. HMI Miss Horniblow's reply reveals all ambiguities inherent in the policy. She acknowledged the unpopularity of service and accepted that the type of people likely to enter service were not the type who would benefit from an extensive education, especially since they could get places anyway without any advanced instruction at all.

It seems to be assumed by many people that in order to popularise courses for domestic service only Scholarships are needed. The root trouble is that the conditions of domestic service are no longer attractive to normal girls and if

²⁷¹ Ibid p5

²⁷² Ibid, see, for example, details of the huge domestic services exhibition held in January 1938 which took place over a week and included a programme of events including "posture in housework", "how to run a house happily with one servant" and "how to run a house happily with three servants"!

²⁷³ Ibid, RS Wood to HMI Miss Horniblow, 26.5 38.

girls go into domestic service it is because they are forced into it by economic or other circumstances.²⁷⁴

Miss Horniblow concluded that she thought there would be great benefit if every girl on leaving school was compelled to take such a further course.²⁷⁵

From the early days of the state system of schools there had been denials that public elementary school domestic subject courses were linked to preparing for service. Yet during the inter-war years this connection was very often made explicit. In the debate about whether Londoners should be allowed to remove practical subjects teaching from the Elementary School to the Continuation Schools, CWI Miss Wark commented

the Ministry of Labour have been for some time past, and still are, making great efforts to induce women to take up domestic service as their life's work ... the present therefore seems an unfavourable time for the Board to imply, by taking the teaching of domestic subjects out of the Elementary School curriculum, that this subject is not one of the essential fundamental subjects of education.²⁷⁶

Twenty years later the same theme was picked up. Private Secretary Marris scribbled in the margin of a note to Mr Wood that his general impression would be that it was fair to say that training elementary girls for domestic service "is a function which can be and is sometimes undertaken by the senior schools". The 1923 Report to the Ministry of Labour said that the purpose of vocational instruction in schools was not to "train domestic servants" yet paradoxically went on "the most encouraging feature of all is that once a girl is trained

²⁷⁴ Ibid, HMI Miss Horniblow to RS Wood, 10 6.38

²⁷⁵ Ibid, Miss Wood to Horniblow 15.6 38. Mr Wood accepted her invitation to speak on the subject but warned "I expect I may find myself getting over into some general reflections on the education of women and girls, but possibly this will not matter".

²⁷⁶ ED 24/1445 HMI Miss Wark to Cabinet Secretary, 20.5 21.

she appears to rise above the distaste for domestic employment".²⁷⁷ Similarly the Spens Report stated that "the opinion, formerly held by many parents, that these courses provide a training merely for domestic service is contrary to fact"²⁷⁸ and yet maintained that the lessons were indeed excellent training for service.

There were increasing complaints by the mid thirties that elementary school teachers were encouraging girls to think of domestic service as undesirable. President of the Board Stanley replied to one such letter

My own feeling... is that on the whole the schools do not exercise any definite influence against girls entering domestic service.

He thought that the teaching did "give them something of a taste for that kind of work" and reassured the complainant, Mr Turner, that "so far as we have any chance of influencing the position through our Inspectors, we always have in mind the possibilities of domestic service as a suitable form of employment for certain types of girl."²⁷⁹ Stanhope, on succeeding Stanley as President of the Board, was faced with similar complaints and told his officials to impress upon teachers the need to encourage girls to enter domestic service - it must be a more useful career than factory work, or typing or teaching".²⁸⁰

It seems, however, that both parents and girls are too well acquainted with the drudgery of domestic work to be deceived by the eulogising of household chores. From the very early days of the teaching of domestic subjects, sources point towards it being unpopular

²⁷⁷ Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the present conditions as to the supply of female domestic servants, op cit, para 13

²⁷⁸ The Spens Report, op cit, p286

²⁷⁹ ED 11/278 Stanley to Turner, 9 11.36.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, Potts to Stanhope 25.10.37. See also Ainsworth to Pearson 18.6 37. Ainsworth, having investigated the position for the President, found the problem to rest with increased demand rather than decreased supply

with girls and parents alike. There seems to have been little co-operation between the domestic centre, the school and the home but rather a tension and mistrust. The 1907 Report on Cookery said that the subject had been hindered by the lack of co-operation from the parents ²⁸¹ and the 1913 Report on Needlework pointed out that a considerable amount of tact was needed to persuade girls to bring the mending in from home.²⁸² Yoxall records parental opposition to laundry lessons because the mothers thought that very heavy work would be entailed. The 1937 circular on cookery materials stated that the unknown ingredients which were used in lessons were bound to create hostility from the parents.

Few commentators in analysing the unpopularity of service recognised one of the fundamental reasons why pupils viewed it with such distaste as a prospective career. The girls had been performing household tasks at home from a very early age and therefore already had plenty of experience and practice long before they began their domestic lessons.

Miss Bibby, a Sanitary Inspector in St Pancras commented

From the very beginning of childhood they have washed and scrubbed, dusted and polished, nursed babies and bathed babies and rocked babies to sleep, have cooked food, washed clothes, mended holes, made beds and run errands... this has been their childhood and their youth.

One forgets I think how great a part of the housework of London is done by children. Indeed a good many people seem to think that the poor have no housework of their own and if they are not working for other people they must be sitting or standing about doing nothing at all.²⁸³

Thus the great irony of domestic subjects provision in Elementary Schools was that the pupils were being "taught" large doses of "lessons" they already knew.

²⁸¹ Special Report on Cookery, 1907, op cit, p xv.

²⁸² Report on the Teaching of Needlework, 1912, op cit, p10.

²⁸³ H Begbie, The Queen's Net, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1915, p170

Provision reached an apotheosis in the Domestic Trade Schools in London. Historians have paid remarkably little attention to this type of school. Purvis has acknowledged the existence of a small number while Hunt has accepted HMI Miss Johnston's view that the aim of the schools was primarily homemaking. No analysis has been given either to the educational theory behind the courses or to practice within them.²⁸⁴ The domestic courses in the Home Training Schools of London epitomise the gender differentiation which domestic teaching brought into all girls' education in the state sector. In contrast to the constant claims discussed that elementary school instruction did not have a "vocational bias" towards service, there was no suggestion that the domestic lessons in these "advanced" courses were not linked to girls' future vocations in both employment and in the home. Although the courses were comparatively few in number, contemporaries attached a good deal of significance to them - seeing these courses have an intrinsic part of any nationwide state system of girls' education. By 1935 there were two aided and two maintained Housewifery Schools in London and three domestic courses at Trade Schools.²⁸⁵

During the nineteenth century there had been made charitable foundations providing domestic training to needy girls and, indeed, the 1929 Report on Trade and Domestic Schools pointed these out as being the first form of technical training for women. It stated that these institutions had not been seen as part of the education system and were to train girls not for service but for work in their own home.²⁸⁶ The development which occurred in the inter-war years in this type of education was that local education authorities, and particularly the

²⁸⁴ J Purvis, "Domestic Subjects since 1870", op cit, p154-5, F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit, p77.

²⁸⁵ In 1935 the output in the capital was 195 scholarship holders, 14 free places and 41 fee payers taking the one year course.

²⁸⁶ Trade and Domestic Schools for Girls, London, HMSO, 1929, p5

LCC, became involved and encouraged these schools, providing finance and inspections, setting up new ones and generally accepting them as part of the state school system.²⁸⁷

These schools illustrate even more than the domestic subjects courses in the elementary schools do, the inter-war ambivalence about how far a girl needed to be trained for her true vocation ie, marriage and motherhood. The home training courses were supposed to be part of a technical system teaching skills for employment and had to be portrayed as imparting to working class girls appropriate lessons over and above the massive dose of domestic instruction they were already receiving in the ordinary Elementary Schools. Yet in spite of an attempt in London to "re-skill" domestic subjects, in reality the domestic courses simply gave the girls a larger "dose" of the lessons they had received in their elementary school. In spite of frequent denials, these schools' primary purpose was to train working class girls to be domestic servants and then to be wives and mothers. Thus even in their "advanced" form domestic subjects remained of low status. Policy in Domestic Trade schools was guided by the conviction that a girl's life in paid employment would be short and ill rewarded. The real educational value of the "skills" taught was minimal. The schools' existence therefore underlines the central theme of this study that when advanced vocational training was offered to working class girls during the inter-war years, it was not of a liberal, educative type but of a practical utilitarian type. The assumption was that the social function of the schools in preparing the girls to be good wives and mothers was more important than any truly educational function.

There were two types of establishment which offered advanced domestic courses for girls - and contemporaries, even officials at the Board of Education, seem to have been

²⁸⁷ For example, the Campden Technical Institute's Home Training Institute was subsidised to the tune of £40 per girl per annum.

greatly confused by the exact differences. Firstly there were the Junior Housewifery Schools whose function was primarily "homemaking".²⁸⁸ These were, in the words of the ATDS to

provide an avenue of escape for those girls who, with only a mediocre standard of general education and no marked inclination at 14 for any particular form of work, tend to drift into blind alley occupations.²⁸⁹

The second type of school were the girls' Trade Schools which provided domestic courses, the aims of which were allegedly to train cooks, nursemaids and domestic servants.²⁹⁰ In the words of HMI Miss Horniblow these were "fundamentally different" from the Housewifery Schools; "the girls are not being prepared for any particular branch of domestic work" but nearly all went into cooking, child nursery or general domestic service. Although, she added, some of the Junior Housewifery school pupils did go into employment, many simply went on to run their own home.²⁹¹

Within this equation it was quite clear that the Junior Housewifery Schools were seen as being of a lower educational standard than the domestic Trade School courses. The Junior Housewifery Schools may have had an entrance exam but this would hardly be regarded as competitive since there were always more places than applicants.

It could hardly be expected that the standard of either educational attainments or general capacity of the entrance should be equal to those selected for the LCC Girls Trade Schools since the latter are intended to provide a larger and

²⁸⁸ ED10/151, Paper U5(8), Memorandum of Evidence on Technical Schools for Girls, HMI Miss H Johnston, undated (1934)

²⁸⁹ ED10/152 Memorandum ATDS to Consultative Committee, undated.

²⁹⁰ There were other trade or technical schools which prepared girls for employment in the needletrades. These are analysed in Chapter Four. For reasons of clarity only the domestic trade schools are discussed in this section

²⁹¹ ED10/152 (Paper U 33), Memorandum on Girls' Junior Technical School and Junior Housewifery School, Miss Horniblow, undated (1936). Miss Johnston confirms this - see ED 10/151, paper U.6(8), Summary of Oral Evidence, Miss Johnson, 26.1.34.

more complete training for entrance to skilled trades ... an ambitious and capable girl would try to get into a Girls Trade School in preference to this.²⁹²

Yet despite the difference between the two types of school all policy makers were convinced that both varieties were "advanced" and "vocational". They had, in the words of HMI Miss Cox, the "ultimate advantage of being able to take working class girls when they are trainable and ripe for vocational study".²⁹³ This comment, of course, conflicted with the recognition mentioned above that the age of 14 or 15 was exactly that at which the girl would at least want to consider training for homework. As HMI Miss Manley commented

From the age of 14 to 16 housecraft is not necessarily the subject that appeals most to girls. At that age girls are beginning to think of themselves as individuals and to study their own appearance.²⁹⁴

The Board of Education's view of the difference between the two types of schools is made clear in a letter from HMI Miss Horniblow to R S Wood in 1938 in which she defined the Trade Schools as preparing definitely for industrial and domestic occupations as distinct from the general domestic training given by the Housewifery Schools.²⁹⁵ She agreed that this distinction was extremely confusing and argued that they all should be classed as Junior Technical Schools "so as to abolish their uncertain status in the Office and in the country".²⁹⁶

²⁹² EO/HFE/4/137 Report of HMI for period ending 31.7.31 on Campden Technical Institute Junior Housewifery School

²⁹³ ED136/109, Note HMI Miss Cox, op cit, p7.

²⁹⁴ ED24/1445, Memorandum Miss Manley, 19 5 21, op cit, p6. For a discussion of this point see p134-5

²⁹⁵ In this category she included North Western Polytechnic, the Newcomen, the Bluecoat, South East London Technical Institute, Hammersmith Trade School, Borough Polytechnic and Wandsworth Trade Schools

²⁹⁶ HMI Miss Horniblow to Wood, 20 6 38 and 18.7 38.

Miss Sanders of the LCC did not have any qualms about the role she perceived for training schools in London. She divided the occupations for which the courses prepared girls into three categories, the highly skilled, the semi skilled and domestic employment.

There is little to be said about the training given for domestic employment, except that the Trade School provides a bridge over the difficult age gap between 14 and 16. It is a common place that girls cannot be absorbed into a good type of domestic employment before 16 and that as they enter other occupations in the interval they seldom go into service later. Girls trained for domestic employment in London do extremely well ... and a good proportion remain in service.²⁹⁷

In practice both types of school, of which there were ten by 1929, offered similar courses in London. It is quite clear that teachers, inspectors and Board officials saw a specific niche for these establishments in training servants. In 1923 CWI Miss Wark requested information about day to day provision in domestic subjects with the purpose of distinguishing if the preparation was for entry into general or specific domestic service.²⁹⁸ She wanted to establish whether the aims of the courses were being achieved. In the same year, when the LCC was considering taking over the Kidbrooke Home Training School in Blackheath, their reluctance was not about the function of the school in training servants but that the trustees of the charity wanted to use fallen girls for such training. It was, in the words of Mr Simmonds, a case of taking "the sheep's money and handing it over to the goats". Eventually it was agreed that the school should be affiliated to the Greenwich Girls Home and Orphanage which had an "insufficient supply of inmates".²⁹⁹

There were constant references to the success of the schools in training servants. The HMI noted at that the new Domestic Training School at the South East London Technical

²⁹⁷ ED10/152, Paper U13, Memorandum Miss H Sanders on the subject of apprenticeship and rates of wages in relation to pupils in London Trade Schools for Girls and in Junior Technical Schools for Girls, undated.

²⁹⁸ ED22/143/556, Memorandum TG1459/23, 22 11 23 [My emphasis - SJK].

²⁹⁹ ED37/561, Simmonds to Baker, 4 5.23

Institute in 1934 that fully 40% of the girls were entering an occupation of a domestic nature at the end of their training. They were consequently concerned that the course should be two years long in order to train the girls properly.³⁰⁰ When the Bluecoat Domestic Trade School reopened in 1927 with LCC support the Inspectors viewed the school's role as being to provide candidates for "domestic service of a high grade". The prospectus issued to parents stated that any intelligent girl wishing to train for a high grade of domestic employment could apply.³⁰¹

In the early twenties, when concern about the shortage of servants was at its peak, a high level conference took place within the LCC. It was attended both by Education Officer Blair and representatives of the Ministry of Labour, its aim being to consider whether more LCC trade scholarships should be earmarked for domestic training and whether the girls of elementary schools should be prepared for such scholarships in their last year. The recommendation made was that "a full time one year's course of training should be provided for girls"; it was to be training of a general character but more specialised in the last three months with training being as practical as possible. It was also recommended that there should be part-time training for girls having to remain at home but who were "anxious to go into service".³⁰² Miss Sanders, having acknowledged the unpopularity of service, suggested that more two year trade courses in the subject should be opened as soon as possible. In 1922 a trainee scheme was approved making more provision at schools with "live in" facilities.³⁰³ A uniform should be provided and worn so as to accustom the girls

³⁰⁰ ED114/561, Report of HMI on the Greenwich Blue-Coat School for Girls, Jan 1931, p1.

³⁰¹ ED98/243, Prospectus of the Bluecoat School, undated.

³⁰² EO/GEN/4/12, Conference on Training Girls for Domestic Service, p15

³⁰³ Ibid, Memorandum of Meeting, 27 6 22

to wearing suitable clothes and "assist them to realise that the uniform usually worn by domestic workers was the one most suited to the nature of their occupation and not in any sense "a badge of servitude".³⁰⁴

It was recognised that it was the residential aspect of service which women hated most and the home training schools and domestic courses attempted to tackle this problem. The four schools in South East London operated a "living in" period during the second year to accustom girls to "a residential practice". At the Newcomen School the time spent varied from between six to ten weeks according to the girl's career speciality.³⁰⁵

The success of these courses was quantified by the wages which ex-pupils could obtain. HMI commented in 1924 that girls leaving the Newcomen School in Southwark obtained "very good places with good wages".³⁰⁶ Although a few had been tempted by munitions work during the war, most of them returned to service afterwards. The Headmistress of the school interviewed prospective mistresses, saw the rooms where the girls would sleep and asked that they should have a little free time daily.³⁰⁷ Similarly the girls leaving the Bluecoat school in Greenwich took posts, usually in the West End, "at an initial wage of 24 to 30 pounds per year, with a rise within a few months". The school's prospectus in the late twenties told parents to expect £26 to £30 per annum as a starting wage.³⁰⁸ There was always emphasis that a girl of 16 rather than of 14 would secure far

³⁰⁴ EO/GEN/4/12, Note 3.7 22, p49.

³⁰⁵ ED114/615, Report of HMI on Southwark Newcomen Trade School for Girls, June 1924

³⁰⁶ Ibid, p4.

³⁰⁷ Ibid

³⁰⁸ ED98/243, Bluecoat School Prospectus, op cit

better employment. This was undoubtedly true; what is less clear is whether the instruction in school in itself ensured better opportunities.

Much was made of the fact that the pupils were being trained for a career, a "speciality". HMI Miss Johnston, when asked by the Consultative Committee in 1934 why these courses were unpopular, said that much had already been done to raise their status and to convince their clientele that the junior housewifery course was useful throughout life as well as for the purpose of livelihood.³⁰⁹ She believed that soon more and more girls would be entering service because of "the improvements in conditions". She hoped that it was increasingly being recognised as a good career for girls.

At the Newcomen School girls specialised as cooks, house parlour maids or nursery maids. Statistics showing whether the girls did actually enter their chosen field are few and it is interesting that the Headmistress of the Newcomen School, who did keep some figures, had only one classification for domestic service rather than groups relating to each "speciality", as might have been expected given the arguments noted above. Of the 42 girls who left the Bluecoat school in the late twenties, 16 went into kitchen work, 18 became parlour maids, 7 nursery maid, 1 became a housekeeper at home, and 5 became shop girls.³¹⁰ The prospectus of the school suggested that the two years of training would enable the girl to by-pass the usual practice of working one's way up from the bottom of the service ladder.

Girls should be prepared to stay two years in their first post. The lowest place in a large staff usually provides the best experience at this stage ... the skilled domestic worker need never fear unemployment and after the age of

³⁰⁹ ED/10/151, Paper U6(8), Oral Evidence Miss Johnston, op cit, 26 1 34

³¹⁰ ED114/561, Report of HMI on the Greenwich Bluecoat School for Girls, Jan 1931, p4

18 a more advanced and varied outlook becomes possible for the ambitious girl.³¹¹

The examples given of such outlooks were of a nursery maid becoming a children's nurse or a ladies' maid becoming an assistant in a creche. Similarly house, parlour and kitchen maids could become head of their respective departments. Small houses and flats offered opportunities for those who preferred to work singlehanded.³¹² The statistics kept for the Newcomen's pupils between 1913 and 1931 showed that the girls did indeed go overwhelmingly into domestic service, 54% were in service in 1931, 24% were married, 4.6% were doing clerical jobs, 3.7% were in shops, and 1% were in a needle trade.³¹³

Thus the home training school pupils did find employment, employment that may well have been better paid if they had left school at 14 and gone straight into service. The hierarchy amongst servants, so strong in the nineteenth century, endured during these years.³¹⁴ It is possible that for some girls starting work as parlour maid or nursemaid was a real achievement. This was, however, a time of servant shortage. What distinguishes the instruction they received was not the skills they were actually taught but the fact that ordinary servant's and, indeed, traditional women's work was described and portrayed as being skilled.

A classic example of this was the "re-skilling" of laundry in the schools' curricula. Laundry had long been unpopular and as early as 1898 a number of commercial laundries, impressed by London's teaching of washing, approached the School Board in the hope that

³¹¹ ED98/243, Bluecoat School Prospectus, op cit.

³¹² Ibid

³¹³ EO/HFE/5/87, Report by the Council's Inspectors of a full inspection of the Newcomen School held during the week ended 6 April 1935.

³¹⁴ See P Malcolmson, English Laundresses A Social History 1850-1930, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986.

they would be able to get apprentices for their unpopular trade.³¹⁵ There were constant attempts to stress how different the new skilled laundry work was to the traditional type.³¹⁶ The 1929 Report on the Trade Schools for Girls accepted that the subject was not popular with girls.

It is a skilled trade in which conditions have improved enormously and a good ironer is sure of steady employment and high wages. No doubt, like domestic service, laundry work is suffering from the traditions of the past and it may take some years before it is rehabilitated in the estimation of the girl worker.³¹⁷

A 1937 choice of occupation leaflet published by the Board warned that this was not the trade for anyone with a weak heart or flat feet but stated that it was good work for a girl of average intelligence and the ability to work quickly.³¹⁸ The reports on individual schools echoed this concern. At Borough Polytechnic the laundry course did not attract as many girls as the other options although there is no difficulty in obtaining professional employment by pupils of these classes. This is probably on account of "the traditional distaste for the work once carried out in very different conditions to those which prevail in modern laundries".³¹⁹

It was hoped by the Inspectors that the pupils would become more enthusiastic and dependable if preparation for paid laundry work was correlated explicitly with washing lessons. At the Newcomen School, therefore, the Inspectors were worried that the teacher

³¹⁵ GLRO/SBL/708 Minutes of Sub-Committee on Domestic Subjects, 1898, p321.

³¹⁶ See EO/HFE/3/5. In 1917 the trade thought that one remedy for the unpopularity would be to adopt minimum wages but the wages in fact adopted were still at unskilled levels.

³¹⁷ Trade and Domestic Schools for Girls, op cit, p14

³¹⁸ Ministry of Labour Choice of Occupation Leaflet 4, The Laundry Trade, September 1937, p3.

³¹⁹ ED/114/612, Report of HMI on the Southwark Borough Polytechnic Institute, Jan 1926, p27-8.

was not emphasising the vocational aspect of the training.³²⁰ The girls destined for various specialities were not receiving the training to fit them for their work. The parlour maids needed more practice in caring for fine linen and the nursery maids in caring for children's clothes. The lessons were in practice, the Inspectors felt, as simple as the laundry taught in elementary schools and classes revolved around the personal laundry of the residents.³²¹

Indeed, analysis of the curricula of these schools suggest that, despite all the claims of advanced training, the pupils simply spent more time on an even bigger dose of the very basic practical lessons they had received in their Elementary Schools. The needlework curriculum seemed to have consisted of sewing the garments the girls would need for their future uniform as servants. At the Newcomen School the girls made 26 uniform items over the course and the inspector considered it a shame that this meant that they did not have a chance to learn any infantile household sewing.³²² At the Bluecoat there was concern that future nursery maids were not doing any children's mending and were only making a "meagre" number of garments for their uniform.

It was in the cooking syllabus that the girls suffered most. At Hammersmith Trade School in 1930 the girls were spending 20 hours a week for two years in the kitchen and, although the Inspectors claimed that they were becoming fairly efficient in preparing meals, they commented that more attention was being given to tidiness than to food. The girls were

³²⁰ EO/HFE/5/87, Report by Council's Inspectors of a Full Inspection of the Newcomen School held during the week ended 6th April 1935, op cit, p4.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² ED/114/615, Report of HMI on Southwark Newcomen Trade School of Girls, June 1924, op cit

also given two hours practical science related to the cookery as most of the girls had never done any science before.³²³

In the Home Training Schools the problem of producing school lunches was exaggerated; not only did girls have to produce the midday meal, they also had to clean the schools and do all the laundry arising from it. At the Newcomen School the girls were entirely responsible for the upkeep of three houses, two of which housed staff and pupils and one of which took paying guests.³²⁴ At the Bluecoat School in 1931 the HMI noted that the routine work was heavy as the kitchen, laundry and cloakrooms all had to be cleaned everyday. The girls also had to do all the school's washing and cook 60 dinners a day.³²⁵ This left little time for the specialised instruction future cooks, nursery maids and parlour maids might need. The solution was seen to be in producing more luxury goods which could then be sold!

If the Headmistress could occasionally obtain orders from local residents for cooked food, as she now does the cakes and marmalade, it would afford the girls' desirable practice in preparing more elaborate dishes from time to time.³²⁶

Concern about the cost of materials also arose at the Domestic Economy school at the Borough Polytechnic. The Inspectors noted that:

³²³ EO/HFE/4/152 Report of HMI on the Hammersmith LCC Trade School for Girls for the period ending 31 7 30

³²⁴ ED 114/615 Report of HMI on Southwark Newcomen Trade School, January 1926, op cit See also EO/HFE/4/137 for the difficulties of preparing 50 dinners a day at Campden Technical Institute.

³²⁵ ED 114/561, Report of HMI on the Greenwich Bluecoat School for Girls, January 1931.

³²⁶ ED 98/243, Report by the Council's Inspectors on the Greenwich Bluecoat School for Girls of a full inspection held during the week ended 18 May 1935, p3

The lack of speed in cooking is due in some measure to the spinning out of the work, to avoid the use of too much material as mistresses fear an adverse balance of their accounts if the cooked food cannot be sold.³²⁷

Given the enormous amount of time spent of a very practical routine of domestic chores, it is hardly surprising that the magazine of the girls' day trade school at North Western Polytechnic reported that the domestic class's reading circle had enjoyed Galsworthy's Escape! as a form of relaxation.³²⁸

Although these schools allegedly provided general education beyond the elementary level, this was extremely limited and consisted of basic English and Arithmetic. This was not the experience of the boys' junior technical schools where well over a third of the curriculum was always devoted to general subjects.³²⁹ In the girls' schools there was always just one teacher who provided all the general subjects teaching along with singing and physical exercise. There was no great expectation of achievement from the girl pupils. At the South East Technical Institute in Lewisham the aim of the English lesson was to teach the girls to speak clearly and write simply and "progress appeared to be very slow but steady".³³⁰ At the Newcomen School discussions in class were "hampered" by the limited vocabulary of the girls and their general inarticulateness. In English, as in Arithmetic, the aim was to teach the girls very limited lessons:

The future interests of the pupils attending this school are altogether practical, the object of their English studies is to stimulate intelligent interest in thinking and reading about matters of general importance to every day life and to train

³²⁷ ED 114/612, Report of HMI on the Southwark Borough Polytechnic Institute, January 1926, , op cit, p27
The need to provide school dinners also meant that the school girls have a long lunch hour thus delaying the girls' return to their duties at home. See ED114/561.

³²⁸ EO/HFE/12/8 The Magazine of the Girls Day Trade School at North Western Polytechnic, Session 1930-31.

³²⁹ For a full discussion see Chapter 4

³³⁰ ED114/592, Report of HMI on the Lewisham LCC South East London Technical Institute, 1934, p13

the girls to express themselves --- rather than to aim at academic achievements.³³¹

Arithmetic tended to be of the domestic kind. At the Newcomen it was based entirely on household accounts while at the Bluecoat the lessons were a revision of the elementary course with application to the matters the girls would come across as housekeepers.³³² The LCC inspectors were especially impressed with this and declared that the application of such lessons "could hardly fail to secure a well balanced family budget".³³³

The girls' schools were disadvantaged in their premises, further conveying the message of low status. A report on the new South East London Institute described the premises as "an excellent example of good planning". It spoke of the well equipped laboratories for the boys and men, the photometry and metallurgical rooms, whilst for the girls there was only the laundry, the kitchen and a room for school dinners.³³⁴ At the Newcomen the cookery was a passage way from one part of the school to another³³⁵ while at Borough Polytechnic the Inspectors noted that it was undesirable to have girls ironing in a dark drafty entrance hall. At the Bluecoat cramped conditions were hampering lessons. The floor in the room where the girls exercised was so unsound that jumping was not allowed while an even greater problem was the local boys who threw things over the school boundary and made a nuisance of themselves.³³⁶

³³¹ ED114/615, Report of HMI on the Southwark Newcomen Trade School For Girls, June 1924, op cit.

³³² Ibid

³³³ ED98/243, Report by the Council's Inspectors on a Full Inspection of the Greenwich Bluecoat School for Girls held during the week ended 18 May 1935, op cit, p2.

³³⁴ ED114/592, Report of HMI on the Lewisham LCC South East London Technical Institute, 1934.

³³⁵ ED114/561, Report of HMI on the Greenwich Bluecoat School for Girls, Jan 1931, op cit

³³⁶ ED98/243, Report by the Council's Inspectors on a full inspection of the Greenwich Bluecoat School, op cit, May 1935

Despite the supposed attempts to raise the status of domestic courses, their low position on the educational hierarchy was compounded by the place they occupied in the hierarchy of trade scholarships. There was a very well structured trade scholarship system through which pupils had to take exams before entry to the schools. Pupils were allowed to specify their favourite trade, but were not guaranteed the offer of a scholarship in that particular line.³³⁷ It seems that scholarships in the domestic subjects were the very bottom of the list, only offered to the girls who performed least well in the examination. Miss Horniblow stated in 1934,

When the scholarship lists are available, the highest on the list are given places in the needletrade schools and the lowest of the successful candidates are offered places in the domestic trade schools.³³⁸

Those who failed to get these scholarships could then enter with others for entry into the housewifery schools. In the early 1930s, when there was great discussion about the changing of the scholarship exam, it was agreed that there should be no minimum attainment for those who wished to apply for the domestic trade courses.³³⁹ Although it was accepted that these domestic courses should have scholarships awarded to them, and although R S Wood claimed in 1938 that "since scholarships and special places were available, domestic training is not put at a disadvantage as compared with other types of vocational education"³⁴⁰, in reality domestic subjects were often seen as hardly worthy of an award. Headmistresses of schools in poorer areas of London often complained that their pupils, who

³³⁷ For a full discussion see Chapter Four.

³³⁸ ED10/152, Memorandum Miss Horniblow, op cit, p2-3

³³⁹ EO/HFE/3/5, Notes of Meeting 15.9 31 See also Note 20.2.32 in which Miss Sanders agreed that there should be different standards of attainment in drawing, for photography a score of 60% was needed, for embroidery 50% and for domestic trade, 35%

³⁴⁰ ED46/293 Wood to Marris, 6 7.38.

wished to win scholarships in the needletrades or dressmaking, were only ever awarded cookery or domestic bursaries.³⁴¹ Thus any attempt to really elevate the status of domestic subjects and thus to alter perception of domestic service was bound to fail.

The fees at these schools were higher than those asked at the other Trade Schools. At the South Eastern Technical Institute fees were £6 per year, while in the late twenties the Bluecoat School's fees were £3 15 shillings per annum. These figures may seem low but it must be remembered that each school served only a small area and that this was a significant sum of money for working class parents who also had to forego the girls' wages for two years. There is some suggestion in the Board of Education papers that the fee paying girls were not working class and that often pupils were "girls of good social status whose parents were sending them to a technical institute to put on time". Miss Horniblow claimed pupils came not only from Elementary Schools but also from Secondary Schools, private schools and abroad.³⁴² Girls were taking subjects such as cookery as a form of extended education, not with any vocational purpose. This may well have been the case in some instances but the figures quoted above about the proportion of girls who did actually go into service at the end of the courses would suggest however this is not a full explanation of parents who were willing to pay for the courses. It is also notable that although most of the students were scholarship holders, these awards only extended to one year while in the session 1933-34 seventy five in attendance had extended attendance to two years.³⁴³

³⁴¹ See, for example, EO/HFE/3/5, See also The London Gazette 9.6.19 "Myopia will not necessarily disqualify a candidate for a scholarship in Domestic subjects"

³⁴² ED10/152, Paper U.33, Memorandum Miss Horniblow HMI on Girls' Junior Technical and Junior Housewifery Schools

³⁴³ The majority of these would therefore have been fee payers.

It may be, of course, that some of the girls in attendance were sent there by their parents to learn to be the good wives and mothers. It is clear that there was no attempt to deny that this was one of the purposes of the schools - indeed they were called junior housewifery schools. Miss Johnston had told the Consultative Committee that the aim of these schools was to concentrate on the subjects connected with the household. The Spens Report stated specifically that the schools were excellent training for home duties. Education Officer Rich made this even more explicit when he spoke of home training "performing a valuable piece of social work".³⁴⁴ When in September 1931 a course for thirty girls was started at the South Eastern Technical Institute it offered "practical training in the management of a home".³⁴⁵

Contemporary comments suggest, however, that this type of course remained deeply unpopular. HMI Miss Johnston, in her report to the Consultative Committee in 1934, said that it was difficult to account for the lack of support which the schools received in England compared with those on the continent. She felt this was "largely a matter of tradition". For a time all domestic work had been considered to be derogatory.³⁴⁶

Yet whatever the intentions, the messages which the girls took away from these lessons during the inter-war years were diverse and complex. Surveys of the earlier and later period show that the influence of home predominated over school and although sometimes lessons might complement examples of home, there was often conflict.³⁴⁷ Elizabeth

³⁴⁴ EO/HFE/4/137, Meeting with Trustees 13 11.31 and 2 12.31.

³⁴⁵ R Bourne and P Latham, Artifex Semper Auxilio, Stroud, Allan Sutton Publishing, 1991, p44.

³⁴⁶ ED10/151, Paper U.6(8), Oral Evidence Miss Johnston, op cit, p4.

³⁴⁷ See A Turnbull, "Women Education and Domesticity", op cit, E Roberts, A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940, Oxford, Blackwell, 1984.

Roberts's research amongst women of Lancashire shows how they believed they absorbed the nature of the role of being a working class woman at home.

They are unanimous in the belief that it was their mother's training which was of real value and that they learned little or nothing at school.³⁴⁸

The home supplied lessons through the attitudes of mothers, through relationships with fathers and brothers, through local conventions on daughterly behaviour. St John has suggested that the effect of the First World War was to strengthen the role of the home in a girl's life.³⁴⁹

The memories of the women interviewed for this study reveal very different perceptions of classroom practice from those of the policymakers. Women talking about their schooldays in London dismiss the frequent lessons in domesticity as irrelevant to their future lives. The lessons themselves were recalled in detail. Ivy recounted tales of three afternoons each week at Holmes Road Domestic Centre.

We did all sorts - beds - oh, you'll laugh, tea leaves on the carpet and sweeping them up. Took hours. Then laundry - blue bag rinse, starching and then you wrote it up as it dried.³⁵⁰

Millicent's school, Grove Lane Elementary, had a separate "little house which we polished over and over, and then we made pastry."³⁵¹ Phyllis recalled learning "laying the table nicely" while Doris and her friends "used to see who could make the most soap suds when the teacher wasn't looking".³⁵²

³⁴⁸ Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, op cit, p16.

³⁴⁹ D St John, "The Guidance and Influencing", op cit, p109.

³⁵⁰ Interview Ivy with Sarah King 1988.

³⁵¹ Interview Millicent with Sarah King 1988

³⁵² Age Exchange, *Good Morning Children*, London, Age Exchange Publications, 1988, p45

The women do remember the very high proportion of the time which was spent on domestic lessons. As Kate recalled

Well you did it over and over really, the best bit was the walk to the Centre. I remember that well, we did have a giggle. You always knew it was a day when you were going to be cooking.³⁵³

Yet the sheer amount of time spent on domestic lessons was not perceived by the women as either preparation for employment or marriage. The overwhelming impression was that, whatever the intention behind them, the "lessons were all a bit of a lark".³⁵⁴ They were certainly not relevant or useful in the way that boys' practical lessons were. Ellen, when asked what her twin brother did during the afternoons, replied

The boys did useful things - more sensible - made breadbins, shelves - sort of things useful for a trade.³⁵⁵

Jephcott found a similar reaction in her study of London girls

I wish they taught you something a bit useful. This comment, I wish they taught you something a bit useful is indicative of the patience with which a good many girls at work look back on their final years at school.³⁵⁶

The lessons were regarded as sometimes enjoyable but were still not taken seriously or seen as connected to real life. Joan remembers how she appreciated the food the school provided for cookery.

All the food was beautiful - lovely, apple balls - when did I ever have apples?³⁵⁷

³⁵³ Interview Kate with Sarah King 1993

³⁵⁴ Interview Ivy with Sarah King, 1988.

³⁵⁵ Interview Ellen with Sarah King 1988

³⁵⁶ P. Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, op cit, p49.

³⁵⁷ Interview Joan with Sarah King 1988

Ellen also enjoyed cookery

Cookery was fun. A proper gas cooker - not the sort of thing we had at home - but it was good, better than work.³⁵⁸

Annie has less happy memories

On no, it wasn't fun. It was all vegetables, peeling vegetables, potatoes, carrots, more potatoes. That's what cooking was.³⁵⁹

Food prepared in cookery lessons was often served to the teachers at lunchtime and a favourite game seems to have been to snatch a mouthful from the plate as it was carried across to the staff room. The women interviewed recall the monotonous preparation of dinners for needy children, particularly peeling potatoes - although one or two specifically point out even today that they themselves did not receive the meals. It is a source of some pride even today that their families were not "that poor".

Just as domestic lessons were not perceived as proper work, domestic teachers do not seem to have commanded respect. Ellen was taught by Miss Cuthbertson, "elderly, thin on top, not really A1 if you know what I mean?".³⁶⁰ Margaret had a German teacher, "she was funny, used to tick us off properly but such a funny thing."³⁶¹ The social class messages which were transferred in pupils' relationships with their elementary school teachers, were, similarly conveyed with the domestic subjects teacher. These women were "a race apart from us, from our mums".³⁶² Ellen remembers that

³⁵⁸ Interview Ellen with Sarah King 1988.

³⁵⁹ Interview Annie with Sarah King, 1993.

³⁶⁰ Interview Ellen with Sarah King, 1988

³⁶¹ Interview Margaret with Sarah King 1988

³⁶² Interview Lena with Sarah King 1988

You never spoke to a teacher outside school - I thought they were ever so rich, above you, you know.³⁶³

The sense of separation was compounded by the fact that the vast majority of the teachers were single. Most of the respondents made comments similar to that of Ivy "they were nearly all Miss".³⁶⁴ To working class girls socialised from an early age by their communities as well as their schools into expectations of marriage and motherhood, this seemed strange. When Miss Mundy of Maryon Park School married it was, "really one-off. You never heard of a teacher getting married".³⁶⁵

All the women recalled hours spent on samplers and making "horrendous underwear" in sewing lessons. Joan, at an open air school at New Cross, resorted regularly to losing her needle in the grass in an attempt to escape lessons. Rose spent two terms making a tea towel and "had a deep sense of failure at never having achieved a crinoline lady".³⁶⁶ William who was a pupil at the Woolwich Polytechnic Junior Trade School was not sure what the girls did in the adjoining girls' school but he remembered that "there was always dressmaking".³⁶⁷ Several women, however, perceived sewing as being more "useful" than other domestic lessons, an interesting feature given the traditional acceptance of women's employment in needlework trades. Margaret, in answer to the question why sewing was more important said

³⁶³ Interview Ellen with Sarah King 1988

³⁶⁴ Interview Ivy with Sarah King 1988.

³⁶⁵ Interview Ellen with Sarah King, 1988.

³⁶⁶ R Naylor, Chelsea Child, op cit, p152.

³⁶⁷ Interview William with Sarah King, 1988.

It seemed a bit more useful - you know you - or they did - worked in a factory until you got married - and usually a garment factory. Clothes seemed important.³⁶⁸

Ellen felt that sewing was "something to get a trade for".³⁶⁹

Rejection of domestic lessons was often in a more concrete form than simply not taking them seriously. Several women recall their mothers positively dismissing the lessons rather than passively accepting what their daughters were supposed to be learning. This was particularly so given the feeling that these lessons were pushing girls towards domestic service. Jane remembers that

My parents thought domestic service was a last resort - although at school you got a lot of it.³⁷⁰

Ivy recalled

My mother wouldn't let me go into service "no daughter of mine" - she said so I went to the factory.³⁷¹

Jane's sister Lena received the same messages from home.

I didn't go to school when we had laundry. Mother said she wasn't having me touching other girls' stockings.³⁷²

That same mother refused to give Jane a bowl in which to transport rice pudding so she arrived home with it wrapped in newspaper. Similarly, Ellen's mother would only allow her to take towels to laundry lessons and Margaret was given only handkerchieves which were re-washed as soon as she got home.

³⁶⁸ Interview Margaret with Sarah King 1988

³⁶⁹ Interview Ellen with Sarah King 1988

³⁷⁰ Interview Jane with Sarah King 1988

³⁷¹ Interview Ivy with Sarah King, 1988

³⁷² Interview Lena with Sarah King 1988.

Yet the rejection of domestic lessons did not imply rejection of domesticity per se. The women nearly all recall with affection learning skills from their mothers of how to do the household chores. Millicent remembers that "we learnt by observing". Ellen's mother taught her the proper way to do things - she was "known by her washing".³⁷³ The women generally accepted the gender division of labour in the home; all equated domesticity with marriage and do not recall ever having contemplated making a career in some form of employment.³⁷⁴ Dorothy who attended a housewifery centre each Friday knew the teacher would prepare girls not for employment but

to be good wives, from a financial point of view, of course, to a working man.³⁷⁵

It may be argued that this is evidence of the girls acceptance of their ultimate vocation. It can also be viewed as a form of resistance - turning society's concept of femininity into a weapon with which to escape from monotonous, unskilled jobs - even if domesticity itself turned out to be monotonous.

The memories of the women who attended Elementary School in London suggest that as young women they did not perceive school as relevant to adult working life - even though they knew family circumstances made employment a necessity. All the women stressed the importance of the family network in obtaining work. Joan, for example, ignored the recommendation of the leaving certificate that she should aim for a low level office job and went to work in a factory packing Epsom Salts with a friend.

³⁷³ Interview Lena with Sarah King 1988

³⁷⁴ This is to be contrasted with the memories of secondary and central school girls See Chapter Five

³⁷⁵ D Scannell, Mother Knew Best, An East End Childhood, London, Macmillan, 1978, p142.

Even if you wanted to do other things your family put their word in and you had to do it.³⁷⁶

Ellen remembers that "you all just got a job where you could and mother saw an advert for me".³⁷⁷ Ivy went through three jobs in six weeks and Millicent lasted two weeks in several jobs before ending up as a milliner "by chance". Winnie's mother paid a lady £3 to get Winnie "in" as a carpet sewer at Harrods³⁷⁸ while Dorothy knew she had to get up early the morning after she left school to "choose a job from The Daily Telegraph".³⁷⁹ Emily hadn't liked sewing at school but a chance remark by a woman cleaner to her mother about an embroidery factory put her on the path to her first job.³⁸⁰ Many thought that school was "alright but it didn't make a lot of difference to your job. As long as they said you were on a level".³⁸¹ Thus the girls do seem to have internalised the message from both school and home that paid employment was a short term necessity, not a source of self-esteem or good economic prospects but a temporary step along the road to inevitable domesticity.

³⁷⁶ Interview Joan with Sarah King, 1988

³⁷⁷ Interview Ellen with Sarah King

³⁷⁸ Winnie Nicholls in All For A Crust Accounts of Women's Work Through the Years, The Good Old Days, Oral History Group, p2.

³⁷⁹ D Scannell, Mother Knew Best, op cit, p142.

³⁸⁰ Peoples Autobiography of Hackney, Working Lives 1905-45, Memories of Emily Bishop.

³⁸¹ Ibid, Memories of Mary Welsh, p52

SCHOOL OR WORKSHOP?
THE GIRLS' TRADE AND JUNIOR TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

In 1937 Miss Crosby of the NUWT visited an exhibition about the work of the Junior Technical Schools in London. She was struck by the differentiation in provision and practice between the schools for girls and boys and the domestic orientation of the girls' instruction. Miss Crosby felt that much remained to be done before parity between girls' and boys' technical instruction was achieved in London and perceived a clear link between the school and subsequent employment opportunities.

We should like to see London leading the way in preparing its girl citizens to enter the better paid trades and so incidentally helping to raise the whole standard of women's work and wages ... the status of women in the industrial world of the future will depend in a large measure upon the equality of opportunity offered to boys and girls in these schools. Let us see that traditional barriers are removed and that the girls have their chance.¹

This chapter will examine the operation of the girls' junior technical schools in London during the two decades before Miss Crosby's judgement. Despite the LCC's "proud boast" that in London all could receive technical instruction according to their needs and abilities, the schools provided girls with a form of technical instruction which severely limited their opportunities in paid employment.² A contemporary judgement that the girls left Junior Technical Schools "still only semi-skilled with a great deal to learn" seems to have been startlingly accurate.³

The Trade and Junior Technical Schools did provide a form of post compulsory schooling for working class girls, which was a very new development in the inter-war years.

¹ The Woman Teacher, 26.2.37, p191

² Appendix, LCC Education Committee Report, Technical and Continuation Education, p50

³ D Pannett, "A Comparison of Girls' Junior Technical Schools in London and in Paris", Unpublished Thesis, University of London, MA, 1939, p145

The London schools gave pupils who would previously have left education at 14 and gone straight into the workshop or into unskilled employment an opportunity to remain in education for another two years to learn a trade, an opportunity denied to most working class girls.⁴ The training probably did allow many girls to get a job which was more rewarding than they otherwise would have done. The schools were generally successful in financial terms in the sense that girls started their first job on a higher wage than if they had gone directly into employment - even if they were starting two years later.

Yet closer analysis reveals another picture. The status, aims and operation of the girls' technical schools were completely different to those of boys. The schools were inextricably tied to assumptions and perceptions of appropriate gender roles for working class women in the home and in paid employment. There were three critical differences in the experiences of working class girls and boys in these schools. Firstly, although policy superficially acknowledged changes in female employment patterns, in practice these schools trained working class girls for the traditional women's trades which occupied the lowest slot on the hierarchy of employment. They thus provided a stream of trained girl workers for industry, a valued commodity for the capitalist economy during the inter-war years. The schools did not, however, give girls the opportunity to enter new forms of female employment such as hairdressing and photography, but instead concentrated on the provision of traditional female skills in needlecrafts which could then be transferred to the home once a girl's period in paid employment was over.

Secondly, it is argued that the Junior Technical Schools provided an industrial, utilitarian trade training for girls rather than the liberal pseudo secondary general education

⁴ In 1926 it was estimated that there were only 41,530 girls under 21 undergoing any form of industrial training of whom 6,065 were apprentices. In comparison there were 315,000 male apprentices and 110,000 male learners - nearly one in five of the occupied male populations under 21. Ministry of Labour, Report of an Enquiry into Apprenticeship and Training for Skilled Occupations, Vol VII, General Report, 1928

that these schools provided for boys. Boys' technical instruction was allowed to develop along truly educational lines in the liberal sense of the word. The girls, however, were seen not as individuals ripe to be educated but rather as future units in industry - and thus an overwhelmingly large proportion of the school curriculum was devoted to pure trade training of the most sterile and unstimulating kind. The liberal ideal did not, therefore, pertain to the reality in girls' vocational schools. This compounded the impression given by a number of institutional mechanisms that girls' technical training was of a lower status to boys; there were different names for the schools, different entrance requirements, different types of courses all of which suggested that girls' vocational schooling did not occupy an important role in their future life in the labour market. This was extended to the assumption that a girl's domestic vocation, as future wife and mother, continued to shape all the training she received. The skills she learnt were ones that could easily be transferred to her real sphere of the home. Thus, a girl's future social role was seen to dictate and constrain her training for any other form of vocation.

Thus it seems patriarchy interacted with capitalism in the operation of these schools. The schools provided a stream of low paid young workers, who could easily be replaced from the next generation of workers that came along; they relieved the industrial employer from training his work force. Moreover working class male opposition to the extension of female employment, for a variety of reasons, also interacted with this to prevent the training for girls being extended. Trade Unions limited the type of lessons which it was permitted to teach girls in the schools and educational policy makers, ever in awe of their Consultative Committees of employers, colluded in this denial of an extension of education.

Finally this chapter will look at the contemporary recognition, both by working class parents and by teachers, that a key part of the education system was not promoting the

employment opportunities of girls. Parents showed their "opposition" by their preference for black coated operations and their desire that their most able daughters should go to Central Schools rather than to Technical Schools. They also sometimes showed opposition in refusing to allow their daughters to take up a trade scholarship, or even a free place. Feminist teachers meanwhile constantly drew attention to the connection between technical training and the economic rewards which women would ultimately receive. They recognised that "without full technical education women can never take their rightful place in industry".⁵

In 1913 the Board of Education's Regulations for Technical Education were modified and courses which had hitherto received assistance as day technical classes were considered sufficiently numerous and distinctive to constitute a separate category in the Regulations.⁶ These schools were described in the new rules as "day schools, organised as part of the system of higher education and providing continued full time education under school conditions for pupils from elementary schools in preparation either for artisan or other industrial employment or for domestic employment".⁷ Throughout the inter-war era they were to provide for certain pupils a continued general education combined with preparation for a specific occupation.

Historians have made little acknowledgement of the development of these schools although their evolution was regarded by contemporaries as sufficiently important to be incorporated within the highly influential Spens Report.⁸ This gave recognition to the efforts

⁵ NUWT Box 114, Miss Le Sueur to Miss Froud, 8 3 37. These words came from a joint resolution of the Open Door Council and the NUWT about technical education

⁶ Board of Education, Regulations for Junior Technical Schools in England and Wales, London, HMSO, 1913, p2

⁷ Ibid, p4

⁸ The Spens Report, op cit, see Chapter 2. Since these schools are relatively unknown, some attention will be paid to their historical evolution in this chapter before turning to their gender dimension.

of junior technical schools to "evolve a type of secondary school providing a liberal education based on a more realistic and scientific curriculum than that of the Grammar School."⁹

The absence of historical analysis of the operation of this network of schools is particularly surprising given that the Spens Report saw them as models for the post 1944 Technical High Schools, a much researched area of educational development.¹⁰ The few accounts which do mention the Junior Technical Schools tend to concentrate on the facts that the schools produced a significant contribution of male skilled labour and were a positive educational response to the most sweeping economic changes of the times.¹¹ Yet such accounts have contained no analysis of the relationship of the schools to changes in women's skilled employment during the period and have dismissed the variety of employment in which women worked under the collective term "women's trades", the phrase so often used by contemporaries as a classification for all female employment. Even feminist analyses of the inter-war period have not considered the operation of these institutions, which, it will be argued, epitomised the gender divide in technical education during these years.¹²

London provided by far the most extensive network of the schools. They were perceived as being a fundamental part of the capital's education system. The schools in London were among the first of their type and often formed a model for provincial institutions. The first school was established for boys at the Shoreditch Institute in 1901.

⁹ Ibid p269

¹⁰ See for example B Simon, The Politics of Educational Reform 1920 to 1940, op cit, G McCulloch, The Secondary Technical School A Useable Past?, London, Falmer, 1989

¹¹ See, for example, D W Thoms, "Market Forces and Recruitment to Technical Education: the Case of the Junior Technical Schools", History of Education, 10,2,1981

¹² F Hunt, Gender and Policy, op cit p111, D St John, "The guidance and influencing", op cit p247. Hunt has mentioned that the schools existed, saying most concentrated on preparing for clerical occupations. St John, while acknowledging the schools, has made no other comment than that they had "much to offer".

By the late 1930s there were twenty two schools for boys whilst there were 16 for girls.¹³ Most of the schools were located in one of the technical colleges with an average enrolment of 125 by 1937. Since the bulk of technical college students attended only part time in the evenings, the junior school provided a basis of day time teaching upon which to support a nucleus of full time staff.¹⁴

It was also in London that the Junior Technical and Trade Schools were most numerous and most specialised. Many reports acknowledged the "leading part London has played in the institution and development" of the system. In his evidence to the Spens Committee in 1934, Education Officer Rich described them as "extremely successful...they have been described as the most purposeful schools now organised".¹⁵ The LCC Higher Education Sub-Committee commented with delight that the HMI had declared that London had, through its Junior Technical Schools, alighted on the two problems of national importance then most troubling educationalists; "The association of education and industry, and the training of boys under present conditions of production and employment for skilled occupations".¹⁶

Although the number of children who passed through these schools in London was comparatively small compared with the Elementary, Central and Secondary Schools, this did

¹³ The maintained schools were Barrett Street Trade School, Bloomsbury Trade School, Campden [sic] Institute Home Training School, Clapham Trade School, Hammersmith Technical School, Norwood Technical Institute, Paddington Technical Institute, Shoreditch Technical Institute, South East London Technical Institute and Wandsworth Trade School. The aided institutions were the girls' junior technical schools at Borough Polytechnic, North Western Polytechnic, Regent Street Polytechnic, Woolwich Polytechnic, the Newcomen School and the Bluecoat School. There was one mixed school, the School for Retail Distribution at Westminster. This had been renamed the LCC Technical Institute for Distributive Trades by the late 1930s.

¹⁴ Adult education grew enormously during this period and is an area still worthy of research, see, B Simon (ed), The Search for Enlightenment, Leicester, National Institute of Continuing Adult Education, 1992.

¹⁵ ED10/152, Memorandum by Mr E M Rich, Secondary and Junior Vocation [sic] Education, 1934, p1.

¹⁶ EO/HFE/1/104 Report to the Education Committee from the Higher Education Sub-Committee, 12.12.28.

not diminish their importance in the eyes of contemporaries. They were viewed as playing a pivotal role in answering the needs of time; they had the honour, according to Mr Bispham of the LCC, of "training an intelligent rank and file of industry". Their aim was, in the words of the Education Officer to train "a nucleus of definitely skilled workers".¹⁷

Both contemporary observers and historians have taken the view that the impetus to the development of the schools was the inter-war changes in the capital's economy. As discussed in Chapter 2, although characterised by depression, these years saw a structural transformation in the economy which often placed a premium on skilled labour. The reason for the schools' development was the "changed conditions of modern industry and the total disappearance in others of the apprenticeship system".¹⁸ Twenty years later, the New London Survey echoed this view, arguing that mechanisation was fast making obsolete all distinctions between skilled and non-skilled labour and that "the altered view of what constitutes skill is bringing with it changed conceptions as to the kind of training needed for industry".¹⁹

The Inspectorate at both national and local level made constant references to the fact that the decline in apprenticeship in London and the constant scarcity of trained workers was the principal factor encouraging the LCC to develop Junior Technical Schools.²⁰ In 1928 a report by London inspectors stated that social observers in London had long been impressed by the lack of opportunities for a London boy to learn a skilled trade. "It was the realisation

¹⁷ EO/WEL/1/22 Report of the Education Officer to the Sub-Committees for the Enquiry into Education in relation to Trade and Industry, 1926, p6 Enthusiasm for the schools became more muted after 1934 when Labour took control of the LCC They saw the schools as being inferior and designed only for the working classes

¹⁸ C W Kimmins, Trade Schools of London, Educational Handbook, London, HMSO, 1911, p110

¹⁹ H Llewellyn Smith, (ed) New London Survey, op cit, Vol II, p5.

²⁰ See, for example, EO/HFE/1/104, Report of HMI on the London Junior Technical Schools for Boys for the period ending 31 7.28

of this handicap to the future prospects of London boys that influenced the LCC in their policy of developing Junior Technical Schools".²¹

There was concern about the decline of apprenticeship in comparison with the rest of the country due to the high cost of working space, the difficulties combining instruction with manufacture in modern factory conditions and the influx of trained workers from the provinces. The corollary was, argued the Inspectorate, that a large number of quite capable London boys were drifting into unskilled occupations of which London provided such variety.²² The Junior Technical Schools were to enable such boys to enter the workshop at 16, rather than at 14, with a considerable amount of trade training thus awarding them a better paid and secure job.

There was certainly contemporary debate about where the Junior Technical Schools slotted into the "liberal versus technical" debate.²³ In London there were two distinct types of trade school: the first type, usually called a "trade school", and found only in London, prepared pupils for specific occupations such as waistcoat making or cabinet making. The second type consisted of pre-apprenticeship schools which prepared for a particular group of industries such as engineering or building.²⁴ Education Officer Rich acknowledged in 1934 that, since there were more schools of the first type in the capital, more pupils were prepared for a particular trade rather than for a whole industry. This, he argued, did not mean that the schools were purely vocational and lacking the provision of liberal education.²⁵ In its

²¹ Ibid, p2

²² Ibid

²³ See Chapter 2

²⁴ The girls' schools were mainly of the first type. In 1935 the LCC standardised nomenclature so that any school providing full time junior technical courses would be called a Junior Technical School See p240-242 for a full discussion

²⁵ ED 10/152, Memorandum Mr Rich, op cit

evidence to the Spens Committee the National Union of Teachers made the same point, stating that the distinction between practical and academic education was artificial and that the Junior Technical Schools had moved away from training artisans to provide an education of a "truly liberal character".²⁶

Nevertheless there is no doubt that the schools suffered from the lack of prestige which has long marred technical instruction in this country.²⁷ The Junior Technical schools were specifically designed not to be secondary in status or opinion. A recurrent theme in the debate about the schools was of whether they were at a disadvantage because they could only take pupils at 13, long after the most intelligent elementary working class pupils had been transferred via the junior scholarship exam to Secondary or Central Schools. When "S" [secondary] inspectors at the Board met in 1930 to discuss the possibility of including parts of Junior Technical School curriculum in the Secondary School they abandoned the idea fearing that such courses would only become a "sink for duds".²⁸ There was always concern that very few pupils chose to transfer to Junior Technical and Trade Schools from the Central and Secondary schools - even though they had the opportunity to do so at the age of 13.²⁹ As will be shown, in practice the boys' Junior Technical Schools did indeed offer a more liberal education, incorporating advanced general lessons with the trade instruction - and they thus became a form of secondary education. The situation was not, however, the same for girl pupils who applied in even smaller numbers to transfer from Secondary Schools

²⁶ Ibid, Paper U 5(42) Memorandum of Evidence submitted to the Consultative Committee by the NUT, [1934]

²⁷ See Chapter 2

²⁸ ED 22/135/542 Report of "S" Inspectors' Conferences, October 1930, p6

²⁹ ED 10/152, Memorandum Rich, op cit; Transfers from central schools were in 1930 - 115, in 1931 - 138, in 1932 - 194 and in 1933 - 183. Transfers from secondary schools to Junior Technical Schools were reached 132 in the two years ending July 1934.

to Junior Technical Schools, realising perhaps, that the education they would receive there would be on a "lower plane".³⁰

Both Board and LCC officials constantly emphasised that the Junior Technical Schools should have "continuously and clearly in mind the changing needs and demands of industries".³¹ Bailey, however, has recently argued that the general policy of the Board towards Junior Technical Schools was restrictive and that the constant priority was to preserve the academic Secondary Schools as the only true advanced education.³² In 1916 the Consultative Committee noted that "the Board of Education was opposed to the treatment of Junior Technical Schools as an alternative to Secondary Schools"³³ and throughout the inter-war era the Board adopted a cautious view towards development in London. In 1926 the Regulations for Junior Technical Schools were incorporated into the new Regulations for Further Education but the growth nationally remained comparatively slow. By 1930 there were approximately 100 such schools in the country attended by about 10,000 pupils.³⁴ The Board of Education's Review of 1937 lamented that "there is ample room for an extension of this kind of educational provision to meet the needs of industry and commerce".³⁵

³⁰ Ibid, It is notable that far fewer girls applied from Central Schools to enter the Junior Technical Schools than boys. This correlates with the suggestion in chapter 5 that the Central Schools for girls did, indeed, become a type of secondary liberal schooling.

³¹ Trade schools on the Continent, London, HMSO, 1932, p8

³² B Bailey, "Technical Education and Secondary Schooling 1905-45", op cit, in P Summerfield and E Evans (eds), Technical Education and the State, op cit.

³³ Interim report of the Consultative Committee on Scholarships for Higher Education, 1916

³⁴ ED10/152, Paper U10. "Junior Technical Schools" in The Education Outlook, Mr P E Meadon, no date. Mr Meadon commented that "It is as men and women, not as clergymen or housemaids that education should think of pupils"

³⁵ Board of Education, A Review of Junior Technical Schools, London, HMSO, 1937 p9

The first Junior Technical or Trade School for girls in London was opened in 1904 at Borough Polytechnic, three years after the first boys' school. According to the 1929 Board pamphlet, Trade and Domestic Schools for Girls this delay was due to an investigation in order to discover which were the trades which provided good prospects for girls.³⁶ It was apparently found that waistcoat making offered good pay for first class work and that "there was a dearth of women workers" and thus a school was opened.³⁷ The venture was an immediate success and a year later upholstery and dressmaking were added.³⁸ By 1939 London offered girls courses in dressmaking (retail and wholesale), embroidery (hand and machine), hairdressing, photography, millinery, lingerie and corset making, ladies' tailoring, men's ready made tailoring, waistcoat making, upholstery, laundry, domestic employment and retail distribution. Far more girls attended trade schools in London than in the provinces. For example, between 1926-1929 1740 students were categorised as taking full time women's trade courses in the capital.³⁹ The largest school was at Barrett Street with 218 pupils in 1934.⁴⁰

At first examination the girls' Trade Schools seemed to have developed with the same concerns and motives in mind as the boys. There was the perception that, although most working class pupils would enter unskilled industrial work, some would become "artisans or skilled workers". There was also an awareness that women's traditional skilled employment

³⁶ Trade and Domestic Schools for Girls, op cit, p5 See GLRO TEB 56, Minutes of the Special Sub-Committee on Technical Instruction for Women, 1902-3

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ LCC Education Committee Minutes 14 3 17, give details of courses offered in Trade Schools by the end of the First World War.

³⁹ There seems to have only been a few hundred taking similar courses throughout the rest of the country

⁴⁰ ED10/152 Paper U 13, Memorandum by Miss Sanders on the subject of Apprenticeship and rates of Wages in relation to pupils in London Trade Schools for Girls, undated [1934], op cit

was changing in similar ways that of men. The 1929 report on girls' schools commented that there was a great change taking place in women's trades. Formerly the worker had received training in the work room but apprenticeship had fallen into disuse and therefore technical training was needed elsewhere.⁴¹ In the Education Office of the LCC there was a similar concern. Miss Sanders, organiser of London's Women's Technical classes, reported that there was very little apprenticeship left for the girls in the capital.⁴² Assistant Education Officer Smail reported in 1927 that the Trade Schools for girls were being developed to grapple with some of the problems left by the decline of apprenticeship.⁴³

There was also a strong sense that these schools should be developed in cooperation with employers and a Consultative Committee was set up with this in mind. As in the case of the boys' schools, there was an investigation into how provision on the continent compared with that in England - although the efforts made were rather more cursory than in the case of the full scale investigations into boys' schools. It appeared that "England seems to lag behind some of her neighbours in the provision of full time vocational education for girls".⁴⁴ There were other similarities; the parents of girls had to give an undertaking that they would keep trade scholarship daughters at school for a certain amount of time and find them employment in the trade for which they have been trained.⁴⁵ From the very early days of the establishment of the schools LCC policy was that girls and boys should receive

⁴¹ Trade and Domestic Schools for Girls, op cit, page 3

⁴² ED 10/152, Paper U 13, Memorandum Miss Sanders, op cit.

⁴³ LCC Annual Report 1927, Appendix, op cit

⁴⁴ Trade and Domestic Schools for Girls, op cit, Appendix

⁴⁵ ED 22/63/457, T Minute 625, 20 11 20. This requirement was dropped in 1926.

a similar number of Trade Scholarships.⁴⁶ In practice by 1924 girls and boys had almost achieved parity in scholarships and this trend continued throughout the inter-war years.⁴⁷

The 1929 Report on Trade Schools for Girls provides an explicit statement of the aims of the schools as defined by the Board of Education. It classified all women's employment into three groups; unskilled occupations carried on in factories often consisting only in packaging goods "or some other occupation subsidiary to that carried on by the men"; semi-skilled work such as box making "in which the skilled work is assigned to men and only the less skilled is done by women" and thirdly, "skilled work for which considerable handicraft competence is indispensable".⁴⁸ This third and smallest category was to be catered for by the trade schools. Such training was necessary, the Report stated, because a woman was "peculiarly liable to loss of employment ... if she cannot adapt herself quickly". The schools could combat this by training girls "... as skilled craftswomen in occupations suitable for women".⁴⁹ [My emphasis]

In 1924, five years before this, the London's Inspectors had published a lengthy analysis of London girls' schools.⁵⁰ They classified jobs for London girls into three heads:

⁴⁶ Indeed before the First World War the original plan was that girls should receive more scholarships in the hope that this would push the working class girls towards the lower ranks of teaching. It had been decided that two thirds of scholarships in 1904 should go to girls but, by 1909, 809 girls had been awarded scholarships as compared with 840 boys. It was decided then that, although the Council required twice as many women teachers as men, the supply was already good "owing to the fewer openings in other lines of life available for women" EO/HFE/3/6, file C.

⁴⁷ 1924 LCC Annual Report, 287 scholarships awarded to girls - 277 scholarships to boys, 20 free places given to girls, 17 given to boys.

⁴⁸ Trade and Domestic Schools for Girls, op cit, p15

⁴⁹ Ibid, p15

⁵⁰ This seems to have been the basis for the Board's national assessment in 1929. The wording is very similar.

Those occupations requiring little more than manual dexterity within a limited range.

Those demanding common sense and general intelligence but little originality or initiative.

Those which demand special intelligence and ability in the worker.⁵¹

It was believed that trade education could do little to prepare for group one, while in class two "much of the work under this heading done by women is subsidiary to that of men and the employment of women in the more skilled branches is only found occasionally". As yet, the Inspectors felt, it remained to be discovered how technical education could benefit these workers although, the supply may create a demand for trade women workers.⁵²

It was, however, group three which comprised girls who most required training - for the needle trades, laundry work, hairdressing and photography. This, the Inspectors believed, was where the trade schools came within their threefold aim:

To remedy the defects in the present system of learning a trade.

To offer more advantageous means of entry into trades to girls whose tastes and capabilities cause them to be attracted to the trades taught.

To extend the period of education and delay the entrance to wage earning to a more appropriate age.⁵³

In conclusion the Inspectors found that the success of these establishments rested on the due recognition of the fact that "drawing in colour formed the basis of nearly all women's skilled trades".⁵⁴

⁵¹ EO/HFE/1/105 Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education given in the London Trade Schools for Girls in the period ending 31 July 1924, p 1

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid p2

⁵⁴ Ibid p25

In practice, these schools did extend some working class girls' education beyond the compulsory leaving age of 14, an opportunity previously denied to all but a tiny number of working class girls who had passed their scholarship exams to Secondary Schools. In many ways the London Trade Schools for girls seem to have been thriving institutions - for example, by the late 1930s the Barrett Street Trade School was teaching dressmaking, hairdressing, embroidery and ladies tailoring, along with part time day courses in dressmaking, millinery, embroidery and evening classes in elocution, trade, English and French. There were seven full time hairdressing teachers, eight full time dressmaking teachers and three embroideresses. The school was supplied with daily copies of The Times, was considering the possibility of appointing a French Assistante and was planning a trip to Paris.⁵⁵ A similar report on the Bloomsbury Trade School reported on the success of the former millinery students, one student had become a buyer with a West End millinery firm, one had a millinery business in Johannesburg, one had a business in Conduit Street, and one was successfully running her own West End dressmaking business. These are significant achievements for working class girls.⁵⁶

There were even senior courses which girls could take beyond the age of sixteen instituted in certain subjects. The Barrett Street Trade School offered senior courses in dressmaking and hairdressing⁵⁷ and in 1930 it was agreed that these could be extended to two years. The debate surrounding the extension of the senior courses does, however, in

⁵⁵ EO/HFE/4/5, Report of an Inspection of LCC Barrett Street Trade School, November 1936, published February 1937. Miss Cox, Principal of the School, was by far the most energetic of the girls' schools headmistresses and actively canvassed employers for support.

⁵⁶ EO/HFE/4/131 - Report of an Inspection of LCC Bloomsbury Trade School, October 37, published February 38. Principal Miss Crawley believed her girls had so much success because she paid due attention to deportment and manners.

⁵⁷ These were approved by the Education Committee on 20 7 27 and 15 5 25

itself reveal some of the limitations which policy makers perceived as affecting girls' schools. Although it was clear that there was a demand for advanced schooling and Principals were constantly advocating it, the Education Committee was very reluctant to extend girls' senior courses to two years and, even when agreement was reached, they did not allow scholarships to be extended. Fee payers continued to form the vast majority of second year students even though it was recognised that the scholarship holders were placed in a less favourable position in employment because of this.⁵⁸ The justification given for the failure to extend the courses was that there simply were not the advanced openings suitable for female pupils. The Consultative Committees and employers tended to agree with this, although in 1934, Education Officer Rich admitted that "it is possible, of course, that the trainees will justify their training by themselves creating avenues of promotion to higher posts".⁵⁹

Headmistresses constantly pointed out that girls need not remain in the rank and file of industry but could rise to positions of responsibility if given the opportunity. The process whereby new courses were instituted in technical schools in London during this period is not entirely clear.⁶⁰ The Consultative Committees of employers were certainly influential - while the energy and political astuteness of the individual principals was also a key factor in initiating courses. Miss Cox of Barrett Street was renowned for this and, for example, with the influence of her allies managed to retain a course in the distributive trades at her school long after the Education Officer wanted to transfer them. The actions of other female

⁵⁸ LCC Education Committee Minutes 28 6.28 and Higher Education Sub-Committee Agenda 9.5 35 In November 1936 of 163 senior female students in trade schools all but 9 were fee payers.

⁵⁹ Report of Education Officer, 17 4.34

⁶⁰ See D W Thoms, "Curriculum Innovation in Technical Education in London 1918-39", History of Education, 8,4,1979. Male principals of technical schools often rose to positions of considerable power within the administration of the system Letters from Paley Yorke, Dr Inghall and Dr Mallet were taken very seriously by the Education Officers and their colleagues. For example, Bispham, former Principal of the Borough Polytechnic became Assistant Education Officer (technical)

headmistresses in a similar vein are, however, hard to find and may be one factor behind the failure to develop more senior courses. Although eventually a small number of other advanced courses were instituted at the girls' schools, the heated opposition surrounding this shows the inherent suspicion of truly advanced schooling for girls. It is notable that in the midst of this debate in 1928 the only thing the Education Committee could agree on was that there should be advanced courses in domestic subjects.⁶¹ Such was the opposition to the creation of the extended hairdressing course at Barrett Street that tutor Gaston Boudou of Emile had to provide all the hairdressing equipment himself!

If the type of courses offered were marked by gender discrimination, so too was access to these schools. In 1905 the LCC authorised, as an experiment, 80 industrial scholarships for girls. By 1918 there were 312 girls scholarships providing fees and, in some cases, maintenance. By 1934 the totals reached 511 for girls, 486 for boys. Grants were paid through the Post Office three times a year and the first instalment was permitted only after three months if the headteacher was convinced that the girl was really suited to the particular trade. In addition, as mentioned above, before the course commenced parents were required to sign an undertaking that their daughter would enter the trade for which she was being trained.⁶² Although the LCC was under no obligation to find employment for pupils, the last instalment of the grant was only paid after a meeting with parents to decide the future job of the girl and arrangements made for the scholar to enter the trade.⁶³

In the very early days of the scholarship girls had been awarded a smaller financial sum than the boys. The Financial Committee raised the question of "why if girls in trade

⁶¹ LCC Education Committee Minutes 28.6 28

⁶² This appears to have lapsed sometime after 1926. See D Pannett op cit, p163.

⁶³ Minutes of the Consultative Committee of Needletrades, 21.9.27

schools require less grant than boys in trade schools, girls in secondary schools should not require less than boys in secondary schools?".⁶⁴ The reply given was that girls' trade schools differed in that the schooling made the pupils immediately able to enter into good wage earning occupations. It was therefore only necessary for parents to face the sacrifice of the wages which the child might earn in more or less unskilled occupations during the two year tenure of the scholarship. The amount that the child could have earned in that two year period was "as is well known, less in the case of girls than of boys".⁶⁵

Although after the First World War the scholarship amounts were equalised, there was still a distinct difference in the entrance requirements for girls and boys to these schools. A scheme was established in 1920 which formed the basis of the selection system until important modifications were made in 1935. The examination scheme of 1920 provided two tests, the first in English and Arithmetic and the second in Handicrafts, primarily art and sewing for girls. Candidates who passed these two stages proceeded to interview, usually with Miss Sanders, Organiser of Women's Technical Classes in London, and two Headmistresses. The Headmistresses were constantly critical of the scheme whereby the first part of the examination took place in March of the school year before the girl was considering entering. The second part of the exam for those successful took place in July but it was the following spring before the girl was actually finally told if she had been successful. Applicants for scholarships could only specify the trades, not the schools in which they wished to study. If awarded a place a girl may have found herself studying at her second or third choice trade at a school a long distance from her home.

⁶⁴ EO/HFE/3/4 Higher Education Sub-Committee Agenda 18.7.12.

⁶⁵ Ibid

Miss Sanders took the entry into girls' trade schools very seriously. She believed that marks alone were not enough to decide if a candidate was worthy of a trade scholarship. A girl who had bad hands, for example, should never be awarded a hairdressing scholarship no matter how well she had done in the exams. She was particularly concerned about the physical characteristics of needlework scholars, arguing that "eyesight, hot hands and other defects such as fingers which have lost and are unlikely to regain sensitiveness of touch at the tips" were far more important in the case of girls than actual ability.

Miss Sanders insisted that at least two or three girls were interviewed for each available place leading, according to Headmistresses, to much disappointment amongst the girls. There was also concern amongst teachers about her insistence that drawings should form a fundamental part of assessment. After lengthy discussions during the mid twenties Miss Sanders still insisted that all girls bring to interview a plant study, a water colour and a representational drawing of an object while those candidates for needletrade scholarships should bring examples of specific garments they had made - knickers, a flannel vest and a petticoat in 1920. The emphasis was thus supposedly on pure manual dexterity rather than on any general aptitude for further education.

By the mid 1920s even Miss Sanders was concerned that the needletrade examinations were attracting candidates of "not a very good type".⁶⁶ When candidates applied for the exam she divided them into three categories - "certainties", "failures" and "the fringe" - far too high a proportion of girls were "failures". She felt that one explanation for the low performance of girls was that the arithmetic paper, one of the first hurdles, was far more suitable for boys than for girls.⁶⁷ Nothing, however, was done to remedy the situation and

⁶⁶ EO/HFE 3/7 Note on Assessment of Personality on Interview, Miss Sanders, 1 4.22

⁶⁷ Ibid, Note of Conference, 20.3.23

considerable concern grew that the majority of candidates, even if they passed the arithmetic exam, couldn't sew well!⁶⁸ Almost a decade later the situation had not changed. Miss Sanders wrote to Education Officer Rich early in 1931 about the continued low standards. 53 girls who had won less than 10 out of 100 marks in needlework were to be eligible for scholarships in the needletrades while 6 who had achieved sewing marks of between 72 and 80 per cent had not won scholarships because of low marks in English and Arithmetic. One girl who had been awarded 98 per cent in the sewing exam had only won a supplementary scholarship. The academic hurdles were thus attracting a type of girl who was not necessarily suited to practical needlework in the trade.

Significantly, in attempts to solve it, the problem was "turned round" so that it became a debate about how boys were not being given scholarships in trades for which they had a flair. As the Higher Education Sub-Committee was told, if all candidates continued to take identical examinations no matter what trade they wished to participate in, "boys who would have made excellent waiters may have failed at the handwork test, or boys who would have made excellent cooks may have failed at the drawing test".⁶⁹ A series of conferences on the matter were held through 1931 and at each of these meetings the interests of girls were increasingly marginalised. At the first meeting Miss Sanders pointed out that a large number of girls were refusing scholarships even when awarded them but "Mr Rich said he was not so much impressed by this".⁷⁰ The discussion centred on how the exam for boys could be changed. Mr Rich scribbled on the bottom of a memorandum concerning a conference in 1932 that "the conference however reached no decision about the Girls' Trade

⁶⁸ EO/HFE/3/8 Trade Scholarships - Amendment of Regulation 1932

⁶⁹ Higher Education Sub-Committee Agenda 3 3.32 and EO/HFE 3/8, Notes of Conference 15.9.31.

⁷⁰ EO/HFE/3/8, Note of Conference 15.9.31

Schools Examination (sic)".⁷¹ Whilst it was decided that, from 1932, priority should be given to boys achieving a place in their first choice trade, the same concern was not shown for girls being given a scholarship in the trade of their preference.

Miss Sanders continued to point out that a corollary of the fact that girls were not truly suited for the trade for which they were being awarded scholarships was that pupils were actually turning down the awards. In the late twenties it had been hoped that this problem would be cured by reducing the age limit at which a girl could enter a trade school.⁷² It had been thought that girls were declining the scholarships because they had already passed the age of 14 by the time they were notified of their success. Yet refusals did not decline. In 1930 101 girls refused their scholarships and thus it seemed, in Miss Sanders' opinion, that a number entering for the scholarship exam didn't "really want a trade training".⁷³ A new scheme was set up whereby the trade subjects were divided into four discreet groups, the mechanical, the artistic, the general (including cookery and hairdressing) and junior art. Different exams were to be taken for each of these. The interview continued to play an important part for girls although the Headmistresses asked Miss Sanders that efforts should be made to ensure that it was not so "curt and silent" The interviews were apparently marked by "brevity, haste and apparently unsympathetic and severely official treatment of candidates".⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid, Note of Meeting 3 2.32.

⁷² See p238-240.

⁷³ The regulations were, however, changed so that girls applying for needle trades had to receive a minimum of 33 marks out of 100 before they could be considered for a scholarship. Miss Sanders pointed out to the Education Officer that she gave 35 marks to any "decently good bit". EO/HFE/3/8 Sanders to Rich 12 2.31

⁷⁴ EO/HFE/3/8, McDonald to Rich 30 6.32.

It would seem, therefore, that a trade training was not perceived as being especially desirable by parents or girl pupils. Girls entered the scholarship exam a considerable time before having to face a decision about actually taking up a trade school place. The possibility of some form of advanced schooling was undoubtedly better than none at all for the families whose exchequer could cope without a daughter's wages for an extra two years. Yet, unlike their brothers, many girls turned down a scholarship, when faced with the choice of a trade school training or immediate employment. This suggests that parents did not perceive the school training as placing girls in an advantageous position in the labour market.⁷⁵ Unlike the clerical training given in central schools, trade training was not perceived as being ultimately valuable enough for the family to forego a daughter's wages for two years.⁷⁶

Even with the new scheme, however, the girls' scholarship examinations continued to be treated differently from those of boys. In 1934 it was decided that the "group B" classification comprising, cookery, laundry, house and parlour work, should be exempted from the Part II exam so that more emphasis could be given to the assessment of needlework and drawing at interview. Miss Sanders justified this by saying that "evidence of ability to draw and of some artistic sense ability furnishes an indication of suitability especially for cookery and house parlour work".⁷⁷ From 1937 she recommended, however, that the candidates for men's ready made tailoring should be required to take the Part II exam from which they had previously been exempt. This would restore the subject's prestige in the mind of headmistresses and parents. She thus acknowledged the adverse effect her earlier

⁷⁵ It is recognised that some scholarships would have been declined because a family needed the girl's wages or could not afford the inevitable extra expenses of the girl remaining in school.

⁷⁶ See Chapter Five

⁷⁷ EO/HFE/3/6 Miss Sanders to Bispham 12.10.37

decision must have had on the Group B subjects. The girls' scholarships certainly did not receive the same high profile as those of boys. Whilst a form setting out all the subjects in which boys could win scholarships was passed to all Senior Boys' departments automatically, in 1934 this still did not occur in girls' schools and, as a result, Miss Sanders pointed out that a number of parents and candidates didn't even know that the scholarships existed.⁷⁸

By the mid thirties it was decided that an increased number of "special places" should be awarded in Junior Technical Schools. The actual amount given in maintenance had been lowered in 1931 from £15 to £13 and it was felt that there were now resources to increase the number of special places allowing attendance free of charge but without grant. Each girls' Trade School had to write in requesting a number of places according to how they perceived the need.⁷⁹ Dr Inghall, Principal of Borough Polytechnic, was keen to increase the number of female pupils at his school. He was dismayed when he was only awarded three special places. He wrote with alarm to Bispham and stated that the small number of fee payers in his schools was "an indication of the needs of the parents in this district to receive assistance if they are to keep their girls at school until 16 years of age".⁸⁰ He pointed out the strong demand for local scholarships. Miss Sanders responded that "the 'needs' of the girls in the locality is not quite a safe criterion".⁸¹ Inghall was told that the important qualification was standards, not girls' needs.⁸²

⁷⁸ EO/HFE/3/8, Miss Sanders to T Division 31.1 34

⁷⁹ EO/HFE/3/9 Note on Special Places at Technical Schools

⁸⁰ Ibid, Inghall to Bispham 21 3 35

⁸¹ Ibid, Miss Sanders to Bispham 27 3.35

⁸² Ibid, Bispham to Inghall 1 4 35

Criticism surrounded the timing of the exam for the trade scholarships. Both parts were held before the Supplementary Junior County Scholarships which elementary pupils could take at 13 to try to gain entrance to a secondary or central school. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that for many years the two types of scholarship were not interchangeable and even once they became so in 1935 there were problems in persuading the girls that they might be better suited to a trade training. Headmistresses seem to have frequently approached the LCC to suggest shortening the time interval between the second part of the examination and the interview, arguing that many girls left school during these months or were no longer attracted to a scholarship once in employment.⁸³

This subject was connected to the question of how long the girls' courses should be. In the early years of the scheme girls were only allowed to commence the trade course after they had reached 14 while the boys were allowed to start the course at 13½, ie before their compulsory schooling ended. In 1924 the HMI had felt that 14 was generally considered the best age for a girl to begin vocational training:

Girls over 16 are not as a rule so adaptable and younger girls are too immature to benefit by it to the fullest extent and are too young to make a choice of a vocation ... most girls when leaving elementary schools begin to think about wage earning and to discover where their tastes lay.⁸⁴

From 1927 girls were permitted to enter the schools at 13½ while boys in London could enter at 13. By 1932 to be eligible for a trade scholarship boys had to be aged between 12 years 5 months and 13 years 5 months; girls were eligible 6 months later at 12

⁸³ EO/HFE/3/5, Education Officer to Dence, undated

⁸⁴ EO/HFE/1/105 - Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education given in London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit, p7

years 11 months to 13 years 11 months.⁸⁵ In 1935 a report on recruitment written by Miss Sanders recommended that there should be one age at which future training commenced for all pupils. Partly for this reason - but also on general grounds the recruitment committee recommended

that the age of entry for girls' trade schools should be lowered and the courses correspondingly lengthened but that additional accommodation should be provided so that the lengthening of the courses should not curtail the numbers for whom training is available.⁸⁶

The Education Officer's response to this was not favourable; he felt that "in view of the high costs involved and the comparatively small advantage to be gained" he could not support it.⁸⁷

Notions of gender differentiation affected the length of courses as well as entry to them. Although the boys' courses were all three years in length, those for girls were only two. In 1928 the HMI commented that the advantages of a three year course was that it gave plenty of time to engineer a good general education and cultivate mental powers. At the time of this report there were only a couple of boys' courses in London which were still only two years long and at the Inspectorate's recommendation the LCC Education Committee extended these.⁸⁸

It seems, however, that it was the rigidity of the LCC which prevented the extension of girls' courses. In 1934 Dr Inghall approached the LCC to request that his

⁸⁵ This was unlike the Supplementary Junior County Scholarship for which both boys and girls had to be between 12.1 to 13.1 years. During the twenties representatives of technical institutions began to campaign for the schools to admit pupils at eleven. They argued that this would remove some of the stigma attached to the schools. The Board vigorously opposed this and The Hadow Report recommended schools continue to recruit at 13. See G McCulloch, The Secondary Technical School, op cit

⁸⁶ EO/HFE/3/9, Report of Committee A on Recruitment, March 1935, p5

⁸⁷ Ibid, Report of Education Officer 21 3.35

⁸⁸ EO/HFE/1/104 Higher Education Sub-Committee Agenda, 13 11.30

Junior Technical course for girl be extended by a year. He had received complaints from employers that the girls did not work sufficiently fast and hoped a preparatory general year would remedy this. Miss Sanders immediately informed her superior Mr Bispham that a similar request had been made by Miss Cox of Barrett Trade School but she, Sanders, believed an extension quite unnecessary. It would require expense and premature specialisation.⁸⁹ Yet pressure to lengthen the courses continued. Teachers lamented that the two year course posed problems because slower girls were only just getting sure grasp of their trade when the course ended while clever pupils would stand a better chance of getting a responsible position later if they could spend another year at school.⁹⁰ In 1935, moreover, a Chief Inspector's Report to the LCC supported an extension since there was no educational reason to differentiate in the matter. Rich once again dismissed this suggestion. Such resistance was not, however, apparent when a shorter one year course of the girls in men's ready made tailoring was instituted at Shoreditch.

The difference in status between the male and female types of establishment was again revealed in the debate about what the schools should be called. As previously mentioned, in London there were two types of school, Junior Technical Schools preparing for a whole industry and Trade Schools - which prepared specifically for a certain job within an industry. By the early thirties it was felt that the term "trade" was derogatory, affecting recruitment adversely and that it would therefore be preferable for the term "technical" to apply to all the boys' institutions. Paley Yorke, Principal of the School of Engineering and Navigation, was concerned that the term "trade" was deterring suitable candidates. He therefore suggested that scholarships should in the future be called Junior Technical Scholarships. Education

⁸⁹ EO/HFE/5/30 Miss Sanders to Bispham 30 4.34. For a full discussion see p248-249.

⁹⁰ D Pannett "A Comparison", op cit, p163

Officer Rich was amenable to the idea and did agree that "trade" suggested inferiority.

Indeed he correlated inferiority with the LCC girls' schools:

as its Girls schools are called Trade Schools and its Boys schools are called Junior Technical Schools it looks to me as if we have already admitted the case which Mr Paley Yorke makes. It looks therefore as if we could call its Boys scholarships Technical Scholarships and its Girls Trade Scholarships ... Miss Sanders might object however.⁹¹

The Education Officer therefore made explicit the fact that girls' vocational education was perceived to be of a lower educational status to that of boys. Miss Sanders did indeed object, replying that she wished both schools to have the same name although "undoubtedly trade is the more accurate term in view of the training given in girls' schools". She felt, however, that if the boys changed, "the girls should follow suit".⁹²

Rich felt it "unfortunate" that Miss Sanders was pressing for parity in the schools' nomenclature. He wrote to Paley Yorke lamenting that, if action were taken, there would have to be a similar change for women. The same anomaly as already existed would then arise but in a more aggravated form; ie that girl's trade schools would have the name "Junior Technical" which was incongruous given their true role.⁹³ Mr Bispham added that it was false to think that the courses in boys' schools were indeed narrowly vocational and trade-like anymore, they could be defended as "an educational form". He was not, however, quite so sure about whether the needle-subjects courses could be described as educational.⁹⁴ Eventually after further discussions it was agreed that the scholarships should all be called

⁹¹ EO/HFE/3/6, Rich to McDonald, 7 2 33

⁹² Ibid, Sanders to Rich 14.2 33

⁹³ Ibid, Rich to Paley Yorke 1.5 33. Early the following year, 1934, the situation had still not been resolved although the Headmistresses had made clear that they unanimously wanted the scholarship to be called the Junior Technical Scholarship for girls. EO/HFE/3/6, Sanders to Bispham and Rich, 6 2.34

⁹⁴ Ibid, Bispham to Rich, 10.2 34

Junior Technical and Trade Scholarships⁹⁵ and nomenclature standardised so that any school providing full time junior technical courses would be called a Junior Technical School. In fact, in practice, the girls' schools seem to have continued to be known generally as trade schools.⁹⁶

This debate is revealing not only about the differential status of the schools but also about the different roles perceived for them. The exchanges made clear that the fact that the girls' training was seen as being not educational but industrial, it was utilitarian trade training. Just as it has been argued domestic lessons in schools were a form of apprenticeship for girls' adult domestic role, so the Trade Schools provided an apprenticeship for stereotypically female paid employment. Although lip service was paid to the notion that young women received a general education within their walls, in practice, the role of the girls' Trade Schools was to provide basic workshop training. The girls' schools were not, unlike the boys' equivalent, perceived as being part of the educational system of the country.

One expression of this difference in practice was that the girls spent far less time than boys on general education. Their adult role of temporary paid workers was perceived as pervading all lessons - just as domesticity was seen to pervade all lessons in the elementary school. It was claimed that the curricula of the schools were designed to expand the girls' general education.

Every pupil's timetable includes a group of subjects specially chosen to help her become a successful wage earner by gaining a general knowledge of her trade, a thoughtful and intelligent women capable of receiving and carrying out new ideas, and a healthy useful citizen.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ LCC Education Committee Minutes, 25 4.34

⁹⁶ A small number of the girls' institutions, mainly those sited within a polytechnic, were known as Junior Technical Schools.

⁹⁷ EO/HFE/1/105, Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education given in the London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit, p8

Yet this stated aim of the girls' schools does not appear to have been fulfilled. In girls' schools at least 75 per cent. of the curriculum was devoted to the trade subject while in boys' schools it was always 50 per cent.. A suggested curriculum for a typical girls' trade school given by the Board of Education in the early twenties advocated that 18 hours of a 27 hour week should be devoted to the trade instruction along with at least 3 hours of drawing and art work related to it. The suggested curriculum for boys incorporated 5 hours of Mathematics, 5 hours of science, 5 hours of technical drawing and geometry, 5 hours of English, and only 6 hours of workshop practice.⁹⁸ The Board's Inspectorate stated that 18 hours should be regarded as a minimum for trade instruction if a girl of average ability was to be satisfactorily prepared for the position of junior workroom assistant.⁹⁹ At the girls' Junior Technical section at Woolwich Polytechnic in 1925 the pupils were spending nearly 20 hours a week in sewing lessons so that they would become sufficiently proficient.¹⁰⁰

The Inspectors acknowledged that 8 hours a week for general education was not a great deal but felt that with "judicious handling and without attempting too much in the time a great deal of benefit can be derived from these 8 hours".¹⁰¹ They claimed that the general subjects of Social and Industrial History, English Literature and Composition and Arithmetic had been chosen to develop the facilities of mind and character and would also enable the girls to meet the demands and difficulties of workshop life.

⁹⁸ ED 22/63, T Procedure Minute 624, Recognition of New Junior Technical Schools, 8 12.20

⁹⁹ EO/HFE/1/105, Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education given in the London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit, p8

¹⁰⁰ EO/HFE/5/258 Report of HMI on the Woolwich Polytechnic Institute Junior Technical School for Girls for the period ending 31.7 25

¹⁰¹ EO/HFE/1/105, Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education given in the London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit p9.

they now play an important part in the activities of the schools not so much by reason of the time given to them or the academic standards reached as by the marked influence they exert on the girls' intelligence and development of mind and the large share they take in upholding "tone" and public spirit in the schools.¹⁰²

In theory all the general subjects were to be infused with an atmosphere of reality - but there are many examples of general subjects being marginalised, especially as there was no mention of them on the leaving certificate given to all girl leavers from trade schools in London. The Chief Women Inspector, Miss Philip, commented in 1934 that

in the case of boys there would be a serious risk in omitting mathematics from the Curriculum. They might desire to enter an occupation in which knowledge of mathematics required. With regard to girls the matter is more debatable but there is plenty of evidence that girls enjoy mathematics when it well taught and find it a congenial subject.¹⁰³

She went on to suggest that if a girl child showed distaste for arithmetic formal teaching should be given up and a more practical approach applied, such as measuring furniture or transposing a recipe. Dorothy Pannett found in her survey that arithmetic lessons consisted of revising the principles already introduced to pupils in the elementary school.¹⁰⁴ The Inspectorate also discussed whether geometry as applied to the needletrades should be included or alternatively whether it could be taught as the "arithmetic of citizenship" as it was at Woolwich Polytechnic. Occasionally some elementary science was taught, such as the elementary instruction in physiology given to hairdressing students - although the Inspectors found at Hammersmith Trade School that the two hours practical science lesson

¹⁰² Ibid, p9

¹⁰³ ED 10/152, Paper U 6(13) Oral Evidence of Miss Philip, 23 2 34, op cit

¹⁰⁴ D Pannett, "A Comparison", op cit, p51.

relating to cookery was very difficult for the girls since they had not done any science before.¹⁰⁵

The Review of Junior Technical Schools in 1937 did admit that the lack of general education was a problem but justified the absence of science in girls' schools by the fact that the subjects were embraced in craft work.¹⁰⁶ Most girls' schools do seem to have included a little Arithmetic in their syllabus and English, History and Art lessons were given limited time although they were usually related to the trade subject, including, for example, many lessons on historical dress. French was sometimes taught after hours in the schools and was obligatory in the few senior courses.¹⁰⁷ The traditional female role was apparent even in extra curricular activities at Shoreditch Institute.

the girls are divided into houses named after famous humanitarians eg Edith Cavell, Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Fry. They stay behind after school hours and make garments for patients in hospitals and knit for poor women.¹⁰⁸

It seems, however, that the teachers of the general subjects in trade schools were reluctant to see their subjects in such a marginalised position. A report of a conference for such teachers in 1937 stated that the teachers saw the trade parts of the curriculum as "utilitarian" and therefore thought that the function of their general subjects lessons was to redeem the pupils from "the sordidness of work".¹⁰⁹ The Inspectors commented with

¹⁰⁵ EO/HFE/4/152, Report of HMI on the Hammersmith LCC Trade School for girls for the period ending 31 7.30

¹⁰⁶ A Review of Junior Technical Schools, op cit, p21-2

¹⁰⁷ ED 10/151, Paper U 5(8) Memorandum Miss Johnston, op cit. The New Regulations of 1926 permitted a foreign language to be incorporated if a case could be made that it was vocationally necessary.

¹⁰⁸ D Pannett, "A Comparison" op cit, p23

¹⁰⁹ ED 22/217/713 Report on a Short Course for Teachers of English, History and Geography in Junior Technical and Commercial Schools, Junior Art Departments and Girls Trade Schools -4 1.37

satisfaction that by the end of the weekend they had persuaded the teachers that they had been inspired by certain sentimentalism and that they should be more realistic about what they were trying to achieve.

There were repeated statements from policy makers that the girls were not only being taught the mechanics of the trade but real skills, "versatility and adaptability".¹¹⁰ Miss Sanders claimed that it had always been the aim of the London Trade School for girls to

give girls a thorough grounding in all processes of the highly skilled trades which are taught and, in the semi-skilled mass production trades, to give each girl a preliminary knowledge of a far wider range of processes than she would be required to know or would have the opportunity of learning in any one job.¹¹¹

In 1925 the Inspectorate denied that a purely trade training was being given to service employers' requirements.

Economic conditions should not entirely govern the methods adopted in schools Although the demand for dexterity may increase ... and the demand for real skill may correspondingly decrease, steps should be taken to ensure the subject is being dealt with broadly and educationally.¹¹²

It was similarly said of embroidery that the increased use of power machinery should not engender instruction in only manipulative processes as it would result in the "mere acquisition of dexterity". The remedy was to include art in the teaching to gain originality, discernment and taste.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ The Consultative Committee Minutes repeatedly used this expression

¹¹¹ ED 10/152, Paper U13, Memorandum Miss Sanders, *op cit.*

¹¹² EO/HFE/1/107, Report of HMI on the Provision of Part Time Technical Training for Women and Girls in the County of London, April 1925, p5.

¹¹³ *Ibid*

Yet it seems clear that in practice the primary function of the Trade Schools for girls was to provide a pure industrial training to fit them for traditional women's employment. In 1932 this was explicitly stated in a Board of Education Report.

In this country we have always regarded the technical school as a place where instruction in the principles underlying industrial practice should be given and have usually been content to leaving training in workshop methods to the mill or works itself but in London Trade Schools, those for girls at any rate, have abandoned completely the traditional function of teaching only the principles of workshop practice and the time spent in them is usually regarded by industry as part of the apprenticeship or whatever may be its equivalent. These schools may be regarded as belonging rather to the industrial system than to the educational system of the country.¹¹⁴

Sanders made the same point in relation to part time courses for girls:

it would be well to consider the desirability of regarding two young workers as one industrial unit, each spending half the time at school and taking half the learners' wage.¹¹⁵

The school brochure of the girls' school at the South East London Technical Institute told parents that they should view instruction in school as being intended to take the place of apprenticeship.¹¹⁶ A similar implication was made during the Board of Education's discussions in 1938 about the future organisation of schools. R S Wood was concerned that if the Junior Technical Schools were allowed to develop into Technical High Schools their character would be determined "not so much by industrial requirements as by the educational".¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Trade Schools on the Continent, op cit, p13

¹¹⁵ ED/10/152, Paper U13, Memorandum Miss Sanders, op cit

¹¹⁶ ED 90/1445, South East London Technical Institute, Brochure for the Day Trade School for Girls in Wholesale Dressmaking

¹¹⁷ ED10/152 Memorandum R S Wood, 15.6.38, p7.

Miss Sanders admitted that for women's trades broad and stimulating trade instruction was difficult to achieve.¹¹⁸ Even the Board Inspectorate agreed in 1926 that dressmaking was "a subject difficult to teach on really educational lines".¹¹⁹ It seems clear that the overriding intention was, therefore, to turn the girl into an "efficient unit in industry"¹²⁰ and to devote the majority of school hours to acquiring speed in workshop practice. Indeed Miss Sanders justified her opposition to extending girls' courses by arguing that it was quite possible to achieve sufficient speed without extra expense if the girls worked harder.

The acquisition of speed must always be a continual struggle in Girls' Trade Schools and I think a good deal of speeding up is possible without expense.¹²¹

Her comments arose from the aforementioned request from Dr Inghall in 1934 that a three years experimental course for girls be set up to see if greater speed on trade processes could be developed by longer training. Inghall claimed he had received numerous requests for girls trained to a much greater speed of working.¹²² He felt that in a few cases the criticisms of employers did smack of their sole interest of making as much profit as possible but in the majority of instances the criticisms rose out of the economic conditions where "the wages paid and the time taken by a girl of 16 from a Trade School to become an efficient unit in industry compared unfavourably with the wages of and time taken by a girl of 14 entering direct from a senior school". He suggested that half of the extra year should be devoted entirely to the practice of speed efficiency.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, Paper U13, Memorandum Miss Sanders, op cit.

¹¹⁹ ED114/612, Report of HMI on the Southwark Borough Polytechnic Institute, January 1926, p17

¹²⁰ EO/HFE/5/30 Inghall to Education Officer, 2.7 34.

¹²¹ Ibid, Miss Sanders to Bispham 10 4 34.

¹²² Ibid, Inghall to Education Officer 2.7.34.

Education Officer Rich met the Governors of the Polytechnic and warned them of the dangers of the proposal. If the course was extended to three years the amount spent on each girl would be 50 per cent more at present; "a Trade School girl's life in industry was a comparatively short one and that a very large number of them could never hope to get more than £2 per week owing to Trade Board rules". He had emphasised, he told Mr Bispham, that in connection with Trade Schools we "had never aimed at turning out girls who could do work just as speedily as the employer wanted".¹²³

The Consultative Committee of Employers certainly wanted fast workers and constantly emphasised the importance of speed in the workshop and consequently in the classroom. Their Annual Report of 1925 stated that "stress has been laid upon the need for speeding up the rate of working".¹²⁴ Inspectors' reports also picked up on this point. The only comment made of the newly opened girls' Trade School at the South East London Technical Institute in 1934 was that the girls were acquiring "some skills and a good rate of speed".¹²⁵ The Board Inspectorate felt that the upholstery classes at Borough Polytechnic should not be split up but be timetabled to run sequentially; "this would speed up the work and help to accustom the girls to the conditions of time etc under which they will have to work when starting in factories".¹²⁶ The Inspectors also commented that, above all, the habit of the girl working slowly should be guarded against in the classroom for; "even the

¹²³ EO/HFE/5/30 Rich to Bispham 20.7.34.

¹²⁴ Minutes of Consultative Committee of Needletrades, 15.7.25

¹²⁵ ED114/592 Report of HMI on the Lewisham LCC South East London Technical Institute, 1934.

¹²⁶ ED114/612 Report of HMI on the Southwark Borough Polytechnic, Jan 1926, op cit p27

best workers may be unemployed if the time they spend on their productions places them outside the purchasing power of the customer".¹²⁷

Thus the schools, rather than providing a broad education, concentrated on the utilitarian function of training girls for industry. Miss Johnston in her evidence to the Spens Committee stated explicitly that "the Trade School for girls takes the place of apprenticeship"; it allowed the girls to enter as young assistants and therefore was of benefit to both the girl and to industry. The two year course brought the girl to a better physical state whilst industry benefited because "the modern workroom cannot give opportunities for vocational training" due to lack of space and time and the threat of economic loss.¹²⁸ There was an awareness that industry was becoming increasingly sectionalised and therefore girls should be prepared for a particular part of a trade. The 1935 Report on Recruitment stated that it was important that specific industrial training be given before entry "into those important trades where the severity of home and foreign competition has necessitated such highly sectionalised methods of production that the thorough learning of the trade or industry has become now impossible".¹²⁹ For girls the ideal of a broad general trade education was thus severely tarnished.

Yet this apprenticeship, this industrial training, was only given in traditional women's trades. In the words of one LCC officer the work of a girls' trade school could be summed up as "courses for trade dressmakers".¹³⁰ Although lip service was paid to the fact that

¹²⁷ EO/HFE/1/105, Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education in London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit, p10

¹²⁸ ED10/151, Paper U6(8), Summary of Oral Evidence, Miss Johnston, 26.1.34, op cit, p5.

¹²⁹ EO/HFE/3/9 Report of Committee on Recruitment 1935.

¹³⁰ ED10/151, Paper U6 (19), Summary of Evidence given by Mr J W Bisphram, LCC Assistant Education Officer for Technical Education, 22.3.34.

women's employment was changing structurally, very little was done to accommodate this. In 1924 HMI referred to recent alterations in the employment of women and pointed to the likelihood that investigation would show that new types of technical education could usefully be offered.¹³¹ They claimed that the 1921 census returns for London showed a rise in women employed in areas of paid employment for which Trade Schools provided training. The Inspectors accounted for this change as the results of war, the recent unemployment and the opportunities now offered to women.¹³²

Yet statistics show that provision remained confined girls to traditional women's trades. The LCC prepared a report in 1925 showing the following distribution of girls being trained.¹³³

Cookery	43
Dressmaking	467
Embroidery	118
Hairdressing	55
Lingerie	20
Millenery	135
Upholstery	123
Photography	38
Ladies Tailoring	257

Needletrades provision remained dominant although it was adapted to include, for example, wholesale dressmaking and machine embroidery. The schools were not "opening new avenues of employment for girls",¹³⁴ girls were still confined to traditional spheres despite evidence of the demand for more provision in the new courses of hairdressing and

¹³¹ EO/HFE/1/105, Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education given in London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit, p1

¹³² Ibid, p2

¹³³ EO/WEL/1/22 Report of the Education Officer, February/March 1926, op cit.

¹³⁴ ED10/152 Paper U.35 Memorandum to Consultative Committee by the Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects, 1934.

photography. There was always a sense of reassurance amongst educational policy makers that in London whatever happened in other trades, the needle trades would absorb a steady supply of trained girls.

in years when the upholstery and embroidery trades had been so slack that the girls trained could not readily be absorbed into these trades it was always possible to place a surplus of the outgoing students at a good wage in other branches of needle trades.¹³⁵

The HMI were also reassured that the girls constantly entering this employment no longer had to suffer uncongenial conditions since "hours, rates of payment and steadiness of employment are very much improved".¹³⁶ An added advantage of the dressmaking courses was, of course, that since the girls spent a larger part of the day making clothes for teachers and inspectors, the institutions could be partially self supporting. Sales of goods made in class would also promote suitable domestic inclinations amongst girls:

quite frequently cheap but tasteful cushions are on sale among the girls, one feels that this particular trade will surely encourage them to furnish their rooms beautifully thus creating the atmosphere of ease and repose so desirable in every home.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ ED 10/152 Paper U13, Memorandum Miss Sanders, op cit.

¹³⁶ EO/HFE/1/105, Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education given in London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit, p60

¹³⁷ D Pannett, "A Comparison", op cit p 82 The LCC were particularly approving when Hammersmith Trade School offered to make a new stage curtain for Newcomen Home Training School for £155 - See EO/HFE/5/87. See also, Higher Education Sub-Committee Agenda 21.6.33 which stated that articles should be sold at a price which would cover the costs of the material used if they were sold to girls, and if sold to others, the price should cover the costs of material plus 16 2/3 per cent and a sum to cover the making of the objects. For a full discussion see Chapter 3.

Bisphram told the Spens Committee that from the outset girls were set to work on commissions and, "the Trade School is, therefore, able to recover a large part of its costs for materials by corresponding sales".¹³⁸

Despite the emphasis on these traditional courses, it was accepted that by far the most popular courses were the new ones of hairdressing and photography. Hairdressing was especially favoured amongst the girls. Opportunities in employment certainly existed but the LCC only permitted it to be taught at Barrett Street and Bloomsbury Trade School. In the early years of the course HMI felt that the yearly output of 15-20 pupils was sufficient for an industry in which only 1,424 women worked in London.¹³⁹

Yet the industry grew as did the demand for courses in "Board Work" - knotting and weaving wigs and "Salon work".¹⁴⁰ In 1925 HMI urged the LCC to provide more courses, particularly for girls of 16 plus.¹⁴¹ The local authority was, however, very reluctant to do anything about this, although there was plenty of local evidence that hairdressing was a popular course. The reliable Miss Cox at Barrett Street Trade School requested 35 new "special places" at her school since it was always possible to fill hairdressing places. In the early thirties the LCC considered taking over the Campden Home Training Institute from its charitable trustees. The trustees told the Education Officer that hairdressing was "by far our most successful class"¹⁴² but Rich noted that "I have no desire to keep this hairdressing

¹³⁸ ED 10/151, Paper U6 (19), Summary of Evidence of Mr Bisphram, op cit

¹³⁹ EO/HFE/1/105 Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education given in London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit, p15

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p19

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p15

¹⁴² EO/HFE/4/137 Warren to Rich 8.2.32

class going".¹⁴³ This was even though the class was self supporting and there had been many letters of protest from students and parents at the proposed closure. Rich would not sway and so hairdressing remained a very small part of the technical education available for women - and as a result those girls whose parents could afford it often went to private schools.¹⁴⁴

Photography was similarly popular. The Education Committee was told in 1924 that numerous applications were received at Bloomsbury Trade School for girls for admission into the photography course for girls of 16 and above. The Committee was advised that the photography trade was a small one and that many employers would only engage girls who had received some sort of training. The work, moreover, was clean and congenial and a number of parents were very keen for their girls to be trained for vacancies in the trade.¹⁴⁵

Instruction in photography was only available at Bloomsbury Trade School and the Regent Street Polytechnic. The Times praised Bloomsbury Trade School for widening opportunities through courses in photography and suggested that

there is little doubt that the entry of highly trained and cultivated girls into these trades is one factor which is enabling London to hold its own with Paris in all matters relating to women's interests.¹⁴⁶

The newspaper viewed photography as being an excellent career for girls who did not care for needlework and who were too sensible to go into the overcrowded world of clerks.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ EO/HFE/4/137 Rich to Marsh 9.2 32

¹⁴⁴ See EO/HFE/3/5, Resolutions of General Purposes Sub-Committee.

¹⁴⁵ LCC Education Committee Minutes 17.12 24

¹⁴⁶ The Times 18 9.25

¹⁴⁷ The Times, 2.7.24

The LCC, however, refused a request in 1926 to grant new scholarships and private training schools continued to be pre-eminent in the area.¹⁴⁸

Part of the mechanism by which Trade School training was geared to replacing the apprenticeship formally given in the workshop lay in the fact that the LCC constantly tried to provide exactly the sort of trade instruction which the employers demanded. Such instruction would provide a ready trained young cheap female worker. Patriarchy and capitalism thus interacted in the trade school classroom. There were attempts to modify training to accommodate some of the changes taking place in the labour market but the aim was not to broaden or increase the chances of the girls but rather to provide the employer with a readily useable worker. The debate surrounding the teaching of embroidery is an interesting illustration of this. Embroidery had been very popular in the twenties¹⁴⁹ but in 1930 the Board received a letter from Education Officer Rich stating that

owing to the present shortage of employment in the embroidery trade the Council's Consultative Committee on the needlework trades has advised that from 1st September 1930 the curriculum of the junior day course in embroidery in the Council's trade schools and in the Borough Polytechnic should be modified and that instead of girls receiving instruction in embroidery for c 18 hours a week [sic], they should spend only about 9 hours weekly on that subject and the time they have set free should be devoted to trade dressmaking.¹⁵⁰

The background to this recommendation was interesting. At a meeting of the Consultative Committee of Needletrades in Spring 1930 Miss Tanner, a Union representative, had raised the question of "slack" time and the fact that there was unemployment in the

¹⁴⁸ Although there is no mention of this in the records it is interesting to speculate that one reason for the opposition to photography courses was that they were perceived as being scientific and therefore inherently inappropriate for girls.

¹⁴⁹ EO/HFE/1/107 Paper U(13) Memorandum Miss Sanders, op cit p5

¹⁵⁰ ED 98/85 Rich to Board of Education, undated [These papers are located in a file entitled Junior Technical Schools for Boys.]

embroidery trade. Mr Symonds, an employer on the Committee, showed great irritation, according to Miss Sanders, at her suggestion that this was no reason to actually stop training girls in embroidery. He told her that "if three leading firms told the LCC there was unemployment, there was unemployment" - and thus the schools must start training embroidery students in dressmaking. Miss Sanders pointed out that ironically it was only last year that the Committee had recommended the provision of extra embroidery courses.¹⁵¹

Rich was worried about the employers' dissent and informed the Higher Education Sub-Committee that he had set an investigation in motion; "if it could be shown the embroidery trade is not able to absorb at reasonable rates of pay the output of the schools without displacing the older and more experienced hands it would obviously be the duty of the Council to make some changes".¹⁵² In fact the Ministry of Labour figures illustrated that there had not been great increase in unemployment amongst embroidresses.¹⁵³ Rich felt, however, that it was not right that girls should be so narrowly trained so as only to do embroidery if employers had nevertheless become dissatisfied. It was therefore decided to increase the dressmaking provision at Barrett Street Trade School and Borough Polytechnic from half a day week to three half days a week for young embroidresses. Rich was, however, horrified to learn that this would cost over £800 a year more¹⁵⁴, especially since the extra expense would not be providing one more girl for industry. He argued that Headmistresses would just have to put up with less machinery and try to sell as many

¹⁵¹ EO/HFE/1/80. She told Rich that Mr Symonds had been exceedingly rude to her and had shouted that he was "sick and tired of the obstructiveness of the LCC officials and it was high time the Council learnt to adapt itself to changes of fashion".

¹⁵² Higher Education Sub-Committee Agenda 3.4 30

¹⁵³ There is some suggestion that Miss Sanders was given the wrong figures and that there had in fact been a far greater increase in unemployment than she was told.

¹⁵⁴ ED/HFE/1/80 Report Miss Sanders 14.5.30

garments produced by students as possible to offset costs. The Headmistresses were told to re-do their sums with less regard to "educational efficiency".¹⁵⁵ Yet just a year later the Consultative Committee argued that the embroidery courses should once again become full time and suggested that a solution would be to place more emphasis in the curricula on modern machine work, particularly using the Cornely machine.¹⁵⁶

The Committee had long been urging that more such modern machines be purchased, although in the early twenties the reason given was that the demand for embroideresses was out stripping supply.¹⁵⁷ The LCC had been reluctant to approve such expenditure and indeed in 1922 the Consultative Committee even discussed whether the employers and unions should club together to buy machines.¹⁵⁸ Eventually the Education Officer received the offer of six Singer Cornely machines on very advantageous terms. The Consultative Committee agonised about these "new and untried machines" as they were suspicious of the new Singer brand¹⁵⁹ and eventually a compromise was reached whereby one of the new Singers would go to the Shoreditch School which in turn would release one of its traditional Cornelys for the Barrett Street School.

Thus the trade school curriculum did make some allowances for changes in production processes within the industries in which women worked. The schools catered for the mechanisation and increased specialisation within women's trades. Yet the changes seem to

¹⁵⁵ EO/HFE/1/80 Miss Sanders to Rich 14.7.30. She was not at all happy with his suggestion that the surplus embroidery teachers should now be used to teach dress making girls for embroidery viewing with concern an arrangement which will impair the efficiency of the training in dress making in order to meet a slump in the embroidery trade.

¹⁵⁶ Minutes of Consultative Committee of Needletrades, 27.1.30

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 15.3.22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 20.6.23.

have been to accommodate employers rather than to benefit the girls. Although some skills were taught, they were taught in such a way that women were still confined to traditional lower grade areas of employment. There is even suggestion that because employers were so closely involved in the formation of policy, wages were not necessarily advantageously increased by this training. Miss Sanders told Bispham in 1934 that during the previous 2 or 3 years there had been a marked tendency amongst employers to depress the wages of young workers in Trade Schools trades.¹⁶⁰

There does, however, seem to have been a general belief amongst policy makers that Trade School training did enhance a girl's ultimate economic reward. In 1924, HMI reported that the remuneration of ex-Trade School girls was notably higher than that of girls entering the work room in the ordinary way.

At one time the rate was phenomenally high, too high to be expected as permanency for junior workers. Owing to the increase since the war of the number of women returning to trades ordinarily open to them there has been a tendency for wages to decrease for all recruits from the Trade Schools into the needle trades and to domestic service.¹⁶¹

Miss Sanders stated that the initial wage of the trade school girl was in many cases considerably in excess of trade board rates applicable to them.

The initial rates obtained by girls from Trade Schools indicate, I think, clearly the position which technical training has won for itself with the trades concerned Girls from London Trade Schools are normally received into industry at at least a third year rate applicable to young workers and in a considerable number of cases receive a higher wage.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ EO/HFE/5/30, Miss Sanders to Bispham 10.4.34.

¹⁶¹ EO/HFE/1/105, Report of HMI on Junior Technical Education in London Trade Schools for Girls, op cit, p17.

¹⁶² ED/10/152 Paper U(13) Memorandum Miss Sanders, op cit.

Miss Sanders went on to report that the Upholstery trade had made an agreement setting forth a wage for trade school girls of one shilling a week more than ordinary rates while the Tailoring trade board was willing to recognise training as equivalent to part or whole of a corresponding period in the work room. In the West End workrooms a girl would usually have to go through 4 stages and spend six months "running around" before "sitting down" but after a trade school training she could enter as a junior assistant and omit these stages. A report on Barrett Street School stressed the very high demand in the needletrades for trained girls and pointed out that after 2 years a girl could enter as a junior assistant, or if the girl did a 2 years senior course she could enter as a junior cutter in the wholesale trade.¹⁶³ Miss Sanders did recognise what a valuable commodity these cheap yet trained young workers were. She realised that the girls were being made economically valuable as soon as possible and therefore were not being given the opportunity to learn more advanced work.¹⁶⁴ She argued that, despite this defect, school records showed that "even in years when employment is scarce, ex-trade school girl workers are seldom unemployed".

The Consultative Committee frequently discussed the wage benefits arising from this training realising that the intervention of the wage board would be crucial in determining actual remuneration.¹⁶⁵ There was increasing concern, however, by the late twenties that headmistresses were setting the girls' starting rates by making an assessment for the employer of the value and merit of the girl.¹⁶⁶ It seems that the girls were therefore starting on high wages but then being dismissed when cheaper workers became available. Miss Sanders was

¹⁶³ ED/HFE/4/5 Report of an Inspection of Barrett Street Trade School, 1936, op cit, p3.

¹⁶⁴ ED10/152 Paper U(13) Memorandum Miss Sanders op cit.

¹⁶⁵ Minutes of the Consultative Committee of Needletrades, 17.5.22

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 18.3 25

sent off to convey to Principals the importance of not obtaining for the girls employment which was likely to be of short duration even if high wages might be offered at first; it was not "in the best interests of the girls to ask inappropriately high initial wages for them".¹⁶⁷ The Consultative Committee of employers made clear their dissatisfaction and asked the Education Officer to remind Headmistresses that it was not their duty to recommend rates of pay, that being a matter which should be the subject of agreement between the girls, their parents and their prospective employer.¹⁶⁸

It is noticeable in examining the reports of the various advisory bodies that the Committees relating to the girls' trades ie. the Committee for Men's Ready Made Tailoring and the Needletrades Committee constantly emphasised the success of pupils in obtaining jobs - while the Committees relating to boys' trades tend to emphasise the exams being taken by the students, the craft techniques and the promotion boys obtained once in employment.¹⁶⁹

This message emerged in the debate over the teaching of millinery and embroidery at Bloomsbury Trade School. The Consultative Committee was highly critical of two teachers whom they felt were not preparing the girls properly for workroom life. As a result a survey was conducted of exactly what was happening to pupils once they departed the school. The employers were not unanimously favourable in their verdicts. Messrs Debenham and Freebody of Crawley reported that Hilda Sawyer was doing hat blocking for them but she was also attending shorthand and typewriting lessons "so that one is rather led to suppose that her millinery has not turned out as satisfactorily as one would have

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 21.3 28.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 17 4.29

¹⁶⁹ See EO/HFE/2/4 for details of the Consultative Committees in, for example, commercial insurance, the furnishing trades and jewellery. There were only the two committees mentioned for girls' schools.

hoped".¹⁷⁰ Madame Raymonde Limited, who employed Clare Barrows and May Cook, said that "a good deal of patience was necessary to make them efficient".¹⁷¹ Miss Sanders concluded, however, that the girls were generally finding jobs and starting at the satisfactory rate of 18-20 shillings a week. The statistics which she collected show that the girls taking embroidery courses were entering that form of employment on leaving. For example, of the 90 girls who left the Shoreditch Institute between 1923 and 1929, 62 of them were working in the embroidery trade in 1930 and 6 were in allied trades. Similarly of the 96 girls who had left Barrett Street after the embroidery course between 1925 to 1929, 71 were in the trade and 13 were in allied trades.¹⁷²

Other sources, however, suggest that future employment prospects were not all so bright. In the late thirties Dorothy Pannett carried out a survey of the prospects of trade school girls. She was told:

Financial prospects are not always encouraging a south London girl employed in the West End can easily spend a third of her weekly wage on fares and meals.¹⁷³

Of the girls educated in wholesale dress making, "their chance of earning a really good wage is slight"; of ladies' tailoring Pannett heard that "the work is monotonous and relatively ill paid" while tailoring would "depress most people". Although a great supporter of the trade schools, Pannett's only words of encouragement were

Those who leave junior technical schools cannot expect a higher wage until they are more expert. A craftswoman need never go hungry even when she

¹⁷⁰ EO/HFE/4/14 Messrs Debenham and Freebody to Miss Crawley, 31.3.30.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, Madame Raymonde Limited to Miss Crawley 1.4.30

¹⁷² EO/HFE/1/80 Miss Sanders to Rich 13.2.30

¹⁷³ D Pannett, "A Comparison", op cit p145

loses her good looks with age whereas many unfortunately office workers are dismissed in early middle life.¹⁷⁴

Even within the LCC it was sometimes acknowledged that financial prospects were limited and indeed this fact was occasionally used to justify the failure to increase maintenance grants. It would not be advisable to give the girl more than she would receive once in employment.¹⁷⁵ It is, nevertheless, significant that the girls' schools were perceived as being successful. The 1929 report on national provision stated that the trade school girl was "able to enter a trade as a trained worker, having been protected from drifting into unskilled or semi-skilled work from which she might be discharged in a few years time". The report concluded that, as a result of their training, many girls were occupying positions that they could not have hoped to obtain without the wider technical experience and "training in observance, character and sense of responsibility" which they had gained in the school.¹⁷⁶

Yet, although it was increasingly accepted that a junior technical education could give a boy the chance to become a manager, supervisor or foreman, there was never any mention of this potential mobility for girls and access to higher earnings.¹⁷⁷ Assistant Education Officer Bisphram told the Spens Committee that trade school girls did not obtain positions on the administrative side of industry - although some did make it to the dizzy heights of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid In 1939 Pannett found that starting salaries in West End workrooms were approximately £1 for dressmakers, 18s for machine embroideries, £1 for millinesses and 15s for men's ready made tailoring in London Hand embroideresses could earn £2-3 on piece work and tambour bead workers £3 but the speed was terrific and usually proved too great a strain, p145.

¹⁷⁵ LCC Education Committee Minutes 19.7 29

¹⁷⁶ Trade and Domestic Schools for Girls, op cit p16.

¹⁷⁷ EO/HFE/1/104 op cit, p17

fitters to court dressmakers.¹⁷⁸ In her evidence HMI Miss Horniblow pointed out that girls and women had not "aspired to controlling positions in the industrial world".¹⁷⁹

There seems to have been little impression given to girls that their future paid work would bring them promotion, satisfaction or enjoyment. A Ministry of Labour leaflet on occupations in the needletrades told its readers that in the made to measure trades the work was "apparently dull".¹⁸⁰ Men's ready tailoring offered no scope for ingenuity or originality and the monotony of work "would depress most people".¹⁸¹ The only source of pleasure seemed to be that some firms allowed girls "to see the customers wearing gowns, suits and hats".¹⁸² It was repeatedly stressed that it was the physical characteristics of girls which suited them to this work rather than ability or ambition. A good dressmaker required patience and good eyesight, a good embroideress excellent eyesight and cool fingers. Girls whose hands perspired regularly should look elsewhere for employment.

Examination of the boys' technical schools in operation illustrates clearly the gender differentiation which characterised the system. The junior technical schools for boys were viewed by educational policy makers in a very different light to those for girls; their aims were far more sophisticated and complex than merely to prepare for life in the workshop. According to the Board's Inspectorate the aim of the education was four fold. Firstly to give each boy a training in the principles underlying a trade or trades, secondly to give him a training in the practice of that trade, thirdly to continue his general education and fourthly

¹⁷⁸ ED10/151, Paper U6(19), Memorandum Bisphram, op cit, p12.

¹⁷⁹ ED10/152, Paper U33, Memorandum Miss Horniblow, op cit.

¹⁸⁰ Ministry of Labour, Choice of Occupation Leaflet 1, The Needletrades, undated

¹⁸¹ D Pannett, "A Comparison", op cit, p86

¹⁸² Ibid, p147

to improve his physique.¹⁸³ A 1928 Board Report commented on the remarkable success that the London schools had had in achieving these aims.

In whatever capacity the boys enter employment they make rapid progress, as a rule, and often rise to positions of high responsibility. Some have risen to posts as managers, chief engineers, heads of department, designers, research workers, other have set up in practice for themselves as consultant engineers, architects¹⁸⁴

Although these achievements might be exceptional, the Inspectors were in no doubt that the boys from these schools made "good progress in industry and that they supply far more than their proportionate share to the ranks of foremen or shop managers".¹⁸⁵

The London boys' schools were heralded as being an exceptional success, particularly in the extension of courses to new trades. Indeed the only worry which the Inspectors had about the schools was that they were producing over qualified boys who, owing to their unusual ability, were being engaged prematurely in specialised jobs. The Inspectors felt that this tendency should be guarded against as the primary intent of the schools was to provide well trained and intelligent recruits for industry able to acquire an all round knowledge of industry and with a good chance of subsequent promotion.¹⁸⁶ The Chief Inspector of the

¹⁸³ EO/HFE/1/104, Report of HMI on London Junior Technical Schools for Boys, op cit, p2

¹⁸⁴ Ibid p17

¹⁸⁵ Ibid

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, Introduction The final accolade came from the Medical Officer who was asked to investigate the prevalence of flat feet and spine problems amongst the boys. He found there were no signs of over pressure and that the boys never assumed a stiff attitude or position for many minutes on end. The hours in the workshop were comparatively few and well spaced. Indeed the conditions under which the boys worked were advantageous to their well being. This was in strict contrast to the experience of the girls EO/HFE/1/104 Report of Medical Officer - 20.2.30. See discussion about deterioration of girls' sight, p151-2.

LCC saw the boys' schools as a major weapon with which to combat unemployment. The schools would turn out adaptable and flexible workers.¹⁸⁷

The HMI noted that in some cases male ex-pupils of the schools did not even enter employment as apprentices but at the next stage. It had been explicitly stated at the inception of the system that the aim of the trade school was to turn out boys ready to enter certain specific trades at wage rates corresponding to second or third year rates.¹⁸⁸ There was no doubt, in the words of the Report for the Committee on Recruitment of 1935, that the boys could be well placed in industry and rose to the posts of overseer, foreman, production manager, chief draughtsman - and, in some cases, even higher executive positions. The report stated that the boys' careers showed that "a good proportion rise rapidly to leading positions in their trades and that some open businesses on their own account". There was also very little unemployment among them owing to their training and general competence.¹⁸⁹ An earlier survey about the employment destinations of school leavers had shown that, indeed, many of the young men were working as clerks, junior draughtsman and production managers.¹⁹⁰ The salary which most of the boys were earning was approximately £2 per week, ie. almost twice as much as their female contemporaries

It has already been mentioned that there was a tendency for the boys' schools to become much like secondary schools, providing a very liberal broad education. As Mr Rich wrote to Paley Yorke in 1933, initially the Board's general Technical Regulations had been very restrictive and had practically stipulated that boys going through the schools would

¹⁸⁷ EO/HFE/1/22, Report of the Chief Inspector on the Junior Technical Schools, 1935, p4

¹⁸⁸ EO/HFE/3/4 Report of Higher Education Sub-Committee, 13 6.12

¹⁸⁹ EO/HFE/3/9 Report of Committee A on Recruitment, 1935

¹⁹⁰ EO/HFE/3/10 Edward Duggan was even doing a B.Sc and intended training to be a teacher.

become artisans. Mr Rich commented "we hammered at the Board on this for years" and now the schools had departed from their original intention of solely preparing a boy for a trade and "his positive segregation to the artisan group". Rich felt that ultimately the Board had been quite enthusiastic about the more ambitious development of the schools.¹⁹¹

The differences between the outlook for boys and girls is perhaps epitomised by the way in which cookery was seen as a subject for boys.¹⁹² A cookery course for chefs was run at Westminster School but it was decided that the minimum age of entry for boys for this course should be 14, rather than the usual 13 or 13½. This decision was taken "owing chiefly to the heavy strain of kitchen work in a very hot atmosphere".¹⁹³ For boys, cookery, in the words of the Principal for the Westminster Technical Institute was "an artistic and scientific trade" and therefore they needed to be taught plenty of English and Arithmetic - and not wear glasses.¹⁹⁴ This was in strict contrast to the utilitarian approach taken to cookery for girls.

The HMI report on the boys' Junior Technical School at Woolwich Polytechnic is also revealing of many of the characteristics which the boys' institutions developed in practice. Comparison of that report with the one completed on the girls' school at the Polytechnic illustrates the major differences in the ways in which the two sexes were educated for employment. The HMI began by commenting favourably on the boys' three year courses which had been extended from 2 years in 1927 to allow a school leaving age approximating

¹⁹¹ This is in strict contrast to the position of girls' Central Schools which developed along secondary lines despite the intentions of policy makers See Chapter Five.

¹⁹² For further discussion, see Chapter 3

¹⁹³ This should be compared with a suggestion in 1913 that all the girls applying for a cookery and laundry course had to be passed as having a very strong physique. EO/HFE/3 6 - Note of history, File C.

¹⁹⁴ EO/HFE/4/110 Letter Principal Westminster Technical Institute to Rich 16.7.31

to the most suitable age to begin apprenticeship or to allow transfer to a secondary school.¹⁹⁵

This theme of the connection to secondary education was taken up later when the report revealed that the pupils were organised in three groups according to ability so that they could each receive the curriculum and instruction to which they were most suited.¹⁹⁶ Indeed so much attention was being given to the most able that they were actually being taught an "alternative" secondary, i.e. academic, course. The Inspectors were not entirely happy with this but went on to commend the broad general education that the boys were receiving; a minimum of 6 hours per week each of English and Science composing separate physics, chemistry and mechanics courses, Mathematics and an optional two year French course. There was also a school orchestra and debating society.

The officers at the LCC were pleased with the tone of the report, particularly because there had been concern only a few years earlier that the theoretical chemistry course at Woolwich required three hours laboratory work a week, make it hard to cover the syllabus in organic chemistry".¹⁹⁷ The officers were well versed with the question of boys' technical schools emulating secondary schools. An unsigned note to Bispham, probably from Ingram, noted the useful purpose the report would serve, "in discouraging the attempt made to provide a day matriculation side to the Junior Technical Schools".¹⁹⁸ The concern was that the liberal education in Junior Technicals should not merely copy the secondary school courses but develop along its own original lines. Rich received a memorandum warning of

¹⁹⁵ EO/HFE/5/259, Report of HMI on the Boys Junior Technical School at Woolwich Polytechnic, April 1936 p1

¹⁹⁶ Ibid p4

¹⁹⁷ ED/90/159, T523/T23, Wallace to C I Abbott 20.2.23

¹⁹⁸ EO/HFE/5/259 Handwritten note to Bispham, 5.5 36

the need to "watch this tendency". It would be a "great pity if the Junior Technicals became merely an imitation poor type Secondary School". Rich wrote boldly at the bottom "I agree."¹⁹⁹ Yet little seems to have been done to curb this tendency at Woolwich and the relentless principal, Dr Mallett, was soon requesting approval for French to be adopted as an ordinary subject to be taken during the day.²⁰⁰

There was no danger, however, of confusing the girls' school at Woolwich with a Secondary School. The courses there, all revolving around the needletrades, were two years long. All involved the pupil spending a vast proportion of their day on the trade subject, a situation "governed by the amount of training necessary for sufficient progress to be made" in the trade subject.²⁰¹ Arithmetic was reduced to 2 hours a week although art was allocated 4 hours to produce general efficiency in drawing. The Governors were pleased with the report and thanked the LCC for the efforts they had made to bring the school to the attention of West End employers. They also agreed that an annual lecture be given on the background to trade work in dress making to widen the girls' interest in the subject "which could easily become narrowed to fit to the immediate needs of the present day".²⁰²

The LCC had, as mentioned above, Consultative Committees of employers to advise on trade conditions. The girls' courses were mainly covered by a single needle trades committee. Each school also had a trade committee attached to it but these were largely undocumented. The Consultative Committee did, however, keep minutes of its meetings and

¹⁹⁹ EO/HFE/5/259 Handwritten memorandum - 18 5.36

²⁰⁰ Ibid, Higher Education Sub-committee agenda 2 7 36.

²⁰¹ EO/HFE/5/258 Report of HMI on the Woolwich Polytechnic Junior Technical School for girls, 31.7 25 p24

²⁰² EO/HFE/5/259 Report of Governors 21 1 26

these provide useful insight into how this group of employers, union representatives and educationalists perceived the school.

The Needletrades Consultative Committee was set up by the LCC in 1921 and during the Twenties met once a month.²⁰³ The tireless Miss Sanders always represented the LCC at the meetings and was most frequently dispatched to investigate questions that arose. These ranged from the inadequate instruction in corsetry padding being given at Barrett Street to the need to keep teachers "abreast of developments" by arranging for them to visit work shops after school hours.²⁰⁴

The Committee had on average ten members. Some represented employers, such as the very active Mr Kay of the London Employers Association; others represented unions such as the National Union of General Workers and the United Garments Workers Union.²⁰⁵ There were also supposedly representatives of the employees. Liaison with employers was of prime importance. Examples of girls' work were regularly sent to leading employers such as Messrs Liberty and Debenhams. The Harvey Nichols representative apparently found the work of the girls at Hammersmith equal to that of women of 6 years experience.²⁰⁶ Each school tended to have a yearly exhibition of its work. The show at Barrett Street in 1925 was pronounced a complete success for nearly all the West End fitters who had been sent personal invitations had attended.²⁰⁷ The same year, the girls' school at Woolwich

²⁰³ Minutes of the Consultative Committee of Needletrades - 15 2.21. Later, when it was felt that the trade schools were firmly established, meetings were every 2 months

²⁰⁴ Ibid 18 1 22/15.2.22

²⁰⁵ Ibid 16 5.23

²⁰⁶ Ibid 19.3.24

²⁰⁷ Ibid 21 2.25

Polytechnic requested that a room be provided in the West End for its exhibition.²⁰⁸

Members of the Committee made endless visits to schools, almost all heaping praise on what they saw. Miss Kelly even travelled to New York to report on the Manhattan Trade School for Girls.²⁰⁹

The influence of the Committee is apparent; few of their recommendations were ever rejected by the LCC Higher Education Sub-Committee.²¹⁰ The members of the Needletrades Committee took their role in promoting the development of the school seriously. From 1924 they began to stress the great demands being made upon the school facilities for technical training in the West End.²¹¹ The 1924 Annual Report of the Committee to the Education Officer emphasised the need for a modern and well equipped centre for instruction in dress making and kindred trades.

It is common knowledge that important streets in the West End are undergoing a complete change and in place of small establishments there are springing up large and important drapery houses capable of vastly increased trade.²¹²

There was constant reference in committee meetings to the need to place girls in good and appropriate employment in the West End. As discussed above, there was some concern that girls were starting jobs on high salaries and then being forced to leave or take a pay cut. Miss Sanders investigated in 1924 and found that of the 447 girls placed that Spring only 6 had moved to jobs at lower wages and 27 had been given raises in the 2 months of

²⁰⁸ Ibid 21 1.25

²⁰⁹ Ibid 21.1 26

²¹⁰ Ibid 21.3 23 See also Committee involvement in the appointment of teachers, 20 1.26 - and in renaming schools - 17.10 28 Thus, for example, a botany teacher to teach girls artificial flower making at Barrett Street was suggested by the Committee and approved.

²¹¹ Consultative Committee of Needletrades, Annual Report, 15 10.24

²¹² Ibid

employment.²¹³ By 1927 the Committee was noting with gratification that no difficulty had been experienced in placing trade school girls with good class firms.

The Consultative Committee believed the Trade Schools occupied a unique position within London's education system. They provided training for skilled employment in the way no other institution was equipped to do. The uneasy position the schools occupied, however, was revealed by the debate surrounding competition with the Continuation schools.²¹⁴ The 1918 Education Act introduced compulsory continuation education for all 14 to 16 year olds in employment. Local education authorities were required to apply to the Board for an "appointed day" on which Section 10 would become a statutory obligation in their area. The London Education Authority did this earlier than most others and thereby required employers within its area to release young workers to go to the local Continuation School. The Consultative Committee felt from the outset that this would have an adverse effect on the Trade Schools, particularly when it was proposed that employers would have to pay half the costs of the education of the "out county" young workers, those who did not reside within the LCC area and who, therefore, were not required to attend the continuation school. In 1921 the Committee reported to the LCC that the cumulative effect of this was to encourage employers to employ "out county" girls to the exclusion of London girls but not to send them to the continuation school.²¹⁵ Things deteriorated even more when, in 1921, compulsory continuation instruction was reduced to one year owing the economic difficulties of the time.

²¹³ Ibid 21 5.24

²¹⁴ For a full discussion of the emergence, operation and demise of continuation schools see D Thoms, "The Emergence and Failure of the Day Continuation School Experiment", *History of Education*, 36, Spring, 1975 D St John, "The Guidance and Influencing", Ch VI, op cit, examines fully the continuation schools for girls in London.

²¹⁵ Minutes of the Consultative Committee of Needletrades, 19 10.21

As soon as the day continuation experiment was initiated the Consultative Committee, fearful of losing control of trade training, requested that all girls liable to attend Continuation Schools should in fact go to a Trade School. The Principals of the Continuation Schools immediately objected and so Miss Cox of Barrett Street and Miss Wilcocks of St Marylebone Day Continuation School were summoned to discuss the situation. It was duly resolved that the girls in trades for which Trade School classes were held should attend their local school as soon as possible after obtaining employment. Only workers in the highest class of the ready made or wholesale bespoke trade or learners in upholstery or embroidery should go to a Trade School. They were not the places for girls who made handkerchiefs or who worked in factories where sub-division was the rule, making juvenile or "misses" coats.²¹⁶

The problem did not, however, disappear. In 1924 the Committee was told of a notice from St Marylebone and Bloomsbury Day Continuation school inviting students to take courses in millinery and dress making.²¹⁷ Mr Henley expressed concern about the great damage which would occur if the public confused continuation schools with trade schools. The latter had, after years of careful organisation, expert training and considerable expense established a reputation which had now ensured the ready and complete absorption into the trade of students who completed full time courses.²¹⁸ It was agreed that all publicity should differentiate in aims and training between the two types of school. The Committee resolved that, in order to minimise the danger of confusion in the trade between the types of training given, a distinctive certificate should be awarded setting out the type, extent and duration of

²¹⁶ Ibid 19 10 21

²¹⁷ Ibid 16 1 24

²¹⁸ Ibid 16.1 24

the training received at each Trade School. Many meetings were spent designing the certificate and in 1924 the Consultative Committee summarised the aims of the exercise:

Any measure which will ensure that the day trade school training and its product are easily distinguishable by parents, pupils and firms is, we feel, to be eagerly adopted if the care, thought and money expended on perfecting the day trade courses system is not to be wasted. While appreciating the Council's other efforts in the direction of vocational training we desire to point out that, as far as needlework trades are concerned, the day trade schools have achieved a standard which is known and accepted throughout the trade and any propaganda, advertisement or publicity which may in any way confuse the trade schools with a less efficient form of training will inevitably cause serious damage of the trade school and its students.²¹⁹

The close involvement of employers did not always have such positive effects. Pannett commented that many employers in London were indifferent and apathetic, the "jealously guard their fashion secrets, keep their doors closed against instructors and then complain that the teaching is not up to date."²²⁰ The opening of a girls' Junior Technical School at the South East London Technical Institute in Lewisham illustrates the sometimes negative effect of the power of the employers on the Consultative Committee. The school had been planned to open in 1932 but was postponed as the Committee stressed to the LCC not only the prevailing national economic situation but also "the large amount of unemployment now prevailing in the needletrades".²²¹

It had long been recognised within the LCC that the south east of London was in need of more technical provision, particularly for females. Plans had already been made before the First World War to provide schools to serve the "large and important" area between the

²¹⁹ Annual Report of the Consultative Committee of Needletrades, 15.10.24

²²⁰ D Pannett, "A Comparison", op cit, p156

²²¹ EO/HFE/4/100 - Higher Education Sub-committee agenda 21.3.33

Borough and Woolwich Polytechnic.²²² Problems had arisen, however, about the role of the Woman Superintendent within the proposed institute. There was some concern that under the present agreement in London the Superintendent of a Woman's Department was - and must be - under the authority of the male Principal. There was a doubt whether the right woman could be found for the new institute, especially as the governing body would be composed almost entirely of men.²²³

HMI Miss Ferguson reported on the question. She felt that the woman superintendent should have a voice in the educational policy of the polytechnic, should attend meetings when women students were discussed and that all correspondence relating to the women's school should be sent to her in the first instance.²²⁴ Wood agreed that the LCC must be required to set out a well defined position for the role of the Woman Superintendent²²⁵ and the LCC Education Officer reassured him that the Superintendent would have adequate power to conduct her department properly without interference.²²⁶

The scheme for the school was, however, abandoned but was revived in the mid twenties. Again there was concern about the lack of provision in the south eastern area which had been subject to much of the outward migration from the centre of London. The 1925 report on the Woolwich Polytechnic had made the demand for more technical education explicit.

²²² ED90/145, Hards to Wood 7.10.11

²²³ Ibid

²²⁴ Ibid, Miss Ferguson to Wood 17.10.11.

²²⁵ Ibid, Wood to Cardew 20.10.11.

²²⁶ Ibid, Education Officer to Board of Education 16.11.11. Apparently this letter was lost and Mr Wood found it in a cupboard 2 years later by which time HMI Mr Davis agreed with him that it would be rather difficult to reply

Not more than 2% of the dress makers and 1% of the ladies tailors of the County of London are employed in Woolwich itself and of those engaged in other skilled needle trades there are still fewer. The number of girls eligible for vocational training is, however, disproportionately high owing to the large number of families resident in the neighbourhood connected with the Royal Arsenal Dockyard.²²⁷

Concern about the state of the economy continued to defer plans. This caused alarm amongst local residents. It was reported that there was little doubt that the people of the neighbourhood would be very disappointed if a girls' trade school did not function.²²⁸ Greenwich Council informed the LCC that "*it is a matter of vital importance to many girls in the neighbourhood*".²²⁹ Unemployment locally had already increased considerably involvement at the Greenwich and Woolwich continuation school.²³⁰ Neither Miss Sanders nor the Education Officer would change their opinion until the Central Consultative Committee of Headmistresses Sub-Committee of South East London organised an extensive report on the area. The women claimed that not only was there no difficulty in placing girls in the needletrades but also went on to propose other technical courses.

The demand in the great south eastern area is not exclusively for needlework. It is felt that courses for the training of shop assistants, cooks (domestic and residential) and prospective hospital nurses and nurse maids would meet a steady demand for trained employees.²³¹

The headmistresses emphasised the unfairness of the existing system whereby girls living in the south east who did win a scholarship had to travel great distances. They included

²²⁷ EO/HFE/5/258 Report of HMI on the Woolwich Polytechnic Institute Junior Technical Schools for girls, op cit.

²²⁸ EO/HFE/4/100 - Memorandum to Education Officer 20 11 31.

²²⁹ Ibid, Report 23 3 30

²³⁰ ED114/592, Report of HMI, p3, Continuation schools by this time had become voluntary paying institutions

²³¹ EO/HFE/4/100, Dell to Gater 21 3 33 See also R Bourne and P Latham, *Artifex Semper Auxilio*, op cit

evidence from many parents who had declined awards because they could not afford the travel costs. They concluded that the necessity for a school in the south east was urgent and that fee-payers from the residential estates would contribute significantly to costs.

The Education Officer was eventually forced to circumvent the Consultative Committee by directly recommending to the Higher Education Sub-Committee that a course in wholesale dressmaking be opened at the Institute. Having heard the report, the Higher Education Sub-Committee instructed Rich to take action in spite of the continued opposition of the Needletrades Committee. Rich conferred with Miss Sanders about "the very least number of scholarships you could do with bearing in mind what these ladies say about fee paying students".²³² Little attention was paid, however, to the headmistresses' recommendation about new courses.

I feel we ought to rule out hairdressing, photography, waistcoat making, ready made tailoring and perhaps upholstery. That leaves us with dress making, embroidery, ladies tailoring, millinery, lingerie and domestic employment.²³³

Eventually in 1934 a course for 20 girls between the ages of 13½ and 15½ in wholesale dress making was started and just a year later it was reported that it had proved so successful that the demand for admission now exceeded accommodation. There appeared to be no doubt that the demand for workers in wholesale dress making was such that no difficulty would be experienced in securing situations for twice the number of girls now being trained.²³⁴ Thus the number of places was doubled and when, in 1935, two new

²³² EO/HFE/4/100 Rich to Sanders 4 4 33

²³³ Ibid

²³⁴ LCC Education Committee minutes 18 7 35. The Singer Sewing Machine Company lent machinery free of charge giving the Council the option to purchase at a later date See Artifex Semper Auxilio, op cit, p110

Junior Technical scholarship exhibitions and a number of special places were initiated, 90 applications were made to the South East Technical Institute.

This institution provides an interesting illustration of popular attitudes to this type of training for girls. It must be remembered that the majority of girls attending the schools would have had no other chance of any advanced education. In 1937 the HMI reported that there are "signs that parents are beginning to awaken to the fact that the trained boy or girl stands an infinitely better chance of continuous employment".²³⁵ But at County Hall there was an acceptance that in general there was not a great public awareness or demand for these schools. During the mid thirties, as concern amounted about low enrolment, the Chief Inspector cited the cause as "a preference for black coated occupations" amongst parents.²³⁶ Dr Inghall similarly argued that the main factor operating against recruitment to his school was "an attitude of mind in both parents and children that a trade occupation is derogatory in comparison with a clerical occupation".²³⁷ It was also commonly accepted that many parents were not aware of the possibilities in Junior Technical Schools and that "in comparison with other types of school the Junior Technical School is almost unknown to the general public".²³⁸

The problems had been explained by a variety of factors: largely lack of support from industry, the attitudes of parents and teachers and the economic constraints of the time.²³⁹ General concern about the future of the Junior Technical Schools led the Board to initiate two

²³⁵ EO/HFE/4/40, HMI Report on Clapham Trade School, 1937, p8.

²³⁶ EO/HFE/1/22 Chief Inspectors Report, 1935, p1

²³⁷ EO/HFE/5/30, Inghall to Education Officer, 2 7.34

²³⁸ A Review of Junior Technical Schools, op cit p14

²³⁹ See D Thoms, "Market Forces and Recruitment to Technical Education The Example of the Junior Technical School", History of Education, 10,2, June 1981.

enquiries nationally. The first, "A Memorandum on the Place of the Junior Technical School in the Education System" in 1930 was an attempt to quieten the demands of the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutes that the schools be developed to secondary status. The Report argued that the cost of this was prohibitive and any radical curriculum change would negate the occupational training of the schools. Then in 1932 Abbott, Chief Technological Inspector, investigated trade schools on the continent, particularly in France and Germany which were commonly perceived to have advanced technical education systems. His report recommended more technical schools of the specialised trade school type. It seems that eleven new junior technical schools had been approved by the LCC in the summer of 1939 when war turned attention to more immediate concerns.²⁴⁰

As previously mentioned, Education Officer Rich was very aware of the lack of status of these schools when he gave his evidence to the Spens committee. He admitted that parents saw them as being on a lower plane, and that head teachers often did not recommend that pupils transfer from Secondary or Central Schools to Junior Technical Schools because they knew that they would lose grant money.

The LCC was reluctant to recognise that the cost of school attendance in itself may have prevented some award winners taking up their place or that fees charged might have been off putting to parents. Fees at girls schools were not low; for example, the course at the girls' Junior Technical School at the South East London Technical Institute cost £3 15s per annum compared to £4 10s for the boys' course.²⁴¹ Until 1935 scholarships did not provide full payment of fees. In 1927 Miss Sanders was asked to investigate costs and came

²⁴⁰ B Bailey, "Technical Education and Secondary Schooling", op cit, p110-115

²⁴¹ ED/114/592 Report HMI on LCC South Eastern Technical Institute p3

to the conclusion that in general they amounted to about £3 a year for uniform.²⁴² Added to travel costs this was prohibitive to many parents even if they received the full maintenance grant of £15. Despite evidence from head teachers, however, the Education Officer felt certain that "cases whereby candidates cannot take up their award owing to lack of means must be very exceptional".²⁴³ Headmistresses constantly bemoaned the fact that even when they tried to persuade girls to move from Central Schools to a more appropriate technical training, parents would not allow them to do so. In 1935 it was found that a very small number of 13 year old girl Central School pupils entered the trade scholarship exam. Half as many girls as boys attempted the trade exam - apparently because they wished to stay in the Central Schools.²⁴⁴ Some Headmistresses felt that the timing compounded the situation. Miss Pond, Headmistress of Tolpark Central wrote to the Education Officer in 1920 commenting that after the great competition to get into the Central School, the girl was not then prepared to turn round and start preparing garments for the trade scholarship even if she did want to obtain a trade training. It was at this point that it was agreed that the samples that girls brought along should be simplified so that Central School girls would have time to complete them.²⁴⁵ The exam was modified so that girls would only have to bring along a pair of knickers and an overall showing gathers. LCC Inspectress Miss Down felt that it had been found that girls below a certain poverty line were unsuited to the trade school course because their parents were incapable of looking ahead for

²⁴² EO/HFE/3/5 Report Miss Sanders, 18 5 27

²⁴³ Ibid, Gater to Cox, 19 7.27

²⁴⁴ EO/HFE/3/9 - p3

²⁴⁵ EO/HFE/3/7, Report of Conference 15 10.20

2 years and sacrificing present for future gains.²⁴⁶ She does not seem to have considered the fact that for many parents the additional costs of schooling along with the loss of wages of the daughter for 2 years simply made attendance prohibitive.

The LCC did make efforts to boost recruitment. In an attempt to increase public awareness of the schools it was decided to hold an exhibition in February 1937. Education Officer Rich told the principals of the institutions who gathered in 1936 to hear of the plans that there was a strong feeling abroad that "there is much truth in the saying: the Englishman pays his taxes in sorrow but his rates in anger". It was therefore important to make businessmen feel that they had a real stake in the technical education of the locality.²⁴⁷ All the Headmistresses of the girls' Trade Schools attended although none seem to have spoken up. Miss Sanders was given permission to form a women's sub-committee and it was agreed in April that half the available display space should go to the girls' schools. Before long, however, women were occupying their traditional role. Once Mr Tomlinson had decided the colour scheme for the draperies, girls in trade schools spent many lessons making them.²⁴⁸ There was concern that this work should not interrupt the time being spent on private work for customers.²⁴⁹ It had been hoped that the boys at the school for waiters would serve teas but Dr Long was unhappy about his pupils performing this servile role so eventually girls both baked and served refreshments.²⁵⁰ Over 10,000 people attended the exhibition and the President of the Board, Oliver Stanley, wrote to congratulate the LCC.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, Lindsay's research showed that many large London working class families were crucially dependent on children's earnings. See K Lindsay, Social Progress and Educational Waste, op cit, p40

²⁴⁷ EO/GEN/1/120, notes for meeting of principals 24 1 36

²⁴⁸ Ibid, note Miss Sanders to Ingram 20 6 36

²⁴⁹ Ibid

²⁵⁰ Ibid, Rich to Lowndes 15 10.36

Miss Crosby of the NUWT who also attended the exhibition was less inclined to praise.

There is much greater variety in the subjects offered to the boy than there is in those offered to the girl. Of the 15 available for girls, 9 are definitely needle trades and the remainder, with the exception of hairdressing, photography and retail distribution, are of a domestic nature.²⁵¹

Miss Crosby added that, while the home and needle were traditionally a woman's sphere and could be expected to make an appeal to girls, there were many girls who had abilities which fitted them for a wide range of occupations. She suggested that, of those courses provided for boys, silversmithing, jewellery and musical instrument making would also appeal to girls. Miss Crosby was in no doubt of the causes of this lack of opportunities for girls. She pointed out that girls were only permitted to train in the domestic and needletrades regarded as women's prerogative because the rates of pay in these industries were well below those in other skilled trades.²⁵²

The activities of the NUWT and of other women's organisations reveal a clear contemporary awareness that vocational education in the technical schools was perpetuating gender divisions in the labour market. The teachers perceived an explicit correlation between the sex specific technical education provided and women's position in the labour market.

Women are so handicapped now: they are not free to choose their own work for unless they adopt a career supposedly suitable for women they have no chance of acquiring skill.²⁵³

The feminist teachers recognised that the vocational training given to boys was "designed and calculated to be that which will give him the best all round training of soul, body and

²⁵¹ The Woman Teacher, 26.2 37, p191

²⁵² Ibid

²⁵³ Ibid, 14 9.23.

minds." They claimed for girls an education which would equally give her such training, "a training which would entitle them to rank as skilled workers".²⁵⁴

The NUWT voiced repeated concerns about the dangers of the system which deemed children only as a future industrial labour work force.²⁵⁵ They believed that there was a real need for technical education given that the economic depression combined with lack of proper training would accentuate even more women's handicaps in the labour market and create "an artificially large supply of half skilled or unskilled women's labour with a corresponding fall in wages".²⁵⁶ The Union argued that education and industry were inextricably linked and that women would play a crucial role in the economic development of the future, as they always had done; "whether the origin of the state was matriarchal or not, women were certainly the first industrialists of mythology and early antiquity".²⁵⁷

The London Unit of the Union was particularly active in trying to ensure girls had equal access to provision. They were not satisfied when Mr Bispham assured them that girls were granted equal numbers of scholarships for, as Miss Dedman pointed out, these were nearly all within domestic subjects.²⁵⁸ At the Union's annual conference in 1936, a motion was moved that technical schools, being vocational in character, should not admit pupils below the school leaving age and that when they did, opportunities for boys and girls should be equal.²⁵⁹ Miss Walmesley, a past President, said that women had a natural right

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 20 4 28.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 16 5 27, p241.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 27 2.20, p181.

²⁵⁷ NUWT Annual Conference Report, January 1933, Residential Address Miss Walmesley.

²⁵⁸ NUWT Box 144, Bispham to Miss Dawson, 2.1.39.

²⁵⁹ The Woman Teacher 15.1 37, p112.

to technical education; "a tradition of technical education along their own lines".²⁶⁰ Miss Griffin pointed out that at present there was little or no provision for girls and they must not be excluded as they were, for example, at a certain school in London where boys received training in hotel service and girls did not. That school was at the Technical Institute of Westminster. The following year, Miss Whateley, backed by her union, was elected to the LCC and was soon a member of three educational committees. She raised the question of why only boys were being trained at Westminster for restaurant and hotel trades and was promised that girls would soon have the same opportunities. Two years later, the girls were still waiting.²⁶¹

The NUWT was not satisfied with the suggestion of the Spens Report that the Junior Technical Schools should become Technical High Schools - for once again, girls were marginalised. The schools were, said President Miss MacMillan, based on a view that

they provide the best type of education for pupils of certain abilities... there could be no good reason for debarring girls from participating failure to provide girls with facilities equal to those of boys handicaps the girls at the outset.²⁶²

The women teachers were also aware that the training in the low status employment given to girls was subtly shaped by the attitudes and prejudices of employers and male employees. It has been mentioned above how employers viewed girls as being suited only for a limited range of employment and how the employers' interests were promoted by the fact that girls arrived ready trained from technical schools and slotted into the lower ranks of each workroom's hierarchy. Yet it is clear that working class men and unions also

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 15 1 37 p112

²⁶¹ Ibid, 7.5.37 p276

²⁶² NUWT Box 121, Speech Mrs MacMillan to Conference, 1938

reinforced the gender division in provision. An example of this emerged in the late 1920s when a debate arose about whether girls should be taught "men's work" in upholstery lessons in technical schools. In 1927 the Annual Report of the Consultative Committee on Needle Trades regretted that so little attention had been paid to "men's work" in schools which appears to have been the upholstery of articles such as chairs and settees rather than soft furnishings. It seems that although some girls were actually performing this work, they were not getting the recognition in status or remuneration given to those in soft furnishings. In 1928 the London Cabinet and Upholstery Trades Federation agreed to provide a list of "men's work" processes which could be included in instruction.²⁶³

The debate continued when the London Furniture Trades Association entered into correspondence with the LCC about what exactly the girls were being taught in upholstery lessons. Miss Dobbs briefed the Education Officer with the history of the situation stating that previously the Amalgamated Union of Upholsterers had taken exception to the institutions which were teaching female students "men's work". A conference had been held and instructions issued stating that "it should be made clear that the object of the class is to prepare the students for household duties only and to enable women to do neatly and well duties which a woman may reasonably be expected to do in a home. The course is not intended to qualify women as upholsterers".²⁶⁴

It seems, however, that the Union soon complained again and the Principals of the girls' schools were required to confirm that the instruction was being followed, and that they were not breaking the agreement not to introduce new classes for girls in upholstery.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Minutes of the Consultative Committee of Needletrades, 18.7.28.

²⁶⁴ EO/HFE/1/212 Higher Education Sub-Committee Agenda, 15 10 31.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, Note to Bispham 1 10 37

Miss Dobbs took to visiting the courses herself and reassured Ingram that the work being carried out was no more elaborate than she had performed herself at home some years before when she owned a carpenter's bench!²⁶⁶ She explained that when she had last visited the schools she had found new furniture being upholstered but the headmistress had now assured her that only one new chair had been purchased. Miss Dobbs went on

Last night I obtained from the institute and students on the spot the history of each new piece of furniture on the premises ... the instructor tells me that he, himself, is a keen trade unionist and undertakes to watch the point jealously now that he knows the decision of his union²⁶⁷

The NUWT was very aware of these kinds of prejudices. In 1921 The Woman Teacher observed that "there was a time during the war, when some people thought that the jealousy felt by certain men of women's work was gone forever".²⁶⁸ That time had long passed.

Mr Bispham admitted to Miss Dawson in a private letter that, since in the upholstery trade cutting was a man's job, the unions had insisted that a male cutter went into girls classes and cut materials for them.²⁶⁹ The National Union of Agricultural Workers made their priorities clear to Miss Pierotti

We too are strongly in favour of good technical education being given to girls and boys after all the men's rates are bound to be adversely affected where cheaper women's labour can be employed.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Ibid, Miss Dobbs to Ingram 17 5 33

²⁶⁷ Ibid, Miss Dobbs to Ingram 18 5 33 Miss Dobbs was particularly concerned to find out if the Union would allow reconditioning of chairs - adding that she had never been taught but she reconditioned her own saddle back armchairs!

²⁶⁸ The Woman Teacher, 4.11 21, p44.

²⁶⁹ NUWT Box 144, Bispham to Miss Dawson, 21 3 39

²⁷⁰ Ibid 28 1.46

Rather unwisely perhaps, Mr Jeffrey, Principal of Willesden Technical College, revealed in a report to the NUWT that in 1921 he had taken a girl onto an engineering course and "we all hoped that she would fail at a man's job".²⁷¹

It is notable that even after the Second World War the same instances were occurring. The trade union was horrified to learn of a mixed upholstery class at the Battersea Women's Institute.²⁷² The four men students were in fact the husbands of four of the female students who, apparently, enjoyed working together on adjusting their own furniture! Eventually this course was allowed to continue on condition no others were set up.

In 1934 the Union wrote to the TUC stating that a negative attitude towards developing women's employment could only have an adverse effect on all workers.

although at first it may appear to be merely a question of sex discrimination, this continual depreciation of the work of women and girls and their importance in the labour market inevitably reflects on wages as a whole and results in the lowering of standards, not only for women but for men.²⁷³

They do not appear to have received a reply.

With other women's organisations the NUWT tried to combat such discrimination. In 1928 there was an NUSEC deputation against women being forced to train for domestic service and in 1930 a conference on female unemployment.²⁷⁴ In 1937 to 1938 the Union drew up with the Open Door Council a Memorandum on Technical Training to send to the International Labour Office. It re-affirmed their conviction that "without full technical education women can never take their rightful place in industry".²⁷⁵ A less happy event

²⁷¹ Ibid, Report of talk by Mr Jeffrey, no date.

²⁷² Ibid, Miss Dobbs, Memorandum, 12 11 45

²⁷³ NUWT Box 144, NUWT General Council to TUC, 18.10.34.

²⁷⁴ NUSEC is the abbreviation for the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship

²⁷⁵ NUWT Box 144, Miss Le Sueur to Miss Froud, 8.3 37.

took place in 1939 when the Women's Federation of Business and Professional Women prepared a memorandum for the International Labour Conference. One of the demands, to which the NUWT's name was put, was that girls should have

Equal rights of admission to all vocational and technical schools provided women and girls are not required to undertake work which they are prohibited by law from performing on grounds of health.²⁷⁶

Miss Froud was furious and wrote vigorously of how the NUWT was opposed to any protective legislation ... "the NUWT only subscribes to policy advocating equality between men and women".²⁷⁷

Some contemporary opinion, therefore, saw and fought against the gender specific training which the Junior Technical and Trade Schools gave to girls. The provision of the schools in London did represent an attempt to provide some technical training for skilled employment for girls. The employment prospects and experience of the pupils who attended may well have been improved. Yet the experience and opportunities of girls in these schools was very much more limited than those of boys. The education given was shaped by the pupils' gender and limited largely to workshop practice in a few stereotypically female trades. The girls who emerged were clearly intended to spend a limited amount of time in the labour market before returning to domesticity and dependence on a male wage. The final words on this venture in girls' education should, perhaps, be given to the student editor of the magazine of the Girls Day Trade School at North Western Polytechnic. In the 1930-31 edition she wrote of the need for pupils "to attack with courage and courtesy" the tasks ahead of them. They would need courage because they had not chosen the easiest of paths and courtesy because the world needed more of it. She told her fellow pupils that the path of the

²⁷⁶ NUWT Box 144, Statement on Technical and Vocational Education and Apprenticeship, Women's Federation of Business and Professional Women, June 1939

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, Miss Froud to Mrs Haslett, 29.6.39.

trade school girl would not be "roses, roses all the way" but that they should go out into the world and "live up to the ideals of the trade school".²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ EO/HFE/12/8 The Magazine of the Girls Day Trade School, North Western Polytechnic session, 1930-31

**LEARNING TO BE PETER PANS : CLIMBING THE LADDER IN THE
SELECTIVE CENTRAL SCHOOLS**

There was one other area of activity which combined all the qualities most necessary for a woman's job - clerical work. It was work that required neatness, precision and an ability to withstand monotony. It did not require brute strength, decision making or decisive analysis. Moreover the supportive and economically submissive role of the female clerk was analogous to the traditional feminine role. Such qualities could, in due course, easily be transferred to the home.

the typist is qualified to make a good wife, because she understands men and their business troubles and is not inclined to be jealous if her husband is detained in town or is bad tempered after a long day at the office.¹

As clerical work during the inter-war years was redefined as appropriately feminine, a large scale entry of girls and women into offices took place in London. The educational response which developed to accommodate this was the Selective Central School, the consciously progressive establishment to which working class children could gain admittance via an examination.² These schools sought to provide a balanced combination of a broad general education and a technical vocational training which would, together, create adaptable and efficient citizens. Through the technical or commercial "bias" to their curricula, the schools were thus meant to epitomise the way in which the liberal versus technical debate could be negotiated in practice. For girls the commercial bias was to emerge as typing and

¹ Pam's Paper, 7 5 27, p5 quoted in P Tinkler, "Learning Through Leisure", op cit, p65 in F Hunt, Lessons for Life op cit.

² For an abbreviated analysis of the Selective Central Schools see S King, "Technical and Vocational Education for girls A Study of the Central Schools of London 1918-1939", in P Summerfield and E Evans, Technical Education and the State, op cit.

shorthand lessons while the industrial curriculum consisted in practice as yet more emphasis on domestic skills.

This chapter will investigate how gender shaped and determined the vocational preparation provided for girls in the Selective Central Schools of London. The schools did partially accommodate new inter-war ideas about female employment by preparing able working class girls for some form of autonomy and economic independence in new - and desirable to those girls - areas of the labour market. The Selective Central Schools of London admitted as many girls as boys thus giving recognition to working class female intellectual achievement and potential social mobility. The schools aimed at preparing all pupils, including girls who would not previously have been expected to warrant such training, with a preparation for skilled paid employment. Significantly, whatever the limitations in terms of remuneration and advancement, clerical office work was overwhelmingly the most popular form of paid employment for young working class girls in this era.³ To these girls, and indeed their families, the typewriter and the shorthand writer's pad were instruments of liberation and independence rather than of oppression.⁴ Families made considerable sacrifices in order to allow their working class daughter to attend the extended four year Central School course up to the age of 15 or 16 rather than entering immediately remunerative employment at 14. The development of commercial lessons in Central Schools were in part a response to this demand.

³ Indeed as Zimmeck as pointed out, one of the most remarkable aspects of the feminisation of clerical work during the inter-war years is the alacrity with which girls sought employment. M Zimmeck, "Jobs for the Girls: The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women 1850-1914", p164, in A John, Unequal Opportunities, op cit

⁴ McNally has pointed out the importance of recognising contemporary perceptions of office employment. See F McNally, Women for Hire : A Study of the Female Office Worker, London, MacMillan, 1979.

Yet the education provided in the Selective Central Schools was highly gender specific and limited the employment opportunities of even able working class girls to those areas of the labour market marred by low status and low pay. As in the case of the Junior Technical and Trade Schools, the preparation for the labour market for girls was defined and curtailed by ideological assumptions both about their ability and future role in society. Although the Central Schools were meant to provide a training for the most able working class children who, while not "academic" enough to climb the meritocratic ladder towards a full secondary education, were able and adept enough to be prepared for skilled employment, the opportunities for which they prepared girls in the labour market were limited. Appropriate females spheres of employment were widened to include clerical work but the dynamics of segregation in the labour market effectively blocked girls' advancement in white collar jobs. Clerical work for women was deskilled to constitute basic typing and shorthand rather than broader commercial work. Whatever claims were made for the provision of liberal and general education, in practice, girls' schools instilled the most elementary clerical skills.

It will be suggested that the feminisation of clerical work and the accompanying preparation for it in these schools was accomplished in such a way so as to accommodate male unease about the "loss" of this sphere of work for men whilst also providing capitalist employers with a ready supply of cheap labour to staff the new equipment and office practices emerging in the capital's economy at this time. Underpinning this organisation was the attribution fundamental to patriarchal ideology of the inherent characteristics of each sex which supposedly fitted them for different types of work. The educational system supported this development in the constant espousal within Central Schools that girls possessed secondary sexual characteristics which rendered them particularly suitable for the routine and monotonous type of office work. The borders of male work and female clerical work were

strictly formalised and policed by a variety of mechanisms and thus women were slotted in at the very lowest levels of the office hierarchy. They were denied the opportunities of advancement that the transformation of clerical work gave to men and deprived of access to other forms of training through the denial of their ability to do anything else. It, indeed, became true that

whilst each man will be worth his weight in gold, each women (at any rate in the lowest clerical rank) will be a subject for exploitation both by the state and by the individual employer.⁵

As well as enforcing the message that the separation between the male sphere and the female sphere of office work was absolute, the Central Schools also reinforced the prevailing assumption in the girls' everyday existence that their real destiny was as wives and mothers. As one writer in My Weekly put it in 1920

why every time I think of the little home that Will and I are getting together, I know that I will never want to type another word when I get scrubbing, cleaning and cooking in it.⁶

This was particularly true of the technical or industrial type schools. Although these schools were supposed to prepare girls for skilled work in industry, in practice they provided more stereotypically and exclusively feminine domestic work. Thus able working class girls were provided with a form of instruction which did little to advantage them on entry into the

⁵ ED12/209, Memorandum on the Teaching and Inspection of Commercial Subjects, R Young, Secretary of the Association of Headmistresses and Representative of the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, 9 6 15.

⁶ My Weekly, 3.5.30, p31 quoted in C White, Woman's Magazines, op cit, p102 Sanderson's oral history has shown that a free place in a secondary school followed by clerical employment resulted in social mobility for many working class girls which they consolidated by marriage. See K Sanderson, "A Pension To Look Forward To? Women Civil Service Clerks in London 1925-1935" in L. Davidoff and B. Westover, Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words, London, Macmillan, 1986, op cit. Further research is necessary to discover whether Central School girls from working class families also married men of similar white collar status

labour market and which defined them as an homogenous group whose practical, skilled training in every area of the curriculum was shaped by their gender.

not only is the practical work to which a large proportion of school time devoted in this type of school entirely different for boys and girls but in such subjects as science, mathematics and drawing the method of treatment ought to vary considerably with the sex of the pupil. In fact in schools of the industrial type it is difficult to see what there can be in common between the work of boys and girls beyond instruction in the ordinary English subjects.⁷

As in the case of the educational institutions already examined, girls in Central Schools received messages about the low status of domestic work and its teachers. This reinforced the impression that, whatever educational achievements they may have to their credit, their future social role would limit any options they may have in the labour market.

Yet, in spite of the limitations placed on the vision of the Central Selective Schools for girls, in practice they did develop far beyond what had been anticipated by policymakers. Partly through parental and pupil pressure and partly due to teacher initiatives the schools became quasi-Secondary Schools, preparing girls for external academic examinations and achieving far higher levels of clerical skills than had been anticipated. Clerical office work, while at its lowest echelons only suitable for the working class girl, was also potentially suitable for the secondary middle class girl who could become a "personal secretary" rather than simply a typist.⁸ The LCC repeatedly refused to allow the maintained Secondary Schools to include clerical subjects within their curricula for girls under the age of sixteen. Increasingly, therefore, Secondary School girls, particularly scholarship winners from the working classes, but also fee paying middle class girls, sought an education and preparation

⁷ ED97/207, Report on London Central Schools 1914, para 11.

⁸ For a discussion of the various terms used within the hierarchy of clerical work see T Davy, "Female Shorthand Typists and Typists 1900-1939. The Years of Transition and Consolidation", Unpublished Thesis, University of Essex, MA, 1980, Introduction.

in the Central School. The Selective Central School thus illustrates how technical education did open up employment opportunities for some girls and could have done so far more had their schools been permitted to develop in the same way as those of boys.

The policy behind and practice within the Selective Central Schools has been largely ignored by historians. Their development has been seen merely as a mechanism for diverting the pressure for practical training away from the academic Secondary School and solving the problem of whether such instruction was really a suitable education for Secondary School and largely non-working class children.⁹ Most historical analyses make no mention at all of this category of school¹⁰ and those which do underestimate their significance. Banks, for example, recognises that Central Schools "exerted an influence out of proportion to their numerical strength" but does not attempt to assess that influence.¹¹ The educational experiences of girls in Central Schools have been ignored to an even greater extent.¹² The scarcity of available surviving records is perhaps one explanation for this neglect as is the relatively small number of Selective Central Schools set up across the country.¹³ However, this does not detract from the evidence that remains clearly illustrating the importance attached to Central Schools by contemporaries or by the considerable number of pupils,

⁹ This chapter will focus on the Selective Central Schools of London. Central Schools varied in name and character according to educational authority

¹⁰ See for example G Sherrington, English Education Social Change and War 1911-20, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1981, and M Parkinson, The Labour Party and the Organisation of Secondary Education, op cit

¹¹ O Banks, Parity and Prestige in English Secondary Education, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, p190

¹² See, for example, J Easterbrook, "The Central Schools of London 1910-39", Unpublished Thesis, University of London, MA, 1978. For an analysis of the gender implications of the Higher Grade schools, the pre-cursors of the Central Schools, see W Robinson, "Breaking the Elementary Mould: A Study of Nine Higher Grade Schools under the London School Board 1882-1904", Unpublished Thesis, Institute of Education, University of London, MA, 1992

¹³ At their peak, just over 300 Central Schools existed in England, nearly 100 of which were in London.

particularly in comparison to Secondary Schools, who did pass through them.¹⁴ Throughout the inter-war years the system of Central Schools which developed was acknowledged as one of the most innovative and successful aspects of the education system, one of the few developments in an economically stringent era.

The Central Schools represented the first nationwide state provision of an education above the basic instruction provided since 1870 in Elementary Schools. Insofar as they represent a deliberate attempt to provide a vocationally biased education of a secondary nature outside the existing, partially private secondary system, the Central Schools are clearly significant. The selective schools are particularly important for they became, in practice, Secondary Schools for the most able working class children¹⁵, the pupils who provided "a ground both for confidence and anxiety" to the nation.¹⁶ It was recognised that the state had to provide for these children who "were destined to play an important part in the future state"¹⁷, but who were also potentially rebellious, "most susceptible of cultivation and sensitive of neglect", if not given the correct sort of schooling.¹⁸ The Selective Central Schools were also seen as leading the way towards educational progress in a more prosperous era. In 1928 the Board of Education pamphlet "A New Prospect in Education" stated this explicitly:

¹⁴ In 1929 the total population of London Central Schools was 27,179, that of secondary schools (both aided and maintained) was 31,282, London Statistics, 1929-30.

¹⁵ As previously discussed, only a very small number of working class children would have been able to win entry via the scholarship exam to a secondary school. See Chapter Two

¹⁶ The Hadow Report, op cit, p44

¹⁷ National Association of Teachers in Central Schools, The Selective Central School, London, NATSCS, 1934, foreword

⁸ The Hadow Report, op. cit, p44.

What up to now has been loosely termed the Central School is important because along with the general advance we may by its means feel our way to new forms and varieties of post primary education.¹⁹

The Selective Central Schools of the twenties and thirties, were modelled upon the Higher Grade Schools which had developed in London during the pre-war period.²⁰ During the late nineteenth century, as an increasing number of pupils worked their way quickly through the permitted seven standards of the Elementary School, the London School Board had responded by setting up Higher Grade Schools. Although technically illegal under the 1870 Act²¹, they provided a form of advanced instruction for elementary sector children. However, although 79 such schools existed by 1900, a dispute between the Board of Education and the London Authority resulted in the issue of new regulations. The Board imposed strict requirements and limitations on any "advanced" schools which would now be officially recognised as Higher Elementary Schools, thus earning a larger grant. Eventually, the London County Council decided not to seek recognition of its Higher Grade Schools under the new regulations but instead to develop the existing schools under the elementary code. It thus forfeited the higher rate of grant but retained more freedom to provide a superior instruction to give pupils "a definite bias" towards the labour requirements of the capital. The name of the "Central Elementary" was decided upon, representing not only the central location to which selected children would come from the surrounding Elementary

¹⁹ The New Prospect in Education, London, HMSO, 1928, p3.

²⁰ See M Vlaeminke, "The Subordination of Technical Education in Secondary Schooling 1870-1914", in P Summerfield and E Evans (eds), Technical Education and the State, op cit, and N Dalglish, "The Politics of Educational Change: The Case of the English Higher Grade Schools", Educational Administration and History, XIX, 2, July 1987.

²¹ For a full discussion of this, see E Eaglesham, From School Board to Local Authority, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956.

Schools, but also illustrating the intention to be a breakaway from traditional types, to be a new type answering a "long felt but unsatisfied need".²²

By the end of the war, the fifty one Selective Central Schools of London were seen as a proven success and were officially acknowledged as such in the 1918 Education Act. The Act recognised the need to provide some form of extended schooling for able children, whether their parents were able to pay or not. It laid a duty on local education authorities to

make adequate and suitable provision by means of Central Schools, central or special classes or otherwise...courses of advanced instruction for the older or more intelligent children who stay at schools beyond the age of fourteen.²³

Although the school leaving age was raised to fourteen, children were to be permitted to stay at schools until the end of the term in which they reached sixteen, thus accommodating a four or five year central school course starting at the age of 11-12. It was officially accepted and nationally assumed that "the London Central Schools represent the type of school contemplated under the Act" and the LCC Elementary Sub-Committee congratulated itself upon

the success which has led to the recognition of the Central Schools as an essential part of the national system of education.²⁴

Although the Central Schools experienced cutbacks during the following years of economic stringency they developed into a national network. The exact types of school

²² A. Nurse, "A Survey of the History and Development of the Selective Central School", Unpublished Thesis, University of London, MA, 1939, p56.

²³ The Education Act 1918, s2(1).

²⁴ EO/PS/1/10, Development of Education in Public Elementary Schools, 17.12.19.

varied from area to area²⁵ but in an age of educational meritocracy, it was the selective type which was most acclaimed. In many areas a system similar to that of London had developed by the early twenties whereby candidates for both secondary grammar and Central Schools sat the same Junior Scholarship Exam in either May or November; the best "A1" candidates were offered places in Secondary Schools, while those who had slightly lower scores or whose parents could not afford the secondary expenses, were allocated to Central Schools. There was also often an interview with the Headteacher and an aptitude test to decide whether an industrial or commercial central course was most suitable. Thus, in theory, the Selective Central Schools answered the inter-war philosophy that children of certain social groups should be allocated to future occupational positions on the basis of intelligence, ability and aptitude.

The development of this type of post primary schooling was in line with the Conservative party's wish to maintain grammar schools and oppose universal secondary education.²⁶ This created a situation in which the position of the Central Schools, as pseudo Secondary Schools operating under elementary restrictions, was always ambiguous and uncertain. Their greatest problem was the constant refusal of the Board to include Central Schools under the secondary code, and thus to provide them with a higher rate of grant. They suffered disproportionately from inadequate accommodation and equipment, larger classes, lower salaries for staff and shorter holidays than Secondary Schools. The schools also came under increasing attack from the Left as a cheap way of educating the working

²⁵ For example, Bradford had nonselective "intermediate schools" and Leicestershire "municipal secondary schools" to which all children of a certain age could go.

²⁶ For a fuller discussion see D Dean, "Conservatism and the National Education System," Journal of Contemporary History 6, 1971 and G Savage "The Civil Service and Secondary Education in England during the Interwar Period", Journal of Contemporary History 18, 2, 1983

class and an evasion of the need to provide universal, free secondary education.²⁷ However, although by the late thirties, this group of schools was suffering some decline, they could still be described in the Spens Report as "answering the need in a highly industrialised society for post primary schools of a nonacademic type".²⁸

It was above all the Selective Central Schools of London which continued consciously to lead the development of this type of school and present a model to the country. During the inception and early years of the capital's system of Central Schools, the Municipal Reform Party were in power on the LCC. They believed that advanced education was suitable only for a wealthy minority and thus the London Central Schools became, and continued to be, highly selective. This enhanced the status of the establishments for they consisted "entirely of picked pupils taught by picked teachers"²⁹, unlike the Secondary Schools which took a large percentage of fee-paying students. The official response of the LCC to the 1918 Act was to plan for the existing 51 schools to be extended to 100 which would take 8% of an age group.³⁰ They would thus figure prominently in London's role in "moulding of the empire and in the general advance of humanity".³¹ By the late twenties, the Central Schools could be described as

one of the most satisfactory and best conducted departments of the London education system. They are an essential and very valuable type of school.³²

²⁷ K Lindsay, Social Progress and Educational Waste, op cit, p11, R Tawney, Secondary Education for All, op cit, p109

²⁸ The Spens Report, op cit, p73

²⁹ EO/GEN/1/147, Proposed London Survey

³⁰ EO/PS/1/10, Development of Education in Public Elementary Schools, 17.12 19.

³¹ Report of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, 16 3.27

³² Ibid

Each institution had either a commercial or industrial bias to its curriculum although some "dual bias" schools provided both types of course in one building.³³ Each school was supposed to provide specifically for the needs of the labour market of the area in which it was situated. By 1927, there was some concern about the categorising of children at eleven so the Education Committee stipulated that the first two years of the course must be made more general, with transferral, if necessary, before increased specialisation in the third year.³⁴

Although it was repeatedly stated in official policy that "educational facilities are available alike for boys and girls",³⁵ the education provided in the LCC Selective Central Schools was highly gender specific during the inter-war years. There was an increasingly general tendency for economic and educational reasons for Elementary Schools to amalgamate into mixed institutions but there was a strong opinion in both central and local Government that Central Schools should remain single sex. The LCC were "unanimously of the opinion that mixed Central Schools should wherever possible be discouraged".³⁶ The stated justification for this was that the practical vocational bias of Central School education, by its very nature, had to be different for the two sexes. A Circular in 1927 told Inspectors that

³³ The contemporary term for the type of Central School was commercial bias or industrial bias - rather than "biased" which is perhaps grammatically more appropriate. The contemporary term has been used throughout this chapter.

³⁴ Transfers from Central School to Junior Technical Schools were rare as were transfers from one type of Central School to another See Chapter Four

³⁵ The New Prospect in Education, op cit, p12

³⁶ ED 97/207, Notes on the inspection of 10 elementary schools, undated

Apart from any question of desirability of separating the sexes it is easier to provide for varying needs. Effective provision of practical instruction can be made more easily and cheaply.³⁷

For the very earliest days of the system of Central Schools there was a concern about exactly how that vocational bias could materialise in practice for girls. It was felt that the aim for a boy should be that on leaving he would have achieved "an all round training and readiness and adaptability that would fit him for the work".³⁸ A Circular issued by the LCC in 1911 stated that "the chief objective of the Central Schools is to prepare boys and girls for immediate employment on leaving school, and the instruction should therefore be such that children will be prepared to go into business houses or workshops at the completion of the course without any intermediate special training".³⁹ The aim was not to provide the technical training for a particular trade or business which the Junior Technical schools were aiming to give. The Central School, in comparison, was to develop the all round abilities of these chosen children and give them a strong general education that would enable them to climb at least a certain way up their chosen employment hierarchy.

Yet there was an uncertainty as to how this could be translated into instruction for girls - especially as both the Board of Education and the LCC obviously felt that instruction in basic commercial techniques was not truly "educational". This tension became apparent in the way in which the girls' commercial Central Schools developed because the bias as it actually materialised did indeed become basic lessons in typewriting or shorthand. It was a tension which brought the LCC into conflict with the Board of Education, the latter constantly stressing that:

³⁷ ED 11/169, Instruction E 137, 29 9.27

³⁸ EO/STA/2/57 The appointment of Headteachers at Central Schools, 1 3.10

³⁹ ED77/214, Report on London Central Schools, 1914, op cit, p1

At the Central School a general education of more advanced type than is given in the Elementary School will be the object; and if the instruction is of more practical character than is usually the case in Secondary Schools, it will not be with the view to fitting the child for any particular vocation but in order to give an added interest to his work generally.⁴⁰

Thus, as the LCC included more and more basic instruction in shorthand and typing in the curricula of the girls' schools, there was a constant ambivalence about whether the Central Schools were actually fulfilling their stated educational aim.

The expansion of women into commercial office work has frequently been cited as evidence that women gained vast new opportunities in the labour market as a result of their war time experiences. Before 1870 clerical work had been based on male apprenticeship. Male clerks generally had a high status in society, job security and an education which set them apart from manual workers. The term clerk was a general term which included many situations and grades of work.⁴¹ Women first entered offices as clerks in the 1880s. The early entries were women from middle and lower middle class backgrounds, relatively well educated and working as copyists and typists. There was, however, by the end of the nineteenth century unease that women's entry into offices would displace the male clerks. The outcry took the form of claims of the loss of femininity with cartoons portraying women in farcical masculine roles. Underlining this was, of course, the fear that women would reduce the salaries of clerical workers and put the male breadwinner out of work. Lewis and Walby have argued that male employers and male trade unionists both wanted to minimise the competition between male and female workers.⁴² Men as employers and as unionists

⁴⁰ ED77/192, Advanced Instruction in Elementary Schools, 1920

⁴¹ The sons of businessmen often entered offices as clerks and thereby got a grounding in management.

⁴² J Lewis, "Women in Clerical Work", op cit, in G Anderson, The White Blouse Revolution Lewis points out that there is not yet sufficient empirical work to show exactly how this was accomplished in a wide variety of settings in which clerks of various types were employed. See also S Walby, Patriarchy at Work, op cit, p154.

shared particular ideas as to what might be considered appropriate work for women and, in the case of employers, cultural beliefs as to women's proper role pulled stronger than any economic urge to rapidly employ the cheapest labour available in the office. The segregation of women into particular grades and jobs served to mollify male clerks while also providing a source of cheap labour. Crompton and Jones have most recently argued that the de-skilling of clerical work has been mediated for men by the creation of low paid, low status female and internal labour markets, the male career path thus being preserved at the expense of women.⁴³ This cannot be explained by a simplistic conspiracy theory. Ideas as to women's role in the workplace, of course, reflected the dominant scientific and cultural beliefs that women by and large shared themselves. Nevertheless, by confining women into strictly segregated employment as typists, shorthand writers and routine clerks employers certainly side-stepped the resistance of male clerks who might be opposed women's entry into the office.⁴⁴ Thus by 1914 the early hostility felt towards female clerks was tempered by the fact, that although the numbers were increasing, they formed a very distinctive group within the clerical labour market and did not directly threaten the position or prospects of the well placed male career clerk.

Thus the characteristics of office work for women were firmly established by the time of the First World War. During the early years of conflict there was an over supply of shorthand typists which was compounded in the immediate post-war years. The Woman

⁴³ R Crompton and G Jones, White Collar Proletariat . De-skilling and Gender in Clerical work, London, MacMillan, 1986 The way in which such a strategy was legitimised and the extent to which it was made acceptable to women needs further analysis.

⁴⁴ Routh has shown that the earnings of male clerks and of skilled male manual workers was similar on the eve of the First World War and the male clerk might thus have felt doubly threatened by the skilled male manual worker and by female competition in the office See G Routh, Occupation and Pay, op cit

Clerk noted that the tendency was to force women more and more into the position of shorthand typists.⁴⁵

There is a very pronounced feeling that they should be relegated once more to the clerical routine work and shorthand typing performed prior to the War, and where, perhaps, there is not antagonism, there is a distinct undercurrent of sentiment that women should not poach on the preserves of men.⁴⁶

Despite the claims that the war had an emancipatory effect on women's white collar employment, the increased participation of women in office work during the following two decades failed to substantially threaten the boundary between what was considered to be male and female jobs. Certain areas of clerical work became increasingly feminised and de-skilled and women were overwhelmingly confined to the low status jobs.⁴⁷ At the same time substantial new white collar opportunities were opening up for men in, for example, accounting, sales and office management and thus offering a male only promotion ladder to those who continued to enter this area of work. The changing structure of company organisation created new opportunities for men as the owner/manager declined and a new strata of lower and middle management evolved. Offices broke up into costs, planning, scheduling and purchasing departments and company secretaries, accountants and personnel managers emerged.

The fact remains that there was a huge redistribution in terms of white collar work, a redistribution that took place not by gentle permutation but by the re-negotiation of boundaries between huge areas of work. Women acquired work which was new and without

⁴⁵ The Woman Clerk, 1, 1, December 1919, p2

⁴⁶ Ibid, 11, 4, March 1920, p39 By 1914 the number of women clerks rose from 2% to 20% of the total

⁴⁷ In the 1931 Census in Lewisham of 8179 females registered in the "Clerks, Draughtsmen and Typists" category; 3398 were typists and only 24 were heads or managers of commercial departments. Of 11759 men in the class, 82 were typists and 426 heads of departments or managers J Ryan, "Developments in the Employment", op cit, p63-64

a tradition of male occupancy but they also acquired work which was transferred, downgraded to them from the men's sphere. This was generally work which was no longer perceived as masculine or the more mechanical parts of office practice.⁴⁸ In the 40 years between 1891 and 1931 clerical labour increased by 255%; between 1901 and 1911 the increase was 39%, between 1911 and 1921 the increase was 49% and between 1921 and 1931 the increase was 18%.⁴⁹ The number of female clerical workers grew to such an extent that by 1931 they amounted to 43% of clerical labour in Greater London. The greatest increase did indeed take place in the decade between 1911 and 1921, a decade in which the total number of male clerks in private employment in London ceased to grow.

London was unique in offering employment to the typist in a wide range of industries such as commercial insurance, local Government, the head offices of new industries such as chemical and electrical. The administrative offices of the new industries were increasingly located in London. Most clerical workers tended to live in the lower middle class areas. The New Survey estimated that in 1931 an average of 20.4% lived in the four middle class boroughs of Hornsey, Wandsworth, Lewisham and Leyton while an average 4.5% lived in the working class boroughs of Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Stepney and Finsbury. The girls would travel in to the centre on the cheaper workmen's trains which ran before 8.00 am.

Previous historical work on clerical workers has focused on class rather than gender and has addressed primarily the issue of proletarianisation - the worsening of the position of clerical workers relative to manual workers.⁵⁰ Women have frequently been omitted from

⁴⁸ It should be noted that it was not until the 1951 Census that women clerks are shown as actually outnumbering men but the writing was very much on the wall during the inter-war years.

⁴⁹ H Llewelyn Smith (ed), New London Survey, op cit, Vol VIII, p274-277.

⁵⁰ For a detailed discussion of various interpretations see, M Zimmeck, "The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women 1850-1914" in A V John (ed) Unequal Opportunities, op cit See also M Zimmeck, "Jobs for the Girls", op cit

these studies which argue that clerical workers' inability to realise the identity of their interests with the manual working class has inhibited unionisation within office work.⁵¹

Anderson argues that women were largely responsible for the worsening position of clerks relative to manual workers.⁵² Zimmick, however, makes the telling point that if the transformation of clerical work is viewed through women's eyes the issue of proletarianisation which has hitherto dominated historical debate seems ephemeral. Proletarianisation is a downward movement and for the women who entered offices during these years there was nowhere else to go but up.

In terms of the class basis of women clerks during the inter-war years, there does appear to be a gradual increase of women whose fathers were skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers and a decline of women whose fathers were in lower middle class.⁵³ Women clerks from middle class backgrounds appeared to be smaller in number than in the previous decades.⁵⁴ Although arguments are made that class composition of an occupation will ultimately determine its status,⁵⁵ the fear that clerical work would lose its respectability was premised on the assumption that it would ultimately take on the characteristics of manual work. The inclusion of more female working class entrants certainly does not, however,

⁵¹ See F Klingender, The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain, London, Martin Lawrence, 1935. He points at the direct relationship between the employment of women and proletarianisation seeing females as an active but unwitting agent. Holcombe also seems to assume that women's positions were similar to those of men and argues that they were more easily reconciled to the lack of opportunity for advancement. L Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work, Middle Class Working Women in England and Wales 1850-1914, London, Archon, 1973, p146, p179

⁵² G Anderson, Victorian Clerks, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1976

⁵³ Sanderson found the fathers of clerks she interviewed were mainly artisans - plumbers, engineers or small shopkeepers. K Sanderson "A Pension to Look Forward To", op cit. See also J Ryan, "Developments in the Employment of Women", op cit, p65

⁵⁴ Davy points out that often the mothers of her interviewees had been servants and encouraged their daughters to go into office work. T Davy, "Female Shorthand Typists and Typists 1900-39", op cit

⁵⁵ D Lockwood, The Black-Coated Worker - A Study in Class Consciousness, London, Allen and Unwin, 1958, p106.

suggest that they took on the values of the work in manual labour but rather of the class above them.⁵⁶

Thus fears about women's entering into the office work were allayed; a rationale was built up showing that office work was women's natural sphere and it was this rationale into which the Central Schools fed. When the Gladstone Committee examined the issue of women's employment towards the end of the war it stressed that men and women did not have the same talents and that the work they performed was not therefore interchangeable. The Committee evoked the classic distinction between mechanical or clerical work and intellectual and administrative work, making it fit their view of male and female capacities and constructing a pyramid of grades whereby women were confined to the lowest clerical work.⁵⁷

Such justifications were used throughout the inter-war years. The typewriter was analogous to the piano and suitable for female fingers. Women did not have to exercise the characteristics of strong judgement and initiative in the offices, characteristics which they naturally lacked. They were, however, naturally neat, precise, efficient and careful and therefore eminently suited for the job of typists. Thus the lower grades of office work underwent a feminisation process both in their composition and in the ideology which encompassed them. As Barren and Norris have pointed out, the shift in sex segregation in

⁵⁶ Lockwood and Sanderson have both found that female clerks tended to marry similarly upwardly mobile men. D Lockwood, *The Black Coated worker*, op cit, p115. K Sanderson, "A Pension to Look Forward To", op cit.

⁵⁷ Final Report of the Treasury Committee on the Recruitment of Civil Servants after the War, Cmd 164, 1918, p7. The border between clerical and administrative grades in the Civil Service was elaborately policed throughout the inter-war years. For a full discussion of the Civil Service see M Zimmeck, "Strategies and Stragems", op cit.

the labour market is frequently accompanied by the traits that are seen as necessary for it - traits of the work become acquainted with the traits of those performing it.⁵⁸

Thus it was claimed that women's dexterity made them skilled manipulators, they took more kindly than male employees to routine work and long confinements, they were able to cope better than men or boys with sedentary employment.⁵⁹ This distinction was rather forced in the place of clerical work since there was little aspect of it that actually took place under dangerous conditions or needed that fundamental male characteristic of brute strength. So in clerical work the line was drawn roughly between the intellectual which was the province of men and the mechanical which was the province of women. According to this view, men's intelligence was wide ranging, bold and penetrating whereas women's was narrow, timid and receptive. Women were quick, neat, painstaking and had a natural resisting power to the dulling effect of monotony - but they were also delicate and unable to withstand the pressures of sustained work and so had neither the desire nor the capacity for responsibility.⁶⁰ Thus clerical work was divided into two clear cut spheres of activity for men and women. Although the boundary between the spheres shifted from time to time the separation between them remained absolute and constant. Women worked with women, under women, doing women's jobs, processes or parts of processes.

The division was compounded by the fact that the nature of clerical work altered fundamentally during these years. Improved communications via telephones and a much extended postal system, inventions such as shorthand typewriters, dictating machines, carbon

⁵⁸ R Barron and G Norris, "Sexual Divisions and the Dual Labour Market", in S Allen and D Leonard (eds), Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage, London, Longman, 1976

⁵⁹ A Davin, "Telegraphists and Clerks", *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 26 Spring 1973. H Martindale, Women Servants of the State, 1870-1938, London, Allen and Unwin, 1938, p18

⁶⁰ Zimmeck points out that these assumptions surely owed more to male self interest rather than any real understanding of what women could or wanted to do. M Zimmeck, "Jobs for the Girls", *op cit*.

paper and stencil duplicators, new ways of storing and retrieving data such as card indexes all facilitated an enormous increase in the complexity and volume of clerical work. A key part of this was, of course, the vastly increased use of typewriters. The first typewriters were introduced into the office in the 1880s and it was during this period that the combination of "typing and shorthand" began. When typewriters were first introduced they were not solely the preserve of women as there were some male typists. From the start, however, women were particularly encouraged to learn the skill. The Pitman School's prospectus of 1905 stated "in the case of ladies, typewriting is really compulsory, as it is rarely that a lady's handwriting is considered suitable, without special training, for business purposes."⁶¹

Women office workers did have their own internal hierarchy and promotional opportunities within their sphere of work. There was, for example, a world of difference between the typist, an audio typist working in a typing pool, the shorthand typist who transcribed notes and the secretaries at the top of the hierarchy who worked for one man. Shorthand and typewriting would be of secondary importance to the top group; their status would result from their access to the inner sanctum of power of the decision maker. Parallel with the inability to cross over into other "male areas" of office work was the increasing specialisation in offices, requiring prolonged training and good qualifications which effectively blocked women's entry. This barrier was reinforced by the marriage bar. The bar was meant to facilitate a high turnover of women staff and thus ensure lower costs. Since few women would remain in service long enough to rise to the top of the scale or earn

⁶¹ Quoted in T Davy, "A Cissy job for Men : A Nice Job for Girls : Women Shorthand Typists in London 1900-39", p126, in L Davidoff and B Westover, *Our Work, Our Lives, Our words*, op cit. Davy argues that this was partly as a result of the marketing techniques typewriting firms used to stimulate interest by having a lady operator demonstrating the machines' uses while likening it to the class specific accomplishment of piano playing

a pension it also rendered uneconomical the provision of greater opportunities or lengthy training for women. Women office workers were, in the inter-war years, overwhelmingly young and single.⁶² The New London Survey found that in Greater London in 1921 94.4% of female clerks were single and 3.5% were married.⁶³

It is not surprising therefore that women did not receive the same financial remuneration that men did from office work. The New London Survey found that the average weekly salaries for men under 25 were 40 shillings if in the public services, 35 shillings if in industry and commerce. For females the equivalent rates were 40 shillings if in public services, and 35 shillings if in industry. If, however, the employee was over 25 the man received between 85 and 100 shillings whereas the women would receive between 57 shillings and 77 shillings.⁶⁴ As The Women Clerk pointed out in 1920

when we begin to probe deeper ... all is not so bright and the equality which we were taught to believe had at last been conceded to women under the Sex Disqualification Bill begins to vanish before our trusting eyes. The lowest grade of clerical work is to be henceforth our preserve, while the avenues to the higher grades will be selection instead of ability".⁶⁵

Yet it should be remembered that for many of these working class girls, entering white collar office work was an enormous achievement and had much to recommend it.⁶⁶ Above all, unlike factory work, office work was respectable. Although the work might have been mundane and monotonous and a girl's thoughts might turn increasingly to domesticity

⁶² D Gittins has shown how female clerks do not marry until later than other occupational groups and also tended to have similar families D Gittins, "Fair Sex", op cit, p83.

⁶³ H Llewelyn Smith (ed), New London Survey, op cit, Vol II, p281.

⁶⁴ It is also interesting to note that the difference between the rates of pay of female manual workers and of clerks was small

⁶⁵ The Woman Clerk, 1, 4, March 1920, p41

⁶⁶ It has been suggested that one of the reasons why occupational consciousness failed to develop amongst female office workers during these years was due to the women's enjoyment of the life they led.

after a few years at the typewriter, for many working class families the choosing of office work for a daughter was based on real social aspirations and a belief that it was a good job for a woman. Thus in their role of preparing able working class girls for office work the Central Schools were certainly fulfilling a much felt need.

Prior to the inter-war years education for clerical work had been provided through private commercial colleges.⁶⁷ The cost of such instruction would have been prohibitive to most working class families.⁶⁸ There was considerable concern at the LCC during the war years about commercial education largely because of the popularity of the private commercial schools.⁶⁹ There was thus a growing awareness that if commercial education were to be provided within the state education system it would have to be provided mainly for girls. At a meeting of the Association of Shorthand Writers and Typists in 1913, Miss Adler of the LCC admitted that the County Council had already done a great deal for boys in the way of training for higher branches of commercial careers but that, although the question of a scheme of special training for girls had been brought up over the over again at the Higher Education Sub-Committee, owing to the "brilliant quibbles of various male members" it had not passed through Council.⁷⁰

In November 1914 Education Officer Blair, met with various officers of the Board. Blair admitted that "no City needed more the advantages of a sound commercial education,

⁶⁷ See G Carnaffan, "Commercial Education and the Female Office Worker" in G Anderson, The White Blouse Revolution, op cit Education was also occasionally provided in the higher grade schools during the early years of the 20th century. In 1899 the School Board of London was not supporting any commercial classes See A Saint, "Technical Education and the LCC", op cit

⁶⁸ Davy argues that a Pitmans college course would require an entrant from an elementary school to stay for 2 years at least, the first year would be spent in bringing her up to a good academic standard.

⁶⁹ ED12/209 Memorandum of Interview, 17 11.14

⁷⁰ Ibid, Report of the proceedings of a conference of the Association of Shorthand Writers and Typists, op cit

but at present a system could not be said to exist".⁷¹ He pointed out that London already had 39 Central Schools with a commercial bias but that they were not doing "well enough", largely because they needed teachers with more experience. The vast majority of the discussion at this meeting was about the need to provide a commercial education for girls. HMI Phillips argued that some aided Secondary Schools had already introduced commercial subjects because the Headmistresses had been convinced of the actual need for instruction and knew that many of the girls relied on a knowledge of shorthand for getting occupations. Blair "studiously avoided giving an answer to" HMI Phillip's question about why commercial instruction could not be given to girls in Secondary Schools and maintained his position that the Central Schools should be modified to meet an undoubted demand for commercial education."⁷²

It was indeed the commercial bias Central Schools throughout the inter-war years which did provide commercial education for girls in the capital. By 1925 there were 27 such schools along with 20 dual bias Centrals which also provided a commercial course.⁷³ The only guidelines laid down by the LCC for the timetable of the schools was that a foreign language be included for four hours a week, that there should be two hours drawing and two hours experimental science and some domestic subjects for girls. Although all subjects of the curriculum should be infused with a commercial bias, the purely technical subjects should only be taught in the third and fourth years of the course - in which one and a half hours per week should be given to shorthand and one hour to book-keeping. For many years the LCC refused to agree to the inclusion of typewriting lessons during normal school hours. It was

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid, See also ED12/209, Day Commercial Schools in London; op cit, 12 11 14.

⁷³ ED97/209, Memorandum, 7.4 25.

frequently asserted that typing was not of proper educational value and restrictions were imposed whereby it could only be taught in the two hours after the end of the school day.⁷⁴

In practice this regulation does seem to have been relaxed. The Hadow Report stated that in the third year of the central school course shorthand and book-keeping were taught whereas in the fourth and fifth year typing and office work lessons took place.⁷⁵ Similarly in 1925 shorthand was "only grudgingly permitted to form part of the curriculum".⁷⁶ Such restrictions and beliefs were particularly significant for girls since it is clear that the primary aim of the commercial instruction for girls was to teach the basic office skills to prepare them for the monotonous low status elements of office work.

Rather than learning such basic skills, boys followed commercial courses covering banking and bookkeeping. Commercial work for boys in Central Schools was viewed as valuable training for able pupils who would later win promotion and rise up with white collar employment hierarchy. For the large number of girls who were being prepared for office work, this idea of an avenue of promotion was not seen to apply. In 1931 Education for Salesmanship lamented that the employment of office girls rather than boy clerks meant that there were no longer candidates for advancement within a firm:

formerly there was a group of boys who constituted a pool from which potential salesmen, managers and other responsible officers of the firm were fairly certain to emerge.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ LCC Education Committee Minutes, 26 3.24 Regulation 291 limiting typing to one hour between 4 30-6 00 pm had been suspended 1920-21 because of the demand for lessons. LCC Education Committee Minutes, 22 10 24.

⁷⁵ The Hadow Report, op cit, p112-13.

⁷⁶ EO/STA/2/40, Memorandum on the Teachers of Shorthand in Central Schools 1911-25

⁷⁷ Education for Salesmanship, London, HMSO, 1931, p68



The Central Schools were to produce a generation of office girls to answer the need for low grade workers. A report on the London Schools stressed that this should specifically affecting the curricula of the school

it is doubtful whether boys and girls ought to do exactly the same sort of work seeing that the proportion of pupils who will become shorthand typists is larger in the case of girls⁷⁸

Whilst the boy junior clerk needed to be able to read books and documents intelligently, the girls simply needed to be taught to take shorthand and type quickly.

the acquisition of mere speed in shorthand is perhaps hardly the province of the Central School, though it may be justifiable to devote more attention to speed in the case of girls, for whom it has a definite and immediate value⁷⁹

The Report then went on to praise girls' schools which had decided to limit the teaching of book-keeping and the teaching of accounts. Ramsbottom, London's great expert on commercial education, summed up the situation in his comment that providing girls with the skills for work meant "to equip them with the necessary proficiency in typewriting and shorthand".⁸⁰

Similarly, twenty years later, in 1938 the same views were still paramount. A confidential Memorandum stated that, for girls, typewriting should be taught more generally than shorthand for "shorthand is more difficult to learn than typewriting, there are fewer girls capable of reaching a high standard of proficiency in it and effective progress is more dependent upon the intelligence of the pupil than appears to be the case in typewriting."⁸¹ The Memorandum also stated that the "function of state aided schools which undertake to

⁷⁸ ED97/207, Report on London Central Schools, op cit, para 11

⁷⁹ Ibid, p13

⁸⁰ ED10/221, Memorandum, J W Ramsbottom, undated.

⁸¹ ED46/267 Pre-employment Training for Commerce, Memorandum T442/83, EJWJ, 22 3 38.

teach typewriting is clearly to inculcate a satisfactory technique."⁸² It would, however, be inappropriate to base a clerical course for boys on such requirements although "there are occasionally boys for whom these subjects are quite proper".⁸³ The Spens Report referred to the commercial bias being epitomised as shorthand and typewriting for girls.⁸⁴

Throughout the inter-war years there was clearly an assumption within the educational system that the able boys who warranted commercial training would be able to use such skills in employment. In 1938 it was argued

the more responsible jobs to which the better boys may hope to aspire demand either qualifications in some specialised branch of knowledge such as accounting, costing or secretarial practice, or an intimate knowledge of the products and organisation of the business itself or an appreciation of its problems.⁸⁵

Thus Central Schools for boys should try to include more general subjects linked with proper business training. A note to Chief Inspector Duckworth in 1937 commented that it was important to stress the difference between commercial and clerical (shorthand and typewriting) courses; and that those courses for boys should be commercial and should not normally include shorthand and typewriting."⁸⁶

There was recognition amongst Inspectors that the type of commercial instruction being given to girls in London Central Schools was very narrow in scope. HMI Miss Hewson commented that the great majority of the girls were going to the humbler ranks of the clerical professions to perform subordinate or not highly specialised work - "the definite

⁸² Ibid, p3.

⁸³ Ibid, p15

⁸⁴ The Spens Report, op cit, p114.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p17.

⁸⁶ ED12/466 Commercial work in Secondary Schools, note to C I Duckworth, 25.3.37. Thus the boys were to be given lessons in business methods, accountancy and banking.

attempts made in shorthand and typewriting classes are frankly utilitarian and have a feeling of inferiority attached to them."⁸⁷ It was generally accepted at the Board that a mere course in shorthand and typewriting would not be accepted as being "properly vocational" but that accountancy, book-keeping and economics had to be included to warrant such a title.⁸⁸ The National Association of Teachers in Selective Central Schools, told the Spens Committee that it was vital not to confuse the mere acquisition of dexterity in shorthand and typewriting with a broad education in adaptability and the ability to translate knowledge into actions.⁸⁹

The actual timetables illustrate the extent to which commercial courses for girls became simply hours of shorthand and typing practice. It was reported in 1924 that in Greenwich Park Central the girls were sacrificing all for speed in shorthand and that the fifth year were having seven hours a week of the subject. In 1928 sixteen hours per week of typewriting at Balham Central was said to be "not now adequate".⁹⁰ In 1937 Peckham Central Girls School was criticised for its ambitious syllabus which included commerce for 40 minutes a week for girls in the final year:

the sections on the stock exchange and insurance might be deleted and the English Banking System should be treated in the simplest possible terms.⁹¹

The pupils themselves were frequently told in negative terms about the employment they could expect to obtain. The Central Schools Employment Committee of London

⁸⁷ ED10/153, Excerpt of evidence to Consultative Committee from Miss Hewson HMI, undated [1936].

⁸⁸ ED22/131/490, Inquiry into Vocational Courses in Secondary Schools.

⁸⁹ ED 10/151, Evidence of the National Association of Teachers in Selective Central Schools to the Consultative Committee, undated, [1934].

⁹⁰ LCC Education Committee Minutes, 9 5 28

⁹¹ LCC Inspectors' Report, Peckham Girls Central, 25.7 37. At the time of research the Inspectors Reports on Central Schools had not been given numbered classification at the Greater London Record Office.

reported in 1933 that in the City good employers selected their higher level staff from juniors. The bright boy starting at a low level had excellent prospects.

Such boys frequently obtain a wide knowledge which enables them later on to qualify as technical representatives, buyers, salesmen or experts in connection with various activities in commerce.⁹²

The trained boy of 16 or 17 was greatly in demand in professional firms, could expect a higher wage and security of tenure. The demand for girls, however, to perform "office work of a routine character" was considerable although it had to admitted that the prospects "can only be regarded as fair".⁹³

A careers pamphlet for girls about opportunities in commercial work noted that it was customary for much office routine work to be delegated to girls and women. It told its readers that work on most machines was apt to be monotonous and limited the opportunities of gaining general knowledge of different departments of the business. Between such mundane office work and higher level administrative work, there was a "narrow bridge over which so far few women only have found it possible to pass".⁹⁴ A familiar theme emerged.

One of the considerations said to limit the prospects of women in commerce is the fact that their business life may be ended by marriage, and it has not been considered, therefore, worthwhile for an employer to engage a women as a candidate for employment leading ultimately to a post of responsibility.⁹⁵

The LCC Guide for Employment for Boys and Girls wrote of the benefits of commercial employment for boys in London; there were "opportunities open to boys of all classes" to climb the well defined ladder of promotion. The pamphlet continued that the

⁹² Central Schools Employment Committee, Eighth Annual Report, op cit.

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ministry of Labour, Choice of Careers Pamphlet, No.19, Secretarial and Clerical Work for Women, 1938, p3

⁹⁵ Ibid, p19

prospects of girls in clerical and commercial life were far more restricted although "typists, including shorthand typists are all women"⁹⁶ even implying that it was the fault of the girls themselves that there were so few opportunities open to them. They were

often conscientious routine workers but perhaps through want of opportunity or ambition are inclined to be too easily satisfied in holding positions where there is little or no responsibility.⁹⁷

The dangers and ill effects of monotonous and routine work had been pointed out by the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1919. They argued that, since it was not possible to change the character of the work per se, the remedy lay in giving the worker

hope of advancement, when he cheerfully will endure early years of drudgery. It is the absence of this hope which takes the heart out of the worker, which women are suffering.⁹⁸

The tendency to stress that females were innately suitable to use new office equipment in the inter-war years extended to school policy. Education for Salesmanship commented about typewriters that "it has been found that the use of these aids ... is a task peculiarly suitable for girls." The Central Schools' Employment Committee undertook to circulate information about new machines to schools as quickly as possible because

although routine and mechanical in character, good progress can usually be made by the girl who has the opportunity of mastering an installation comprising several machines.⁹⁹

Women were also believed to be particularly suited to indexing.

⁹⁶ London Regional Advisory Council for Juvenile Employment, A Guide to Employment for Boys and Girls in Greater London, London, LCC, 1928, p43

⁹⁷ Ibid, p50

⁹⁸ Ministry of Reconstruction, Report of Women's Employment Committee, op cit, p15.

⁹⁹ Central Schools' Employment Committee, Eighth Annual Report, op cit.

a woman who takes up indexing must have lived with her eyes open, otherwise she is apt to be a purely mechanical indexer who would take down the proper nouns and not understand the subject with which she is dealing...I would advise you to make yourself familiar with the ordinary way of alluding to and addressing persons of title, for example, an indexer should know the difference between the proper way of addressing a dowager and a peer's daughter.¹⁰⁰

Girls were also disadvantaged in the teaching they received in their endless typing and shorthand sessions. There was concern that teachers in boys' Central Schools should be adequately qualified, particularly in book-keeping for

there is a growing tendency to extend the scope of the book-keeping and theoretical side of commercial instruction in boys' schools (giving incidentally less attention to shorthand)"¹⁰¹

There was no such concern about the teaching in girls' schools. There was general recognition at the LCC that it was difficult to find teachers of typewriting and shorthand who were highly qualified. The subjects did not "appeal to the ambitious or the academically minded teacher" and "owing to the boom in the City it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure highly qualified outside teachers".¹⁰² Although all teachers of vocational subjects were supposed to be qualified in what they taught, this was evidently not so in the girls' schools. In 1931 Bloomfield Road Central had been without a commercial teacher for a term when they were forced to "import" a man from another school.

he learned shorthand as a boy at school, has had no need to use it until quite recently, is without formal qualification and until the time of the inspection was not very familiar with modern methods of teaching the subject.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ ED12/209 Report of the Proceedings of a Conference of the Association of Shorthand Writers and Typists, op cit, p11.

¹⁰¹ EO/STA/2/37, Report of Education Officer, 21 1.38.

¹⁰² Ibid, Bennett to Chief Inspector, 28 4 37

¹⁰³ LCC Inspectors' Report, Bloomfield Road Central Girls, 1931

The Inspectors hoped that once a mistress qualified in the subject, the girls would spend less time "occupied in longhand" during shorthand lessons. A questionnaire in 1937 revealed that much bookkeeping was taught by teachers not specifically qualified and that the teacher often "does not know much about the subject".

Yet in spite of the limitations of the education given, the Selective Central Schools were overwhelmingly popular with their clientele. Working class parents and girls wanted the type of employment training which the schools were perceived as giving since, in their view, even the most mundane of office jobs represented a step up from factory work. There were constant references at both Board and LCC level to the popularity of the commercial courses. Miss Backett's Memorandum to the Spens Committee reported that the message in working class families was "whether it is expressed or not, it is that a child must go to a Central School if she is to have a chance, presumably a chance of getting on in the world".¹⁰⁴ There was constant concern that unless the courses became more definitely specialised parents would remove their daughters at 14 for them to attend commercial cramming institutions.¹⁰⁵ It was recognised that the girls would "become the prey of the less desirable but ubiquitous private commercial schools" if no provision was made for them in the state schools.¹⁰⁶ In April 1938 a Committee was appointed to report on pre-employment training for commerce.¹⁰⁷ Its investigation found that, although at the time of admission to the Central School parents were required to sign an undertaking that they

¹⁰⁴ ED10/152 Paper U.21, The Education of London Elementary School Children over the age of 11, Miss E M Backett, undated [1934]

¹⁰⁵ ED77/214, Report on London Central Schools, *op cit*, p6. This thesis will not examine the private commercial colleges or the small number of commercial schools set up in London but this area would be an important area of study

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p8

¹⁰⁷ ED46/267, The Committee included no women members.

would keep their daughter at school for the entire four year course, it had become in practice, impossible to insist. This was the case even after the introduction of a certain number of maintenance exhibitions between the age of 14-16. It was generally accepted that the average parent of a Central School girl was anxious to see definite results "especially if they have an obvious and immediate cash value." He would be more likely to keep his child at school if he was satisfied that he was more or less getting what he wants.¹⁰⁸

Thus commercial training was the type of vocational training which parents desired and demanded for their daughters. Ballard wrote in a section on Central Schools in a survey of London education that

if parents were allowed to choose the bias for their children they would almost to a man (and to a woman) choose the commercial bias.¹⁰⁹

The London Headteachers reported in 1924 that parents were always willing to pay for commercial examinations and there is some evidence that Central School girls went on to train further in such establishments as the Dulwich Commercial Institute and the Oliver Goldsmith Commercial Institute.¹¹⁰

The LCC became concerned that this overwhelming popularity of commercial courses (as opposed to the industrial bias central courses) could engender a shortage of workers for other areas of the labour market and made efforts to prevent so many pupils taking the commercial bias exams. In 1926 the Hadow Report stated that some Selective Central Schools in London were refraining from providing the popular training courses in London "in spite of strong pressure from parents". The Headmistress of Peckham Girls' Central insisted that some girls take a child care course "in spite of the great demand for clerical

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, Pre-Employment Training for Commerce, op cit, p9

¹⁰⁹ EO/PS/31/19 Proposed London Survey.

¹¹⁰ EO/PS/1/11, Memorandum of the Association of Headteachers of Central Schools, 14.3.24

training".¹¹¹ By 1927 the problems were believed to be so serious that the Elementary Education Sub-Committee set up a special investigation. It was resolved that the name "Industrial Bias" should be changed to the more appealing "Technical Bias" and that a non-commercial side should be introduced into all large Central Schools which should be scientific for boys and which could be domestic for girls. Nevertheless there were by 1935 only seven schools providing solely an industrial bias for girls and 49 a commercial bias. The remaining Central Schools were "dual biased".

Thus the commercial bias courses in the London Schools for girls demonstrated both the limitations and potential of this educational experiment. They did offer to a certain group of girls training in a new field of employment which could provide some of the benefits absent in traditional women's work - or at least in the perception of the girls themselves. The girls were permitted to enter a former male sphere and to use modern equipment not previously associated with femininity. Office work did offer to them social status, better wages than they might otherwise have earned even if they were lower than those of male colleagues, the freedom to wear their own clothes, to work set office hours, possibly to have their own space at a desk in the office. These had frequently been denied to young working class girls in employment. The great popularity of the commercial courses demonstrates the contemporary perception that this was a desirable form of labour. Yet this new white collar work cannot be regarded uncritically as an escape route from the constraints of gender. The expansion of office work and expansion of female office work in practice represented less a broadening of job options than the replacement of one limited range with another. The schools contributed to the rigid sexual division of labour in which females were confined to low status work and denied the advancements which the acquisition of skills gave to boys.

¹¹¹ LCC Inspectors' Report, Peckham Girls Central School, 25.7 37

The schools prepared girls for a specific sphere of clerical employment, thus relieving males of inappropriate mundane work and supplying a steady supply of workers required for the administrative and commercial enterprises of the capital. At the end of the inter-war period a comment made by the Central Bureau for the Employment of Women two decades earlier seemed equally apposite.

Women have unfortunately made their own a special department which has almost universally become a blind alley - typing and shorthand ... the youngest male clerk can become a departmental manager, perhaps a managing director; the girls remains a shorthand typist all her life.¹¹²

Yet despite their limitations, the Central Schools do seem to have developed in a way unexpected by the policymakers. The London Selective Girls' Schools, particularly the commercial ones, were far more than mere extensions of the Elementary School. They developed a strong ethos of their own far more akin to that of a Secondary School. Much academic teaching in them was done by specialist teachers and was experimental as, for example, in the case of foreign languages.¹¹³ There were many Inter Central School sports and drama competitions. Like Secondary Schools, the schools had house systems and prefects to develop a corporate spirit and prepare for democratic responsibilities. School journeys were common, many of them abroad. Open days, parents' evenings and speech evenings all contributed to the similarity to Secondary Schools and to the new opportunities which were offered to some working class girls.

There seems to have been much more similarity between the girls' Secondary and Central Schools than between those of boys. The Hadow Report commented that

¹¹² Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, *Careers Guide to the Professions and Occupations of Educated Women and Girls*, London, 1919, p175

¹¹³ The LCC appears to have encouraged specialist teaching. New territory was broken in 1926 when, as an experiment, Central School pupils were permitted to listen to French radio broadcasts at 3.15 p m on Friday afternoons. See also ED22/107/326.

Central Schools for girls... which often follow courses of study very little different from those of Secondary Schools show less tendency than is generally to be found in Central Schools for boys towards the special requirements of local occupation.¹¹⁴

The Board of Education, while aware of this development, was not pleased with it. From the inception of the Central Schools the Board had insisted that they not be too similar to the Secondary Schools, that they should provide preparation for employment and not for examinations or higher education. Concern grew in the 1920s that the LCC were allowing the Selective Central Schools to "take the place of Secondary Schools".¹¹⁵ There were frequent arguments between the two authorities about this point, about, for example, whether Central School pupils should be permitted to take external exams or stay at school after the age of 16. This resulted in the general attitude at the Board, expressed by Pelham that "London do Central Schools well (I don't mean too well)".¹¹⁶

The LCC was particularly aware of the strength of feeling in the southern areas of London where there had been much building and migration by artisans and white collar workers. In 1923 Education Officer Blair wrote of the demand of the new residential housing developments of the south and District Inspector Phillips added a note about the high scores in the scholarship exams of these regions.¹¹⁷ Similarly in 1926 Inspector Murray commented

the demand is real and most insistent in the better parts of London and especially in the new building estates on the south side of the Thames.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ The Hadow Report, op cit, p112-13

¹¹⁵ ED11/154, Kerslake to Pelham, 4 3.29

¹¹⁶ ED97/208, Memorandum 8 10 23

¹¹⁷ Ibid, Blair to Secretary of the Board, 14 8.23

¹¹⁸ ED97/209, Memorandum D I Murray, 4.3.26.

Thus when plans were drawn up for the building of new Central Schools, educational districts eight and nine, south of the river, were allocated a higher percentage of places than other London regions.

The Board of Education did not, however, concur in this tendency. The official position was that the schools were for a certain intelligent practical rather than academic pupil. When in 1923 the LCC requested approval for two new Central Schools at Wandsworth and Lewisham the Board replied that "Lewisham is not a district in which we should expect an overwhelming demand for Central School places and it is right that Secondary School provisions should largely predominate".¹¹⁹ There was, therefore, concern that the LCC appeared to be making the assumption that "the distinction between Central Schools and Secondary Schools is a social and not an educational one."¹²⁰

Yet the Central Schools for girls continued to develop along these pseudo-secondary lines, largely it seems through the initiatives of teachers. The recurring problem of establishing exactly what happened within the classroom walls and exactly how policy was put into practice by individual teachers is accentuated in the case of the London Central Schools as a great deal of freedom was given to the teachers to organise timetables, curricula and experimental teaching. Ballard, acknowledged expert and champion of Central Schools, commented that "few schools have so large a share of liberty."¹²¹

In the NUWT records on Central Schools are to be found frequent references from headmistresses about their concern that these able working class girls should be given every opportunity to achieve within the academic system. In 1928, the NUWT found 39 central

¹¹⁹ Ibid, Letter Board of Education to Education Officer, 10 2 25.

¹²⁰ ED97/208, Memorandum HMI Pelham, 11.10 23

¹²¹ The Times Educational Supplement, 7.5 38

Girls' Schools had NUWT members on their staff. The Headmistress of the Elliott Central School wrote to General Secretary Miss Froud in 1928:

I think my own school compares quite favourably with many Secondary Schools in its equipment, accommodation and staffing - we have a library of 800 volumes for 360 girls, special rooms for needlework, art, science and geography, a typing room, a dining room and a kitchen, a house for housewifery lessons and a cookery room; 13 full time teachers and 2 part time - 8 have university degrees, 6 with honours.¹²²

Although the Board of Education would not allow girls to stay until the end of their fifth year in a Central School unless they were sitting for a vocational examination, Headmistresses reported that many of their pupils paid their own fees for academic external examinations which would allow the girl to matriculate. Since no child was allowed to stay beyond the end of her sixteenth year at a Central School some girls were forced to move to Secondary Schools in the March before sitting for the school certificate the following June. This was obviously disruptive. The staff of the Brixton Central School wrote to the NUWT Headquarters saying that although they were a commercial bias school, they aimed primarily at academic success:

no girl has ever dropped the commercial side of her work so that it means that many of our pupils have left school with an academic certificate equal to that obtained in the Secondary School as well as their certificates for shorthand, commercial arithmetic and commercial french.¹²³

Miss Lloyd of the Stanley Central School reported that although few of her pupils could afford the fee for the school certificate, some did and it was school policy to let the girls sit the exam very young as they could rarely stay on for more than four years. If they

¹²² NUWT Box 9, Letter Headmistress of Elliott Central School to Miss Froud, 18 6.28

¹²³ NUWT Box 9, Letter Brixton Central School to General Secretary, undated.

possibly could parents were willing to pay for a variety of academic and vocational exams.¹²⁴ In October 1934 the Association of Headteachers told the Spens Committee that

from every standpoint including that of the successes in recognised school certificate examinations, these girls have achieved remarkable results and in doing so have provided the strongest argument for regarding all education after the age of 11 as secondary.¹²⁵

Although an internal memorandum suggested that the practice of entering pupils for exams was far more prevalent in boys' than girls' schools, the statistics for the Central Schools of South East London indicate that at least as many girls were entered for a variety of certificates and that success was very prestigious and encouraged in the ethos of the school. For example, the school log book of Brockley Girls' Central School mentioned in 1930 that the building was being used by the three surrounding girls' Central Schools as a centre for the Oxford certificate. Schools had presentation ceremonies and prize days, while in 1937 Downham Central was closed for a day's holiday in honour of scholastic success.¹²⁶

The Board of Education was increasingly concerned at the number of Central School girls taking external examinations.¹²⁷ They were even more aware of a corollary of this tendency - the fact that the Central Girls' Schools in London were increasingly becoming "competition" for the prestigious Secondary Schools. The Education Committee joined in this concern in 1924 over a serious decline in attendance in girls' Secondary Schools¹²⁸ and

¹²⁴ See EO/PS/1/11, Report to HMI Spencer 22 8 24. In secondary schools the Governing body paid entrance fees

¹²⁵ ED10/152 Memorandum U 47, The Education of Senior Children not in Elementary Schools, National Association of Headteachers, October 1934.

¹²⁶ School log book, Downham Central Girls School, 1937.

¹²⁷ ED22/108/334 The Preparation of Central School Pupils for External Examinations, 13.7 33

¹²⁸ EO/PS/2/4, Report of the Education Officer, 14 2.24.

in 1929 an exchange took place concerning evidence from Headmistresses that parents of Secondary School girls were seeking the addition of commercial subjects to the timetable.¹²⁹ Boys' successes in external exams did not arouse the same concern. A report on Woolwich Boys' Central in 1936 noted that nine old boys had gained B.Sc degrees, two M.Sc degrees and two were associates of the Institute of Chemistry. The school could also claim two mayors of Woolwich and two members of the LCC.¹³⁰

The question of whether commercial subjects should be taught in Secondary Schools continued to vex the Board and the LCC throughout the inter-war years. As early as 1910 Headmistresses had been pointing out that, if such subjects were not provided by Secondary Schools, girls would leave at an earlier age.¹³¹ Evidence continued to accumulate. The Headmistress of Peckham Secondary School reported to the LCC in 1930 that the previous year she had made exceptions, girls having been permitted to enter the commercial class in school before they had taken the school certificate. This had undoubtedly led some parents to hope that this would become common practice. She said that many of the girl pupils were being removed before the completion of their course at school owing to not being permitted to enter a commercial class so that their parents had to transfer them to the nearest Central School.¹³² The Board was of the opinion that it was better to include commercial subjects in a Secondary School after the age of sixteen when the pupil had taken the school certificate. In practice the Education Committee also permitted this.¹³³

¹²⁹ Ibid, Report to the Higher Education Sub-Committee, 12.12.29.

¹³⁰ LCC Inspectors Report on Woolwich Central School, 6 4.36.

¹³¹ EO/HFE/1/57, The Teaching of Commercial Subjects, Report of Conference on 21.11.10.

¹³² EO/GEN/2/2 Headmistress Peckham County Secondary School to LCC Education Officer, 29 5.30

¹³³ The LCC was more ready to approve commercial courses in aided rather than maintained secondary schools.

In the early 1930s there was considerable discussion about how to deal with the situation within the LCC. Education Officer Gater in the Report to the Higher Education Sub-Committee of December 1929 suggested that the best way of dealing with the problem of competition between the Central Schools is for "the Secondary Schools to endeavour rather than to accentuate the differences between the two types of school and not to assimilate the curriculum of the Secondary to the Central Schools."¹³⁴ Miss Brooks, District Inspector Haycock and Mr Ballard met with the Education Officer to emphasise their agreement with Headmistresses that girls who had not yet taken their school certificate exam could if they wished start learning shorthand for two years from the age of 15. They argued that if the girl had to, for whatever reason, take the School Certificate examination late she was left with no time to take a useful commercial course unless her venture into paid employment was drastically postponed. The Education Officer was not prepared to agree to this, seeing the refusal to incorporate commercial subjects in Secondary Schools before the age of sixteen as a fundamental part of the relationship between the two types of schools. Shorthand and book-keeping were, however, introduced into the London General School Exam in 1931. Although the Chief Inspector commented that "there appears to be little doubt that the girls do leave the Secondary Schools in this way in fairly considerable numbers" and argued that the way to improve the retention would be to provide typewriting and shorthand, little was done.¹³⁵

Part of the Board of Education's dispute with the LCC over this matter was their general disinclination to support London's policy of promoting Central Schools at the expense of Secondary Schools. As already discussed, London did not have a good record for the

¹³⁴ EO/PS/2/4, Report of the Education Officer, December 1929.

¹³⁵ *Ibid* Report of Education Officer, 14.2.24, *op cit*.

amount of Secondary School places available per thousand of the population.¹³⁶ Although the Board felt that the London Central Schools were a matter of legitimate pride and satisfaction they saw little evidence of any attempts to define their position in relation to Central Schools. HMI Pelham reported that "I think that it is fair to say that the Council have always been much more interested in the development of Central Schools than Secondary Schools".¹³⁷ It was felt that the constant pressure to allow pupils to remain at Central Schools after 16 and the desire of the LCC to establish five year courses was diverting the authority's attention from the real need of extending elite secondary education.¹³⁸

Many teachers in the schools were organised in the National Association of Teachers in Selective Central Schools, (the "NATSCS") a body was set up by a Miss Rees in 1928 in an effort to secure recognition of Central Schools as worthy of the status and benefits of true secondary education.¹³⁹ The Central School teachers suffered in salary terms compared with Secondary School equivalents.¹⁴⁰ In schools established before 1925 an extra salary

¹³⁶ The London Teachers' Association in October 1934 argued that the number of secondary school places per thousand of the population in London was only 7.6 and that the Selective Central Schools were claimed by some to be "more or less adequate compensation for the sparse provisions of adequate Secondary Schools...although the work is done with less equipment and larger classes." ED/10/152, Memorandum U.28, London Teachers' Association, October 1934. In the early 1920s this dispute raged between the Board and the LCC although Permanent Secretary Selby Bigge felt that it would be wise to wait until the new Education Officer had got into the saddle after the retirement of Robert Blair "in the hope that we may be able to instill in him doubts of the wisdom of the council's policy more successfully than we have been able to do with Sir Robert Blair." ED/97/208, Selby Bigge to Chambers, 7.11.23.

¹³⁷ ED97/208 Memorandum Pelham, 11.10.23.

¹³⁸ The cost per head of educating a child in a Central School in 1923 was only £3 less than doing so in a secondary school - but the difference between the cost of educating an Elementary School boy and a Central School boy was over £9.

¹³⁹ Other organisations existed such as the Association of Assistants in Central Schools and the Association of Headteachers in Central Schools but the records of these appear to have been lost.

¹⁴⁰ In London the salary scale for a male graduate in a secondary school was £276-£528, in a Central School £192-£248. The equivalent figures for women were £264-£420 and £180-£324.

allowance was made to all members of staff but when the Burnham Agreement came into effect that year some LEAs including London cut off the allowances. Eventually allowances were restored to Headteachers and 50% of staff but that was all that was permitted by the Board. In 1931 the LCC did, however, grant four extra days holiday per year to make clear the distinction from the ordinary Elementary School.¹⁴¹

The National Association of Teachers in Selective Central Schools was not a feminist organisation - as the NUWT discovered. Miss Rees had originally been a member of the NUWT which did, indeed, have a large number of members who taught in Central Schools. The most prominent of these was Miss Neal who felt that "Central Schools are an absorbing interest and, at the same time, the bane of my life."¹⁴² She was delegated to attend the inaugural meeting of the NATSCS and was horrified at the experience. The "pompous and bombastic" representatives of the NUT permitted hardly any female Central School teachers to speak.¹⁴³ Miss Froud, having heard her account, hoped that this would "be a warning to Miss Rees that the men would certainly seize the machinery of the new organisation and use it for their own ends". She would find eventually that she had sold her feminist principles for the sake of an increment of £3.10.¹⁴⁴ Thereafter, although the NUWT always sent representatives to meetings of the NACTCS, they were wary about the organisation as a whole for they did not feel that it promoted their concern to bring true equality to the education of girls and the position of female teachers.

¹⁴¹ LCC Education Committee Minutes, 25 2 31

¹⁴² NUWT Box 9, Miss Neal to Miss Froud, 10 6 28

¹⁴³ Ibid, Report of Central School Teachers Meeting, Tottenham, March 1928, undated

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, Miss Froud to Miss Neal, 21 3.28

The NUWT decided that they did not wish to broadcast a Central School policy because they saw these schools as an expedient which would disappear when true secondary education was provided for all. They argued that "if conditions in school for children of 11 plus are made superior to those of younger children, the tendency would be for men to fill the posts in the senior schools" and it was therefore better to press for proper secondary education for all.¹⁴⁵ The Union felt that "the Central School, itself, is a manifestation of the great desire for some form of advanced education for all children of the age of 11 plus."¹⁴⁶ The Central Council strongly disapproved of the practice of using Central Schools as cheap substitutes for Secondary Schools.

In general, Central School teachers tended to stress that the "Central Schools of London provide in the full sense of the word a liberal education"¹⁴⁷ and criticised the "materialistic" aim of simply preparing pupils for work.¹⁴⁸ They constantly emphasised the professional status of their work and deplored the use of untrained teachers, of "skilled artisans" to instruct in vocational practical subjects.¹⁴⁹

The same sources nevertheless imply that the comparative freedom of staff in some cases resulted in more emphasis on traditional female virtues. This emphasises how alone the NUWT were in their critique. The Central School Teacher, Journal of the NATSCS, accepted

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, Outline of Miss Crosby's statement to the Central Council, 17 3.28.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, Central School Policy - Education Committee, undated.

¹⁴⁷ NUT Minute Book of Central School Section.

¹⁴⁸ NUWT Box 9, Memorandum on the position of Central Schools in the Elementary System of London, Association of Assistants in London Central Schools

¹⁴⁹ NUT Minute Book of Central School Section 10/11/28.

The sharp differentiation between the position of men and women in the field of commerce ... women in business are expected to be Peter Pans, that is to do routine work and not aim at promotion ... it follows that the question of training girls for commerce chiefly turns upon the question of the office arts.¹⁵⁰

Reports praised Headmistresses for the stress placed on the "value and beauty of the practical" instead of on academic work.¹⁵¹ A Miss Ambler, Head of Peckham Girls' Central, won congratulations in 1931 for the success of domestic subjects at her school:

The Headmistress herself is extremely interested in all branches of homemaking and it is largely due to her enthusiasm that such a keen spirit for domestic subjects exists.¹⁵²

The NATSCS in 1934 published The Selective Central School which made a strong attack on the pressure put on girls by the time spent on domestic lessons. The book pointed out that many girls were already under strain from tending younger siblings at home and stated

The policy that ought to be pursued in an age of sex equality is a matter of demanding serious and unbiased thought.¹⁵³

However, this comment appears to have been the Association's only thought on the matter. Their journal, The Central School Teacher frequently emphasised

the general uplift aesthetically and economically which the next generation must receive if the girls have thorough domestic training.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ The Central School Teacher, November 1936, p10

¹⁵¹ LCC Inspectors Report, Bloomfield Road Central Girls, 1914.

¹⁵² LCC Inspectors Report, Peckham Central Girls, 25/7/37

¹⁵³ NATSCS The Selective Central School, op cit, pp29-30.

¹⁵⁴ NATSCS, The Central School Teacher, December 1929, p13.

Although women did hold positions of authority within the NATSCS there is no surviving evidence of their interest either in the inter-war discrimination against female teachers or in the position of girls in schools. Indeed an Editorial of 1935 commented

the teacher is more and more entering into public affairs and social work. He is surely now a man among men and not merely "a man among boys".¹⁵⁵

Even if parents and pupils perceived the commercial Central Schools as opening up new opportunities for girls the pupils were still given a very large dose of the traditional female subjects of the Elementary School curriculum. As early as 1906 Education Officer Blair reported that the Board of Education had worried that the curricula of Central Schools contained

too much maths, even where only four hours was given to the subject, and that they would ask for, on the whole, a considerable share of time to be devoted to the Domestic Economy¹⁵⁶

In 1914 Divisional Inspector Howard found that this situation had been reversed and that "the syllabus for boys is usually considerably more extensive than for girls" in arithmetic.¹⁵⁷

Twenty years later, towards the end of the inter-war years, the NATSCS found that in practice

mathematics and science had dropped or curtailed, especially in girls. The time is frequently given to additional handwork or domestic work.¹⁵⁸

Inspectorate reports continued to criticise the amount of mathematics being taught to girls. The report on Greenwich Park Central Girls' School commented on the "ambitious

¹⁵⁵ Ibid March 1935.

¹⁵⁶ EO/PS/1/2, Education Officer's Report, 19 7.06

¹⁵⁷ ED77/214, Report on London Central Schools, op cit, p12.

¹⁵⁸ NATSCS, The Selective Central School, op cit, p32.

and full" syllabus in Maths while a 1937 report on Peckham Girls' Central stated that the girls required a "less ambitious" approach.¹⁵⁹ Conversely Maths teaching was praised at Bloomfield Road Central, Woolwich, where "emphasis has been rightly laid on the practical and domestic aspects of the subject".¹⁶⁰

The assumption that girls' inability to cope with the theoretical and rational made a correlation with domestic aspects of all subjects necessary was also evident in policy concerning science. In reports and policy statements, girls' science was always referred to as "elementary" and tended to be nature study, botany and elementary physiology. These required less expensive resources than the chemistry and physics taught to boys. There is some evidence that boys' Central Schools provided well equipped laboratories and advanced teaching.¹⁶¹ In 1925 the Inspection of Peckham Girls School resulted in a complaint about the lack of emphasis on "what might be described as science in the home"¹⁶² while Bloomfield Road was praised for linking science to domestic subjects so that girls

in performing operations in cookery and laundry know something of the scientific basis of their work and approach them more intelligently than would otherwise be the case.¹⁶³

The question of girls' irremediable innate weakness in some subjects emerged in the debate about the allocation of supplementary junior scholarships. These awards were open to all pupils, including those already in Central and Secondary Schools, and provided a

¹⁵⁹ LCC Inspectors Report, Peckham Central Girls School, 25/7/37

¹⁶⁰ LCC Inspector's Report, Bloomfield Road Central, Woolwich, 2 5.14.

¹⁶¹ The GLRO holds photographs of boys working in well equipped laboratories.

¹⁶² LCC Inspector's Report, Peckham Central Girls' School, op cit, 25.7.37.

¹⁶³ LCC Inspectors' Report, Bloomfield Road Central, Woolwich, 1918.

maintenance grant for a secondary education.¹⁶⁴ In 1924, there was concern that girls had won a significantly smaller number than boys. This was the result of the ending of the "probationer bursaries" which had previously gone mainly to girls.¹⁶⁵ In 1926, the LCC Inspectorate met to consider the problem and were unanimously

of the opinion that the apparent divergence in standard was no greater than to be expected from the known inferiority of girls in scoring marks in arithmetic.¹⁶⁶

A new marking scheme was adopted to adjust girls' marks in the allocation of scholarships in such a way as to "achieve an approximately equal standard of intellect...between the two cases".¹⁶⁷ This continued to operate through the inter-war period and statistics show that the scholarships were indeed given to equal numbers of each sex. Such a scheme is significant. No efforts were made to adjust maths teaching in girls' schools so that they received the same amount as boys, or to change the format of an exam which disadvantaged female students. However, the scheme to allocate scholarships does represent a recognition of girls ability to "achieve" intellectually, to merit a superior education and be given the chance of potential social mobility. This outlook is also evidence in the equal number of places provided for girls and boys in Central Schools in London. However gender specific the Central Schools may have been, they do illustrate some new awareness of what schooling should offer to girls.

¹⁶⁴ These supplementary scholarships were available for pupils of 13-14

¹⁶⁵ These were a particular type of supplementary scholarship awarded only to those undertaking to enter teaching

¹⁶⁶ EO/PS/1/3, Memorandum, Chief Inspector Spencer, 8.2.26.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

The question of gender differentiation is also apparent in the debate about the role of external exams in the Selective Central School. Given the Board's unease about pupils sitting existing "secondary exams" such as the Oxford and Cambridge Locals it was suggested that a special Central School Leaving Exam should be instigated.¹⁶⁸ Whenever the matter was discussed, officials were aware of the difficulties of "providing in one common examination for the different needs of boys and girls".¹⁶⁹ In 1928 there was particular concern as to how laundry and cutting out could be assessed.¹⁷⁰

The general subjects of the curriculum in a Selective Central School were to be infused with either a commercial or industrial bias and thus be "relevant" to pupils' future lives. Once again notions of gender differentiation influenced the syllabi. While it was suggested that a suitable geography course for an industrial Central School could concentrate on the world distribution of commodities, it seemed that girls would benefit most from lessons about, for example, "the geography of the breakfast table and the Christmas pudding".¹⁷¹ It was advised that a good History syllabus could be founded on "a study of man's activities and of his overcoming obstacles in the creation of comforts to himself"¹⁷² but the Inspectorate were wary of teaching such male achievements in too ambitious a way to girls. They complained of one textbook being used at Greenwich Park that it was "somewhat too difficult and more suited to boys than girls".¹⁷³ English lessons also

¹⁶⁸ The Hadow Report recommended this

¹⁶⁹ ED 11/154 Memorandum on External Examinations for Central School Pupils, London Association of Headteachers of Central Schools, December 1928

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, Report of the Committee on Leaving Examinations for Modern Schools, 16 10 28.

¹⁷¹ EO/PS/1/15 Report by the Chief Inspector, Handwritten Notes added - unsigned

¹⁷² The Central School Teacher, April 1934, p8

¹⁷³ LCC Inspectors' Report, Greenwich Park Central, 1918.

conveyed appropriate gender characteristics. In 1931, at the mixed Peckham Central, boys excelled in class debate while girls concentrated on performing a play in a "simple and childlike way".¹⁷⁴

Overwhelming popularity was not the problem of the industrial or technical bias Central Schools for girls - although the places were still sought after as a form of advanced education. In line with the perception of the schools as an alternative form of Secondary School parents often wished their daughters to sit the scholarship exam and attend a Central School even if they had no inclination or aptitude for the technical bias taught.¹⁷⁵ Indeed there was acknowledged difficulty about how to decide whether a child should receive education of a commercial or industrial type, particularly given the popularity of the commercial schools Ballard referred to selection as "rough and ready".¹⁷⁶ It was reported that the head teachers and inspectors made an arbitrary division as best they could.¹⁷⁷ Unfortunately in practice, the report continued, the results were not so disastrous as in theory they ought to be and even children who had attended in industrial bias schools did secure commercial openings - and, more rarely, commercially trained children did join the ranks of skilled labour. Whilst this was seen for boys as evidence that "adaptability and general training which has made him alert, industrious and reliant" was working in practice, it was seen as evidence for girls that "it is not so easy to obtain satisfactory openings on the industrial side".¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ LCC Inspectors' Report, Peckham Central Mixed, 17.4.31.

¹⁷⁵ This parallels the development in the Junior Technical and Trade Schools.

¹⁷⁶ The Times Educational Supplement, 7 5 38.

¹⁷⁷ ED 77/214, Report on London Central Schools, op cit, p5. In London papers were set and marked by impartial examiners in English and Arithmetic and a psychological test given, preceded by an eliminatory test. The Headteacher then interviewed all likely candidates for aptitude. See Nurses, "A Survey", op cit.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid p7.

The LCC required that two hours twenty minutes per week be devoted to domestic subjects in technical bias schools, two hours be given to needlework throughout the four year course and preferably one hour to millinery. At the inception of the selective school system there had been uncertainty as to how the technical bias would materialise in girls' schools.

The Inspectorate commented

In the girls' schools the industrial bias is more negative than positive in characters, the bias shows itself more in the exclusion of subjects such as French and Shorthand than in definite training of an industrial type. This is almost inevitable. The majority of girls will either stay at home or enter the higher ranks of domestic service.¹⁷⁹

The Hadow Report summed up the technical courses as simply "more time" spent on needlework, art and domestic subjects. The Selective Central Schools did indeed devote a great deal of time to needlework. Indeed it was repeatedly argued that the technical bias for girls meant preparing them for the West End needletrades. Yet the opportunities for employment in these fields was limited since it was usual for girls to enter the needletrades at the age of fourteen at a very low wage. The Central School girls were not put in an advantageous position in the labour market by staying on at school until sixteen. In 1927 when the General Purposes Sub-Committee was bemoaning the lack of popularity of industrial bias courses it recognised that, as well as the great preference for clerical black coated work for status reasons, there was also the more basic criterion that office employers preferred trained girls of sixteen but industrial employers wanted youngsters of fourteen.¹⁸⁰

A 1936 report acknowledged:

¹⁷⁹ ED97/207, Notes on the Inspection of Public Elementary Schools, 1912

¹⁸⁰ EO/WEL/1/22, Report by Education Officer to General Purposes Sub-Committee, 12.12.27.

Technical bias for girls often resolves itself into the preparation of girls for entry into the needletrades at the age of 16½ at a wage approximate to the age of 14.¹⁸¹

The needlework is not a "trade work" in the trade school sense and of the girls actually taking up employment in skilled needle trades, a large number do so at the age of just over 14 years. Positions in these trades for girls older than this are comparatively limited in number.¹⁸²

The LCC Education Committee, aware that the technical bias was not sufficient to place the girl in a privileged position in the labour market, therefore tried to encourage girls to leave the Central School at fourteen to transfer to a Trade School.¹⁸³ They were unsuccessful in their efforts because of the higher status attached by parents to a Central School education. Yet the Committee was reluctant to include a foreign language in the curriculum of industrial bias schools even though both parents and teachers wanted such provision recognising that it did improve the prospects of girls employed in dressmaking and millinery in the West End.¹⁸⁴ There was evidence that parents withdrew industrial bias pupils from the schools a few months earlier than those in the commercial schools.¹⁸⁵

There was also concern that the teachers of technical subjects in the Central Schools were not adequately fitted to their task, being largely academically trained.¹⁸⁶ There was a difficulty in keeping technically trained teachers at the Central Schools as the Headmistress of the Elliot Central School reported in 1928.

¹⁸¹ EO/PS/1/12, Survey of Central School Accommodation, 1936.

¹⁸² Elementary Education Sub-Committee Report, 1927.

¹⁸³ See Chapter Four

¹⁸⁴ ED77/214, Report on London Central Schools, op cit, p5-6.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p7-8

¹⁸⁶ ED77/214 Report on London Central Schools, op cit, p10.

The art mistress has just left for a trade school where she will earn more money than she did here.¹⁸⁷

Given the tendency of Central Schools to veer increasingly towards an academic secondary type of outlook the non certified technical mistress often felt marginalised and of low status within the school. The industrial bias Central School for girls was thus hampered both in comparison to the Junior Technical and the Secondary Schools.

It is recognised that the Central School with a technical bias is, generally speaking, the least successful type of Secondary School. This is largely due to the existence of the Trade School which is not only staffed and equipped liberally but is allowed to teach specific trades while the Central School, retaining of children up to the age of 16 plus, is only allowed to give an industrial bias.¹⁸⁸

The boys' schools were not similarly hampered for it was recognised that "this kind of training has a certain influence upon a boy's choice of occupation".¹⁸⁹ Boys won scholarships to engineering colleges, became apprentices at a premium in shipbuilding or entered the drawing office of engineering works. The only concern was that the courses were too ambitious and had a tendency to develop into something beyond the capability of the boys.¹⁹⁰ The Hadow Report commented on the special attention being devoted to practical mathematics, science and handwork in boys' technical bias schools.¹⁹¹ In 1936 LCC Inspectors found the course at Woolwich Boys Central reflected credible levels of

¹⁸⁷ NUWT Box 9 Letter Headmistress of Elliot Central School to Miss Froud, 18 6 28

¹⁸⁸ NUWT, Box 9, Headmistress Elliott Central School to Miss Froud, 18 6 28

¹⁸⁹ ED77/215, An Account of the Teaching of Science to Boys in a London Central School, September 1914.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ The Hadow Report, op cit, p112

craftsmanship, advanced work in the cultural aspect of woodwork, art and study of modern influence in design.¹⁹²

A Central School education was not, however, a route towards further training for girls. Despite initial insistence by the Board that pupils should go straight into employment, it became increasingly accepted that the Central School boys could go on to full or part time higher education. The influential President of the Board, Eustace Percy, became a great champion of the idea. In theory Central School pupils could apply at sixteen for an intermediate technical scholarship but since the standard required was that of matriculation there were few applications from Central School graduates while the Secondary Schools felt their clientele were "too good" for such technical awards. Thus the Central Schools for girls were "treated as a dead end".¹⁹³ Meanwhile able boys from Central Schools took another route

It is an actual fact that boys still leave Central Schools for a year to go into Secondary Schools "for a name".¹⁹⁴

In 1925 discussions took place about the possibility of leaving scholarships for the Central School fifth year pupils of whom there were 2000 in London at that time. It was agreed that the problems of boys and girls were totally different for "there does not seem to be the same openings for girls as there are for boys in the higher walks of industry."¹⁹⁵ Brereton suggested that the solution was a list of approved courses in such subjects as Photography, Hairdressing, Dressmaking, Tailoring and Domestic Subjects to which girls could win scholarships.

¹⁹² LCC Inspectors' Report on Woolwich Boys Central, 5 4.36.

¹⁹³ EO/HFE/3/12, Draft Memorandum, Brereton, 21.7 25.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

¹⁹⁵ Ibid

If (my emphasis) it appears that courses in these subjects can be justified in the ultimate economic interests of girls entering upon them at 15½-16 years of age. Indeed it may prove that a shortened course of six months to a year in these special women's trades is all that is to be justified on the technical side for girls.¹⁹⁶

The Higher Education Sub-Committee decided, however, to postpone consideration of the idea and it does not seem to have arisen again in the inter-war years. The needlecraft lessons were similarly hampered as in the Elementary and Trade Schools since girls had to pay for the materials used. The Headmistresses' Consultative Committee reported that they were:

Unanimous in our opinion that under present conditions the educational value and importance of the correct teaching of needlework has to be subordinated to the necessity of making garments for which a sale can be found.¹⁹⁷

They spent inordinate amounts of time trying to get a sale for the garments or otherwise had to face the distressing and repugnant task of extracting pence from the girls:

It is in our opinion anomalous to require the sale of needlework garments on the present system and to require in the case of craft materials only the repayment of the proceeds of any sales which may be made.¹⁹⁸

The situation had not changed by 1934 when the Headmistresses met with HMI Miss Bright and pointed out that "in mixed schools while boys working in handicraft centres are given the articles they make, the girls are required to pay for all garments".¹⁹⁹

In practice the industrial/technical bias Central School courses for girls emerged as "advanced" domestic instruction. As ever, working class girls were defined by their gendered domestic role. There was recognition of the inherent problem that the courses were

¹⁹⁶ ED/HFE/3/12, Memorandum of Meeting with Rich, Smail and Miss Fawcett, Brereton, 4 11 25.

¹⁹⁷ EO/HFE/1/57, Consultative Committee of Headmistresses, Report of the Conference, 21 11.10, p35

¹⁹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹⁹ EO/GEN/2/2, Agenda of Central Consultative Committee of Headmistresses, 19 7 34, p3.

even more unpopular amongst the parents and pupils who had fought hard to achieve a Secondary School place. One district inspector reported:

It would, I think, be a mistake to introduce the word "domestic" into any published announcement of the object of the schools for girls. There is a rooted dislike to the term both on the part of the parents and the girls as it is connected in their minds with domestic service which is easily the least popular of all careers²⁰⁰

It was generally accepted that the large amount of time devoted to domestic instruction should continue to form an "ever increasingly important feature of the schools" for they were of "great importance in afterlife".

There was an accepted correlation between the technical Central Schools in London and domesticity. The Hadow Report stated categorically "the technical course for girls is predominantly domestic in character".²⁰¹ There was the additional benefit that the students were being turned into good mothers. The Headmistress of Peckham Girls Central received great praise in 1934. She had been convinced that many of her girls were not suited to the commercial work they preferred and so she set up a "technical" course in childcare. They made infants' clothes, studied feeding, toys and home nursing. The Inspectors proudly claimed that some of the students were able to go on to train as professional nurses after this schooling but statistics show that most in fact went as nursemaids into private homes. Nevertheless this was seen as exactly the type of course which a Central School should provide and the Education Committee was certain that every girls' Central School "contained pupils who would benefit from a course of this kind".²⁰²

²⁰⁰ EO/STA/2/57, Report by District Inspector, undated and unsigned, 16.2.11.

²⁰¹ The Hadow Report, op cit, p114.

²⁰² LCC Inspectors Report, Peckham Girls' Central School, 25.7.37.

The Selective Central Schools' great "advantage" was they could provide an extended, advanced domestic training to intelligent girls who would become skilled and keen domestic workers and later exactly the sort of wives and mothers which the nation needed. The 1923 Report on the shortage of servants stated that in practically every Central School provision was made for a more or less continuous course of domestic training but this needed extending so that all girls proceeding to higher schools could have further opportunities for obtaining such instruction.²⁰³

There was constant emphasis placed by LCC officials and the Inspectorate on the fact that these schools provided more advanced domestic training for the more intelligent pupil than other educational institutions. Reports criticised schools for not attempting a sufficiently ambitious domestic syllabus and, as previously discussed, insisted all subjects had a domestic element added. The Hadow Report of 1926 praised the amount of time Central Schools devoted to housecraft, to bookkeeping based on household accounts, to needlework, to sick nursing and to elementary hygiene. Such domestic courses are intended by girls who wish either to pursue occupations in the home or ultimately to become managers or housekeepers in hotels, private houses and institutions.²⁰⁴

The Central Schools Employment Committee was certainly keen on this type of occupation for female pupils:

The Committee feels that every encouragement should be given to girls to take up such work and steps are accordingly being instituted to obtain attractive posts.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Ibid, p17 Report to the Ministry of Labour into the Present Conditions as to the Supply of Female Domestic Servants, 1923, op cit, para 14.

²⁰⁴ The Hadow Report, op cit, p113.

²⁰⁵ Central Schools' Employment Committee, Report 1933, op cit.

The London Guide to Employment told its readers that, although domestic work was commonly considered work for which women are "naturally fitted ... the fact that a large part of the work is skilled is too often overlooked". The Guide stressed the jobs of interesting, intellectually demanding new household gadgets and pointed out that promotion to superior positions was possible because "a working housekeeper is frequently employed by an unmarried man".²⁰⁶

The Central Schools also had a role to play in producing a new generation of modern housewives. Inspector Brereton insisted that domestic instruction could definitely be safely extended for "so much unhappiness existed today from girls not knowing how to run their homes properly" and his sentiment was widely supported. Messages about enlightened housewifery were certainly conveyed to Selective Central Schools. It was stated that:

As the enlightened housewife organises her work to minimise drudgery and avoid waste of time, the domestic subjects class should set a high standard in this direction. The cultivation of a happy and intelligent attitude in home affairs should be impressed upon girls".²⁰⁷

It was in the national interest, moreover, that the girl learnt that the home was the centre of family life, that her role was to ensure the wellbeing of the family and that any time for leisure was "largely dependent upon efficient organisation of this".²⁰⁸ The Central School Teacher suggests that many teachers were keen to concur this philosophy. In 1929 it reported that great progress was being made in Central Schools towards producing a "thoroughly capable and housewifery type of girl"²⁰⁹ while a 1931 article argued that the

²⁰⁶ A London Guide to Employment, op cit, Domestic Service Section

²⁰⁷ EO/PS/2/12, Handicraft in Senior Girls Schools, op cit, p3.

²⁰⁸ Ibid

²⁰⁹ The Central School Teacher, November 1929.

teacher should aim to show "that the welfare of the country depends upon the good housewife".²¹⁰ To this domestic ideal were added other appropriate elements of inter-war femininity, middle class ideals imposed upon the working classes as during the nineteenth century. The Central Schools of London were to teach "good manners" and "culture". It was reported with relief that even the less desirable girls attending Greenwich Park Central improved as they passed up the school, gradually becoming "refined in manner and bearing".²¹¹

Yet in spite of all this stress on domestic lessons for girls, the subject remained educationally of low status. The London Central Schools offered inadequate facilities and equipment although Inspectors had been told to ensure "a standard for the homes of the future" was offered.²¹² As the NATSCS reported, "the old elementary notion prevails that the attendance of a few of the girls' at a cookery centre is sufficient" but the equipment of schools for practical subjects for boys seemed more "uniform with laboratories, woodwork rooms" and sometimes power-driven machinery.²¹³ The Inspection of Charlton Mixed Central in 1936 pointed out that "the boys have good handicraft rooms in a separate building but the girls have no domestic subjects room".²¹⁴ Girls even suffered at play. Apparently requiring less space for their games, the Education Committee allocated 35.7ft² to each boy in the playground and only 30ft² to each girl.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Ibid October 1931

²¹¹ LCC Inspectors' Report, Greenwich Park Central, 1924

²¹² EO/PS/1/12, Survey of Central School Accommodation, 1936

²¹³ The Central School Teacher, December 1929.

²¹⁴ LCC Inspectors' Report, Charlton Central School (mixed) 1936.

²¹⁵ LCC Education Committee Minutes, 16 2 21.

The memories of the women who actually attended these Central Schools suggests that the institutions developed in a way only hinted at in official documents. They did indeed become very much like Secondary Schools and were often perceived as such by the girls and their families. Dorothy's family, however, had other concerns. Having failed the entrance exam to a Secondary School Dorothy was accepted for a Central School in East London.

I was so excited I fell over twice on the way home and arrived with knees bleeding and stockings torn. As my mother was bathing my knees I stammered out my marvellous news. Mother said quite calmly, thank Mrs Wilkie for her kindness but we don't think a mixed school is suitable for you. My father had seen the boys and girls larking about on the way home and had conveyed his views to mother. There was no point in telling mother I wouldn't lark about. I only wanted to be a teacher. I told Mrs Wilkie and she said "such a pity, such a pity".²¹⁶

Entry to the "Central" was perceived as entry into a completely different world. To working class girls it was the equivalent of entry to the middle class world of the Secondary School. The Central School uniform, symbolising respectability and propriety, was part of the image. Joyce recalls that at Brockley Central

Oh, you always wore your hat. They liked you to be ladylike, speak nicely and have nice manners.²¹⁷

Margaret's mother could not afford the proper version of the uniform at Greenwich Park so Margaret had to wear her navy blue guide hat with the school band. She had black lisle instead of black wool stockings and felt envious of her friend as she stood next to her in assembly.

Instead of applying myself to my devotions, [I], would, with open eyes gaze at her woollen black stockings which looked so much better.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ D Scannell, Mother Knew Best, op cit, p89

²¹⁷ Interview Joyce with Sarah King, 1988

²¹⁸ Age Exchange, Good Morning Children, op cit, Memories of Margaret, p36.

Girls at Greenwich Park Central - or Guinea Pigs College as it was nicknamed, were told it was not ladylike to remove caps in public, or walk about with blazers undone. They should never walk more than four abreast along the pavement or go into a sweet shop on the way home. The greatest sin, however, was mingling with the boys from the nearby Central School. Margaret clearly recalls:

some girls being called on to the stage at assembly and threatened with expulsion. Their crime had been that the teacher had spotted them playing football cum netball with some boys on the way home from school.²¹⁹

Academic achievement was emphasised at the schools and ex pupils are keen to stress that "we did almost what the grammar girls did".²²⁰ Millicent, who remained at Elementary School, was extremely envious of her central school sister having homework each night. Teachers emphasised academic results and relegated commercial lessons to the secondary role. Teachers were also remembered in a positive role. Miss Baker of Brockley Central School had strong views which she conveyed to Joyce.

She definitely knew her views. Well she was a pacifist so we didn't do wars - all the 18th century with no battles, but they were good, they kept you at it.²²¹

Dorothy who attended Catford Girls' Central in the late twenties recalls a visit by the School Inspector to an English lesson. He suddenly asked what a sequence of words beginning with the same letter was called and an anguished expression came to the teacher's face as silence fell in the class. Dorothy came up with the word "alliteration" and managed

²¹⁹ Ibid

²²⁰ Interview Joyce with Sarah King 1988

²²¹ Ibid.

to spell it correctly. So relieved was the teacher at the Inspector's congratulations she chased over and hugged Dorothy as soon as he had left.²²²

None of the women recall teachers stressing the vocational utilitarian aspects of lessons.

They used to say sort of, there is more to life than getting a job. They had this very caring outlook as if there was something wider.²²³

It was quite possible to "leave behind" all the typing and shorthand lessons and concentrate on public examinations at the age of 14. Those who did follow the commercial course often did well. Dorothy left Catford Central in 1929 with a glowing testimonial. She was competent in shorthand to a speed of 90 words a minute, could type carefully and had also received instruction in Bookkeeping and French. She passed the full Junior Certificate of the London Chamber of Commerce and had gained distinctions in Arithmetic, Geography, English, Elementary Mathematics, Shorthand and French.²²⁴ Joyce recalls:

At a pinch, you could go to University - I even heard of one being a teacher.²²⁵

Yet there were severe limitations on the extent to which Central School girls were prepared for economic independence and middle class status. Domestic lessons were prominent in the curriculum. Joyce recalls at Brockley Central lesson after lesson on how to clean a bath:

Well, we have this flat - just like a proper one and if it was your turn, it was your turn to have a bath - a proper one - at school! Anyway when you were

²²² Age Exchange, Good Morning Children, op cit, Memories of Dorothy, p50

²²³ Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988

²²⁴ Age Exchange, Good Morning Children, op cit, p50.

²²⁵ Interview Joyce with Sarah King, 1988.

dressed everyone crowded in and watched you clean it - all serious it was - or it was meant to be.²²⁶

Most of the girls, moreover, seem to have gone on to suitably female low status clerical jobs.

Honestly and truly, by and large they went to office jobs - I suppose a few did nursing but it was shops or offices.²²⁷

Brockley Central provided no careers advice at all as Joyce recounts:

I desperately wanted to be a journalist. It wasn't a well, they said it's difficult. Anyway I went to the agency in the end and while I was there the News of the World rang. I said please send me, any paper will do, they said that we can't send a girl to the News of the World. So I went to the Pru. I didn't madly want to go, I thought that there was more interesting jobs but my father said that its got a pension and I thought "good heavens, I shall never need a pension"²²⁸

Moreover all the girls remember the strong message conveyed that marriage as an ultimate destiny was still essential:

I thought that I would get married as everyone else did. You were almost regarded as something wrong with you if you were on the shelf - as if you were lacking in attraction. But I didn't think a lot of marriage - I thought it was rather hard work. They all looked so worn²²⁹

Given the suggestion that the Central Schools for girls in central London became very similar to the Secondary Schools it is interesting to compare the memories of these women with the memories of women who attended equivalent Secondary Schools, having passed the scholarship exam, at exactly the same period in London. Iris who was living in Lewisham at the time recalled that as soon as she got to her Secondary School she realised.

²²⁶ Interview Joyce with Sarah King, 1988

²²⁷ Ibid

²²⁸ Ibid

²²⁹ Ibid

Academic things did come first, even for the paid girls. That was the thing with that school, it was all academic.²³⁰

Margaret expected hard work when she won her scholarship in 1927 to the Dame Alice Owen school. "Oh, it, we knew, it was going to be academic. It was a grammar".²³¹

Vivian attended Blackheath GPDST school from the age of 7 as her parents could afford private schooling.²³² She felt that the intelligence of the scholarship girls who arrived from Elementary Schools meant that "class melted out, we respected brains".²³³ Iris and Margaret, however, found that the class messages they received as scholarship girls were very strong. Both stressed the sense of feeling different and of trying to "learn to be ladies".

Iris still talks of the pupils at the Prendergast School, Lewisham as two separate groups:

Oh, the scholarships were always apart. We used to band together - there was one teacher, she kicked up a stink - picked on me about my clothing. We weren't very well liked at the Prendergast as we weren't paid for. My father came up and I was quaking, my father said "if it weren't for the likes of my daughter and her brains there would be no prestige in this school" and with that she shut up.²³⁴

The academic priorities of the Secondary Schools would seem to have been expressed in a similar way to those in the Central Schools. Streaming was vigorous, particularly with subjects not deemed to be typically feminine - such as maths and science:

They took the sheep from the goats when it came to science. The ones who weren't bright did botany.²³⁵

²³⁰ Interview Iris with Sarah King, 1988.

²³¹ Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988.

²³² GPDST schools were those run by the Girls Public Day School Trust

²³³ Interview Vivian with Sarah King, 1988.

²³⁴ Interview Iris with Sarah King, 1988

²³⁵ Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988.

As at the Central Schools, the culture of the school was important - as expressed, for example, speech days. Margaret recalls:

A prize was everything - oh, the glory of going up on the platform - or having your results read out.²³⁶

Commercial lessons were not an esteemed route through the school.²³⁷ In the girls' minds external examinations of the purely academic kind continued to be paramount. Margaret recalls.

Well in the sixth there was this general lesson - the Head took it and the commercial girls came in. Well I thought, blow that, it is not relevant to the exams. They mattered.²³⁸

The pupils of the Secondary Schools perceived the same inverse relationship between academic ability and domestic competence. However, in practice it seems that the subjects in Secondary Schools were taught in a way which left academic objectives intact.

Oh domestic science, that was hilarious. I didn't do much but we used to have to go to Catford on the bus because we didn't have a cookery room at school. Well you made the thing and then you carried it home - well I had a mouthful of soup left most days. Then there was an exam and you made a swiss roll. The scholarship girls were laughing at the back when my thing fell to the floor. I flashed it back on the plate and patted it down and she said - the teacher - that's marvellous Cunningham. Mum threw it away.²³⁹

Middle class femininity was stressed in the school rules - appearance and behaviour always had to be proper, dignified. Vivian remembers standing outside the sweet shop one day while her mother went in to buy her montelimar. In class and gender terms physical

²³⁶ Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988

²³⁷ As previously discussed, largely due to parental pressure, some secondary schools did introduce commercial subjects for those girls who had taken the school certificate, ie, over the age of 16

²³⁸ Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988

²³⁹ Interview Iris with Sarah King, 1988.

punishment would have been inappropriate but harsh words from greatly respected mistresses were almost the sole form of chastisement:

The biggest thing was the chewing out by the deputy. You didn't need more than one of those.²⁴⁰

Iris recalls "conduct marks were bad, really terrible. Three a term and you were expelled, out One girl went for pinching - she was paid for."²⁴¹ Margaret perceived the class based outlook of the school's environment in one particular incident which continues to annoy her:

One thing used to irritate me. The Headmistress used to keep saying don't leave money about, it is a temptation to the staff. Well, I thought, why should the staff steal? One girl did steal something and her name was read out at assembly. She was there, we still remember her name at reunions.²⁴²

Unlike the Central Schools notions of femininity do not seem to have included marriage.²⁴³ None of the ex pupils remembers any mention of marriage as a possible future in the Secondary Schools:

They didn't stress marriage - no, it was more giving you the ability to do anything - things you'd need to do in life.²⁴⁴

University life and then a career were seen as suitable destinies. Margaret recalls that "University was the thing - the main aim if you could afford it". Assemblies were told of any old girls' successes at universities and in the professions and Margaret recalls the excitement when they were told that one of their former pupils had been called to the Bar.

²⁴⁰ Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988

²⁴¹ Interview Iris with Sarah King 1988.

²⁴² Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988

²⁴³ P Summerfield has argued that the secondary schools at this time were preparation for professional spinsterhood - economic independence for women in a new professional class P Summerfield, *Schooling in Lancashire 1900-50*, *Oral History*, 15, 2, 1987 and P Summerfield, "Cultural Reproduction", *op cit*, p150

²⁴⁴ Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988

Teaching was portrayed as being a particularly suitable career to these girls - especially for the girls unable to go to university:

They liked the good ones to be teachers. And well, one of them took me under her wing - she knew I wanted to be a teacher - though she hated the sight of me, she was all for me going on.²⁴⁵

The corollary, however, was that if family circumstances or inadequate exams results made these accepted destinations impossible in Central Schools, the schools "washed their hands of you". Unlike the academic girls who were perceived as being high achievers if they managed to matriculate, Secondary Schools put enormous pressure on girls from working class families who failed to follow the course marked out for them. Margaret got "4 A grades" but her family could not afford to send her to university:

I wanted to be a librarian but no-one told me that you had to do a post-graduate diploma - I didn't know. In the end I was a typist in a factory.²⁴⁶

Similarly, Iris had to leave her school suddenly at 16 when her father died.

When I went to get my things, she didn't allow me to speak to the girls - she stood in the door - and this was the teacher who was going to help me.²⁴⁷

Iris went on to find a job as a clerk in the office at Chiesmans, a large store in Lewisham. Like Margaret she had been given temporary access to middle class femininity, to the possibility of a career and to economic independence but for both women their gender and class positions interacted to deny them the future which the schools deemed appropriate. Thus ultimately they had to return to the accepted role of the working class woman in the highly gender specific inter-war society.

²⁴⁵ Interview Iris with Sarah King, 1988.

²⁴⁶ Interview Margaret with Sarah King, 1988.

²⁴⁷ Interview Iris with Sarah King, 1988

CONCLUSION

There has probably never been a time when it was the ultimate aim of the majority of educators to produce among girls characteristics other than those suited to an ideal home life.¹

Alicia Percival's comment, made as the inter-war period ended, did indeed seem appropriate for the era in which she lived. As two decades of experiments in vocational and technical education in London drew to a close, the prevailing intentions and results of that education for working class girls were clear. They were still deemed to have a common vocation dictated by gender even if their academic ability or their practical aptitude or both were high. It was assumed that a domestic vocation demanded training at school and that any other technical instruction came a poor second to preparation for an adult role as wife and mother. The situation was such that the Open Door Council felt it necessary to demand in 1939 that

The technical training given to girls should be equal in value, status and variety to that given to boys ... their training shall be as long as that given to boys ... and that they shall be free to take up all trades and to study all processes involved.²

As discussions took place about the form that the 1944 Education Act should take, it seemed that once again the role of girls in technical education would be marginalised. Preparation for the publication of the Spens Report had involved much discussion of the role of technical education within the state system and of whether the proposed new Technical

¹ A Percival, The English Miss, London, Harrop, 1939, p314.

² ED46/293, Secretary of the ODC to Earl de la Warr, 19 4 39 This letter recites the recommendations of the ODC conference of 18 3 39

High schools should be accorded secondary status rather than operating under the technical education regulations.

The debate was revealing about the status awarded to technical education for girls after twenty years of practice. Girls' vocational schooling tended to be omitted from all discussions. The Spens Committee was told "there are few, if any, occupations for girls for which preliminary training in a technical school is necessary".³ The question was simply, according to C.I. Ducksworth "how far technical education of a secondary type would enable or debar a boy from entering a particular vocation".⁴

The preliminary discussions about the new names for the schools clearly confined girls to their traditional position within vocational schooling, i.e. the domestic field.

The word "junior" in the title junior technical schools is a notable offence. Could we have technical secondary schools, commercial secondary schools and domestic secondary schools?⁵

Girls were not envisaged as participating fully in a true secondary technical education system; they would be confined to a separate lower status alternative.

While the Consultative Committee only suggests this alternative form of secondary school in terms of technical work (sic), it would be difficult to resist a parallel for girls on the commercial and housecraft side.⁶

Wallace of the Technical Section was dispatched to investigate the relation of the proposed re-organisation to paid employment. His report classified young persons' jobs into three categories; the unskilled jobs filled by boys and girls with no education beyond the

³ ED10/151, U 5(22), Evidence of the Association of Assistant Mistresses

⁴ ED10/273, Note to C I Ducksworth, 29 11 37

⁵ ED10/273, Memorandum R S Wood, 15.6.39, op cit

⁶ Ibid

elementary, superior jobs in industry and, lastly, the best jobs in commerce. The concern of technical education was the last category. Yet girls were not mentioned as figuring in this superior category at all. Wallace's only comment was "no comparable estimates seem to have been made for girls, but industrial employment for girls is mainly unskilled".⁷ Girls were therefore classed as a homogeneous group, undistinguished apparently by age, ability or aptitude and, therefore, by implication, not the concern of the new secondary vocational system.

The question posed at the start of this thesis was of how a dilemma facing educational policy makers in the aftermath of the First World War was resolved. That dilemma was whether, in the midst of structural economic changes, girls' vocational education should enable them to enlarge their opportunities in paid employment or whether policy should ignore occupational changes and continue to orientate girls towards domesticity, thus discouraging them from competing with men. It was posited that the tension between productivity and domesticity characterised educational policy and that schools' curricula had to accommodate both the needs of the London economy for trained workers and the need of the menfolk for trained domestic workers.

This thesis has argued that, whatever those unacknowledged tensions, the desire to preserve conventional gender roles intact both in paid employment and in the home remained paramount. The schooling which girls received posed no challenge to accepted economic and familial power structures. The post-school destinations of the working class girl were defined more categorically by her gender than by her class or academic ability. This was an era in which the educational byword was meritocracy. Schools were to create a better world by utilising the talents of each individual, people were to be allocated to various

⁷ ED10/273, Memorandum Wallace, Educational organisation for the age range 14-16, op cit, p2.

occupational positions on the basis of intelligence, ability and aspirations. Social cohesion as well as economic efficiency would result through the socialisation of children into the value of social mobility. Yet these ideals were compromised for working class girls. Their gender overrode other considerations, interacting with class to deny them full participation in this new order. They were categorised as a homogeneous group undistinguished by ability or aptitude.

There was some increasing acceptance of the need for education to prepare girls for economic survival in an extended range of jobs in London. Stereotypically female employment was redefined to include less domestic service and more white collar clerical work. Yet in a society unwilling to countenance the combination of paid work and motherhood, all female paid employment was seen as temporary even though many women had no choice but to try to combine the two roles. In their preparation for waged work, girls were slotted into the bottom of the new economy, permitted only to tread certain lower rungs of the occupational hierarchy. The stereotypical gender divisions within paid work and within familial responsibility were held out to justify the disadvantageous experience of women in the labour force, the wage differential between men and women, the concept that the training and promotion of women was pointless and the idea that any work given to them must necessarily have the attributes ascribed to the women themselves.

The ideological basis of this educational system which did not open up new vistas or possibilities for the majority of working class girls was the enduring assumption that the working class woman was uniquely fitted for a single domestic role. Unlike their middle class contemporaries, working class girls' education was not awarded the luxury of the debate about whether women could also be prepared for professional employment. In the domestic lesson lay a perfect inception of class and gender. The assumed predilections and abilities

of working girls for domesticity led to a sex specific curriculum dominated by assumptions about the home based and dependent nature of their future lives. The impetus to technical education for girls was not directed towards their membership of the paid workforce and their economic contribution to society but rather to their involvement as mothers, unwaged and outside the economic infrastructure. This was closely related to the vigorous and unsympathetic scrutiny of working class mothers that took place at the time. Domestic lessons were also used to negotiate the acceptance of partial paid employment for women by directing girls towards domestic work, which was felt to be peculiarly appropriate to women as an extension of their role in the home, hidden in a suitable sphere.

The strength of the domestic ideology contributed to a social understanding of all women's paid work as less important than that of men even if it was skilled. The way in which Junior Technical and Trade Schools taught skills for such work in the needletrades was thus antithetical to the valued principles of a liberal education. While boys' lessons reinforced spatial development, numerical concepts and intellectual debate, girls were given utilitarian preparation for workshop life. Female pupils were not perceived as future adaptable and valuable citizens. Rather they were viewed as future industrial units who were required to generate capital efficiently but temporarily. By implication, therefore, the great inter-war debate about how practical instruction could properly be educational excluded girls. Although the debate was expressed in neutral terms, it was inherently gendered. Yet since boys and girls were rarely employed in directly comparable work, the skills they had learned could never objectively be compared. The question of why a girl's skilled training should be less highly valued than that of a boy was simply not posed.

If the Selective Central Schools gave the opportunity to some able working class girls to step over occupational boundaries laid down by class and move to white collar clerical

work, they too remained constrained by gender. Working class girls and their families could aspire to social mobility through occupational mobility, particularly in clerical work. This was a transition in which the educational route followed was increasingly important. In practice London Central Schools for girls did develop along pseudo secondary lines representing an awareness amongst pupils, parents and teachers of the advantages clerical office work offered compared with traditional female employment. Yet once in white collar work, girls remained confined to a secondary supportive role. Rather than broadening job options, central school education contributed to the replacement of one limited range of opportunities by another. The mould of gender stereotyping was not broken. Female entry into new areas of employment did not impinge on the economic superiority of men, on their self perceptions of masculinity or their power within the home.

Thus for non academic working class girls the educational opportunities of the inter-war years were largely a fiction. The residual option of social mobility for the working class child through formal education for paid employment simply did not exist. Admittedly that option was available to only a comparatively small number of working class boys but girls were doubly disadvantaged. They received the powerful messages that their preparation for adult life and the ways in which that preparation was or could be different from that of boys, signified a lower rather than an equivalent status in every sphere of school life.

Of course adult male and female roles were very different in inter-war society. Few women escaped some version of the domestic role and for many it became their most significant adult function. Most working class girls did indeed come to attach great importance to achieving marriage rather than to success in paid employment. This had less to do with the attraction of marriage itself than with the unattractiveness of the jobs on offer

and the powerful message that if they remained unmarried, they would be social failures.

As Marjorie Spring-Rice wrote in 1939

Throughout their lives, they have been faced with the tradition that the crown of a woman's life is to be a wife and mother. Their primary ambition therefore is satisfied. Everybody is pleased when they get married, most of all the great public, you see therein the workings of nature's design and immutable laws. If for the woman herself her crown turns out to be of thorns, that again must be nature's inexorable way.⁸

The legacy of inter-war vocational education given to girls was in the messages that these pupils in turn passed on to their daughters when they became mothers in the heightened domestic climate of the late 1950s.

This thesis has shown that for working class girls conventional expectations concerning gender were much more intransigent and applied more emphatically than those concerning class. Technical education could occasionally encompass a situation in which a working class girl was encouraged to aspire to new types of employment - whether as a shop girl, a factory girl, or a clerical worker. Yet any possibility was strictly constrained within a gender framework. The strength of domesticity and the gender division of labour in inter-war homes meant that the possibility of crossing the social boundary from women's work to men's work with all its concomitant rewards was simply not on the agenda.

As the twentieth century draws to a close the debate about vocationalism in schools has resurged. It appears that once again there is a crucial moment of opportunity to re-evaluate the ways in which schools prepare adolescents for adult life. Technical education is as much the Cinderella of the school system as ever; the doubts and uncertainties which mark it are redolent of the unresolved issues of the inter-war years. Those issues remain gendered. Despite the official repudiation of the narrowly defined domestic function for

⁸ M. Spring-Rice, *Working Class Wives*, op cit, p95.

girls, research shows that the experience of the young non-academic female in education continues to limit opportunities in the labour market and to instill a limitation of aspiration.⁹

The economic pressures of the 1980s reintroduced into schools the debate about how schools should prepare children for adult life. The by-word of "relevant" replaced the inter-war adjectives "general and practical" in the debate. The concern about Britain's economic performance internationally and the development of the national curriculum combined with national vocational qualifications have brought to centre stage again the question of whether education should be concerned with knowledge for its own sake or be instrumental in preparing for adult life.¹⁰

The City Technology College initiative, announced in 1986, aimed at providing a broadly based education including a technological element which would prepare for working life. Private sector sponsors would make a contribution towards the costs of the schools and optimism radiated about the future effects of this policy on education in industry and society. The Junior Technical Schools and the Secondary Technical Schools were almost wiped from the records in an attempt to give CTCs an image of novelty and success.¹¹ The colleges represent an attempt to imbue technical education with a new higher status. Pupils would

⁹ There have, of course, been many positive developments in recent years. Young females are moving into new areas of employment and achieving economic equality. It is, however, middle class academic girls who have made such advances - the girls for whom vocational instruction in schools tend not to apply. The following comments about the contemporary situation focus on the situation of the non-academic working class pupil in the 1990s.

¹⁰ In 1985 the Chancellor's Budget speech contained a plea that schools prepare pupils to become members of the work force that is "adaptable, reliable, motivated and is prepared to work at wages that employers can afford to pay" There have once again been scathing attacks on the failure of the state school system to prepare pupils who are fit to start work. Business people are apparently deeply concerned about the poor performance of recruits straight from school.

¹¹ The Evening Standard, 28 2.94, comment made by Head Teacher of first such school. In early 1994 the decision was taken to promote a new kind of technology college, again sponsored by businesses, which would give "this generation the skills and knowledge required by industry".

be selected positively for this type of schooling rather than being directed towards it because they were not sufficiently able for the academic, higher status alternative.¹²

Yet recent experiments directed towards the traditional participants in vocational education, the non academic working class pupil, have not been, in contemporary educational jargon, "girl friendly". Indeed fears have been expressed that the new vocationalism will lead to greater sex segregation and sex stereotyping by encouraging girls to premature specialisation in traditional courses.¹³ While it is undoubtedly true that the new vocationalism has the capacity to draw girls into traditionally male dominated subjects, it also has the capacity to reduce the status of subjects in which girls have traditionally succeeded. The National Curriculum still does not require boys to do traditional female work¹⁴ while the expectations of girls themselves remain orientated towards marriage and domesticity.¹⁵ There is a clear danger that the new vocationalism will enforce the position of the majority of young working class females in an unequally divided labour market. Research into the operation of the two vocational schemes of the 1980s, the Youth Training Scheme and the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative, has shown that, in the operation of the schemes in London, girls were overwhelmingly grouped in secondary female sectors.¹⁶

¹² It remains to be seen whether this attempt to change attitudes towards technical education succeeds

¹³ The Times Educational Supplement, 27.2 87

¹⁴ It is recognised that comparatively few girls now take domestic courses. Uncertainty remains about the role of technology in the National Curriculum. It has been suspended as a compulsory subject until 1996.

¹⁵ B Campbell, Wigan Pier Revisited, London, Virago, 1984

¹⁶ For example, within the clerical work option, boys were all placed on the business studies course while nearly all girls were in the secretarial skills group. Within the TVEI programme, girls were overwhelmingly grouped in the "occupational families" of hairdressing, retail and commerce. See C Cockburn, Two Track Training: Sex Equality and the YTS, London, Macmillan, 1987

Yet the new vocationalism has also illustrated the potential technical education has to change attitudes towards female employment.¹⁷ Educational policy is now made within a framework of equal opportunities legislation. The operation of the Inner London Education Authority represented a progressive attempt to put such legislation into practice. Many feminist teachers today recognise the power of schools in gender socialisation and are prepared to challenge it within their classrooms. From an early age boys and girls use computers and new technology, acquiring skills which are now a pre-requisite for many areas of the labour market. As the whole notion of paid work alters, there are signs that vocational training for young people is contributing to the development of new perspectives on the roles of the sexes in adult life.

The importance of this cannot be overestimated. This study of vocational education in London during the inter-war years has illustrated just how significant "gender loaded" technical schooling can be in perpetuating gender divisions in society and in reinforcing rigid boundaries between men's and women's employment. In the words of the National Union of Women Teachers:

The attitude towards the education of girls is merely a reflection of the attitude taken in the world in general to woman's value as a person, to woman's work and to woman's remuneration. If the most important posts, if the higher jobs are only to be held by men...the technical education of girls will appear as an unnecessary expense.¹⁸

¹⁷ This is particularly important as education for full time employment increasingly becomes an anachronism and vocational training becomes a substitute for employment

¹⁸ The Education of Girls, NUWT, London, 1950, p7.

APPENDIX A

Outline Characteristics of the Varieties of Schools Operating in London for Girls During the Inter-War Years

Elementary Schools

All non fee-paying children would enter a local elementary school. Average class sizes were 48 in London. Most schools were mixed although some had separate boys' and girls' departments. The schools were divided into "grades"; pupils had to achieve certain educational standards before passing to the next grade.

Senior/Senior Elementary Schools

In London from 1924 Elementary School pupils aged eleven who failed to obtain places in a Secondary, Central or Technical School attended a local Senior Elementary School or department within an elementary school. This would cater for all 11+ pupils in the area. The schools in London were mainly single sex and increasingly became known as Senior Schools. By the late 1930s approximately 80% of 11 year olds were in re-organised schools. They remained there until they left school at 14.

Junior Technical/Trade Schools

These schools provided trade instruction from the age of 13½ for girls, 13 for boys. The courses were for two years (three for boys). Places were obtained through success in the trade scholarship exams. It was, therefore, usually pupils in the Senior Schools who obtained admission to a Trade School although it was possible to transfer from a central or secondary school. Schools were all single sex apart from one - the School for Retail Distribution. Fee-payers could also attend a Junior Technical/Trade School. This category includes the junior domestic/home training schools. Approximately one third of the school curriculum was devoted to general subjects, the rest to trade instruction.

Central Schools

Elementary pupils who failed to gain entry to a Secondary School through the scholarship exams taken at eleven could, if their marks were high enough, win a place in a selective Central School. There were approximately 100 in London catering for 27,179 pupils by 1929. Each school had a commercial or industrial bias which affected all subjects of the curriculum. There were also employment related lessons in, for example, typing and shorthand. Most were single sex institutions.

Secondary Schools

Throughout the inter-war years it was possible to pay for a Secondary School place. For those whose parents could not afford this entry was via a scholarship exam taken at 11. The supplementary junior scholarship exam could also be taken at 13 by pupils in Central Schools or fee-payers already in Secondary Schools. From 1907 25% of places in maintained Secondary Schools had to be allocated to free place children. All such schools were single sex in London during the inter-war years.

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ED14	London: general files
ED20	Higher Elementary School files 1896-1926
ED21	Public Elementary School files
ED22	Inspectorate Memoranda 1878-1941
ED24	Private Office Papers
ED45	Juvenile Unemployment Centre files
ED46	Further Education: general files
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The files are held in the Public Record Office.

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