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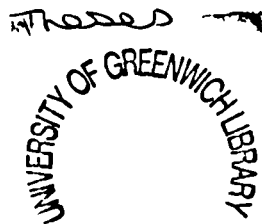
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SISTERHOOD OR SURVEILLANCE?  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORKING GIRLS' CLUBS  
IN LONDON 1880-1939.

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the Girls' Club Movement in multi-cultural London from the 1880s to 1939 and situates it within the context of gender, class and race.

Part One places the clubs in their historical context and critically examines issues of poverty, sexual purity, morality, femininity and ethnicity. The ways in which ideas about race superiority interacted with class superiority in the formation of middle class values are also discussed as is the contemporary perception of working class and ethnic minority cultures. The cultural gap between the social classes is highlighted as are the forms of surveillance including disguise, which were undertaken in order to gain knowledge of working class life.

Part Two looks at clubs in relation to the concerns discussed in Part One. Chapter Six (and the Appendix) survey the provision of clubs in London. Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine examine the clubs under the overlapping themes of protection, discipline and empowerment. The nature of this empowerment is examined in the context of the dominant ideology of married motherhood.

Drawing on little-used club records and oral evidence, the thesis suggests that the clubs were part of a middle class initiative which aimed to re-make working class culture. The interaction between the club organizers and members is examined and it is suggested that a straightforward imposition of middle class values was not possible as a variety of factors were operating. Questions are raised about the possibility of 'sisterhood' within unequal class relations and 'social mothering' is considered as a form of humanized policing.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

AJY	Association for Jewish Youth.
CIA	Clubs Industrial Association.
GFS	Girls' Friendly Society.
ILP	Independent Labour Party.
JAPGW	Jewish Association for Girls and Women.
JLB	Jewish Lads Brigade.
LMH	Lady Margaret Hall.
LSE	London School of Economics.
NCGC	National Council of Girls' Clubs.
NOGC	National Organization of Girls' Clubs.
NUWW	National Union of Women Workers.
T&T	Time and Talents Settlement.
WIC	Women's Industrial Council.
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union.
WUS	Women's University Settlement.
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association.

NOTE. The place of publication of all books quoted is London unless otherwise stated.

## INTRODUCTION

The English suffragette and socialist Sylvia Pankhurst spoke at a Working Girls' Club in Woolwich, south-east London in October 1915. She talked of her work with women in Bow, of married women's right to work, of low wages and of the need of women to organize. She went on to name capitalism as the cause of the war.<sup>1</sup> This talk raised all sorts of questions for me. What exactly were girls' clubs? Were they a kind of women's centre where feminists hoped to lead girls to independent thought and action? Were they evidence of a separatist female culture? Perhaps they were simply a response to war-time conditions which meant that there were more young female workers in munition towns like Woolwich. Could they simply be recreational or could they function as places of surveillance and control? Did they have any relationship with boys' clubs?

Throughout this thesis I have used the term 'girls' to describe young working women. This was the usage of the day and seemed to apply to all unmarried working females under thirty. The clubs started from fourteen years and no maximum age was stated.

Clubs for working girls started in the second half of the nineteenth century with an upward surge in the 1880s and 1890s. Working with girls was part of the philanthropic women's 'mission' to women. As Edith Sellars observed:

There is not a town, hardly a village but women are on the watch [my emphasis] there to shield from danger the unstable and make rough places smooth for the weak. All ranks and all creeds are at one in striving to lighten the burdens of our girl toilers and bring into their lives brightness and hope.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Pioneer, 15 October, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> E. Sellars, 'Woman's work for the Welfare of Girls' in A. Burdett Coutts, (ed.), Woman's Mission, 1893, p.35.

Women of all creeds were 'on the watch' for girls. Christian Edith Sellars admired the Anglo-Jewish community which put 'an English Jewess, until she is eighteen...under the surveillance [my emphasis] of a committee of Ladies'.<sup>3</sup> By the turn of the century, it was noted that 'in a poor part of London...there were four girls' clubs in one street'.<sup>4</sup> The literature of the time suggests that it was almost fashionable for leisured philanthropic women to have some experience in running girls' clubs during this period. Margot Tennant, who later married the future Prime Minister, Asquith, helped her sister Laura run a club in Scotland. When she came to London, she visited a factory in Whitechapel three times a week during the lunch hour. She did this for eight years until her marriage in 1894. Margot and Laura also started a creche in Wapping.<sup>5</sup> Margot's half sister Katherine, also worked with poor girls after she 'came out' during the 1920s.<sup>6</sup> Some clubs lasted until the end of the thirties growing into larger institutions whilst others had a small membership and disappeared. The clubs were run by individuals, by University Settlements and by religious organizations and are detailed in Chapter Six and the appendix. The clubs were places where girls who had left school could engage in 'improving' activities during their leisure time. There were hostels attached to some of them and all were girls-only until 1939. Boys' clubs also developed from the 1880s through the period. Some were exclusively male but in some cases women helped to run them. Men, it would appear, did not help at girls'

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.44.

<sup>4</sup> F. Freeman, Our Working Girls and How to Help Them, 1908, ch. 3.

<sup>5</sup> M. Asquith, Autobiography, edited by M. Bonham-Carter, 1962.

<sup>6</sup> unrecorded conversation with I. Dove, July, 1992.



clubs. There were moves towards mixed activities during the inter-war period but it was not until after the Second World War that most clubs became mixed.

Studying the period from 1880 to 1939 has enabled me to include evidence from oral history of the inter-war years, thus giving space to working class voices which are inevitably absent from the history of the early part of the period. I have also been able to examine the impact of both the war and the gaining of female suffrage. I generally found a greater sense of continuity than change throughout the whole period: girls were seen to need protection from male lust, they needed to have their female sensibilities developed and refined in order to be able to fulfil their maternal role in life. In order to stress this continuity and to recognize the massive socio-economic changes which did take place, I have organized Part Two thematically. Part One concentrates on the late Victorian context and the impetus for club work which I believe was modified but not changed in essence by the 1930s.

I have chosen to concentrate on London because, as the capital and biggest city, it symbolized all the 'problems' of the poor and was also perceived as a place of danger for girls. The heart of the Empire was not a place where the Christian Ideal of White Womanhood was flourishing.

The clubs were not monolithic in their approach, although there were many similarities. There was a general aim to 'widen horizons' and to 'develop character'. Although it seems that only a minority of girls actually went to clubs, some of the clubs were very popular. It seemed important to question whether the clubs imposed English middle class values on the girls, or whether these were the values to which the girls were aspiring. Did the girls ignore/resist the attempts to refine them in order to get the best out of club facilities? How far did being female shape the

development of the clubs and did feminism affect the participants? Class and race assumptions also needed to be investigated. What do references to 'our working sisters' actually mean?

There has been no study of Working Girls Clubs in London. Recently however, Joyce Goodman has done an interesting study of two clubs in Manchester. She situates the girls' club activities in relation to a gendered view of domesticity and leisure.<sup>7</sup> Fiona Montgomery has also worked on Manchester material and has looked at the reading list of one girls' club in Manchester in connection with local suffrage activity.<sup>8</sup> There has been work on boys' organizations.<sup>9</sup> Eager and Dawes' studies are empirical whilst Springhall and Hendricks rely heavily on a class analysis suggesting the need for a disciplined work force. Whilst such an analysis is important, I am interested in the relation of class and gender and have been influenced by the theoretical work of Joan Scott and Davidoff and Hall.<sup>10</sup> These last two writers have explored the importance of gender in class formation and this thesis is particularly concerned with class and gender considerations in the development of clubs. Gender, I would argue, also applies to boys' clubs as much as

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<sup>7</sup> J. Goodman, 'Leisure for Girls: Girls' clubs in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester', History of Education Society Bulletin, no. 60, 1997. (forthcoming). My thanks to Dr. Goodman for this article.

<sup>8</sup> F. Montgomery, 'Women who Dids, and all that kind of thing...' Male perceptions of 'Wholesome Literature'., in C. Parker, (ed.), Gender Politics and Sexuality in Victorian Literature, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> W. Eager, Making Men, 1953. F. Dawes, A Cry From the Streets, 1975. J. Springhall, Youth, Empire and Society, 1977. H. Hendricks, Images of Youth, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> J. Scott, Gender and the Politics of History, 1988. L. Davidoff and C. Hall, Family Fortunes, 1987.

class although to date historians have tended to place the emphasis on class. As work on masculinity develops, so more historians are beginning to incorporate gender concerns into their work.

The clubs started to develop at a time when, among many other things, there was concern about the urban poor and about girls' sexuality. 'Adolescence' also became a new definition and there developed a growing concern about the physical health of the 'race'. Changes took place in the economy which affected female employment and the place of women in society was being contested legally and ideologically. Jewish immigration also made an impact on London life. The following writers have been very useful in providing a context within which the clubs can be set.

To get a sense of Victorian London work by Gareth Stedman Jones and Judith Walkowitz has been invaluable.<sup>11</sup> Stedman Jones gives a detailed social economic picture of the London poor, providing a sense of the 'problem' of the poor as defined by the middle class. Walkowitz, by linking sexuality and class, highlights the changing female presence on the urban landscape adding a gender dimension to our understanding of late Victorian London. Nead's work is also useful in placing philanthropy within the context of female sexuality, bringing out images of 'fallen' women. She also raises Donzelot's analysis of philanthropy as a form of policing.<sup>12</sup> Prochaska's work has provided a firm context for looking at women's involvement in philanthropy without going into the specifics of girls' clubs.<sup>13</sup> Harrison's article on a specific organization

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<sup>11</sup> G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, 1971. J. Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delights, 1992, p.17.

<sup>12</sup> L. Nead, Myths of Sexuality, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> F. Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England, 1980.

is very comprehensive, placing the Girls' Friendly Society in the overall context of a conservative revival. He raises questions of the relations between philanthropy, politics, feminism, religion and class.<sup>14</sup> Carol Dyhouse and Anna Davin's work on girls' socialization was also useful providing me with many sources on Victorian working class girlhood.<sup>15</sup>

The issues of protection and control have been raised by, among others, Walkowitz and Jeffreys.<sup>16</sup> Whilst Walkowitz sees much of the reform work done with young women around sexuality as classist, prudish and repressive, Jeffreys views it as an example of female solidarity providing a necessary network of protection against male sexuality. The issue of the 'age of consent' thus emerges as important. Whilst it is generally agreed that children need protecting, it is not generally agreed when they stop becoming children. The perception and control of adolescents thus became important. *Were young women between the ages of fourteen and twenty to be regarded as children or autonomous agents? One mechanism of control was to regard all the working classes and the 'natives' within the Empire as children or child-like in need of guidance in order to become English middle class.*

The idea of 'Englishness' was highlighted by the Jewish Girls' Clubs. Amongst a number of writers of

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<sup>14</sup> B. Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family - the Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920.', Past and Present (61), Nov. 1973, 107-138.

<sup>15</sup> C. Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England, 1981. A. Davin, 'Work and School for the Children of London's Labouring Poor in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century'. Phd., Birkbeck, University of London, 1992. A. Davin, Growing Up Poor. Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> J. Walkowitz, Prostitution in Late Victorian Society, Cambridge, 1980. S. Jeffreys, Spinster and Her Enemies, 1985.

accounts of Anglo-Jewry, Feldman, White, Marks and Burman were particularly valuable for issues of immigration and anglicization.<sup>17</sup> Feldman provides a useful analysis of how anglicization was not necessarily imposed on a passive community but was much more an area of negotiation. My research certainly bears some of this out as the efforts and values of the Anglo-Jewish middle class club leaders seem to have been appreciated. White provides a valuable feeling of the social reality of Jewish East End life whilst Marks and Burman focus on Jewish women. Burman looks at the changing gender roles in the immigrant community whilst Marks focusses on Jewish prostitution.

'Englishness' is taken as a norm by Victorian reformers. Imperialist rhetoric is used when discussing the English working class using the missionary ideal to control/improve English girls as well as the 'natives'. The English middle classes were horrified to find that their own white 'race' was ignorant of 'correct' moral values. Here Said's idea of 'imaginative geography' has been very useful.<sup>18</sup> The poor were another country which offered women some of the freedom and excitement that the Empire offered men. Alice Gregory, who was active in professionalizing midwifery, likened the district midwife to a 'colonial administrator'.<sup>19</sup> Vicinus, in

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<sup>17</sup> D. Feldman, *Immigrant workers, Englishmen and Jews - Jewish Immigration to the East End.*, Phd., Cambridge 1986. J. White, *Rothschild Buildings*, 1980. L. Marks, 'Jewish women and Jewish Prostitution', *Jewish Quarterly*, vol 34, no.2 and 'Dear Old Mother Levy's' *Social History of Medicine*, vol 3, no. 1. R. Burman, 'Jewish women as Breadwinner - the changing value of women's work in a Manchester immigrant community.' *Oral History*, vol 10, no. 2, 1982.

<sup>18</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism*, 1978.

<sup>19</sup> I. Dove, 'Peripheral and Powerful - a history of Alice Gregory, Leila Parnell and Maud Cashmore, founders of the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies, Woolwich and the National Training School for Midwives'. M.A dissertation, UKC, 1986.

her analysis of the women's settlements also uses colonization as a similar metaphor.<sup>20</sup>

Some British women did have experience with 'native' girls in the empire. Work by Ware and Twells<sup>21</sup> has been useful in examining ideas of 'English womanhood', which was an assumed ideal upheld by club workers. This was an ideal against which they saw themselves and one which they wished to develop amongst working class girls. Religious differences could be tolerated provided that cultural differences were minimized. The Jewish community in Britain was very anglicized and was able to make a big impact on the club movement. This was done by not re-inforcing East European culture and language, by introducing English culture and by sharing the patriarchal Christian Ideal of Woman as mother and moral guardian.

Records of organizations which ran girls' clubs are scattered and, in some cases, are scanty. Some of the club organizers wrote autobiographies which included accounts of their work written with hindsight. In some cases, they wrote about their work at the time but these are rare. Umbrella organizations like the National Organization of Girls Clubs and the Federation of Working Girls' clubs published journals which are housed at the British Library. Records of Settlements have been quite well preserved: the Time and Talents Settlement records are at the Greater London Record Office, the Women's University Settlement's records are at the Fawcett Library, Southwark local history library has information on the Bermondsey and Robert Browning Settlements and Newham local history library houses the

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<sup>20</sup> M. Vicinus, Independent Women 1850-1920, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> V. Ware, Beyond the Pale. White Racism and History, 1992. A. Twells, '"So distant and Wild a Scene": language, domesticity and difference in Hannah Kilham's writing from West Africa 1822-1832', Women's History Review, vol. 4 no. 3. 1995. 301-318.

records of Canning Town Women's Settlement. Some information on the Lady Margaret Hall Settlement is at the college in Oxford. Records of the West Central Club are at the Museum of Jewish Life and in a private collection. There is some information on East End clubs in Tower Hamlets local history library. The detailed records of The Deptford Fund Club and Albany Trust are at Lewisham local history library and those of the Girls' Friendly Society at their headquarters in Kensington. Hackney local history library has mainly annual reports of the Girls' Guild of Good Life and the Church Army's records are at their headquarters in Blackheath.

I have also consulted a variety of newspapers, the records of the National Vigilance Association at the Fawcett Library, the Womens' League for Health and Beauty archives at their office, Booth's notebooks at the London School of Economics, the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women's annual reports at the London Library, political pamphlets at the Marx Memorial Library and the journal of the League of Coloured Peoples at the British Library. All of these helped to provide a context.

Most of the written records, with the exception of some club members, contributions to journals, convey the voices of the club organizers and not the voices of the working class girls. Oral evidence has given space to club members but, as with much oral evidence, it cannot be regarded as representative. The few women I interviewed spoke enthusiastically about their time with the clubs in the inter-war years. Most of them were Jewish and it is therefore tempting to give undue prominence to the inter-war Jewish clubs. Jewish women were easy to reach because, although they have moved away from the East End, the Jewish Chronicle still provides a focal point for the community. The response to my letter in that paper was overwhelming. I did not

find an equivalent point for tracing members of non-Jewish clubs. The eighteen women who were interviewed wanted to talk positively about their experiences and it would be unlikely that anyone who did not remember their club with affection would want to be interviewed. It is also not possible to reach women who did not go to clubs.

Oral history, as Hareven points out, is useful in gaining insights, in getting at the essence of the experiences and is a record of subjective perceptions.<sup>22</sup> It is not a re-creation of events. For the women interviewed, the clubs were an important part of their growing up and the positive elements far outweighed the negative ones. Memories of how they were treated are overlaid with how they think young people should be treated today. If restrictions on their behaviour are remembered, they are remembered fondly, since as adults they now identify with the club leaders. In some cases details such as club rules are not remembered partly because other aspects were far more important and partly because such rules were taken for granted.

The women interviewed shared the same aspirations as those of the club leaders. The clubs therefore, may have been reinforcing the values of the home and community rather than imposing any values on a 'deficient' working class. However, generalizations cannot be made from this evidence. It would not be safe to assume that there was a consensus of values in the clubs during the 1930s. The evidence does indicate the importance of the clubs for the individual women as remembered now. Striking similarities are evident in the memories as clubs are described as 'a home from home' or a 'way of life'. Clubs were remembered as places for friendship and opportunity under a largely benevolent guardianship. Even when conflicts are

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<sup>22</sup> T. Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time, Cambridge, 1982.



remembered and class and political differences are registered, the clubs are still seen as beneficial.

It seemed relatively easy for the women to talk about their club experiences since they chose, in most cases, to contact me. They willingly spoke about other aspects of their lives as I attempted to put the club life in a socio-economic context. The Jewish women were happy to explain aspects of their culture and religion with which I was not familiar and all women were pleased that their lives could have some significance as 'history'. However it was difficult to get interviewees to be critical as some questions about discipline or gender were met with (friendly) incomprehension and were answered with phrases like 'we did in those days' or 'that's what girls did'. My pre-conceptions about periods such as the 1930s led to the asking of, what seemed to the interviewees, irrelevant questions. The place of the clubs in relation to anti-semitism did not have any meaning as, in spite of activity by the British Union of Fascists in the East End, all the women interviewed did not remember any anti-semitism and felt quite safe on the streets. What interviewees remember during an interview is affected by the kinds of questions asked which, in turn, are affected by the pre-conceptions of the interviewer. Interviews are obviously affected by the relationship between the participants and the skill of the interviewer. Like other sources, oral history has to be handled critically, but its very subjectivity adds a qualitative dimension.

It has been argued that the working classes in the period needed to be controlled/improved for the stability of England and the Empire.<sup>23</sup> Working class boys needed to become reliable, thrifty workers with an interest in an ordered, capitalist society. They needed to be guarded against dead end jobs, drink, gambling and

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<sup>23</sup> J. Springhall, Youth. H. Hendricks, Images.  
S. Humphries, Hooligans or Rebels?, Oxford, 1981.

becoming criminals. With girls, the emphasis was on their future unpaid work within the home and their sexuality. Although clubs for boys and girls started around the same time, I would argue that the impetus for the girls' clubs came from the desire to control/protect their sexuality. Females across the classes were moral guardians of the race and as such were considered to be chaste, dependent angels within the home. Working class women clearly did not conform to this ideal. Sympathetic reformers felt that the material conditions prevented working class women from achieving this - the homes of the poor were not 'real' homes and as such could not provide a suitable environment for young women. Working class girls, whose lives were very independent and public compared with the middle classes, were seen as closer to sexual ruin. All women were seen as at risk from male profligacy but working class culture seemed to offer much less protection for young girls and it was thought that it was much harder for poor girls to resist the attractions of 'low life' without firm moral guidance.

Dominant notions of 'womanhood', natural and eternal could be developed if working class girls had contact with the middle classes. Middle class women internalized these gender-specific values and sought to help to develop them amongst others. Woman's position as moral guardian was important and influential. If working class girls could become good wives and mothers then they could influence men in order to bring about a better society. Donzelot argues that philanthropy provided an area in which families could be 'policed'.<sup>24</sup>

Working class girls were policed in a very gender specific way. Middle class reformers were moved by a sense of gender solidarity at the prospect of female degradation in a patriarchal culture. Any policing was

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<sup>24</sup> J. Donzelot, Policing of Families, 1980.

seen as protective surveillance or guidance. Middle class women had the authority to guide their own daughters and/or servants. Yeo argues that private motherhood was extended to social mothering and as such could include disciplining, protecting and empowering and it is around these three areas that the second part of this thesis is organized.<sup>25</sup>

The clubs contained all three elements in varying degrees. Because of the specific female nature of the clubs, it could be easy to think of it them as engendering some kind of universal sisterhood, a deliberate separatist strategy as Freedman has suggested for the American experience.<sup>26</sup> This, however, is not the case. The specific class structure of England of this period, together with the accepted notions of motherhood would militate against this analysis. The club organizers clearly had the authority and status of their class position and this position was acknowledged on both sides. Having this power did not mean that the organizers were not challenged or their rules circumvented. The girls consented or negotiated with the 'ladies', enjoying having their horizons widened. The clubs did not necessarily replace the attractions of the street as it was hoped they would; many girls continued to wear 'frivolous' clothes and to experience free and easy relationships with young men which often led to early marriages. A minority of girls became club workers and must have imbibed middle class values to a greater degree - this certainly seems true of the immigrant Jewish community. Becoming club workers gave them some standing in their community and so could be

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<sup>25</sup> E. Yeo, 'Social Motherhood and the Sexual Communion of Labour in British Social service, 1850-1910, Women's History Review, vol. 1, no. 1, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> E. Freedman, 'Separation as Strategy: female institution building 1870-1930.', Feminist Studies, vol. 5, no. 3, 1979.

regarded as empowering.

Involvement in the clubs was empowering for the middle class women. They clearly enjoyed the work although many admit that it was difficult. For some, club work provided a stepping stone to other public work and clubs provided a training ground for a new women's profession - the social worker. Some of the 'ladies' involved were very concerned about bad housing, low wages and poor working conditions. However they did not seek to make structural changes in society through the clubs. Feminists, in general, did not use the clubs for direct propaganda purposes although Sylvia Pankhurst had a junior section of the East London Suffragettes. Clubs attempted to socialize girls into chaste motherhood and the project was at the individual level. It aimed to refine, educate, elevate and to influence girls to recognize their true worth. The emphases varied - some clubs concentrated on sewing and domestic service training whilst others informed girls of their industrial rights and introduced them to ideas of profit sharing. Ideas about citizenship were also important, especially during the inter-war years and 'discipline' is often more dominant than 'empowering' but there is little sense of repression as the girls refused to be repressed. The calm order of the Deptford Fund Club, for instance, seems very fragile as the secretary's weekly reports constantly refer to the girls' behaviour - it was always very much improved.

The reformers internalized the values of the patriarchal culture which placed women in a dependent asexual maternal role. Defence against male lust was quite a rational action given the prospect of disease and childbirth. The special place allocated to women could be a very powerful one, one in which the wife and mother had moral authority over those in their care. This role was extended to the care of working class girls who could be guided to a position in which they

could assume guardianship over their families' morals. Women could thus improve mens' morals which would lead to a better society in which women need not be the victim of male lust. The moral regeneration of working class women would re-make working class culture. This culture would be re-made in a form which would not challenge the dominant ideology. Smith-Rosenberg has argued that an important question is who controls the right of sexual access to women.<sup>27</sup> If it is the woman herself then everything is challenged. If it is older women then it is less of a challenge as the younger woman's sexual autonomy is denied. Although many of the women involved in running the clubs were not much older than the girl members, they were in a position of authority like mothers. Social motherhood may have produced a humanized policing - whether this policing was effective remains to be seen.

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<sup>27</sup> C. Smith-Rosenberg, 'Writing History - Language, Class and Gender', T. de Lauretis, (ed.) Feminist Studies; Critical Studies, 1986.

PART ONE  
THE CONTEXT

CHAPTER ONE  
POVERTY AND PURITY.

By the late nineteenth century, Britain was experiencing a social and economic crisis as mid-Victorian prosperity was being eroded. Britain in the 1880s was undergoing a depression with competition from abroad. London, in particular, was experiencing international terrorism from Anarchists and Fenians and was starting to experience a wave of immigration from Eastern Europe. The decade witnessed unemployed marches which culminated in police repression on Bloody Sunday in 1887 as demonstrators were forbidden from entering Trafalgar Square. London was no longer a confident capital of the Empire. It was constructed, as Walkowitz argues, by writers as a 'dark, powerful and seductive labyrinth'.<sup>1</sup>

As Jones and others have outlined, the late Victorian London poor were an object of concern.<sup>2</sup> The East End, in particular, became a byword for chronic and hopeless poverty. With the decline in staple industries came irregular and casual work and low wages. There was high male unemployment and sweated female labour. The existing bad housing could not accommodate the rising population. Jewish immigration in the 1880s was also seen to exacerbate the problem. Working class culture was seen as unsavoury and often violent. The 'Jack the Ripper' murders in Whitechapel added to this sense of corruption as well as giving fuel to anti-semitism. The growth of Trade Unionism and Socialism also gave rise to anxieties about public disorder.

Late nineteenth century London was also a place in which females had a public presence. The expansion of

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<sup>1</sup> J. Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delights, 1992, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, Oxford, 1971.

the mass market and the retail trade led to the development of department stores and a change in shopping habits. These stores became 'Palaces of consumption' and offered middle class women a chance to shop and wander in comfort and safety.<sup>3</sup> Shopping became a leisure activity and a major form of female leisure. These stores also employed females giving new opportunities for women's work.

Middle class women were also starting to enter the job market and, along with middle class school girls, their presence was becoming visible on public transport. Women philanthropists also made their mark on the poor areas of London. Louisa Hubbard estimates that there were some 20,000 salaried and half a million voluntary women befriending the homeless by the late nineteenth century. Women were also entering public service such as the London School Board.

Much of this public activity was confined to middle class women but many working class women became active in the Salvation Army's Hallelujah Lassies. Working class women made their presence felt in strikes, the most well known was that of the 'match girls' in 1888.

London was becoming a place of possibility for women. It was also a place of danger and middle class women complained of sexual harassment on the streets. Women had to be careful of what they wore and of going out alone and middle class women could identify with street dangers. Public appearances of the poor and of women in the new urban landscape together led to anxieties about the moral health of the nation.

Two publications of the decade strongly influenced many middle class reformers. The Bitter Cry of Outcast London (1883) and 'The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon' (1885) highlighted the state of the poor and the dangers

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<sup>3</sup> J. Walkowitz, City, p.48.



that females faced in London.<sup>4</sup> The former was given much publicity by W.T. Stead in his Pall Mall Gazette and the latter was written by himself and given the maximum publicity possible. Stead introduced a new style of journalism which extended the practice of Sunday papers to a more respectable audience. He provided a platform for a social exposé of poverty and orchestrated a moral panic over enforced prostitution. Stead also took the lead in making the Whitechapel murders national news. These murders confirmed middle class fears that poverty spawned immorality.

The publication of The Bitter Cry of Outcast London by the Reverend Andrew Mearns in 1883 highlighted middle class concerns. The shocking aspect of the pamphlet was that the poor were getting poorer and more corrupt: poverty and morality were interlinked. Brooke Lambert, an East End clergyman responded by saying that civil disorder would be understandable as the poor had 'lost their birthright'. The poor were driven to drink, crime and prostitution. Mearns called for the 'real lovers of the poor' to 'watch over the true interests of...their brethren'. He called for more personal contact between the classes and Lambert cited Octavia Hill's housing management scheme as a scheme whereby the poor could be 'bettered by intercourse with women of higher views'. Mearns also advocated State interference into housing and licensing hours and specifically State intervention 'on behalf of the young'.<sup>5</sup>

The urban poor were another country to the Victorian middle class - they did things differently there.

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<sup>4</sup> A. Mearns, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, 1883. W. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon', Pall Mall Gazette, 1885.

<sup>5</sup> B. Lambert, 'The Out Cast Poor - Esau's Cry', The Contemporary Review, vol. 44, Dec. 1883, 924-933, p. 931.

Fictional and non-fictional literature abounds with images of darkness and chaos. The English urban poor was constantly compared with non-English races. The racist language of Imperialism provided a way of describing a difference that was barely comprehensible to the middle class. On their doorstep there was a 'dark continent' inhabited by 'wild races' who lived in a 'foul and fetid air' like that of the African swamps. There were colonies of 'heathen and savages' in the heart of London.<sup>6</sup> The criminal young were described as 'English Kaffirs', 'street arabs and Hottentots'.<sup>7</sup> T.H. Huxley likened the poor to a 'Polynesian savage' and W Booth likened them to an African pigmy.<sup>8</sup>

Using Said's notion of 'imaginative geography',<sup>9</sup> it can be said that the Victorians created a discourse of the poor - they spoke for the poor with their own idea of the poor which constructed the poor. They were the 'other' who lived in the 'abyss' another frequent image in the literature - Masterman's From the Abyss (1902), London's People of the Abyss (1903), Booth's On the Verge of the Abyss (1890) and Higgs' Glimpses into the Abyss (1906). Masterman, who lived amongst the poor writes of 'black masses' and of the 'abyss ...disgorging its denizens for the labour of the day.' The poor lived in physical and spiritual darkness - another image used by writers as diverse as the Salvation Army leader, Booth, in Darkest England and the Way Out (1890) and the socialist Margaret Harkness in Darkest London (1890). This image appeared over thirty years later in Jones' In Darkest London (1926).

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<sup>6</sup> G. Sims, Living London, 1903, p.65.

<sup>7</sup> M. May, 'Innocence and Experience', Victorian Studies, vol. 17, 1973.

<sup>8</sup> P. Keating, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> E. Said, Orientalism, 1978, p.54.

The Poor were to be feared and pitied but they could also be helped. Their culture, which was seen as deficient, could be re-made in the middle class image and class differences and hostility could be overcome. The poor were unknown and frightening but if they became known they could be educated. The poor were thus 'investigated' in various ways. Some of the middle classes went into disguise [see Chapter Five] and lived as one of the poor, some lived openly in Settlements and others, like Booth, did social surveys. The middle classes gained knowledge which gave them power, power which Foucault argues is the power to define others. Said also argues that knowledge of subject races is what makes their management easy or profitable. Knowledge and power interact in a 'dialect of information and control'.<sup>10</sup>

The darkness of working class culture is countered by the 'sweetness and light' of Arnoldian middle class education. The purpose of this education was to achieve 'perfection and beauty'. The exact nature of this education is rather vague but wisdom is not to be gained for its own sake but had wider moral and spiritual implications. Culture was all that was 'best' in the world and the working classes had a right to it. Middle class reformers were operating within a discourse of salvation, a discourse which they would not necessarily see as one of control.

With the 're-discovery' of the poor in the 1880s, came an awareness of the young poor. With the Education Acts of the 1870s, children were less visible, less an obvious object of concern as they started to go to school. Juveniles became more of a focus. Boy labour had not been a category before the 1880s but with the changes in industry there was high demand for cheap

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<sup>10</sup> E. Said, Orientalism, p.36.

boy labour in dead end jobs.<sup>11</sup> Working class boys were seen as aimless and restless preferring the low amusements of the streets and, as independent earners, they appeared out of parental control. They were at an age when they might embark on criminal careers and should be encouraged to continue their education or to take apprenticeships. Institutes for boys were started in the 1870s aiming to win boys 'to all that is manlike and Christlike'. Numerous other clubs were opened by churches, Settlements and the Jewish community. A London Federation of Boys Clubs was formed in the 1880s and a National Association of Boys Clubs in 1924. The clubs were a constructive alternative to the street corner but their aims were also to mould characters. For one club worker, clubs compensated for the lack of privileges that the boys experienced. By giving and winning friendship, boys could be made into men.<sup>12</sup>

Features of manhood were loyalty, courage, endurance and discipline. Clubs provided recreation and instruction with a public school emphasis on sport. Boys needed to follow 'manly pursuits' and 'manly ideals'. These could be realized by 'the comradeship of other boys and the guiding friendship of men who have grown to self discipline and fruitful manhood'.<sup>13</sup> Clubs were run largely by public school men who, though critical of working class cultural mores, were sympathetic to the boys. Paterson, a club worker, claimed some success as boys came under the influence of a public school or college mission. One measure of success was that the boys began to smoke pipes rather than cigarettes. Clubs, he claimed, helped to develop a 'corporate sense, enabled thoughts and language to become a little 'cleaner and higher' as well as

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<sup>11</sup> G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London.

<sup>12</sup> W. Eager, Making Men, 1953, p.129.

<sup>13</sup> W. Eager, Making, p.410, p.428.

encouraging discipline and punctuality.<sup>14</sup> Paterson also hoped that clubs would contribute to a closer bond between masters and men. Russell and Rigby thought that public school values were appropriate for all. The public school made 'England great'<sup>15</sup> and that the results which they claimed for boys' clubs derived from the values which made our 'public schools the special pride of our country.'

Clubs for girls were developed at the same time. Adolescent girls were also visible on the streets, having left school. Although earning very little, they sometimes found the money to dress up and act in a way that was not compatible with middle class ideals of young womanhood. Meacham states that reformers were less worried about recruitment and training of girls as they were likely to marry.<sup>16</sup> A girl's 'dead end' job was not an object of concern. It was the girls' sexuality which was the focus. Girls should conform to dominant notions of womanhood. This necessitated them being chaste and also developing a good moral character in order that she could be able to provide an ordered, religious, thrifty home. By middle class standards, many working class mothers were not attaining this Ideal. Girls' street behaviour suggested that they were close to promiscuity if not to sexual ruin. At the time of publication of The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, there was also a widespread concern about child prostitution.

In 1879, Alfred Dyer formed the London Committee for the Suppression of the Traffic in British Girls for the Purposes of Continental Prostitution. This pressure group managed to get a Select Committee of the House of

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<sup>14</sup> A. Paterson, Across the Bridge, or Life by The South London Riverside, 1911, p.104.

<sup>15</sup> C. Russell and L. Rigby, Lads' Clubs, 1932, p.261. originally published as Working Lads' Clubs, 1908.

<sup>16</sup> S. Meacham, A Life Apart: the English Working Class 1890-1914, 1977.

Lords to investigate laws relating to the sexual protection of girls. From the investigations, it was made clear that girls as young as thirteen could be procured quite legally. Following this, a Criminal Amendment Bill was debated at various times between 1882 and 1885. The Bill did not receive much support from politicians until W.T.Stead, the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette took up the cause and made it a Crusade. In July, 1885, Stead 'exposed' the child victims of upper class licentiousness in true tabloid fashion. A million and a half copies of 'The Maiden Tribute' were sold. His articles caused a storm and mobilized public opinion on a large scale. A new social purity organization, the National Vigilance Association [NVA] of feminists, trade unionists, clergyman and socialists was formed. The Criminal Amendment Act was quickly passed which raised the age of consent for girls to sixteen and widened police powers against brothels and procurers.

The N.V.A was set up specifically to protect girls, though women like Ellice Hopkins had been working on this issue throughout the 1870s. The age of consent at thirteen was an indication of the low status of womanhood to Hopkins. She was appalled that an honest thirteen year old who had been 'enticed' to a brothel could get no legal redress.<sup>17</sup> The law legally protected an heiress up to twenty-one but refused to protect a 'poor man's daughter even at sixteen from a trade of vice.'<sup>18</sup> Concern for the protection of young girls had been present for some time. The agitation around the age of consent focussed public attention on the young female, especially the working class female. To most

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<sup>17</sup> E. Hopkins, A Plea for the Wider Action of the Church of England in the Prevention of the Degradation of Women, 1879, preface.

<sup>18</sup> Ellice Hopkins, 'Social Wreckage', The Contemporary Review, vol.44, July 1883, p.97.

children and were in need of protection. Working class school leavers were not seen as independent young woman but potential victims who needed moral guidance. One of the first women doctors, Elizabeth Blackwell thought that poor women and girls were more vulnerable to male advances as she cited the 'amusements and free gatherings of the poorer class' which were 'signs of degraded sex'.<sup>19</sup> The debate around 'The Maiden Tribute' gave a distorted picture of youthful sexuality but opened up spaces in which women could speak. They could speak about crimes against the person and not against men's property. Concerns about the poor and concerns about the protection of girls were linked. The urban poor could not provide an environment in which girls could attain true womanhood. Mearns, who wrote The Bitter Cry, was also a member of the N.V.A. It was this concern about girls' sexual welfare that was the spur to the formation of girls' clubs. Concerns about white slavery re-surfaced throughout the period: W.T.Stead's daughter, Estelle, was involved in setting up a girls' hostel in the 1920s and there was pressure from some feminists and others to raise the age of consent to eighteen and twenty one during the early part of the twentieth century. Whether working class girls wanted this protection and whether the sexual needs of adolescents were ever recognized as educationalists became conscious of the concept of adolescence is something which must be considered. The roots of the girls clubs lie in the notion of protection.

Boys' and girls' clubs developed at a time of concern about the urban poor. There was an overall aim to re-make working class culture and whilst children were now required to go to school, young workers were very visible and were a cause for concern. The issue of the age of consent raised the question of the moral

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<sup>19</sup> E. Blackwell, Moral Education of the Young, 1879, p.50.

the age of consent raised the question of the moral welfare of girls, and girls' clubs therefore had a different emphasis than the boys' clubs as gender expectations were operating. There was no concern about the age of consent for boys. Boys were to become good workers: a turn of century commentator acknowledged that this was relatively easy as compared with the work with girls. Girls had to be 'initiated into the mysteries of domestic duties'.<sup>20</sup> It was more ambitious to teach 'a trade of the home' and to train future mothers. Not only was it more ambitious but it was crucial. Bray, a worker at the Cambridge Settlement, determined boys' character by the kind of home they came from and the good character of the home was largely formed by the activities of the mother. The least desirable home was the one in which the mother got up late, did the minimum of domestic work and then spent her time gossiping. The mother determined the respectability of the family. Paterson also found the working class mother 'uncomely' who did not care for clean and tidy homes and produced meals of poor quality.<sup>21</sup> Clubs for girls would compensate for what their homes could not provide. They would develop qualities within the girls so that they would be able to provide good homes for future generations. As young girls, they needed protection, moral guidance and training in some domestic skills: as young workers they needed a place of recreation: as deprived members of the working class they needed contact with refined members of the middle classes which would enable them to develop true womanhood.

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<sup>20</sup> R. Bray, The Town Child, 1907, p.149.

<sup>21</sup> A. Paterson, Across, p.21.





2.4 Degrees of poverty in London, 1889

Plate 1. Map showing degrees of poverty in London, 1889. A Social Atlas of London, J. Shepherd et al., 1974.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MORAL ETHOS

All the clubs seemed to have an overall aim of 'improvement' which was related to 'refinement'. As members of the working classes, the girls needed to improve themselves morally. As females, this improvement was to conform to dominant ideas of femininity. Such ideas were modified during the sixty years under study but I would argue that the overall moral ethos was gender specific throughout the period.

Most of the clubs were prompted by a religious impulse which was predominantly Christian. However, it is interesting that the Jewish Clubs which were run by the Anglicized Jewish Establishment differed very little in their outlook. Eastern European immigrant girls were regarded as deficient in much the same way as English working class girls and they needed to be shown the values of the English middle class. The ideological place of women in both religions was similar in that she was to look 'well to the ways of her household' (Proverbs 31:27). Christianity as well as Judaism draws on the Old Testament. Although sharing the same faith, Anglicized Jewish club leaders were fairly distanced from the Jewish girls in that they did not speak their language - Yiddish - and some of the religious practices were different. Jewish leaders, however, assumed that the girls had been brought up in the faith but Christian leaders often deplored the lack of Christian knowledge and faith and there is sometimes a sense of bringing Christ into the girls' lives.

The emphasis of religion varied from club to club from the Anglican Girls' Friendly Society, the Catholic clubs to various undenominational clubs. Membership of a faith was not usually an entry requirement for the girls - the religion came from the leaders. Some like the Church Army or the Time and Talents Settlement hoped

for Confirmation but others like the L'Esperance Club tried to encourage ideas of profit sharing or raise the matter of industrial rights as at the West Central Jewish Club. I have found one club which was run by a non-believer - this was the Chesterton Club in Homerton which was run by an agnostic, Miss Johnson who attended lectures at the Ethical Society. She, however, managed to win over support of the local clergy.

The dominance of religious ideas amongst the club organizers comes as no surprise when one considers the place of religion in middle class Victorian society. In spite of, or because of the religious controversies which raged during the century, the middle classes were expected to be active Christian worshippers. The Jewish Establishment anglicized their synagogues and forms of service and Jewish women started to emulate their Christian counterparts and take an active part in devotion whilst the men, like Christian men, concerned themselves with material affairs.<sup>1</sup> Women had a special place as guardians of religious virtues and as guardians this place could be empowering and could enable them to transcend the material world in which they had so few rights. Religion helped to construct a nineteenth century view of femininity, enabling women in the private domestic sphere to participate in the public world. Being a good woman meant being a good religious woman. Men had religious duties but they were firstly citizens. Religious values informed all of women's lives and work. Ideas of female service and self sacrifice were important to middle class women's idea of themselves and these ideas fuelled the various projects of philanthropy which enabled the women to take up positions of power in relation the men of their class. They extended the domestic moral haven from the

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<sup>1</sup> R. Burman, 'The Jewish Woman as Breadwinner: the changing value of women's work in a Manchester Immigrant Community', Oral History, vol. 10, no. 2, 1982.

industrial capitalist world to the public world where their 'working sisters' were endangered. Material conditions were seen to work against the spiritual and moral development of working class females but middle class women, because of their material advantages, their concept of religious duty and sense of solidarity with members of their own sex believed they could help others to develop true womanhood. They could give moral guidance which would enable all women to provide an antidote to the worst excesses of industrial capitalism. All could lead beautiful moral and spiritual lives and ultimately be at one with their Maker. It was the duty of women to do all they could to ensure that other women were given every opportunity to reach a high state of spiritual development as class and gender divisions were irrelevant before God.

This religious outlook was not only confined to the spiritual world - it was also linked to a belief in social progress. The family was seen as the agent of that progress and women were the key figures within the family. The reformers had a moral and spiritual vision of a better society which could be achieved by individuals acting upon individuals to change the 'mind set and behaviour of the poor'.<sup>2</sup> Social problems could be remedied by the proper exercise of family responsibilities - responsibilities which were gendered. Thus work with girls involved encouraging them to develop abilities in order to be good wives and mothers who would promote religious values and encourage chastity, thrift and hard work. It could be argued that they were 'handmaidens of classical political economy, undertaking to discipline the poor',<sup>3</sup> however the reformers saw their work as projects of empowerment -

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<sup>2</sup> J. Lewis, Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England, 1991, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> J. Lewis, Women and Social Action, p.13.

enabling young women to attain a high standard of spiritual and moral well being within a better society.

Discipline and protection were seen as necessary aids to empowerment. The girls' behaviour was so unlike the expected middle class norm that physical and mental discipline was seen to be needed to produce calm, ordered physical and mental behaviour which would accord with notions of femininity. Girls needed protection because poverty and lack of moral guidance made them vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The girls were seen as potential victims of male lust not independent initiators of relationships. Scares about child prostitution and white slavery reinforced the ideas of the innocent working girl trapped in a life of sexual degradation not of young women who chose prostitution as a rational alternative to poverty. Different class mores led to misunderstandings about courting customs and reformers were dismayed by what was seen as sexual assertiveness and precocity. Working class girls did not exhibit victim-like behaviour and needed to be protected as much from themselves as from men. They were seen as close to sexual ruin and were in need of moral guidance.

In attempting to interpret the ethos of the clubs, there seems to be a continual tension between empowering, disciplining and protecting. Club leaders' writings often focus on the initial difficulties and so there is an emphasis on disciplining and 'taming' 'wild' girls who cannot sit still or be quiet. The comments on the girls' street behaviour are striking in that the organizers are clearly shocked at the girls' sexual precocity and feel the need to provide a home-like atmosphere in which the girls could receive the right moral guidance from their 'social' mothers. Club leaders delighted in their successes - they comment on the girls' participation in singing, drill and sewing competitions and on the general improved attitudes and behaviour. Some clubs taught occupational skills such

as typing and helped the girls to find jobs giving them greater access to the employment market. Cultural outings and holidays gave the girls wider experiences than they might otherwise have had. There is also evidence that friendships were maintained between the girls and the leaders and a sense that they had bridged the class divide. Whilst some of the leaders despair of the difficulties, especially when working with 'rough' girls, they clearly feel that they had played some part in empowering some of the girls so that they could contribute to their vision of a better society - a society with a religious base in which women had a special gendered place of moral importance.

The cultural and social gap between the ladies who organized the clubs and the girls who attended was often enormous but that did not deter the ladies. Such women felt they had had plenty of experience with working class girls as they had certain duties towards their servants. Middle class women had moral obligations to their servants who were part of their household. Mary Benson who worked at the Lady Margaret Hall Settlement in South London, wrote of the mistress's 'rights and duties' towards her servants. Domestic service was a great 'power for the good' as the 'lives of future wives and mothers [were] closely bound to us'. Mistresses had to ensure that 'the physical, mental and moral conditions of [the servants] lives [were] favourable to their development and happiness'.<sup>4</sup> Maude Stanley who started one of the earliest clubs wrote that mistresses should get to know their servants, encourage thrift, look to their pleasures and give them a good training for marriage.<sup>5</sup> It was not such a difficult step, then, to extend these obligations to working class girls and

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<sup>4</sup> M. Benson, Streets and Lanes of the City, 1891, p.xiii, 1891.

<sup>5</sup> M. Stanley, Servants, 1892 article on microfiche at the Fawcett Library.

women in general. Indeed, the impulse of one of the largest organizations for working girls - the Girls' Friendly Society arose from the obligation of the employers to their employees. Convinced of their obligations and armed with the belief of their own superior knowledge and education, these middle class women widened their acquaintance with working class girls by venturing out into alien, and in their view, possibly dangerous areas where they discovered huge cultural and social differences.

Having presented the reformers as middle class it is important to establish that they could not be described as a homogeneous group. Most were from the leisured class - Katharine Tennant, for example, was the daughter of a wealthy businessman and was used to mixing with the aristocracy and in government circles - but there is evidence that some who actually ran the clubs also worked for a living. Kit Russell, who did voluntary work at Time and Talents, Bermondsey eventually became a trained social worker as her father had become bankrupt. Women who worked for large organizations like the Church Army were not necessarily middle class. Sister Marsden came from a skilled artizan background and club work was part of her general training. Some of the women who became club leaders were originally club members. Hannah Feldman, whose parents were Jewish immigrants, clearly enjoyed the social mobility that working at West Central gave her. Florrie Passman from a similar background also imbibed club values to become a paid club leader for over thirty years.<sup>6</sup> Eva Slawson ran a girls' league as part of her work with the Congregational church in London. She worked as a legal secretary and was from a lower middle

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<sup>6</sup> Interviews with Lady Elliott, 21st May, 1992., Kit Russell, June, 1992., Sister Marsden, 28th July, 1992., Hannah Feldman, 2nd June, 1990.

class background.<sup>7</sup> Eva was interested in socialism and feminism and these interests were shared by Emmeline Pethick who ran the L'Esperance Club off the Euston Road and by Sylvia Pankhurst who had a junior league of the East London Suffragettes. Women of all political opinion were interested in club work. Mrs Townsend, who was President of the Girls Friendly Society, was married to a Tory MP and her views were generally conservative. She was supported by Lady Knightly, a Conservative feminist. Maude Stanley, who ran a club in Soho, was a daughter of the aristocracy whose mother was an active Liberal and who campaigned for women's education. Lily Montagu was the daughter of a very wealthy Liberal MP but she became a socialist and supporter of female suffrage.[see Chapter Nine].

These women's educational background varied. Florrie Passman and Hannah Feldman had elementary schooling at a London Board School. Some like Lily Montagu and Kit Russell had private secondary education whilst those who worked at the Settlements had a university education. In the latter half of the period, workers like Phyllis Gerson and Kit Russell received social work training. Some of the women married and some did not. For some, the work was an interlude before marriage for others it was a stepping stone to other work. Helena Swanwick and Kathleen Courtney became peace activists and others like Miriam Moses became active on the Board of Guardians and the Care Committees.

The ladies operated within a general framework of ideas of improvement and whilst some seem to concentrate on specific aspects of behaviour and on providing wholesome activities others like Maude Royden, who later became a suffragist and church feminist felt that club work was important in that it could help to 'cure the

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<sup>7</sup> T. Thompson, Dear Girl, 1987, p.207.



social sores' as 'this life that is led in the slums must corrupt a nation'. She envied her friend Kathleen Courtney who was making sacrifices 'for England and for humanity'.<sup>8</sup> Maude, herself, was briefly involved in club work in Liverpool for which she had no talent whatsoever. Fully confident of their ability to understand working class girls, these women, many of whom had never experienced the independence that adolescent girls were exhibiting in the street, launched themselves into club work. Through this work many middle class women achieved some measure of independence of their own and the clubs were places of empowerment for them.

The extent to which the clubs were places of empowerment for the girls is a question which is addressed throughout this thesis. Working class voices are few for the early part of the period and so their reactions are filtered through middle class observers. Indeed the general images of working class girls are constructed through middle class eyes and these images are important in understanding the ladies' perceptions and subsequent actions.

On reading the middle class literature of the period, the reader is struck by a consistency of the images of working class girls. Social commentators, fiction writers and club workers all stress the girls' bright clothes, noisy behaviour and independence. Some comments are critical, some fairly neutral and some are tinged with admiration and often amazement. Working class girls showed a strong public presence on the streets which impinged on the middle classes from the late nineteenth century.

Dress was the most obvious aspect on which to comment as working class girls' best clothes were very distinctive. During the nineteenth century dress was a

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from Maude Royden to Kathleen Courtney, 19th June, 1900. Lady Margaret Hall Archive, Oxford.

clear marker of respectability with the prostitute being seen as a wearer of 'tawdry finery'.<sup>9</sup> The middle class were uneasy about working class girls' dress sense. By middle class standards, the girls' dress exhibited bad taste, conspicuousness and gave strong suggestions of immorality.

The focal point of the girls' dress in the 1880s and 1890s was their large feathered hat described by Besant as having 'crimson and blue feathers'<sup>10</sup> and by a journalist as having 'flowers and feathers of the most garish colours'.<sup>11</sup> Whether English girls stole artificial flowers for their hats, as American girls did,<sup>12</sup> is not known, but 'Cartwheel hats' were worn by girls in Poplar, where a local vicar's daughter thought they were 'overdone'.<sup>13</sup> Not all disapproved and one Settlement worker was obviously amused when she tried to organize a group photo of some girls. It was difficult arranging the 'large and beautiful hats so that the back row can be seen at all'.<sup>14</sup>

Fiction writers also incorporated hats as part of their efforts to portray working class life 'realistically'. Morrison (1893) tried to show an understanding of his working class heroine in Lizerunt by viewing things from her point of view. She thought it 'not decent... to go bank holidaying (without) a hat of plush, very high in the crown of wild blue and wilder

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<sup>9</sup> M. Valverde, 'The Love of Finery: Fashion and Fallen Women in Nineteenth Century Social Discourse', Victorian Studies, vol. 32, no. 2, winter, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> W. Besant, East London, 1901, p.295.

<sup>11</sup> The Young Woman, 1897, p.380.

<sup>12</sup> J. Addams, Spirit of Youth, 1909, p.80.

<sup>13</sup> E. Baillie, The Shabby Paradise: the autobiography of a Decade, 1959.

<sup>14</sup> A. L. Hodson, Letters from a Settlement, 1909, p.112.

green'.<sup>15</sup> Margaret Harkness (1887) portrayed Nellie in City Girl as having to have a feather for her Sunday hat as she wanted to be 'stylish'.<sup>16</sup> In a sympathetic story of a working class girl by Pett Ridge, Mord Em'ly wears a plush green hat and is verbally aggressive to the police.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from their hats, the girls' love of clothes and adornments is often mentioned. Journalists observed that matchbox makers were 'resplendent...in gilt earrings, trailing feathers'.<sup>18</sup> The Jewish Chronicle refers to the girls' love of dress' as they patrolled 'up and down'.<sup>19</sup> Dress was clearly seen as a sign of independence and indicative, sometimes, of a troublesome nature. An observer for Booth's social survey found girls in Bromley 'all rough and didn't wear jackets' and would use bad language. Some were 'wild, giddy and ignorant'.<sup>20</sup> A 'difficult' girl at one South London club often wore clothes worthy of comment: '[she] was the terror of the club with large black eyes, black hair, curled fringe, swarthy complexion. [She wore] a red gown and a large feathered hat'.<sup>21</sup> Fringes, like those of the above girl were a fashion which provoked comment and seem to be associated with being unfeminine and independent. Mother Kate remembers factory girls in Haggerston who were 'white aproned and thick fringed, talking very much like boys'.<sup>22</sup> Another Settlement

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<sup>15</sup> A. Morrison, Tales of Mean Streets, 1893, p.31.

<sup>16</sup> M. Harkness, City Girl, 1887, p.16

<sup>17</sup> W. Pett Ridge, Mord Em'ly, 1893.

<sup>18</sup> The Young Woman, 1893, p.6.

<sup>19</sup> The Jewish Chronicle, 30th June, 1885.

<sup>20</sup> Booth collection. Notebooks B177, B179.

<sup>21</sup> A. Hodson, Letters, p.191.

<sup>22</sup> Mother Kate, Old Soho Days & Other Memories, 1906, p.64.

worker refers to 'hungry tomboys with huge fringes and noisy jokes at a Settlement tea'.<sup>23</sup> Factory girls in Burnley were even forbidden to wear fringes and were ordered to part their hair down the middle.<sup>24</sup>

Along with vivid colours went vivid public behaviour. Male observers like Besant and Masterman found the girls' behaviour threatening. Walter Besant was clearly very disturbed by the Bank Holiday behaviour of girls on Hampstead who went around in 'little companies', 'laughing and shrieking'. Their language was 'vile and depraved' and to him these 'neglected creatures' were 'foul mouthed Bacchantes'.<sup>25</sup> Masterman, too, observed factory girls 'roaring out meaningless expletives' and 'staggering along sideways' on a Saturday night.<sup>26</sup> Gissing, in a novel which emphasized the degradation of the urban poor, included groups of girls in his fictional Netherworld who 'linked arm in arm by the half dozen (and leaped) along with shrieks like grotesque maenads'.<sup>27</sup>

Female observers do not appear to feel so threatened and whilst finding the girls' behaviour noisy, they do not necessarily equate it with immorality. An article in the Young Woman cites the factory girls who 'revels in lawlessness in the street...hustles her pal into the gutter...yells derision as she meets her particular male chum...and whirls around to the strains of a barrel-organ'.<sup>28</sup> Another

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<sup>23</sup> Newspaper article, source unknown, dated 1898 in Time and Talents scrapbook.

<sup>24</sup> English Woman's Review, Feb. 1886

<sup>25</sup> W. Besant, East London, p.295. W. Besant, As We Are and As We May Be, 1903, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> G. Masterman, From the Abyss, 1902, p.86.

<sup>27</sup> G. Gissing, The Netherworld, 1889, p.111.

<sup>28</sup> The Young Woman, 1897, p.292.

observation came from Mother Kate who saw girls at eleven and twelve at night 'dance up and down Great Cambridge Street, shout and tumble about like so many young colts'.<sup>29</sup>

Beatrice Potter, later Webb, who investigated women's work gave a more sympathetic but patronizing view of the girls brimming 'over with the frank enjoyment of low life'. These 'genuine daughters of the people' who 'unburden themselves in the pleasure of promiscuous lovemaking' should not be condemned in Potter's view as 'they had no consciousness of sin'.<sup>30</sup> Opinions differed on the virtue or otherwise of the girls. One Roman Catholic priest in Bow found the girls highly immoral - he saw them 'unrestrainedly soliciting and selling themselves to the vilest of sins'<sup>31</sup> and Father Thompson of Bow described the girls as 'wild as rabbits' who kept 'loose relations'.<sup>32</sup> However a Catholic mission in Bow thought the girls noisy but not immoral.<sup>33</sup> A vicar from nearby Bromley claimed that 'the lives of our working girls are most virtuous - their gregarious nature prevents them from harm'.<sup>34</sup> Millwall girls were not thought to be virgins but a club worker in the area felt the local girls were 'clean and moral'.<sup>35</sup>

There is a general view that the girls were wild but had warm hearts once the *club workers* got to know them. Initially the girls could be difficult and

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<sup>29</sup> Mother Kate, Old Soho, p.64.

<sup>30</sup> B. Potter, 'Pages from a Work Girl's Diary', The Nineteenth Century, vol. 24, 1888, p.311.

<sup>31</sup> The Tablet, 3rd June, 1898, p.858.

<sup>32</sup> Booth notebook, B180, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Booth, B180.

<sup>34</sup> Booth, A34, p.94.

<sup>35</sup> Booth, B173, p.5.

potentially violent. Henrietta Barnett recalls 'wild whoops' in her club as girls wrapped the heads of teachers in tablecloths and she remembers frequent fights amongst the girls.<sup>36</sup> Emmeline Pethick writes of gas pipes being torn down and furniture being broken up.<sup>37</sup> Helena Swanwick was exhausted by the girls who were 'exceedingly rampageous' and at the same time 'hysterical'.<sup>38</sup> Girls would 'rush about shrieking'<sup>39</sup> and Clara Collet observed them as 'rough and boisterous'.<sup>40</sup> However, the girls could be tamed and Pethick discovered qualities like resilience, vitality and eagerness. Collett and Black noted their loyalty and warm heartedness.<sup>41</sup>

Such attitudes to girls' dress and behaviour continued well after the First World War. Writing in The Nineteenth Century and After, Edith Sellars, who had worked at the Browning Settlement, Walworth, thought that the war had produced girls who were 'wild and reckless' and knew no 'modesty' or 'self-restraint'.<sup>42</sup> If there had not been a war, she argues, girls might be leading orderly lives, possibly as domestic servants where they would have been subject to the 'soothing influence of good food and regular hours', or as factory workers under parental control. Both boys and girls had

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<sup>36</sup> H. Barnett, Canon Barnett, His Life, Work and Friends, 1918, p.103.

<sup>37</sup> E. Pethick, My Part in a Changing World, 1938, p.73.

<sup>38</sup> H. Swanwick, I Have Been Young, 1935, p.159.

<sup>39</sup> F. Freeman, Religious and Social Work amongst Girls, 1901, p.70.

<sup>40</sup> W. Booth, Life and Labour of the People, vol. 4, 1892, p.325.

<sup>41</sup> W. Booth, Life and Labour, p.235.

<sup>42</sup> E. Sellars, 'Boy and Girl War Products; their reconstruction.', Nineteenth Century and After, Oct. 1918, 702-716, p.702.

changed though she saw the change as 'more markedly for the worse among girls than boys'. Girls took sexual initiatives with soldiers whom she saw as innocent victims being pursued by 'flappers' with 'hair down their backs'. Girls earned much more than they did before the war and so could live independently. As potential voters, Sellars felt it was necessary to change young people who were in need of discipline and education.

Basil Henriques, a club leader in the inter-war period, commented on the 'vulgar rowdyism of Jewish girls who dressed themselves 'to look like prostitutes'<sup>43</sup> His wife and co-worker, Rose, insisted on ladylike standards which in the 1930s meant wearing hats and no cosmetics. Oral evidence testifies that other Jewish club leaders of the inter-war years also discouraged cosmetics: Miriam Moses of the Brady Club was very firm about banning make-up and Phyllis Gerson of the Stepney Club told me that she discouraged it.<sup>44</sup>

Noisy, public behaviour and loud clothes characterized working class girls for the middle classes throughout the period. Middle class girls did not let off steam in public - they exhibited self control and some were chaperoned. For many their social life depended on introductions but this was not the case with working class girls. Helen Bosanquet noted their courtship was 'quaintly different from that which takes place in the higher ranks of society'.<sup>45</sup> A Settlement worker commented that 'some of the girls are so dreadfully willing to be friendly with the opposite sex they do not wait to be introduced' and another cites girls who feel sorry for workers who have to wait to be

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<sup>43</sup> B. Henriques, The Indescretions of a Warden, 1937, p.84.

<sup>44</sup> Interviews with P. Gerson, 30th July, 1990; Mrs. B.M and Mrs S.W. 18th Jan. 1991,

<sup>45</sup> B.Bosanquet, Aspects of the Social Problem, 1895, p.77.

introduced.<sup>46</sup>

Middle class women were shocked at the girls' obvious independence from family supervision and by the conspicuousness of their dress and behaviour. There was some acknowledgement that many club girls were from respectable families and would not mix with rough girls, but perceived incidences of noisy, purposeless behaviour and garish clothes dominate middle class writing. The streets were dangerous places which could not be properly supervised but the club, like the home, was a controllable space. A space into which improving activities could be structured. Physical energy so frequently observed amongst the girls could be diverted into drill and musical games. Girls could be encouraged to sew sensible underclothes and so their dress sense could be influenced. Drill and sewing were also seen as improving disciplines in themselves, encouraging order and refinement. Social intercourse could be controlled by admission regulations and by supervised mixed socials. Space was generally provided for improving literature and above all the opportunity for talk with the ladies. Formal lectures on morals were not generally favoured as the girls' moral development was seen to need informal contact with the ladies. The presence of religious, refined and educated women would rub off on the girls. Exposure to the ladies' dress, manners and inward spirituality would influence the girls' own behaviour and attitudes. The ladies could provide the refining influence that was seen as missing in the lives of working girls. Their influence would bring out their potential - in the words of a club leader, the girls were 'rough hewn stone awaiting patient cutting and polishing'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> A. Hodson, Letters, p.12; K. Dewar, The Girl, 1921, p.56.

<sup>47</sup> F. Freeman, Religious and Social Work, p.73.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### FEMININITY AND GIRLHOOD

Flora Freeman's description of 'rough hewn stones' is a metaphor for the interest shown in the girls' development. This development was seen in the context of dominant ideas of femininity. Such ideas were modified during the sixty years studied as women became citizens but women's essential domestic role remained unaltered.

The dominant idea of Victorian femininity was that of the pious, chaste quiet woman who led an orderly life in the service of the home. She was to provide physical, moral and religious comfort within the confines of the private sphere. She was not expected, unless circumstances were exceptional, to be in paid work. Girls, therefore, were expected to be brought up with a view to dependency and with an education limited to the domestic sphere. Their girlhood was extended as they remained dependent on her home until they married. Although actual conditions varied within the middle classes, it is fairly true to say that the working class girl who was earning at the age of fourteen was a very much more independent person than this middle class ideal and her behaviour indicated to the middle classes that she was very much in need of guidance to develop as a 'true' woman. She had not had the physical and moral advantages of the middle class girls but nevertheless was seen as capable of improvement. It was this cross class contact that was the important aspect of early club work. Through this contact, provided within an atmosphere of Arnoldian 'sweetness and light', the working class girl could be elevated to true womanhood.

Although middle class girls were not expected to do paid work, it was recognized that it was a necessity for working class girls. Their femininity need not be

compromised if they did work which was appropriate to their future roles as wives and mothers. Early club leaders encouraged girls into domestic service although large clubs like the West Central taught shorthand and helped girls find work in offices as alternatives to factory workshops. The West Central and L'Esperance clubs set up their own profit sharing ventures in order to alleviate the low wages.<sup>1</sup> None of the clubs or any section of the women's movement advocated that girls should learn skills which would compete with men's work. Recreational activities at the club usually followed gendered lines in keeping with the school curriculum and general convention.

The idea of the middle class girl leading a sheltered existence was reinforced by the discovery of 'adolescence' around the turn of the century. This was given 'scientific' credibility by the American Professor of Psychology, G. Stanley Hall. In his very lengthy book on the subject he identified the period of adolescence as crucial to development and was a period of 'storm and stress'. He also affirmed the importance of puberty. He linked physiological and psychological changes putting them in a context of evolutionary theory. Girls' adolescence was more important than boys' as girls were 'nearer to the race' and were 'at the top of the human curve from which the higher superman' would emerge. Girls' adolescence was very different from boys as during this hormonal change the girl was at a very critical stage. She needed protection from overwork and physical activity and to conserve her energies as she was the 'organ of heredity'. Girls had a clearly distinct role from boys; as their bodies were 'made for maternity' and 'all ripe

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<sup>1</sup> Lily Montagu, My Club and I, 1944. E. Pethick, My Part in a Changing World, 1938. Interview with Mrs. E.G., 14th Jan. 1990.

and healthy womanly women desire [children]'<sup>2</sup>

Hall popularized the idea of adolescence among educationalists on both sides of the Atlantic and his ideas gained currency in Edwardian Britain when there were anxieties about the future of the British race and Empire. Dr Mary Scharlieb, a British Eugenist, also linked ideas of adolescence with ideas about race. The Race would be 'whatever the women of the race make it'. Women were central to 'race regeneration' as mothers or through other forms of service: 'All women may be spiritual mothers of the nation'. It was important for her that a form of education was found that would 'place the well-being of the English race on a really satisfactory and stable foundation'. She advocated state provision for parenting in order that it could 'make us the nation we might be, and of which the England of bygone years had the promise'. For girls, the highest earthly ideal... is that she should be a good wife and mother'. Adolescent girls were unstable, shy and exhibited 'unseemly' laughter and rough manners. They needed obedience, self restraint and order. She advocated domestic training, carefully planned Swedish exercises and team games. The latter were to promote good spirit as 'those who teach and control the games of adolescents are making and marring a national destiny'.<sup>3</sup>

Another eugenist doctor, Elizabeth Sloan Chesser, thought that every girl had a 'duty to the race' and devoted a whole chapter of her book to the subject. The girl had to 'develop her powers to their utmost capacity so that...she [would be] more worthy to transmit life to

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<sup>2</sup> G. S. Hall, Adolescence and its Psychology, 1904, p.610, p.561.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scharlieb, Womanhood and Race Regeneration, 1912, p.7, p.35. M. Scharlieb and T.A. Sibley, Youth and Sex, 1912, p.13, p.22, p.39, p.40.

new generations'.<sup>4</sup> Writing fifteen years later, during the inter-war period, she affirmed the differences between boys and girls and claimed that the 'girlish' boy and 'mannish' girl were the results of physiological imbalance. Girls' and boys' brains developed differently, allowing boys energy and drive and girls to be gentle and tender. However, she believed that girls could be trained and could be competent in games and in the labour market. By this time she did not subscribe to the view of a sheltered life for girls and thought that girls should have healthy interests, a regular occupation and lead active lives. Girls had a right to a good education and should be economically independent in order to marry for love. Her language was couched more in terms of citizenship than of race. Post-war girls had responsibilities as citizens and she thought that 'girls must prepare through study and thought and self-discipline for the future, for the new problems of love and marriage, for new civil and political responsibilities'.<sup>5</sup>

Another post-war writer, Phyllis Blanchard, a follower of Hall also saw women as important as citizens. She was also influenced by Freud and asserted that women had a larger unconscious than men and that their libido was directed towards motherhood. This gave women a great capacity for self-sacrifice. Blanchard extended this view of motherhood to the 'mothering of mankind'. She was very influenced by the Scandinavian feminist, Ellen Key and felt that women should use their new political power to break from masculine forms of expression. They would then set up the 'love ideal in the hearts of mankind'. She thought that it was important that 'sex-energy' was sublimated during adolescence and that this energy was channelled into

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<sup>4</sup> E. Sloan Chesser, From Girlhood to Womanhood, 1913, p.39.

<sup>5</sup> E. Sloan Chesser, Youth, 1928, p.99.

intellectual and artistic pursuits. Blanchard had spent 'time with factory girls' and noted that their environmental influences were not conducive to the above sublimination.<sup>6</sup>

Girls were no longer seen as asexual beings but their sexual activities were to be channelled into hetero-sexual marriage. Both Blanchard and Scharlieb warned of the dangers of girls being attracted to girls or women during adolescence. Scharlieb describes these attachments as unhealthy and when carried beyond the 'bounds of sanity', 'form...dangers to the young people'. Blanchard, writing after the war, is much stronger in her language and backs up her view by quoting the proceedings of an international conference of medical women in New York in 1919 where same sex affections were described as 'perversions'. Along with this went an 'aversion to male companionship'. Blanchard argues that these relations may involve 'gross manifestations' and are partly caused by the desire not to be dominated. The presence of post-war career women who have rejected marriage and the large number of 'masculine women' had added to the problem. Proper guidance on sex impulses and education about women's maternal role were thus seen as necessary.<sup>7</sup>

Twentieth century club leaders do not describe their work in the language of eugenics although motherhood may perhaps have meant different things to different people. Eugenicist or imperialistic impulses were either assumed or not present. Neither do their writings reveal any worries about same sex attraction. Oral testimony gave an emphasis on friendships gained at the clubs during the 1930s and one interviewee happily

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<sup>6</sup> P. Blanchard, Care of the Adolescent Girl, 1921, p.192.

<sup>7</sup> P. Blanchard, Care, p.136. M. Scharlieb, 'Adolescent Girl under Modern Conditions with special reference to Motherhood', Eugenics Review, vol. 1, April 1909-Jan. 1910, 174-183, pp.175,6.

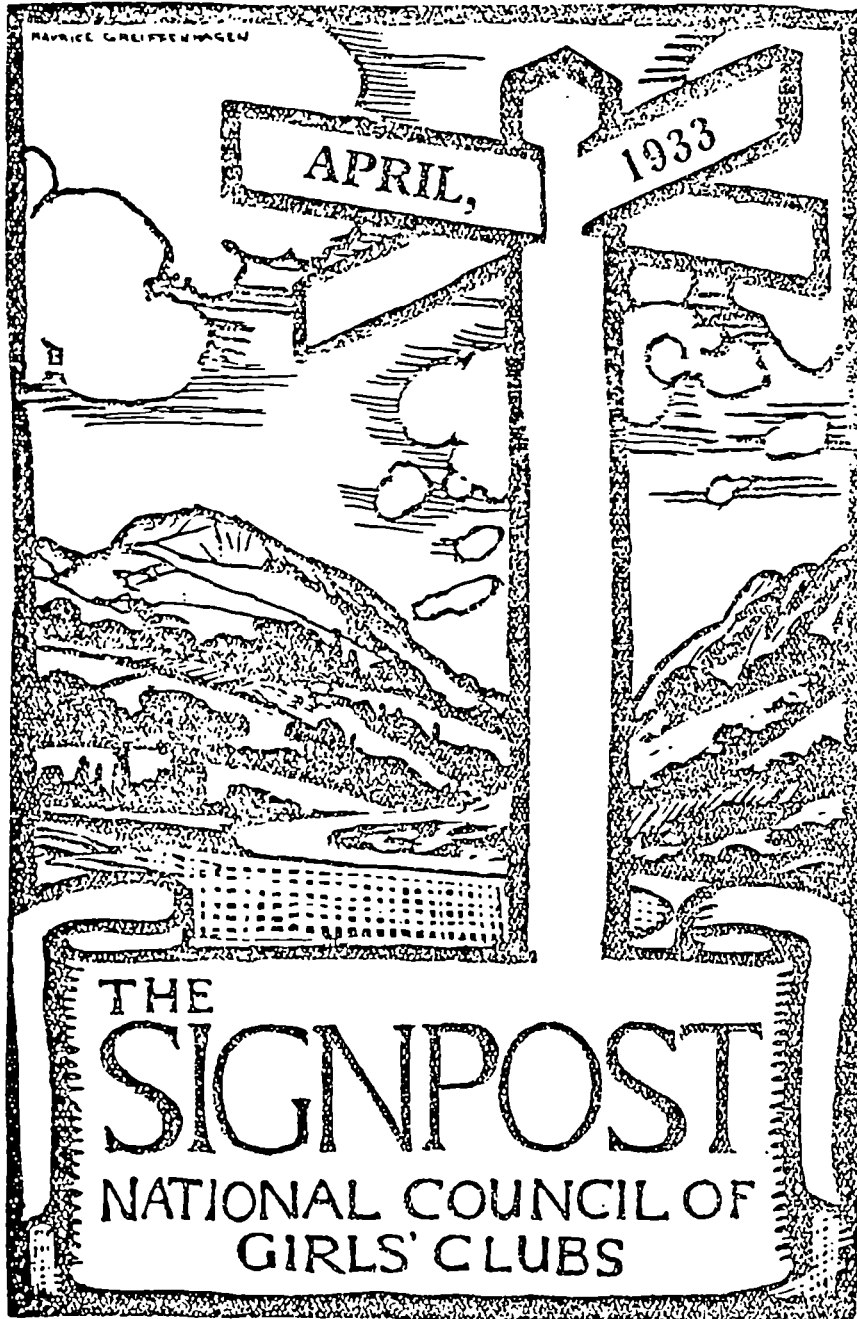
described her admiration for club leader Lily Montagu as a 'Grand Passion'.<sup>8</sup> It was during the inter-war period that moves were made towards mixed clubs and this may have been in keeping with the rise of the anti-lesbian culture although most of the arguments are couched in terms of relating to boys rather than of any concerns about girls' relationships with each other. It is difficult to ascertain whether the absence on this issue was due to taboo or to the club leaders' perceptions. Some of the club leaders still came from the generation where women's close friendships were unquestioned. It is therefore not easy to make direct connections between the work of Hall, Scharlieb, Chesser and Blanchard and club work but these writers had a general influence on educational thinking.

Many twentieth century clubs did however reflect the interest in citizenship. Demands for citizenship had come from the women's movement and even before women gained the vote some clubs gave lectures on industrial matters and experimented with forms of club democracy. During the inter-war years there was an awareness of the need to inform the girls about political matters. The general attitude to girls is indicated by Signpost, the journal of the National Council of Girls' Clubs.[NCGC] The motto of the organization was 'to a fuller life for service'. The cover depicted a girl standing against a signpost which was at the junction of many roads. The main road was the 'road of life' and the side roads were the variety of activities which girls could take. [Plate 2] The horizon was wide and open. There was a general emphasis on leading a full, active, life with physical culture becoming a prominent part of club work. Club leaders spoke less of 'improvement' and more of widening opportunities. Interest in spiritual development was less obvious and girls' interests in

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Miss H.F. 2nd Feb. 1990.

work, marriage and popular culture were acknowledged. All the club activities both reflected and defined what was thought appropriate for girls. The 1930s club girl was a far more active and informed girl than her Victorian counterpart but, like the rest of women in society, she had a gendered part to play.



Motto:—"To a Fuller Life for Greater Service."

ONE PENNY

Plate 2. Cover of NCGC journal, Signpost, April, 1933.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### ETHNICITY

Femininity was defined within the middle class British context where Imperialist attitudes fostered ideas of white supremacy. Although not called to war, English women, as Hammerton points out, had a specific role in perpetuating the Empire.<sup>1</sup> They were superior to women of other races and as such had a responsibility to other races. In 1929, the Liberal, Mrs Corbett Ashby, wrote in a Girls' club magazine, that whilst the people of Canada and Australia were 'like ourselves', 'we are responsible for the welfare of India and Africa'.<sup>2</sup> This attitude of responsibility had a long historical tradition. Whilst there was a strand of racist thinking which placed black people as inferiors there was also the view that they were equal before God and were capable of being educated into English ways. Hannah Kilham is an example of a missionary who held these views strongly.

Hannah Kilham did not believe in the inferiority of native peoples but in spiritual equality. She believed that all could receive God's truths and become better people. She thought that the British were the only people who could help the world become Christian. Africa, and in particular Sierra Leone, was in a 'state of infancy' and needed to be nurtured and educated. Hannah Kilham's work gave English women a maternal supervisory role within the Empire. Like club organizers, she was concerned about domestic reform and included tracts entitled Family Advices in her bilingual text book aimed at developing literacy in the Gambia. She had originally written these tracts for poor women

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<sup>1</sup> A. James Hammerton, Emigrant Gentlewoman, New York, 1979, p.163.

<sup>2</sup> Newsheet, April, 1929.

in Britain and they were on themes such as 'self discipline', 'honesty' and 'neglect'. It is interesting that she thought that these tracts had universal qualities and so were applicable to women of a completely different culture. She also promoted girls' domestic education by advocating employment of African girls in missionary households where they could learn 'domestic order', decency, quietness, cleanliness'. She promoted schools where girls could be taught domestic skills in addition to literacy and Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

As Ware has pointed out, English women reformers had a past tradition of anti-slavery activity and cared about the treatment of 'native' peoples. The reformers shared Hannah Kilham's view that other races were in need of education and needed to reject their own cultural practices. The story of Annette Ackroyd is a case in point. In response to a request from an Indian reformer Annette Ackroyd set up a school for girls in Calcutta in 1872. Before she went she took the trouble to learn Bengali and on arrival she was critical of European attitudes to the Indians. However, she quickly became critical of the girls' dress and customs showing attitudes similar to those of the club organizers to working class girls in London. Her attitudes, like those of the club organizers, were well intentioned but displayed an unconscious superiority about English middle class values and customs. These values and customs were self-evidently to be desired by people of all classes and races.<sup>4</sup>

I would argue that these kinds of attitudes influenced club organizers and English superiority signified English middle class superiority.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Twells, "So Distant and Wild a Scene": Language, domesticity in Hannah Kilham's writing from West Africa, 1822-1832, 301-318, p.301.

<sup>4</sup> V. Ware, Beyond the Pale. White Women, Racism and History, 1992, pp 143-147.

London was socially and culturally diverse, comprising many classes and nationalities. People of many countries were attracted to London, some on a temporary basis as servants, sailors or clerks and often more permanently such as the Irish or Jews who were escaping starvation and/or persecution. Whole sections of London did not conform to middle class English behaviour but the middle classes held on to the belief that they were the model to which all aspired or would aspire if they had the chance.

The immigrant community which made most impact on the club movement was the Jewish one. Although anti-semitism was a feature of English life, the small Jewish establishment had gained legal emancipation during the nineteenth century and had integrated into English society whilst keeping their religious life. About two hundred banking and mercantile families dominated the organizational life of Anglo-Jewry, creating religious, political and welfare institutions. The head family was the Rothschilds, who along with twenty or so other families, led what has been described as a 'beneficent oligarchy' and were seen as royalty.<sup>5</sup> Many members of these families married their cousins and these notables have been described as 'The Cousinhood'.<sup>6</sup>

The arrival of East European Jews fleeing persecution made a big impact on both the host and Jewish communities. In order to protect their fragile acceptance, Anglo-Jews sought to control the immigrants by initially discouraging them from coming. When they did come, various welfare agencies were set up in order to defuse the host community's alarm at what was seen as an alien invasion. Anglo-Jews were very anxious to promote a favourable image of the Jews emphasizing

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<sup>5</sup> T. Endelman, 'Communal solidarity among the Jewish Elite', Victorian Studies, Vol. 29, 1985, pp 485,6.

<sup>6</sup> C. Bermant, The Cousinhood, 1971.

respectability and patriotism. The Jewish Board of Guardians hoped 'By direct influence to improve and anglicize them and to render them self supporting'.<sup>7</sup> The Russian Jews and the ghetto were seen as pre-modern and inferior. The task was to 'aid these brethen of ours towards that higher standard of culture offered by English life'.<sup>8</sup> The reaction in some cases was postively xenophobic - 'the Russian Jew is filthy because he is a Russian not a Jew'.<sup>9</sup> The Jewish immigrants were as foreign to the Anglo-Jewish establishment as they were to the host community. The immigrants brought with them different social and religious customs and a different language, all of which were regarded as inferior. Anglo-Jewry set about making the immigrants into English people culturally whilst retaining their Jewish faith.

Anglo-Jewish women, prior to the arrival of the immigrants, had a well established role in philanthropy. In the 1840s, Judith Montefiore advocated genteel charity, and during this decade the Jewish Benevolent Society was formed which consisted of ladies visiting poor homes, encouraging self sufficiency and thrift. Jewish women also did visiting for the Jewish Board of Guardians. The Rothschild family continued with philanthropy throughout the period. Lady Louisa Rothschild, niece of Judith Montefiore, nursed sick villagers and later ran evening classes for East End girls in the 1880s. Constance Battersea, daughter of Lady Rothschild, was active in Christian temperance but

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<sup>7</sup> The Jewish Board of Guardians, Annual Report, 1892, p.67 quoted in D. Feldman, 'Jews in London, 1880-1914', R. Samuel, (ed.), Patriotism; the Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, vol. 2, 1989, p.214.

<sup>8</sup> The Jewish Chronicle, 12 Aug., 1881, quoted in D. Feldman, Patriotism, p. 214.

<sup>9</sup> D. Schloss, 'The Jew as Workman', The Nineteenth Century, June, 1891, p.99.

later spearheaded the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women.[JAPGAW] She also joined the National Union of Women Workers.[NUWW]

The extent of Jewish women's philanthropy was marked by a conference in 1902. Its purpose was to 'discuss the matters concerning the spiritual, social and moral welfare of the community'. The activities mirrored the philanthropic work of the dominant Christian community. Work was done on issues such as training, education, rescue and recreation of immigrant girls. Although Jewish organizations were run separately from gentile ones, the general ethos was the same - that of the promotion of English middle class values.

Clubs for Jewish working girls and boys featured prominently in the club movement. The activities of the clubs differed very little from the gentile clubs. The early clubs taught English as a Second Language and some taught Hebrew but drill, singing and domestic crafts were prominent in the late Victorian clubs. There was an increase in sport during the inter-war years as was the case in most other clubs.

There seems to have been no interest in the promotion of any aspects of East European culture and although Yiddish was not banned, it was not used. Phyllis Gerson, a club leader in the thirties of German descent, had never heard Yiddish spoken until she went to the East End and she was puzzled at the Orthodox women's custom of wearing wigs.<sup>10</sup> The gulf between the established Anglo-Jewry and the immigrant community was wide. Lily Montagu, a devoutly religious Jew, was shocked at menstruation taboos present in the practices of the immigrants.<sup>11</sup> Like some other Jewish women of

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with P. Gerson, 30 July, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> L. Montagu, Faith of a Jewish Woman, 1943, p.23.

her class, she was working for the emancipation of Jewish women within the Synagogue. Some Jewish women were also engaged in female suffrage having made the links between philanthropy and politics like many of their Christian counterparts. Feminism was part of the Anglicization process for some of the Jewish establishment and the development of 'womanhood' was the development as defined in English terms. East European women were seen as part of the backward races. No recognition was made of the fact that in the traditional culture it was often the case that women worked and took responsibility for the material world whilst men were concerned about religious matters. Gender roles in the immigrant community had to adapt to the dominant role of the male as the breadwinner and the female as the moral guardian.<sup>12</sup>

Anglo-Jewry was anxious that the Jewish poor were seen as a sober, industrious, thrifty workforce echoing attitudes of the Evangelical movement. To counter the anti-semitic attitudes which were encapsulated in the 1905 Aliens Act, Jews were to be seen as loyal British citizens. Apart from welfare programmes which ensured that the immigrants were not a burden to the host community, Anglo-Jewry also put efforts into the education of children of the immigrants in order to anglicize them. In 1881 a Jewish lawyer, who was presenting prizes at Stepney Jewish School said that in order to counter anti-semitism it was necessary to show that 'as Jews they were imbued with the same English spirit...and had a common interest in the country to which they belonged'.<sup>13</sup> Patriotism was reinforced later annually at this school on Empire Day when 'the Flag of Britain was sung... [and there were] lessons of

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<sup>12</sup> R. Burman, 'The Jewish Woman as Breadwinner: The changing value of women's work in a Manchester Immigrant Community', Oral History, vol.10, no.2, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> East London Observer, 29 May, 1881.

patriotism...what the Empire does for us, and what we should do for the Empire...the Union Jack was saluted in the proper military fashion, and the ceremony concluded with cheers for the King and Country'.<sup>14</sup> White argues that the clubs, like the schools, were vehicles for this conservative ideology and there seems to be evidence of this amongst the boys' clubs. The chairman of the Hutchinson club spoke of Britain being the 'greatest, most powerful, the most just, the most tolerant [Empire] known to the history of the world'. He went on to say that it was the duty of the Jews 'not only to be equal to their neighbours but even models to them in conduct and industry'.<sup>15</sup> At the official opening of this club Lionel de Rothschild hoped that the club would 'instil pride in being Englishmen'.<sup>16</sup> The President of Stepney Jewish Lads spoke of the desire to 'turn out decent living, honest Englishmen'. He made the claim that today 'we have a set of working lads who will compare with any similar lot in the kingdom'.<sup>17</sup> The historian of the Jewish Lads' Brigade, a uniformed boys' organization, argues that it shared the imperialist aims of Christians like Baden Powell who wanted to produce a fit patriotic race ready to carry on the imperial mission abroad.<sup>18</sup>

Jewish girls, however, did not get lectures on patriotism. Clubs were to do with the 'sweetening the lives', with the emphasis on moral development, improvement and refinement. It seems that it was possibly implicit in Victorian ideology that the Home,

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<sup>14</sup> J. White, Rothschild Buildings. Life in An East End Tenement Block 1887-1920, 1980, p.167.

<sup>15</sup> Jewish Chronicle, May, 1907.

<sup>16</sup> Jewish Chronicle, 30 June, 1905.

<sup>17</sup> Jewish Chronicle, 19 Jan., 1912.

<sup>18</sup> S. Kadish, 'A Good Jew and a Good Englishman'. The Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade 1895-1995, 1995, p.139.

which was the basis of the nation's prosperity, also had a role to play in any Imperialist enterprise. Men had to be more closely identified with the nation since they were called upon to defend it and patriotism was part of the Victorian construction of masculinity. No doubt it was assumed that women as 'helpmates' would support their men's patriotism. Jewish girls became 'English' girls in that they were to aspire to an English education which assumed specific attitudes to gender roles based on middle class values.

Whilst it is relatively easy to trace the impact of Jewish immigration on the clubs it is more difficult to measure the impact of Irish, Welsh or internal migration on London clubs. There seems to have been no specific Irish girls' clubs although there were some Catholic clubs. The Catholic clubs were fewer with the Catholic community lacking the impetus of female philanthropy which was present within the other religious groups. In a girls' club competition in 1893 only one out of the nine competing clubs was Catholic. There was concern that girls would be in spiritual 'danger' if they went to non-Catholic clubs where 'unbelief' could be imparted.<sup>19</sup> A club run by the Settlement of the Holy Child in Whitechapel and later in Poplar was seen as important as providing an alternative not only to the street and to low amusements, but also to 'undenominational clubs'. Young girls were already at risk as they were forced to work amongst 'pagans'. The club was good at keeping those boys and girls in a 'Catholic air which is what they breathe in the Settlement'.<sup>20</sup> There was a definite emphasis on Catholicism but no particular interest in Irish culture or politics although the period studied encompasses some

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<sup>19</sup> The Tablet, May 22, 1893, p.604.

<sup>20</sup> St. Leonards Chronicler, 1933; undated letter from Father Martindale to Old Girls from the archives of the Settlement of the Holy Child.



of the most important political situations in Anglo-Irish relations. The political issues which were covered at the above club were those relating to communism and other 'anti-God' activities in Spain and Eastern Europe during the 1930s. Another Catholic club in Bow did allow girls to bring in Irish dancing and St. Patrick's day was celebrated.<sup>21</sup>

Immigration of single Irish girls was a matter of concern during the 1920s and 1930s. Women in Ireland were discriminated against in the matter of land ownership, were denied access to contraception and divorce and received inadequate state benefits. They generally came to work in the East End for families. One Irish writer presents them as naive and unable to deal with non-Catholic men. Clubs were promoted as useful places but it was regretted that only the already 'sensible' girls went to them.<sup>22</sup> Irish girls at a 'training home' attached to the Bow club were remembered as having 'nothing - nothing'.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from the specific Catholic aim, the clubs were concerned with humanizing the girls. At the Bow club this was done by the nuns: at the Settlement club this was done by contact with the lay ladies. It was 'the mixing with the ladies at the club' which 'made ladies' of the girls. It seems that the culture of the girls, be it English or Irish, was to be subsumed under middle-class English Catholic ideas. Ideas of respectability were necessary to counter an image of the 'rough' Irish. One south London club, run by the Time and Talents Settlement, was very relieved when the local Catholic priest opened a club taking the Irish girls off

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Miss I. H., May 24, 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Irish Independent, 10 Dec., 1936.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Sister T.M and Sister P. 17 May, 1991.

their hands.<sup>24</sup>

Whilst much of the Catholic community was an immigrant community, it did not ally itself with the Jewish immigrants in the East End. There was an implied sense of resentment when the Settlement of the Holy Child moved premises from Whitechapel to Poplar where the Catholic population 'greatly exceeded that of Whitechapel'. When the actual building was sold it 'had passed into the hands of the Jews'.<sup>25</sup> Jews were seen as bad employers by the Settlement who overworked and underpaid the Irish girls in their service. A commentator in the Irish Independent too was critical of Jewish employers though she was anxious to stress that it was the foreign Jew who was the problem.<sup>26</sup>

There seem to have been no clubs specifically for Welsh girls, although there was some immigration to London from the depressed areas during the 1930s providing a small but constant supply of servants for Londoners. Clubs in general were thought to be helpful for these girls. The National Vigilance Association thought that one Welsh girl who was 'neglectful' should be 'more or less dragged out to a club.'<sup>27</sup>

There is very little evidence that people of Caribbean or African descent had any impact on the club movement. A report by Nancie Hare in 1935 suggests that there were 250-300 working class families with 'West Indian or African' heads in London. These were generally sailors who married white women. According to the report, the children's upbringing was English and it was claimed that they experienced very little racism in

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<sup>24</sup> The Tablet, 17 June, 1893, p.936. Mayfield Review, 1922, p.20. Time and Talents scrapbook, 1898-1913, item for 1905. Held at Greater London Record Office.

<sup>25</sup> Mayfield Review, 1919, p.11.

<sup>26</sup> Irish Independent, 10 Dec., 1936.

<sup>27</sup> National Vigilance Association archives, box 120.

school. However there was some tension between the white and black communities: girls were generally attracted to 'coloured' men and lost their white friends. They were subjected to sexual harassment from white men.<sup>28</sup>

The League of Coloured Peoples with which Hare was associated was set up in 1931 because of a concern amongst eminent 'coloured' people for the 'cause of the Black man'. The League went in for some philanthropic activities and organized parties and outings for 'coloured' children in London and also inter-racial socials. It has, however, been described by recent black activists as an 'Uncle Tom' organization.<sup>29</sup> Nancie Hare's report stressed the respectability of the heads of the family. She also recommended clubs for boys and girls who had left school. The clubs would allow them to do things 'at which coloured people excel' - handwork, dramatics, singing, dancing, football, netball and athletics. She also recommended that other people should be encouraged to the clubs as segregation was 'most undesirable'. I have not found any evidence that any clubs were started for 'coloured' girls. The sexual harassment which Hare cites does not seem to have been taken up either by black or women's organizations.

The implication for femininity is that English middle class women were the norm and 'foreign' ways were deviations. Although women's role changed during the period studied with a gradual entry into the public sphere, English women were essentially homemakers with a built-in superiority over the non-English. English working class girls could be taught the appropriate

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<sup>28</sup> N. Hare, The Negro Population in London and Cardiff, 1935.

<sup>29</sup> P. Fryer, Staying Power, 1984.

behaviour and values. Provided Jewish women were prepared to subscribe to English ways, then they too were accepted. The Jewish community clearly kept a careful watch on their girls, encouraging them to industry and respectability. Their ethnicity was assimilated, their foreign ways anglicized which allowed for an acceptance of their faith. Although Christian, the Irish were seen as far less respectable and the English Catholic took great pains to absorb them. The culture of the Irish poor was very similar to that of the English working class but they resisted assimilation. They were a problem because they were seen as 'rough' and also because their religion represented a threat to the English Church and State. Their allegiance to Rome made them suspect. The Catholic clubs had a strong emphasis on religion and whilst they might have approved of the educational and recreational activities of non-Catholic clubs, Catholic girls attending them were thought to be in spiritual danger. English non-catholics were 'pagans' on a similar footing to foreign non-Christians. There was considerable tension in being an English middle class Catholic as they shared the values of the non-Catholic middle class but regarded their own religion as superior.

The idea of Englishness becomes even more complex when foreign immigrants do not have white skins. 'Coloured' children were described as having an English upbringing and were largely Christian. However they were seen as different. The sexual harassment experienced by 'coloured' girls from white men suggests that being black was simultaneously threatening and inferior. Although clubs were advocated, it is not known whether black girls went to them: perhaps their numbers were not sufficient to be commented upon. There is a sense from the literature that 'coloured' girls were on the margins of the white community.

Non-Englishness is connected with race, ethnicity,

religion and class. Catholics and Jews had to assimilate and aspire to Evangelical values. The nominally Anglican working class had to conform to middle class values otherwise they were no better than foreigners. Black girls were obviously foreign but their numbers were possibly too small to impinge on the club movement in this period. English femininity was built on the unconscious assumptions of white middle class notions of the 'Ideal Woman'. The girls' clubs did not reflect the multicultural nature of London, rather they reflected views about the superiority of the English race. The dominant culture was so strong that immigrants themselves welcomed the chance to become English as it was a possible vehicle for social mobility. This point is taken up in a later chapter.



Plate 3. Jewish East London. From C. Russell and H. Lewis, Jew in London, 1900.

DISTRIBUTION OF NEGRO WORKING CLASS FAMILIES IN LONDON

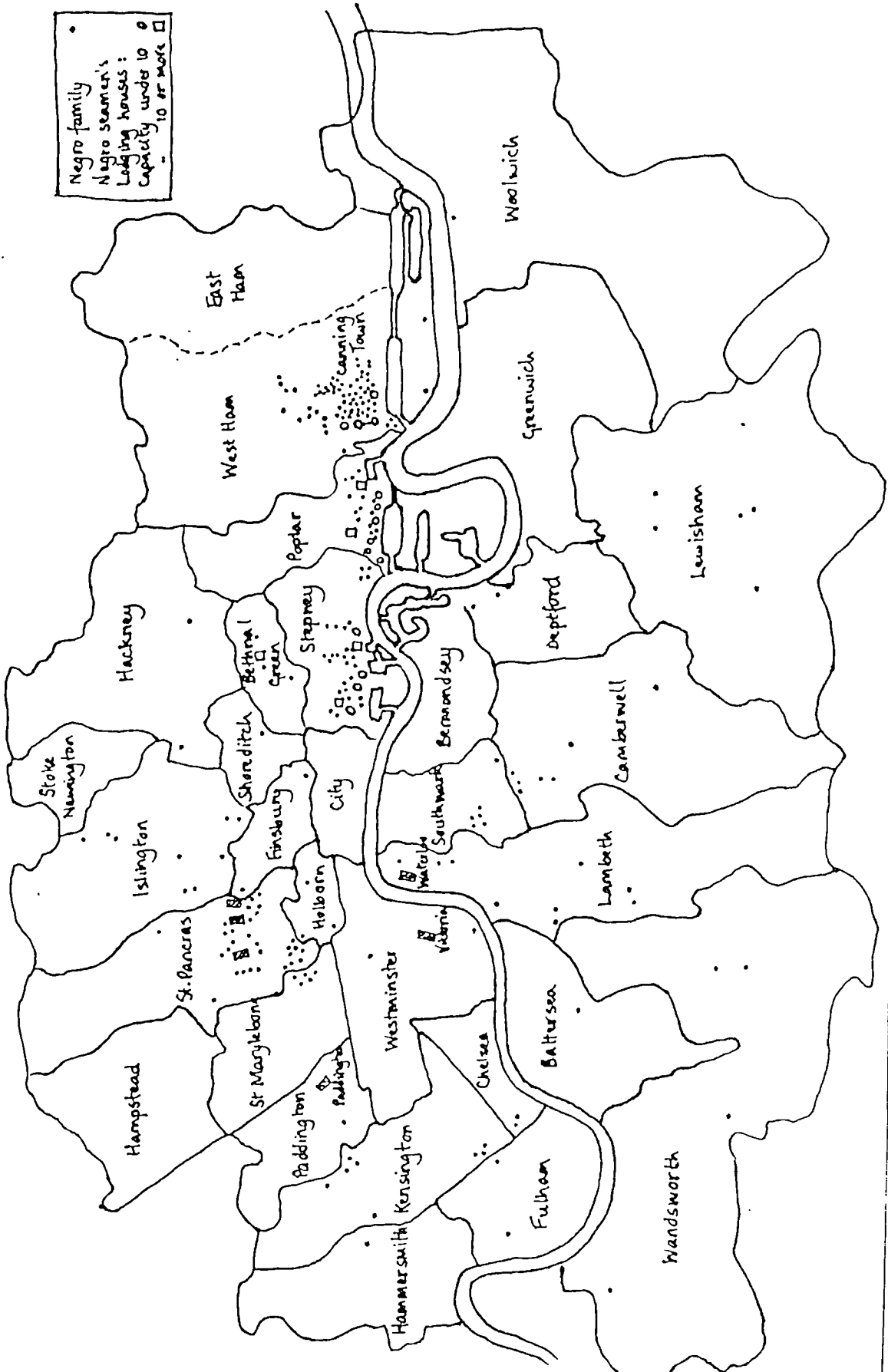


Plate 4. Map of Black Families in London. Nancie Hare, Negro Families in Cardiff and London in 1935, 1935.

CHAPTER FIVE  
WOMEN IN DISGUISE

Some of the ladies who had access to what they believed to be the right moral, spiritual and feminine values wanted to know about the working class girls for whom they cared. They wanted to see the poor from the inside. In order to do this, they, like many of the middle class, 'investigated' the poor. As Hendricks points out, 'Between 1880 and 1914 British working class life and labour was described and examined on a scale not witnessed since early Victorian years'.<sup>1</sup> Mid-Victorian Britain had produced investigating journalists like Mayhew but by the last quarter of the century there were serious studies such as Charles Booth's work on London's labour and the Rowntree's study of the poor in York. The Fabian publication Around About A Pound a Week (1913) was a small study of working class women in Lambeth and women trade unionists such as Clemantina Black investigated women's work. The concern about women's sweated labour culminated in the Sweated Labour Exhibition in 1906 which was organized by the Daily News. Investigation did not only result in studies. There was a desire to live amongst the working class and Settlement workers aimed to get involved in the community in order to increase their knowledge of the poor. For some reformers, however, the need to know what working class life was really like could not be met by studies or by settlement work. For some, the way to learn, was for them to become one of the working classes (temporarily) and to go 'in disguise'.

To go into disguise seems to have been a tradition from Greenwood (1866) to Orwell (1933 and 1937) and is one taken up by several women reformers - Beatrice

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<sup>1</sup> H. Hendricks, Images of Youth 1880-1920, Oxford, 1990.



Potter (1888), Lucy Guinness (1886), Mary Higgs (1905), Olive Malvery (1906) and Ada Jones (1926). These women all wanted to discover a truth which they believed their class position prevented them from knowing. Keating suggests that disguise is 'as much an attempt to break from one form of status as it is to adopt the trappings of another'.<sup>2</sup> This may have been the case but it was hoped that the new identity would bridge the class gulf and discover the inside truth. The aims of the women were well intentioned but this kind of activity could be interpreted as akin to spying. Did they, at any point, consider the feelings of the class they were intending to help, as they proceeded with their investigation by covert means? At a practical level, it is also interesting to speculate on how the women maintained their disguise and were accepted by the working class.

Three of the women mentioned above do not seem to have been uncomfortable about their disguises but Beatrice Potter expressed some concern. Although she had had experience of disguise in Lancashire, her account of her investigations of sweatshop conditions in London reveal some of the difficulties. She felt herself to be an 'imposter' as her sewing skills were limited and her fingers 'unhardened'. She records that she did not feel that her attempts at a working women's manner or accent were very effective but she managed to pass. She kept a certain distance from the other girls and was rather touched and embarrassed when food was pressed upon her by a working girl.<sup>3</sup> Beatrice Potter was trying to investigate working conditions rather than working girls and her covert actions were aimed at the employers.

Lucy Guinness, who was the daughter of the Guinness

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<sup>2</sup> P. Keating, Into Unknown England, 1976, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> B. Potter, 'Pages from a Work Girl's Diary', The Nineteenth Century, vol. xxiv, no. 139, p.302.

family who ran a missionary college in the East End, wrote an account of her disguise amongst East End girls out on the streets in the evening. She suggests in a short piece called 'Only a Factory Girl' that she went completely unnoticed. She does not describe her reasons for the disguise, nor how she lived and worked among the girls. In this article she concentrates on the girls' leisure activities and she writes as if she is an observer - 'we pass unnoticed' - in the streets.<sup>4</sup> She is concerned that the girls are left to pursue low street amusements because no one cares for them. The disguise allows her and her servant to mingle in the street, pubs, theatres and music hall without bringing attention to themselves. She adopts certain behaviour which she feels is appropriate like elbowing her way 'in true factory girl style'. She shows an understanding of the attraction of the amusements but finds the theatre 'degrading' and heard only the 'vilest language' in the gin palaces. The words of music hall songs were 'unprintable'. After midnight the streets were cold and Lucy Guinness then identified more strongly with the factory girls - 'we factory girls' - as she perceives them with no family caring for them.

Her work inspired club work and she is remembered some twenty years after as undertaking an 'audacious scheme'. It was necessary for her to go into disguise with an 'assumed cockney accent' to get to know 'the whole' wrote Lettice Bell who published Guinness' account some twenty years after the event.<sup>5</sup> Lucy Guinness' father, writing after her death said that it was in order to become 'thoroughly acquainted' with working girls 'ways and deeds' that she disguised herself as a factory girl. With a family servant, he

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<sup>4</sup> L. Guinness, 'Only a Factory Girl' in L. Bell, Perils in the City, 1909, p.13.

<sup>5</sup> L. Bell, In Perils in the City, 1909, p.10.

recorded, his daughter worked for a time in one of the East End factories and lived in lodgings among the 'lowest and degraded' characters. Her identity was completely concealed by a 'broad brimmed hat with its usual feather, coarse jacket with sleeves tucked up to the elbow and apron tied around the waist'.<sup>6</sup> A photograph was taken of Lucy and the unnamed servant dressed in this disguise - an indication of the self-conscious nature of the activity.[see plate 5]

From her only written account of her work, it is difficult to assess what she actually did and whether it bore any relation to her father's perception of her activities. What is important, however, is the impact of her activities on others like Lettice Bell, quoted above, of the Federation of Working Girls' Clubs. Whatever the extent of her disguise, Lucy's comments were received well as she could now write 'with certainty'.<sup>7</sup> The middle classes could now speak and act from a point of knowledge and aspects of working class life were no longer unknown and were potentially controllable.

Olive Malvery is far more explicit about her reason for disguise:

I awoke to the fact that I could never do very much for these people until I had really tasted life with them ... My desire was to know and understand them and be free to serve them.<sup>8</sup>

Olive Malvery came from India to study singing at the turn of the century. She took a keen interest in London life, made friends with Hoxton girls' club organizer Sara Rae and did voluntary help in various girls' clubs. In order to find out more about the girls' lives she enlisted the help of a 'Mr. C' who had contacts among

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<sup>6</sup> H. G. Guinness, Lucy Guinness Kumm, 1907, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> L. Bell, Perils, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> O. Malvery, The Soul Market, 1906, p. 68.

the working classes. In some cases, he secured accommodation for her with an artisan family and he often accompanied her, being an excellent 'cockney actor'.<sup>9</sup> Olive worked in many places - water bottling, jam and meat factories, sweatshops, retail shops and with costermongers. She lived with families or with girls she had befriended. She never makes it clear how long she stayed in these jobs, or, if she went home in between. 'Mr. C' seems to have been a link with her own class, supplying money where necessary.

Olive Malvery does acknowledge that it is 'not easy to slip into a new life' as an outsider is recognized. However, her 'foreign appearance' helped her. The girls made up stories about her, enabling her to keep her silence. 'Mr C.' also gave her some credibility on some occasions as her 'boyfriend'. For her to become a lodger in New Cross, 'Mr C' had described her to the family as a 'poor little foreign girl' and from her account she had no trouble in being accepted by them. The daughters of the family introduced her to the foreman of the Aerated Water Company who took her on. With this job, as with the others, she records no difficulty in being accepted by employers.

Olive had a certain theatrical quality and she describes her disguises as 'transformations'. She had a 'property box' in a rented room where she sorted out appropriate clothes. She was photographed in her various disguises. In one she is with a posed group of factory girls waiting outside the factory. They are all wearing quite respectable clothes and Olive Malvery blends in well. It is not known who took the photograph and how this was explained to the other girls/women. Perhaps it was the ubiquitous 'Mr. C'? There are other photos of her, working in a coffee shop, a sweet shop and selling fruit from a barrow. The photograph of her

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<sup>9</sup> O. Malvery, Market, p.134.

as a flower seller is not taken in the street and looks like a still from a stage play. [see plates 6 to 10]

Her accounts are lively with plenty of sympathy for the girls. She attempts to reconstruct working class dialogue to emphasize her personal involvement with the girls. She writes very confidently about her activities with no hint of self doubt. She does not record how she was able to come and go from the people's lives. There is a sense that she undertook each role successfully and viewed the other participants as players. Her activities enabled her to write confidently on working women's lives and she later opened hostels for women and was on the committee of the National Association of Women's Lodging Houses founded by Mary Higgs.

Mary Higgs, a reformer in Oldham interested in women's housing, thought that nothing but 'accurate and scientific exploration would reverse the currents leading to degradation'.<sup>10</sup> Around the age of fifty she and a friend disguised themselves and undertook investigations of a few days length in Yorkshire, Lancashire and London. They stayed in lodging houses and shelters. This kind of 'first hand exploration' was the nearest road to accurate knowledge'.<sup>11</sup> She was open to sources of information not available to the general public. Mary and her unnamed friend dressed shabbily but respectably and carried a few belongings in an old shawl. She does not record any difficulty in passing as homeless. Her account reveals how she was both shocked by and in sympathy with the women she met, some of whom were drunks and prostitutes:

It made one long to go and live continuously with these girls, acquiring influence and being able to speak to them as a Christian woman and save them from the web in which they were tangled.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> M. Higgs, Glimpses into the Abyss, 1906, p. vii.

<sup>11</sup> M. Higgs, Glimpses, p.87.

<sup>12</sup> M. Higgs, Glimpses, p.283.

Her investigations made her realize, as Deborah Epstein Nord points out, how much she was protected by her class. Mary Higgs saw that as a poor, working class woman she was vulnerable to taunts from men and that she could not have attempted her investigations without her companion. She became aware of gender differences as she realized that a destitute male became a tramp while a destitute female became a prostitute.<sup>13</sup>

However, she did not respond merely at the individual level. Her investigations led her to form the National Association of Women's Lodging Houses. She proposed that lodging houses for women should be run municipally at cost price and that women should be treated as customers and not as objects of charity. Women connected with girls' clubs were on the committee of the National Association - Olive Malvery, Grace Tong, Marian Montagu and Emily Janes. Women's housing was still an area of concern twenty years later when Ada Jones went into disguise.

Ada Jones drew on late nineteenth century images of the urban poor in Darkest London published in 1926. This work was based on her investigations into women's housing which she undertook in disguise. Under an assumed name of Annie Turner and wearing her shabbiest clothes, she pretended to be homeless and penniless. She spent some time in shelters and doing casual work. Ada appears to have been accepted by the people she came in contact with and she records that her own accent did not raise comment because she thought that the 'majority of Londoners speak better...and their intonation [was] astonishingly correct'. She said that she was 'never challenged as to [her] origins'.<sup>14</sup> It is, of course,

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<sup>13</sup> D. Epstein Nord, Walking the Victorian Streets, Women Representation and the City, Ithaca, 1995, ch. 7.

<sup>14</sup> A. Jones, Darkest London, 1926, p. 47.

possible that her accent was noticed but that it was not commented upon. She claimed that after her experiences, she could now 'speak with knowledge'.<sup>15</sup> As she had experienced 'actual and physical privations', she was better informed than the rest of the 'well fed'.<sup>16</sup> Her work highlighted the lack of provision for women which existed in London. She wrote up her experiences in journalistic articles and became involved in running homes for homeless women. Married to the one time Fabian, Cecil Chesterton, she also wrote other books on youth and women and was impressed by the achievements of Soviet women.<sup>17</sup>

Ada's direct experience helped her in her arguments for social reform but there is a sense of voyeurism when she refers to her 'Annie Turner clothes'<sup>18</sup> revealing that her activities were discussed in a middle class context. Unlike the earlier reformers, no photographs were taken.

All these women used disguise as a way of gaining social knowledge and used that knowledge in attempts to improve social conditions for working class women and girls. Their intentions were clearly good and their work demonstrates personal commitment and courage. However, none of the women raise the question of the feelings of the women under scrutiny, or of the morality of such pretence. Olive Malvery, who appears to have got most involved with individuals who took her on trust, seems quite unconcerned about her deceit.

Disguise has both elements of sisterhood and surveillance in it. Because of the concern privileged

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<sup>15</sup> A. Jones, Darkest, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> A. Jones, Darkest, p.254.

<sup>17</sup> A. Jones, Women of the Underworld, 1931. What Price Youth?, 1931, Salute the Soviet, 1942.

<sup>18</sup> A. Jones, Darkest, p.254.

women felt for poorer women, they desired to know all about their lives at the everyday level. Going into disguise put working women under surveillance - a form of surveillance over which they had no control. Disguise reinforced the unequal power relations between the classes. This tension between compassion and class is a tension which runs throughout this thesis. The organizers of girls' clubs all showed concern about working girls and stressed the importance of knowing them at a personal level. They also held the assumption that the girls could not achieve their full womanhood without the influence of middle class ladies. Their assumption was that working class culture produced deficiency. In order for the girls to imbibe middle class cultural values, they had to be placed under middle class control. Clubs provided female space in which that control could be exercised through personal influence.

Sisterhood involved a degree of surveillance by one class over another. The superiority of certain class attitudes, plus the assumption that sisterhood could transcend class, served to justify middle class activity among working class girls, be it in the form of social surveys, settlements, disguise or clubs.





LUCY GUINNESS - ROOM AND HER COMPANION  
AS FACTORY GIRLS

Plate 5. Lucy Guinness in disguise as a factory girl during the 1880s. L. Bell, In Perils in the City, 1909.



*Photo by Charles Street, Rothesay, N.B.*  
OLIVE CHRISTIAN MALVERY (MRS. ARCHIBALD MACKIRDY).

Plate 6. Olive Malvery as herself. O. Malvery, The Soul Market, 1906.



*Photo by H. H. H. Ltd., Bedford Street, Strand.*

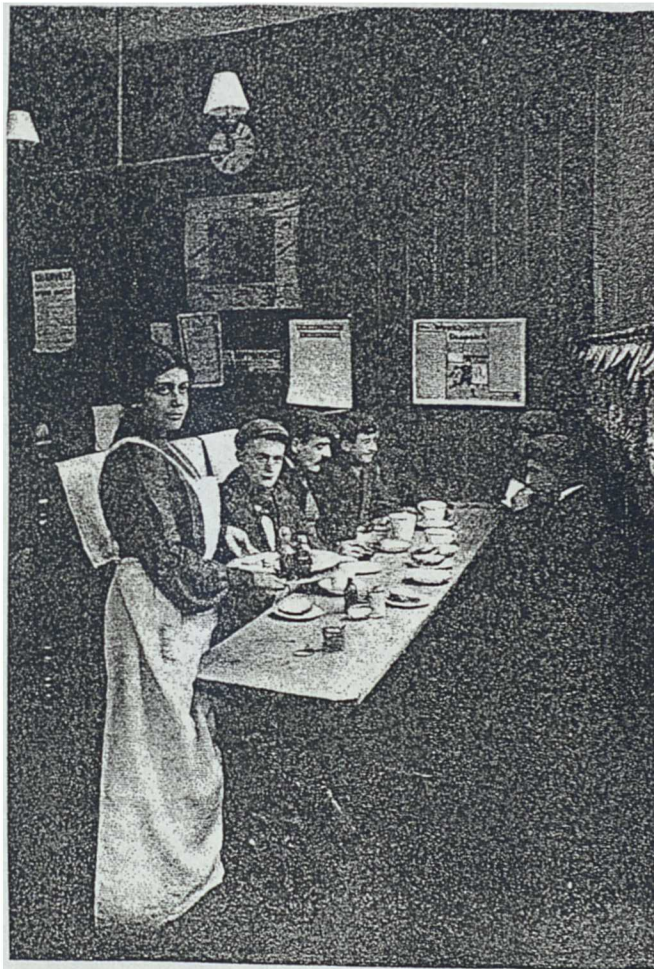
MISS MALVERY AS A FLOWER-GIRL.

Plate 7. Olive Malvery as a flower girl. O. Malvery, The Soul Market, 1906.



FACIORY GIRLS WAITING IN THE STREET FOR THE DOORS TO OPEN.  
MISS MALVERY IS LAST IN THE GROUP.

Plate 8. Olive Malvery as a factory girl. O. Malvery,  
The Soul Market, 1906.



MISS MALVERY SERVING IN A CHEAP COFFEE HOUSE.

Plate 9. Olive Malvery as a waitress. O. Malvery, The Soul Market, 1906.



SERVING CHILDREN IN A "SWEET" SHOP.

Plate 10. Olive Malvery as shop assistant. O. Malvery,  
The Soul Market, 1906.

PART TWO

THE CLUBS

## PART TWO

### INTRODUCTION

Part Two will open with an outline of club provision [see also Appendix]. I shall then discuss the clubs under three themes - protection, discipline and empowerment. These themes are the strongest factors which have emerged from studying the mainly middle class records of the clubs.

Protection was an important reason for the formation of the clubs in the 1880s and relates particularly to sexuality. Elements of it remain throughout the period. Discipline is a feature of all the clubs although more concerns about it are voiced in the earlier part of the period under study rather than in the inter-war years. Empowerment is certainly an aim of club workers although some of their ideas of what constitutes empowerment may be disputed. Girls may not have wanted to become 'better' servants but may have welcomed the chance to develop skills in order to have a wider choice of work. Oral evidence suggests that an appreciation was felt for having access to wider cultural activities and that the clubs were important for the girls' self development. If there was empowerment it was within the prevailing ideas of class and gender. The clubs did not seek radical revolutions.

As the themes are present in all the clubs, there has been some unavoidable repetition but I hope this will help to emphasize the overlapping nature of the themes. Club workers wanted to produce 'better' girls and intended to do so by working within their own cultural norms. Protection, discipline and empowerment were all intertwined in a process of social mothering.



CHAPTER SIX  
DEVELOPMENT OF PROVISION FOR GIRLS 1875-1939

The population of London was expanding and by the 1880s fifty percent of London's population had been born elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Most of these were internal migrants who were mainly single and female. Philanthropic organizations and individuals developed clubs and hostels to cater for young women's leisure and housing needs in this changing city. It was mainly women's organizations which took these initiatives and in mixed organizations it was women who were in direct contact with the girls.

For some organizations, club work was only a part of their work. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), for example, was initially interested in uniting young women in the leisured classes in religious service. The Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) aimed at promoting good relations between domestic servants and their employers. Both these organizations developed world-wide links. The Salvation and Church Armies concentrated mainly on rescue work although the Church army ran clubs in central and south London and ran one club with hostel facilities specifically for barmaids. The Women's Settlements sometimes started their own clubs but very often they supported clubs run by local churches or missions and their work was not confined to girls. The above organizations are discussed below.

There were also some notable individuals who pioneered club work. Maude Stanley started a club in Soho in 1880 and opened another one in Walworth. She was instrumental in developing club work and through her the London Girls' Club Union was formed. Lily Montagu started the West Central Jewish Girls club also in Soho, in 1893. This developed to include a boys' club and

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<sup>1</sup> J. Harris, Private Lives, Public Spirit, Britain 1870-1914, 1994.

later and adult club. Lily Montagu was an inspiration to other club workers and by 1911, eleven Jewish girls' clubs were affiliated to the Association of Jewish Youth (AJY), Lily Montagu was also active in the wider club movement and was one of the founding members of the National Organization of Girls' Clubs (NOGC). This developed into a flourishing umbrella organization by the 1930s and became known as the National Council of Girls' Clubs (NCGC). [see Chapter Nine]

It was recognized by the 1890s that club workers needed to share ideas and to receive some sort of training. Maude Stanley initiated annual conferences for club workers; the Clubs' Industrial Association (CIA), with which Lily Montagu was connected, also ran conferences; the YWCA ran training weeks and the Settlements organized training in conjunction with what later became the London School of Economics (LSE).

The various organizations developed differently, in different circumstances and for different kinds of girls. Domestic servants, factory girls and girls in business emerge as the main categories. They were all part of the new urban working class who were seen as in need of the guiding principles of a middle class religious home, principles, which, if followed, would enable girls to become good wives and mothers. As the social and economic conditions changed throughout the period, so did the clubs' activities and emphases. Some twentieth century clubs tended to stress industrial rights and ideas of citizenship. Club literature of the 1930s referred to wider political issues such as General Elections and the League of Nations. The clubs responded to, but did not initiate any structural changes. The women involved in club work covered the political spectrum and had varying degrees of interest in the women's movement. Most had a background of religious faith and it was the nineteenth century religious organizations which took the initiative in forming

clubs. We now look closely at club provision, further details of which are provided in the Appendix.

#### YWCA.

The YWCA was one of the earliest organization to try to bring girls together. Formed in the 1850s to provide a home for Florence Nightingale's nurses, it later merged with Emma Roberts' prayer circle which united to 'plead for each other...and for young women as a class.'<sup>2</sup> An inter-denominational organization, it responded to women working in shops and businesses by setting up Homes and Institutes. It provided free teas on Sundays, Bible classes, lectures, literacy classes and a library in institutes all over London. The North London Institute, for example, attracted shop girls and respectable servants to its Tottenham Court Road premises in 1869 whilst the institute at Limehouse attracted over forty factory girls to their Bible classes in 1872. In that year five girls were baptized. Homes for working girls were established from the 1870s as the YWCA was very conscious of country-born girls under twenty, who were alone in London.<sup>3</sup>

Five homes were established in London between 1878 and 1881 and attracted girls who were barmaids, clerks, needlewomen, cashiers, shopworkers, teachers and telegraphists. Letters of gratitude were published from girls who left the homes. Each girl received a bible on her departure. The homes attracted Welsh, Dutch, Swedish and Norwegian girls and Gordon House was opened especially for the benefit of German girls of a 'humbler class'.<sup>4</sup> There is no record of the girls' response to curfew rules or to the prohibition of writing or

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<sup>2</sup> L.Moor, Girls of Yesterday and Today, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> YWCA Annual reports 1869, 1872, 1878-1901. Held at the Modern Records Centre, Warwick University.

<sup>4</sup> YWCA Annual Reports 1895, 1894, 1881.

needlework in rooms. Needlework was not allowed at all on Sundays. Girls from the homes got invited to tea at the homes of the wealthy and were also taken to art galleries, lectures and concerts.

The Association's journal sought to develop links abroad especially in the empire. Readers were exhorted to help their 'sisters in India' who were asking to be taught about 'your Saviour'.<sup>5</sup> There were many travel articles throughout the period and the general tone can be summed up as cosmopolitan and anglo-centric. At the annual conference in 1884, The Earl of Shaftesbury referred to the 'coloured friends who have sung' and to white and black redeemed by the same Saviour.<sup>6</sup> It is not recorded if these 'coloured friends' are visitors or residents. The journal also advised girls to be tidy as it was a good training for marriage and once married a wife should be 'subject to the husband's rule'.<sup>7</sup>

An off-shoot of the YWCA was the Factory Helpers' Union which became the Federation of Working Girls' Clubs and produced the Girls Club Journal. Leisured members who wanted to work in clubs could undertake a two weeks training course which could include lectures on topics such as 'Needs of Girls Today', 'The Factory Girl', 'Adolescence', 'Problems of Discipline' and visits to clubs, hostels and classes.<sup>8</sup>

The YWCA responded to the changes brought about by the First World War as did many other organizations. The behaviour of girls at this time was seen as a problem for many reformers. The YWCA was very conscious of girls in military centres and was concerned about the 'large numbers of girls being affected undesirably by

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<sup>5</sup> Our Own Gazette, 1884, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> OOG, 1884, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> YWCA annual reports 1884 p. 23, 1894, p. 105.

<sup>8</sup> Training for Girls Club work, n.d c1914.

the presence of troops in many centres'.<sup>9</sup> As in medieval times, girls would help men to be 'pure and strong' by 'not walking out with any stranger and by not befriending soldiers who drink'.<sup>10</sup> Girls were exhorted to knit, sew and make dolls for the daughters of Indian troops, clothes for Belgian refugees and children of British troops. Girls could have a positive role especially if they were in the YWCA and linked with girls in the colonies. Girl Guides too were encouraged: 'it is like joining an army and its splendid'.<sup>11</sup>

During the inter-war years the YWCA continued to provide clubs and hostels. An example of this is the Princess Arthur Club in Montpelier Row in Blackheath, south-east London. It celebrated its fourteenth birthday in 1931. Like other clubs of the time it also held 'Indian' evenings. Advice was given in the Association's journal on how to run such an evening.<sup>12</sup> Writers in the journal seemed to be very fond of India and one article explains the mixed heritage of the Anglo-Indians, how they 'share something of East and West' but 'bear our names, share our religion and love our Empire. [my emphasis].<sup>13</sup>

The YWCA took an interest in anti-white slavery campaigns and the League of Nations. They initially supported Mussolini as his 'strong leadership' was necessary 'against Bolshevism. Even in 1929, they still thought that his autocracy was a necessary step to democracy.<sup>14</sup> They also published articles by Maude

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<sup>9</sup> Central Committee for Work Among Girls in Military Centres, 1914.

<sup>10</sup> B. Wilson, Your Country Needs You, n.d.

<sup>11</sup> anon., How Girls Can Help in Time of War, 1914.

<sup>12</sup> The Blue Triangle Gazette, April and Nov. 1931.

<sup>13</sup> The Blue Triangle Gazette, Sept. 1928.

<sup>14</sup> OOG, Sept. 1923, Blue Triangle Gazette, Aug. 1929.

Royden and Margaret Bondfield on the co-operative commonwealth and political freedom.<sup>15</sup> One article which stands out, is by a Quaker, Bertha Bracey, who warned of the dangers of German fascism in 1933.<sup>16</sup> Bertha Bracey became very prominent in helping German-Jewish refugees come to Britain. The YWCA became very involved in helping Czech women get domestic training in Britain after Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland. Through their international links, members were in direct contact with Czechoslovakia. One letter records the sense of betrayal at the Munich Agreement and a member of the worldwide YWCA, Susanne de Dietrich, referred to the agreement as 'wishy-washy pacifism'. The female refugees, described as girls but looking much older in the photograph, were received and trained at a hostel for domestic servants in Seaford, Sussex.<sup>17</sup>

The YWCA experienced a split in 1919 with a group seceding to form the Christian alliance of Women and Girls. The circumstances of the split are of interest here because they centre on what is thought to be appropriate activities for club girls. The split came after disquiet felt by some members who thought that club workers were lacking in religion. This was shown by the activities which some club workers allowed such as dancing, card playing and smoking. These did not accord with Evangelical ideas. The main body of the 1919 Council meeting proposed that the nature of recreation might differ widely, but that it should not take up an undue proportion of time and that all activities should awake members to their duties as Christian citizens and homemakers. This was not accepted by the dissenting group who felt that they had to leave. It is not known how large they were or if they formed their own clubs.

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<sup>15</sup> OOG, June and Sept. 1926.

<sup>16</sup> The Blue Triangle, July 1933.

<sup>17</sup> Correspondence and photographs, YWCA box 243.

### Girls' Friendly Society.

Another early organization to be concerned with the welfare of working girls was the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) which was formed in 1875. Unlike the YWCA, the lady members, called 'associates', were Anglican although the girls could be of any denomination. One of the objects was to encourage 'the purity of life' and so girls had to be respectable. It was argued that rescue organizations helped the 'fallen'. Another object was to 'bind together...ladies and working girls for mutual help, sympathy and prayer'. Over forty years after its inception girls were still thought to need help if they were working in the 'heathen' city.<sup>18</sup>

Harrison describes the organization as part of the Tory revival.<sup>19</sup> Mary Townsend, the founder and President for many years, does appear to have been very conservative so far as women's position went. Although she was happy to support her Tory husband at political rallies, she made it clear in The Times that she had not read her own papers at the annual GFS meeting in 1882 - they had been read by her husband.<sup>20</sup> Another Conservative active in the GFS was Louise Knightly who became one of the original members of the Primrose League, a Conservative Women's Association which, it is claimed was the basis for the modernizing of the Conservative Party.<sup>21</sup> Louisa Knightly was also a member of the Conservative and Unionist Association for the Franchise of women. However as a member of the National

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<sup>18</sup> GFS, 1876, The Constitution, 1879, The Book of the GFS, no. 139, June 1920, p. 43. Held at Girls' Friendly Society headquarters, London.

<sup>19</sup> B. Harrison, 'For Church Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920', Past and Present, no. 61, Nov. 73, 107-138, p.107.

<sup>20</sup> The Times, 28 June 1882.

<sup>21</sup> B. Campbell, The Iron Ladies. Why do Women Vote Tory? 1987, p. 2.

Union of Women Workers (NUWW), she came into contact with women of other political persuasions. The political conservatism is apparent in the Society's aim to promote a feeling of unity between employer and employee and hoped that 'no one...would be likely to trespass on the natural privilege of the employer to be her servant's best friend'.<sup>22</sup> As Harrison points, the Society was to moderate class conflict.

The GFS grew rapidly. After the first ten years it had 821 branches in England and Wales. By 1892, there were 56 lodges, 87 registries, 222 clubs and 61 homes of rest. The membership grew in the first five years to 47,610 and this doubled during the next five years and tripled by 1910.<sup>23</sup> This rapid growth during the first ten years coincided with the general concern about girls and social purity.

Although the GFS was mainly rural with a focus on domestic servants, much work was done in London where factory girls were considered to be 'morally neglected'.<sup>24</sup> It is not clear how high the actual membership was as reports concentrate on annual events which usually featured a free tea. The Bethnal Green branch recruited with a tea which attracted seventy girls in 1878.<sup>25</sup> Whitechapel branch which ran literacy, Bible and sewing classes then opened in 1881 with 200 members.<sup>26</sup> A similar recruiting meeting was held in Hoxton where 80 to 90 members came to tea.<sup>27</sup> *One of the*

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<sup>22</sup> GFS, 1876, pp. 29-30.

<sup>23</sup> B. Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family', pp. 111, Past and Present, A. Money, The History of the Girls' Friendly Society, 1905.

<sup>24</sup> GFS Advertiser, Aug. 1880, p.7.

<sup>25</sup> The GFS Reporter, April 1879, p.92.

<sup>26</sup> Friendly Leaves, Mar. 1881.

<sup>27</sup> Friendly Leaves, Feb. 1879.



first branches in London was Brixton where 300 girls attended the annual festival in 1878. Branches were also opened in Streatham and Clapham in the same year.<sup>28</sup> The St. Paul's branch at Deptford opened in 1877 and the GFS was still active in the area when it opened a lodge in 1917.<sup>29</sup> The GFS was very active in south-east London, opening three more branches at the Deptford end of Greenwich, a Woolwich and Charlton branch and one in the less fashionable end of Blackheath.<sup>30</sup>

The Society's journal suggests that the organization emphasized the women's traditional role as moral guardians. Political events were largely ignored, although once women had gained the vote, it was thought important for women to form opinions on such issues as housing.<sup>31</sup> The GFS was imperialist and Royalist and linked its view of female purity to patriotism. At a fund raising event in 1882, the Rev Huleatt of Bethnal Green said that 'a pure -hearted maidenhood was the surest bulwark of the nation'.<sup>32</sup>

As with the YWCA, the Society was concerned about girls' behaviour during the First World War. Friendly Leaves commented in its editorial in February, 1915 that 'girls seem to be losing their head' and that there was 'silly behaviour' around army camps. With the entry of women into munitions factories, the GFS set up hostels. One such hostel was for the workers at Woolwich Arsenal in south-east or Kentish London.

In spite of its wartime activities, the GFS started to lose membership. Between 1913 and 1919, it lost 6537

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<sup>28</sup> Friendly Leaves, Jan. 1879.

<sup>29</sup> Friendly Leaves, Nov. 1878, p. 219. GFS Magazine, Jan. 1917.

<sup>30</sup> Friendly Leaves, branch reports, 1881, 1883.

<sup>31</sup> The GFS Magazine, Jan. 1919.

<sup>32</sup> Friendly Leaves, July 1882.

Associates and 38326 members. It was being seen as old fashioned. Whilst this was happening in England its ideals were being spread around the world. Deborah Gaitskell has examined hostels for South African girls and women during the first half of this century and discovered that four of the women missionaries involved had belonged to the GFS. With the expansion of the economy, there was the increasing need to release men from domestic labour and the need for the incoming female labour to be 'protected'. The ideas behind the hostels were to provide 'a class of respectable, industrious Natives, happy in domestic service'.<sup>33</sup>

The GFS offered practical help but apart from that its central idea was that of friendship and the whole Society turned on the relationship between the Associate and member. The importance of the lady associates lay in their 'refining influence' especially in relation to factory girls. It seems that the more respectable girls were attracted to the GFS as the following observation by a Settlement worker indicates. She found the GFS girls quiet, easy to manage and willing to read good books. They belonged to a different class than the 'club girls', were 'rather superior' and gave themselves airs. One member came from a 'spotless' home and was 'such a joy'.<sup>34</sup> An Associate could encourage girls to be thrifty, temperate, chaste and could encourage all the womanly virtues needed to be a good female worker and wife.

#### Settlements.

The GFS attracted ladies who were based at home but others, many of whom had been to university, were

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<sup>33</sup> D. Gaitskill, '"Christian Compounds for Girls": Church Hostels for African women in Johannesburg, 1907-1970', Southern African Studies, no. 6, 1979, p. 57. Thanks to John Tosh for this reference.

<sup>34</sup> A. Hodson, Letters from Settlement, 1909, pp. 108,9.

looking for an outlet away from home. The Settlement movement pioneered by Toynbee in the East End aimed at helping the poor through direct contact with them. The growing physical separation of the rich and poor was thought to be a severe problem. Using the language of the imperialist enterprises, a Settlement was defined as a 'colony of members of the upper classes, formed in a poor neighbourhood with the double purpose of getting to know the local conditions of life from personal observation and of helping where help is needed'. The 'settler' believes that it is a 'misfortune for all parties and a danger to the nation if the classes live in complete isolation of thought and environment'. The settler aims to 'bridge the gulf between the classes'.<sup>35</sup>

Although pioneered by men, there were twenty two women's settlements and seventeen run by men in 1914. Many of the London settlements started in the 1890s. There was a Women's Settlement Association which met three times a year to exchange ideas. Training was also developed in the women's settlements. The settlements worked with all age groups and not all ran girls' clubs. Some supported clubs run by other organizations.

The term 'settlement' seems to have been loose and the institutions varied. Some of the settlements in London were separate women's settlements and some were mixed with women's departments. Some were comprised of university women whilst others were the domain of leisured women who were motivated by religion. At the Women's University Settlement, Lady Margaret Hall and Bermondsey Settlement there were women's houses whilst at Robert Browning and Bernhard Baron there were husband and wife teams. It is not clear in many cases how many workers were actually resident.

Women workers were from various Christian denominations and from the Jewish faith. Their political

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<sup>35</sup> W. Picht, Toynbee Hall and the English Settlements, 1914, pp. 1,2.

interests were diverse: some became active in the peace movement, suffrage, Liberal and Labour politics whilst others had no recorded political interests.

In London, settlements were formed mainly in east and south London. Indeed, the area from Bermondsey to the Elephant and Castle attracted five different settlements with two more at Walworth and Nine Elms. Although the East End had become synonymous with poverty and crime and had attracted philanthropic workers, it should be recognized that much philanthropic work was done in south London which received much less publicity. South London was densely populated and very poor but unlike Whitechapel, there were no sensational murders and the area did not experience Jewish immigration. It is interesting that one of the settlements, the Time and Talents moved to south London from Whitechapel as the potential Christian population diminished. It is possible that Jewish immigration affected the face of Christian philanthropy in east London and this could explain the number of settlements in south London.

The first women's settlement was started in Nelson Square near the Elephant and Castle in 1885 and was called the Women's University Settlement (WUS). It was made up of ex-members of Girton, Lady Margaret Hall, Newnham and Somerville Colleges. It aimed at working 'quietly' with 'no straining of opportunities'.<sup>36</sup> Prior to the arrival of the settlement, Octavia Hill was already running a girls' club in Red Cross Street and Charterhouse Mission was providing musical drill for factory girls. The settlement helped with these and with three other factory girls' clubs.<sup>37</sup>

The Settlement opened its own club in 1890 at 192 Blackfriars Road where the rent was paid by an ex-Girton

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<sup>36</sup> WUS, minutes, 1887, 5/WUS/1. Held at the Fawcett Library.

<sup>37</sup> WUS Annual Report 1887. 5/WUS/1.

student. It became known as the Acland club in 1894 and incorporated a separate boys' club. There were eighteen members in 1890, forty-nine four years later and by 1929 girls' membership was 116.<sup>38</sup>

Girls from 'good homes' were not encouraged to come, there was a fine for rough language and there was a girls' committee.<sup>39</sup> It was open six nights a week and it provided literacy, sewing, singing and history classes. It also offered drill, wood carving, lectures and holidays. Girls were allowed to invite friends to mixed socials. This club later amalgamated with St. Mary's club in 1930 which had been run by the Work Girls' Protection Society whose president was Catherine Gladstone, the mother of Helen who had become the Head of the WUS in 1901. The joint club closed in 1949.

Another women's university settlement was founded ten years after WUS in nearby Kennington. The Lady Margaret Hall (LMH) was a 'centre of study as well as for work' and was a 'shining cleanliness in the midst of dirt'.<sup>40</sup> The settlers aimed to practise 'neighbourliness with all classes'.<sup>41</sup> Two clubs can be traced in connection with this settlement - the Daisy Club and the Salamanca. The references to the Daisy Club are brief: it was operating in the early 1900s and was still flourishing in 1937. The Salamanca was running from at least 1911, it contributed to the war effort and club members visited Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford during the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> One of the workers at the Daisy Club was

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<sup>38</sup> G. Barrett, The Blackfriars Settlement 1887-1987, 1987. WUS Annual Report 1929, 5/WUS/92.

<sup>39</sup> WUS Annual Reports 1888-1894, 5/WUS/1.

<sup>40</sup> G. Bailey, The History of Lady Margaret Hall, 1923, pp. 113, 123.

<sup>41</sup> Lady Margaret Hall, The Brown Book, 1909, p. 62.

<sup>42</sup> LMH Settlement Annual Reports, 1926-35. Held at Lambeth Local History Library.

Kathleen Courtney who later became an active pacifist and suffragist. She remembers the Daisy club as an 'eye opener' and the poverty and ignorance which she met made her realize that there was 'something terribly wrong in society that must be changed'.<sup>43</sup> Another settlement worker, A. L. Hodson, also found Lambeth an education as she discovered that the 'poor were an unknown quantity'.<sup>44</sup>

Further east, women from the Wesleyan Bermondsey Settlement moved into a house in Rotherhithe to work with girls and women during the 1890s. There were seven clubs in the area ranging from the respectable Beatrice Club to the riverside St. George's Club which was aimed at the roughest classes. Anna Martin was honorary secretary of this settlement for some years and although she did not work directly with the girls' clubs, she wrote extensively about working women. She stressed that working women should not be judged by middle class values and settlement workers should know the reality of working class life. A former teacher, feminist and suffragist, she argued the need to change laws to ensure that women were not dependent on their husbands.<sup>45</sup> Anna Martin was a close friend of Miss Robinson who managed Beatrice House as a centre of work for girls and women.<sup>46</sup> [see Chapter Nine]

Another worker at this settlement with radical leanings was Ada Brown. She worked at the 'rough' club of St. George's in 1898. It has been claimed that she had a great effect on the girls who often came to the

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<sup>43</sup> Undated interview (c 1960s) with Francesca Wilson, p.9. Held at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.

<sup>44</sup> A. Hodson, Letters, p. 191.

<sup>45</sup> A. Martin, The Married Working Woman, 1911, Mothers and Social Reform, 1913, Mothers in Mean Streets, n.d.

<sup>46</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Annual Report 1911. Southwark Local History Library.

club drunk.<sup>47</sup> Ada Brown came from a comfortable, provincial family and married Alfred Salter from Greenwich in 1900. Alfred also worked at the Settlement and recruited the Aldam family also of Greenwich. Mary Aldam later became an active member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).<sup>48</sup> Alfred and Ada were committed to social and political reform and together they formed the Bermondsey branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Ada Salter became one of the first women councillors to be elected in London in 1909 and she became the first woman Mayor. She was also active in the trade union and co-operative movements.

Very close to the Bermondsey Settlement was the Time and Talent Settlement in Bermondsey Street. Two clubs developed from the settlement, one for poorer girls at Dockhead and one for the more respectable girls. The clubs started in the 1890s and expanded in the inter-war years to include married members. The settlement also ran a hostel from 1913 which expanded to two houses in the 1920s. The demand for hostel accommodation declined in the 1930s. The settlement still continues today catering for elderly residents with a resident paid worker and 'friends' who support financially.[see plate 11 and Chapters Eight and Nine]

Further west, the Robert Browning Settlement was started in Walworth in the 1890s. This was run by Mr and Mrs Herbert Stead, brother and sister-in-law of W. T. Stead of the Pall Mall Gazette. Amongst various activities organized there was a girls' club which attracted various kinds of girls. In 1904, there was a new girls' guild which met five times a week with 115 members. Their motto was 'Sisters All'. The settlement

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<sup>47</sup> F. Brockway, The Bermondsey Story-the Life of Alfred Salter, 1949, p.15.

<sup>48</sup> I. Dove, Yours in the Cause, 1986.

also organized girls' socials and annual camps.<sup>49</sup>

South London, from Deptford to Battersea seems to have been inundated by settlement workers. In addition, the Albany Institute in Deptford was an extensive philanthropic venture [see Chapter Eight] and the activities of the GFS in south London have been noted.

The non-Jewish areas of the East End and the newly developed East London Borough of West Ham also had Christian settlements from the 1890s. There were women's settlements in Bethnal Green, Hoxton, Canning Town, the Isle of Dogs, Stratford, Poplar which ran girls' clubs as did the mixed settlements in Poplar and West Ham.

With the growth of London, areas on the outskirts grew large enough to become boroughs. West Ham was created a borough in 1886 and its population doubled between 1881 and 1901. There was factory work available for girls and women but there was much poverty and overcrowding. Various women's settlements started in Stratford and Canning Town with girls' clubs in the dock area run by women from the Dockland Settlement.

The Canning Town women's Settlement was a centre of women's social work. It was an inter-denominational organization founded in 1892 which aimed at interpreting 'east to west and west to east'.<sup>50</sup> Rebecca Cheetham, warden until 1917, was an ex-grammar school teacher who was very involved in social reform. She was a member of the NUWW, the local co-operative movement, the Board of Guardians and co-opted on to the local education committee. She was interested in sharing the work and ideals of the Settlement Movement and visited twelve settlements in the USA. Canning Town became a focus for

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Browning Settlement Annual Report 1904, p.46. anon., Eighteen Years in the Central City Swarm, 1913, p.171. Held at Southwark Local History Library.

<sup>50</sup> Canning Town Women's Settlement Policy, 14 Oct. 1927. Held at Newham Local History Library.



settlement work and was visited by American and French settlement workers in 1922.<sup>51</sup> The Settlement hosted a Social Study School in conjunction with the LSE in 1918 which was considered a great success and continued to look outwards during the 1930s by supporting the National Council of Women's resolution on the reduction of arms expenditure.<sup>52</sup>

The Settlement took over and developed a local Girl's Evening Home in 1894 as part of their extensive work for women and girls. Activities were provided for factory girls, business girls and domestic servants. Girls took part in drama, musical and drill displays at the local Lees Hall and at the People's Palace at Mile End. They also took part in the London Girls' Club Union competitions. The club was also affiliated to the Union of Working Girls' Clubs in the East End. Holidays and outings were offered throughout the period. The minutes generally dwell on the excellence of the girls' work and behaviour. Although poor themselves, the girls organized relief for distressed miners in 1929.<sup>53</sup>

The mixed settlement in Canning Town was the Malvern College Mission which was developed into the Docklands Settlement by Reginald Kennedy Cox. Opened in 1894, it had six branches by 1937. Its original focus was on boys but after the war girls were admitted. From an unpublished autobiography it seems that a very lively club was run by the ladies at this settlement. Students from Bedford Ladies' College supplied kit for netball and tennis. Girls were taken out to tea, to see

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<sup>51</sup> Canning Town Women's Settlement minutes, 1897-1902, 27 Jan. 1922, 28 April 1922.

<sup>52</sup> Canning Town Women's Settlement minutes, April, 1918, 25 Mar. 1931.

<sup>53</sup> Canning Town Women's Settlement minutes, 25 Sept. 1903, 16 May 1919, Annual Reports 1916, 1922, minutes 27 Feb. 1929.

Shakespeare and were introduced to 'high class' music.<sup>54</sup>

In the Stratford area of West Ham a small women's settlement opened in 1896 and was reported to be still active in 1938. It was affiliated to St. Margaret's Settlement in Bethnal Green and ran a girls' club. St. Margaret's was one of two settlements in Bethnal Green and was opened at Victoria Park in 1892 by ladies from Oxford. The ladies aimed to share a religious faith and to raise the standard of life. They ran two girls' clubs, one of which was for the 'lower social type' identified by 'low fringes' and those who wore magnificent or no hats.<sup>55</sup> In 1938 it was running clubs divided by age and not by respectability.

St. Hilda's was the other settlement in Bethnal Green. Run by Cheltenham Ladies' College it also ran a girls' club. It was one of the early members of the Federation of Working Girls' clubs. In 1913 St. Hilda's founded the Daffodil club specifically for Jewish Girls. In 1936, they experimented with a mixed club on Sunday evenings which was thought to be a success as it attracted those who might not otherwise have come.<sup>56</sup>

The dockland area of the East End was served by the Women's Presbyterian Settlement in East India Road in Poplar. This settlement which was founded in 1899 started the Victoria Docks Girls' Club as well as running brownies and guides.<sup>57</sup>

Poplar was also served by the Roman Catholic Settlement of the Holy Child. This settlement arrived

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<sup>54</sup> E. Cannon, We Slept Three in a Bed, n.d. Held at Newham Local Library.

<sup>55</sup> M. Talbot, 'St. Margaret's House', J. Knapp, The Universities and the Social Problem, 1895, p.126.

<sup>56</sup> M. Rendel, St. Hilda's East. A Century of Community Service 1889-1989, 1989. St. Hilda's East Annual Report 1936, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> H. Judd, The Story of the Presbyterian Settlement in Peace and War 1899-1949, 1949.

in Poplar having moved from Whitechapel where it had previously served the Roman Catholic population. It was originally the Catholic School Union and opened in 1893. It later changed its name to St. Anthony's before becoming the Holy Child. The settlement was supported from 1913 by past and present pupils of the Convent of the Holy Child in Mayfield, Sussex. It was run entirely by lay Catholic women with support from the Church and convent. They ran a girls' club with a specific aim of promoting religion as there was concern that girls might go to the many non-catholic clubs. The contact with the ladies was considered important especially, as was noted in 1927, that 'class hatred [was] being insidiously excited among the poor'.<sup>58</sup> The club was active throughout the period, continuing in spite of First World War air-raids. Mrs Spencer Bull, the resident warden during the 1930s had her work acknowledged by an award from the Pope. A teacher who helped with netball at the club admired the way Mrs Spencer Bull lived simply in Poplar but 'kept her standards' and treated everyone alike.<sup>59</sup>

The Isle of Dogs, an almost separate part of the East End, had its own settlement. Opened in 1896, St. Mildred's House concentrated on providing clubs. Drink was identified as a major problem amongst women and girls as there were drink clubs in the factories. Success was claimed as women did agree to give up alcohol. This Anglican settlement was affiliated to St. Margaret's in Poplar.<sup>60</sup>

Christian Socialists also thought that settlements were important in improving the working classes and in

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<sup>58</sup> St. Leonards' Chronicler, 1927.

<sup>59</sup> Mrs Spencer Bull, The Settlement of the Holy Child, 1946, correspondence with Sister Wilkins, 16 May 1991.

<sup>60</sup> K. Wintour and K. Bradford, The Story of St. Mildred's Settlement, 1957.

providing the necessary social mix. The women's part of the Maurice Settlement in Hoxton provided 'wholesome recreation' for factory girls. The first warden was a Miss Evans who was followed by Muriel Wragge in 1918. Muriel's sisters were involved in work outside the home: her sister was one of the early professional midwives who had trained at the first midwifery training hospital in Woolwich and her half sister ran a kindergarten in Blackheath. Although Muriel was somewhat 'alarmed' at the prospect of running a girls' club, she clearly enjoyed her work - taking girls into club competitions, educating them about the 'facts of life' and bringing them religion as there was 'no doubt that [they] wanted [it]'. The local press described her as an 'inspiring Spirit'.<sup>61</sup>

The Society of Friends turned to settlement work just after the First World War. They had been involved in adult education and club work in the late nineteenth century and families like the Cadburys had always been active in social welfare. Elizabeth Cadbury was on the executive of the Frideswide Girls' Club which started in Drury Lane in 1893 and moved to St. Martin's Lane in 1895. The settlement at Winchester House in Walthamstow was opened in 1919, providing educational and recreational activities for adults. Girls and boys were able to meet for games and crafts.<sup>62</sup>

The Anglo-Jewish establishment had a tradition of providing social welfare especially to meet the needs of the East European immigrants. By the turn of the century, Jewish women were very active in philanthropy and social reform both within and outside the Jewish community. They did not run settlements on the scale of their Christian counterparts but the Oxford and St.

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<sup>61</sup> Commonwealth, June 1898, p. 182. M. Wragge, The London I Loved, 1960, p 4. The City Press, 14 May 1927.

<sup>62</sup> The Friend, 12 Oct. 1923.

George's Boys' and Girls' Clubs in Whitechapel developed into the Bernhard Baron Settlement in the inter-war years and was run by Basil and Rose Henriques. [see plate 12 and Chapters Eight and Nine]. Phyllis Gerson lived at Stepney Girls' Club and developed other activities but it was not termed a settlement. [see Chapters Eight and Nine].

#### Other Organizations.

The Church Army ran clubs amongst their many other activities and, for women in the Army, club work was part of their general training. Their main activity was in the Edgware Road where the Heartsease club was opened. It was renamed the Alexandra Club in 1909 and was active throughout the period. In the same area, they ran a club from 1893 with accommodation especially for barmaids. Pub work was not considered to be a desirable occupation for women by many people, but the Church Army felt that by providing the right kind of spiritual and material advice, the barmaids could learn to 'love the Lord'. The Army also managed the Princess Club for factory girls in Bermondsey from 1907.<sup>63</sup> [see plates 13,14,15.].

The Roman Catholic Church has left very little evidence of club activity. Apart from the settlement mentioned above, I have not found many references to girls' clubs though the nuns of the French Order of the Sisters of Auxiliatrice ran a thriving club from the 1880s throughout the period in Bow. They also ran a hostel for girls in business and a training home for domestic servants. Unlike the Jewish club workers, they made very little impact on club work in general.

The National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) was an organization of philanthropic women who were active in improving the conditions of girls and women. It

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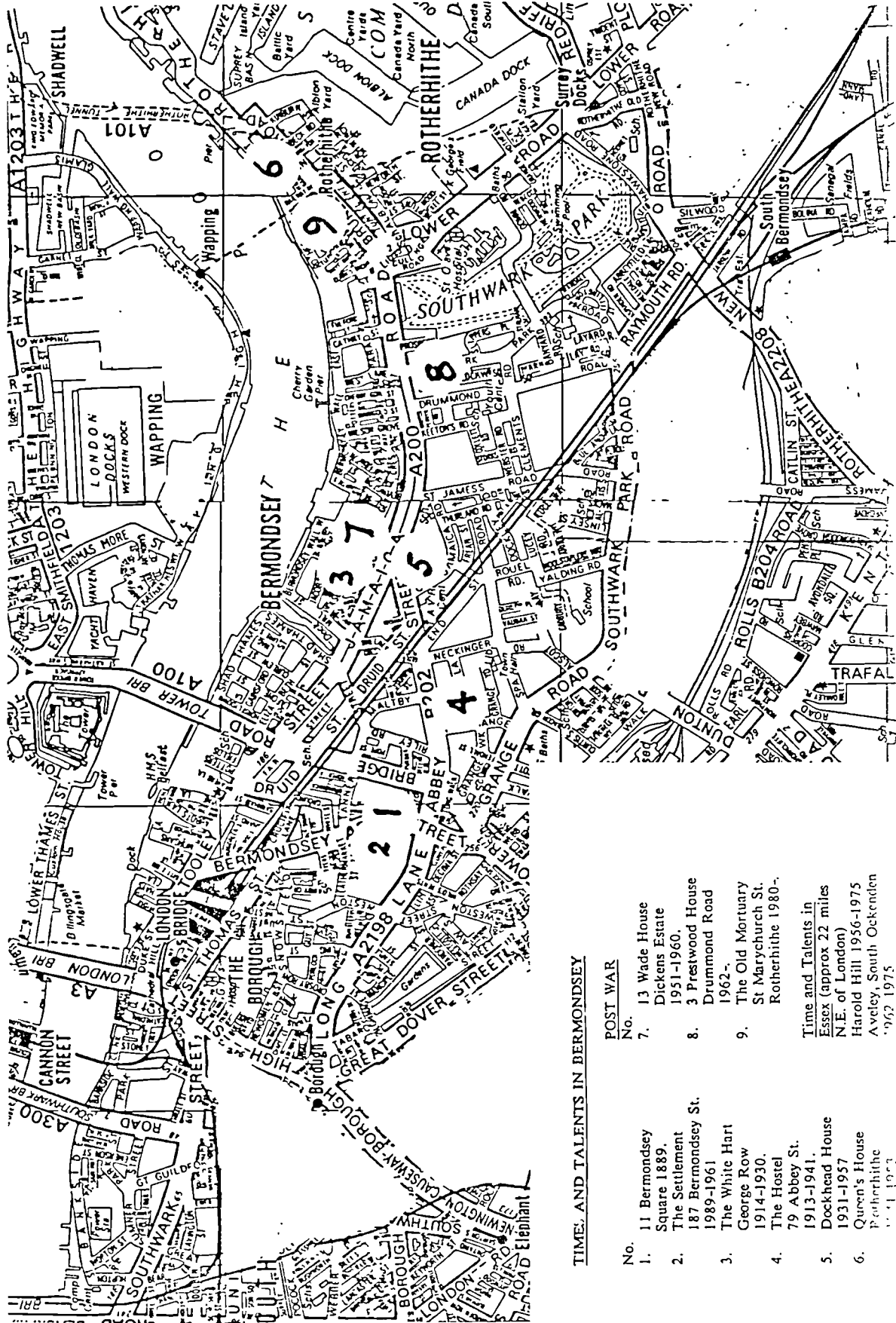
<sup>63</sup> Church Army Review, Aug. 1908, pp. 5,6. K. Heasman, Army of the Church, 1968.

attracted women across the political spectrum and from different religious denominations. Club work was very often on the agenda of the annual conferences and it had its own club committee. Another organization concerned with women and girls' welfare was the Women's Industrial Council (WIC). It focussed on industrial life and in 1899 formed the Clubs Industrial Association (CIA).[see Chapter Nine] This aimed to raise girls' awareness of their industrial rights. Membership of WIC tended to be more to the political left than the NUWW, but some women were active in both organizations. The CIA combined with the NUWW Girls club committee to form the NOGC in 1909. This umbrella organization for girls' clubs ran a journal, held conferences and ran training schemes for club workers.

Concern about and provision for working girls in London was widespread. It is impossible to assess the number of clubs in existence during the period. [see Appendix] Some clubs were well attended and lasted many years. Others were small and disappear from the records; no doubt there were many others whose existence was not recorded. Most clubs came to rely less on voluntary workers and employed staff but voluntary help was generally present although much diminished by the inter-war years. Club work was on a large enough scale to be described as a movement - a movement in which women of the leisured classes attempted, for a variety of reasons, to cross the class divide. It was so widespread that H. G. Wells chose it as a vehicle for discussing future society. In his novel, The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman (1914), Lady Harman, who wants to help working girls, is interested in setting up hostels where girls could get nice, cheap accommodation. Others, she finds, want to use hostels to control the girls in order that they understand discipline. One such person is Mrs Pembrose who has worked in a girls' club. The working class girls dislike the barrack-like atmosphere of the

hostel and point out that if they were paid properly, there would be no need of hostels. It is also suggested by a friend that the hostels could be the start of a new collective life for all.

The clubs and hostels did not transform society and were not intended to. The questions which need to be raised are ones which relate to their relationship with the status quo in terms of class and gender and whether the working girls found them beneficial in any way. The middle class reformers were concerned with protecting the girls and in providing a safe place in which they could develop. I shall now discuss the nature of the protection, discipline and empowerment which was offered and how it was received.

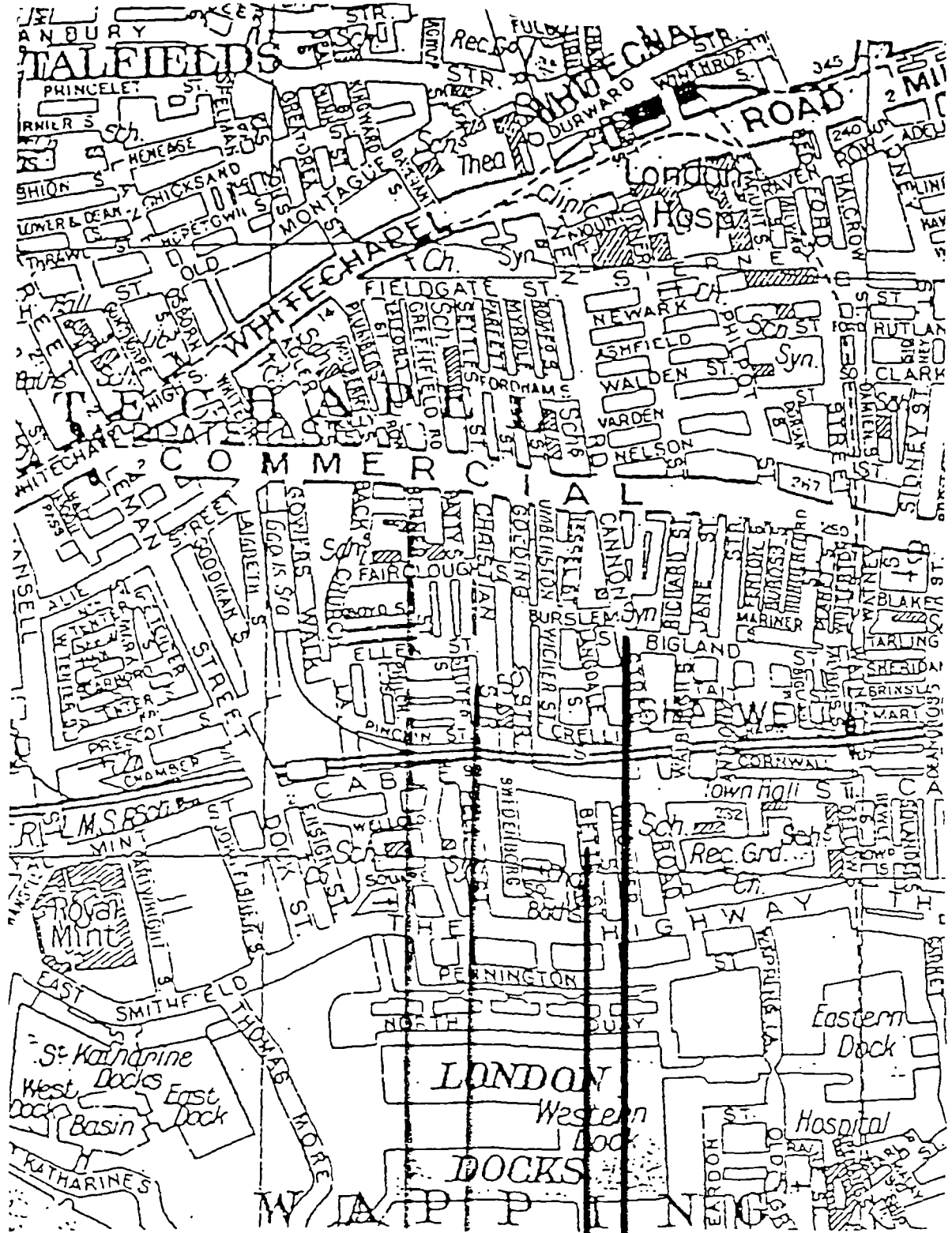


**TIME, AND TALENTS IN BERMONDSEY**

No.	POST WAR
1.	11 Bermondsey Square 1889.
2.	The Settlement 187 Bermondsey St. 1989-1961
3.	The White Hart George Row 1914-1930.
4.	The Hostel 79 Abbey St. 1913-1941.
5.	Dockhead House 1931-1957
6.	Queen's House Rotherhithe 1962-1975
7.	13 Wade House Dickens Estate 1951-1960.
8.	3 Prestwood House Drummond Road 1962-
9.	The Old Mortuary St Marychurch St. Rotherhithe 1980-
	Time and Talents in Essex (approx 22 miles N.E. of London) Harold Hill 1956-1975 Aveley, South Ockenden 1962-1975

Plate 11. Time and Talents in Bermondsey. M. Daunt, *By Peaceful Means. The Story of Time and Talents 1887-1987, 1987.*





- BERNEPE STREET (now HENRIQUES ST) O.St.G from 1930
- "CHRISTIAN STREET" TALMUD TORAH
- BETTS STREET C.St.G GIRLS CLUB 1915-1930
- CANNON STREET RL O.St.G BOYS CLUB 1914-1930

Plate 12. Location of Oxford and St. George's Jewish Clubs in the 1930s. M. Guter, 'Oxford and St. George's', undergraduate project, PCL, 1989.



The Heartsease Club.—A Day in the Country.

Plate 13. The Heartsease Club run by the Church Army.  
Church Army Blue Book, 1906, p.21.



Bua-eating Contest.

Plate 14. The Alexandra Club, formerly the Heartsease, on their annual outing in 1928. Church Army Review, June 1928, p.23.



Plate 15. The Princess Club run by the Church Army in Bermondsey. Church Army Review, August 1908, p.5.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PROTECTION

Providing protection was one rationale of club work. Girls were seen to need to be protected from themselves and from men. Victorian middle class reformers worked towards the pure ideal of chaste womanhood but were very aware that many women fell short of this. The promiscuous and the prostitute were the other side of this ideal and often there was no distinction made between the two. The prostitute was an obvious public reminder that women could be sexual and could work independently outside the home. She was a constant reminder of the double sexual standard and was both feared and pitied. As a source of physical and moral contagion, she was separate from respectable society and her clients were often regarded as victims. A way of tempering her independence and of denying her sexuality was to turn her into a victim and an object of pity. A popular image of the prostitute was of a working class young woman seduced by an upper class profligate man. Middle class men could be exonerated by this image and it could allow middle class women to become involved in rescue work. Moral corruption amongst the upper classes gave more credence to the economic and political growth of middle class power.

The image of the prostitute also became one of a younger woman as the century progressed, thus emphasizing her powerlessness. Stead's revelations in 'The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon' in 1886, drew massive public attention to the plight of the young working class girl and her possible ensnarement into prostitution. For reformers the 1880s brought the focus onto prevention rather than rescue and an interest in adolescent rather than adult sexuality. The rise in the number of clubs, it has been argued, was linked to the desire to train the young and innocent in 'sexual

repression.'<sup>1</sup> However this is a very twentieth century view. Reformers were more likely to have seen themselves as protecting the girls from male abuse, degradation and death. They saw their work as enabling all women to achieve the high moral standard which was seen as theirs by virtue of their gender. Middle class women were spurred on to express their solidarity with working women, identifying with them as sexual victims and they felt particularly concerned that the perpetrators of sexual crimes were privileged men.

In seeking to protect girls, the reformers imposed a code on them which assumed adolescent dependency and which denied the girls' own social customs. The language of the reformers is an indicator of their attitude: Matheson describes the girls as 'like big children', the Hoxton club refers to these 'little sisters of ours', and the Church Army called them 'childwomen'.<sup>2</sup> The concerned and caring nature of the reformers who provided moral guidance brought a new kind of power to the middle classes as these 'social explorers' colonized the working class.<sup>3</sup> However, some of the voices were those of middle class women who were clearly blaming men for the degeneration of English womanhood through a discourse of religion and philanthropy. Women were thus able to take part in the public, male dominated political debate about gender relations.<sup>4</sup>

A woman who was very active in seeking to regenerate the nation's morals was Ellice Hopkins. In the 1870s she set up the Ladies Association for

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<sup>1</sup> J. Walkowitz, Prostitution in Victorian Society, Cambridge, 1980, p.246.

<sup>2</sup> E. Cadbury et al, Women,s Work and Wages, 1906, p. 241. Girls' Guild of Good Life Annual Report 1892-93, p.11. The Church Army Review, Aug., 1908, p.5.

<sup>3</sup> L. Nead, Myths of Sexuality, Oxford, 1988, p. 150.

<sup>4</sup> F. Mort, Dangerous Sexualities: Medico and Moral Politics in England since 1830, 1987.

Friendless Girls and formed the White Cross Army, an Anglican social purity organization which worked amongst men to raise their consciousness about sexual behaviour. She was a devout Anglican who was appalled at the degradation of the 'divine ideal of Womanhood' in a Christian country.<sup>5</sup> She thought that middle class women could help working class women to bring up the 'young of another generation to reverence womanhood' and that it was necessary for woman of all classes to combine... 'from duchess to charwoman' in the realization of a 'common womanhood' and 'common motherhood'.<sup>6</sup> Middle class women could give guidance, not from any merit but because their material circumstances enabled them to be 'nicer and more particular'.<sup>7</sup> She felt close to working class women: 'we would be like them but for circumstance'<sup>8</sup> and declared that she would not recognize a class of 'our own sisters set apart for moral and physical destruction'.<sup>9</sup>

Ellice Hopkins much admired Josephine Butler who worked successfully for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, laws which had endorsed the double sexual standard. This unequal standard was not the standard of Christ and Butler spoke forcefully about the lasciviousness and licentiousness of men's behaviour.<sup>10</sup> Other women's rights activists wrote in a similar vein in writing about the double standard. The pioneer woman doctor, Elizabeth Blackwell, claimed that 'the great

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<sup>5</sup> J.E Hopkins, A Plea for the Wider Action of the Church of England, 1879, preface.

<sup>6</sup> J. E. Hopkins, On the Early Training of Girls and Boys, 1883, preface and p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> J. E. Hopkins, *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> J. E. Hopkins, A Wider Plea, p.24.

<sup>9</sup> J. E. Hopkins, Ladies Association for the Care of the Friendless Girl, 1878, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> J. Butler, The Hour Before Dawn, 1882, pp. 26-28.

truth that women are now learning, is the necessity that 'every man should be chaste' and that it was men who were the cause of the creation of the 'outcast group of degraded women'.<sup>11</sup> Women's rights activists used the argument of the female victim as a way of talking about male power but they also got support from male-dominated groups like the National Vigilance Society and the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women and from various church groups. Socialists also condemned prostitution and laid the blame on the economic condition of women and the licentiousness of the ruling class. There were differences of opinion on how far the law should be used to enforce social purity with some feminists being disturbed by the repressive measures used against prostitutes as a result of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885.

It is against this background of public debate that various girls' clubs were formed in the late nineteenth century. The clubs could physically protect the girls by offering space from 'temptations' and could provide moral guidance and 'example' which would influence their dress, behaviour and values. The clubs set out to re-make femininity in accordance with middle class norms of 'pure womanhood'. Whether the girls subscribed to this notion or wanted to be protected will be taken up at various points.

As already discussed, club workers frequently commented upon the girls' dress and street behaviour. This unease was probably related to attitudes to the prostitute who was a public woman and whose 'love of finery' set her apart from respectable women. Indeed 'love of finery' was related to moral ruin in nineteenth century social discourse and was seen by some as a cause of prostitution. In evidence to the Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Acts (1871) a Portsmouth

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<sup>11</sup> E. Blackwell, Purchase of Women. The Great Economic Blunder, 1887, p.40.



Chaplain claimed that as soon as a 'girl' gave 'up the intention to do right', 'she commences to decorate and adorn herself'. Another chaplain asserted that 'the temptation to go on the streets is due to some extent to dress'.<sup>12</sup>

Emma Roberts of the YWCA listed the factory girls as one above the 'fallen' in class hierarchy<sup>13</sup> and the transition from factory girl to street walker is explicitly made in Elizabeth Gaskell's fictional Mary Barton. Although writing about an earlier period, the image of Esther helped to establish a view of the factory girl against which 'respectable' girls sought to distance themselves. Esther, a factory girl, spent money on dress and the male protagonist, John Barton warned her

Esther, I see what you'll do with your artifices and fly away veil and stopping out when honest women are in their beds; you'll be a street walker.<sup>14</sup>

His warnings came true: Esther, who wanted to be a lady was seduced and abandoned and became a prostitute. When she returned to see honest Mary she 'took off her finery' and put on a suit of clothes 'befitting the wife of a working man'. This suit of clothes 'had a sanctity to the eyes of the street walker, as being the appropriate garb of that happy class to which she could never never more belong.'<sup>15</sup>

Clothes were a clear marker of respectability and moral seriousness. Ruskin urged women to obey the

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<sup>12</sup> M. Valverde, 'The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Women in Nineteenth Century Social Discourse, Victorian Studies, vol. 32, no. 2, winter, 1989, p. 176, p.177.

<sup>13</sup> L. Moor, Girls of Yesterday, 1910.

<sup>14</sup> E. Gaskell, Mary Barton, 1848, reprint 1970, p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.292.

Bible, dress plainly and not be 'mad for finery'.<sup>16</sup> The working class girl in her best clothes seemed very close to prostitution or to loose living. Working class sexual mores and customs were also subject to misinterpretation and it is possible that 'chastity' and 'prostitution' did not have the same meaning for the different classes. Walkowitz cites Harriet Hicks who was unclear about the term prostitute. She was an ex-prostitute who was now living with one man. When asked if she was still a prostitute she replied, 'No, only with one man'.<sup>17</sup> In her study of rescue homes in Glasgow, Mahood claims that the authorities did not always distinguish between prostitutes, mill girls, unescorted girls and unmarried mothers. All girls' street behaviour at Bank holidays was described as promiscuous. The authorities of the Glasgow Lock Hospital defined a prostitute as 'consorting with more than one man' although only one in ten of the inmates subscribed to this definition.<sup>18</sup>

For working class girls, cheap finery was not connected to their sexual behaviour. Aware that for a short time in their lives that they had a little money to spend on themselves, they chose to emulate ladies of leisure in the few hours they had at their disposal. Their clothes were a way of brightening their lives and an expression of their (short-lived) independence before marriage. Their noisy street behaviour was not necessarily an indicator of promiscuity and whilst the working classes may have had lenient attitudes to sex before marriage, it was generally preferred that pregnant girls did marry. It is possible that the girls did not feel the need of protection as they were in control of their relationships and had differing

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<sup>16</sup> J. Ruskin, The Crown of Wild Olive, 1866, p. 189.

<sup>17</sup> J. Walkowitz, Prostitution, p. 203.

<sup>18</sup> L. Mahood, The Magdalenes, 1990, p. 71.

attitudes to sex and respectability.

The idea of protection continued throughout the period. The image of the vulnerable working class female remained in Edwardian England and during the inter-war years. William Stead who had sensationalized the issue in the 1880s [see Chapter One] was still remembered nearly fifty years later as the following example shows.

In 1928, the Girls' Guild of Good Life, Hoxton, laid a stone for the building of a girls' hostel. This club which had been in existence since the mid 1880s had been campaigning for a hostel for over eleven years. The stone was set by Estelle Stead in memory of her father whom she claimed as having 'inspired the founding of the Girls' Guild'.<sup>19</sup> Estelle was on very close terms with her father and wrote an affectionate biography of him soon after his death on the Titanic when she was in her thirties.<sup>20</sup> She continued his interest in Spiritualism and also edited his journal the Review of Reviews, for a few years after his death. During her editorship, she published reprints of her father's articles, keeping him very much alive in the public's mind. Stead had indeed, been on the Council of this club in its early years but the early reports contain very little reference to him or his interest in child prostitution or white slavery. This latter issue, the enforced prostitution of innocent girls, was a subject of great concern amongst reformers from the 1880s onwards. What is interesting about the club is that concern is most explicit during the 1920s. According to the 1926 Annual Report, white slavery was 'always...going on in underground ways'. Girls were

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<sup>19</sup> E. Stead, Girls' Guild of Good Life, Annual Report, 1928 on the occasion of laying the hostel's Foundation stone, 18 Oct., 1928. Held at Hackney Local History Library.

<sup>20</sup> E. Stead, My Father, 1913.

nearly ensnared from the streets of Hoxton:

one day one of our members, a slim pretty girl came to see me and said that a foreign-looking man had tried to make her unconscious while she waited for a bus. He had flicked a handkerchief under her umbrella, the scent of which made her feel faint.<sup>21</sup>

The same report warns girls to be wary of touring companies which might be a cover for enforced prostitution. This is an interesting story in that it also had currency during the earlier period before the First World War. Florence Booth of the Salvation Army had warned of the dangers of theatrical companies. 'Young women and girls' were enticed into French music-halls and were expected 'not only to dance but to make themselves agreeable to visitors'.<sup>22</sup> Estelle Stead was herself an actress during this period and had her own touring company and one wonders if she would have been able to substantiate this.

During this pre-war period, the Criminal Amendment Act which was concerned to legislate against white slavery, was passed in 1912 as a result of agitation by feminist and social purity groups. Elizabeth Robins, a former actress, writer and feminist tersely commented that the passing of the Bill 'owed more to the death of Stead than to concern about the abiding horror of women's lives.'<sup>23</sup>

During the agitation, there were many white slave narratives, some purporting to be factual and some fictional, on both sides of the Atlantic. Olive Malvery, who devoted an entire book to the subject in 1912, cited the case of an English girl who had been taken to the Argentine by a 'so called theatrical agent' and was expected to lead a 'bad life'. Olive Malvery claimed that she personally knew cases of 'girls being

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<sup>21</sup> Girls' Guild of Good Life, Annual Report, 1926, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> F. Booth, The Times, 17 Feb. 1909.

<sup>23</sup> E. Robins, Way Stations, 1913.

cajoled into going to so called 'theatrical engagements' in Paris.<sup>24</sup> Malvery's book is full of stories of procurement but her interest was not eccentric. Elizabeth Robins wrote a very successful novel on the subject. Where Are You Going to ...? (1913) is the story of two middle class sisters who were lured into a London brothel. One sister escaped but the other was never found. The Manchester Men's League for Women's Suffrage recommended this book to a Manchester girls' club in 1916.<sup>25</sup> There are also other publications by various other writers with titles like In The Grip of the White Trader (c1907-13) and Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls (1910) which emphasized girls being 'lured', 'trapped' and 'ensnared'.<sup>26</sup> Foreign pimps were generally seen to be the culprits but Mormons were also accused of enticing women to Utah.<sup>27</sup> American literature was also full of stories which depicted a world in which women mysteriously disappeared.<sup>28</sup>

The issue of white slavery was used by many suffragists as ammunition in their arguments for the Vote. Christabel Pankhurst was quick to blame the government for being complicit in its degradation of women as it allowed 'houses' which serviced the Army in India. Male supporters of women's suffrage also linked white slavery with the Vote. The Awakener (1914), the paper of the Men's Society for Women's Rights carried stores of drugged chocolates and the dangers of picture

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<sup>24</sup> O. Malvery, The White Slave Market, 1912.

<sup>25</sup> F. Montgomery, "Women who Dids, and all that kind of thing..." Male Perceptions of 'Wholesome' Literature' in C. Parker (ed.), Gender, Politics and Sexuality, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> anon., In the Grip of the White Trader, n.d., c1907-1913. E. Bell, Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls or War on the White Slave Trade, Canada?, 1911.

<sup>27</sup> Girls Club Journal, May, 1909.

<sup>28</sup> A. Meil Hobson, Uneasy Virtue, New York, 1987, p. 200.

palaces. They viewed W.T.Stead as a martyr and enthusiast. White Slavery was viewed by some men as a 'stain on England's honour'.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of all the lurid stories, historians have argued that the actual incidents were small in number and that some of the girls and women were not unwilling victims.<sup>30</sup> The idea of a young girl in need of protection was a very powerful one. Meil Hobson argues that the images of sexual exploitation were ways of 'comprehending the changing social landscape'.<sup>31</sup>

Olive Malvery did not only confine her concern to writing she also put her ideas into practice. She set up hostels for women in the West End during the pre-war period as she believed girls in London had to face many dangers: 'there were prowling about creatures of prey, more dangerous and terrible than any wild beast.'<sup>32</sup>

Olive Malvery was also a friend of Sara Rae, the founder of the Girls Guild of Good Life in Hoxton. This club had a room named after Malvery and the 1914 Annual Report contained an article devoted to her memory. It is quite possible that she influenced the demand for a hostel in Hoxton. A building fund was set up for the hostel with Estelle Stead on the committee. The first donation was received from the Queen in 1917 but it took eleven years before the building was under way. The laying of the stone, dedicated to the memory of W.T.Stead, also occasioned the publication of poems in the 1928 Annual Report. These poems remembered Stead's 'exposures' of the 1880s. One of them claimed that '... women bless his name/ Through who chivalry deliverance came' and that Stead

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<sup>29</sup> Excelsior, no. 10, Nov. 1912.

<sup>30</sup> J. Walkowitz, Prostitution.

<sup>31</sup> B. Meil Hobson, Uneasy Virtue, p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> O. Malvery, The White Slave Market, p. 325.

Assailed strongholds of rampant vice  
Until at length God gave the victory  
And law protecting British girls  
From those who sought to traffic in their shame.<sup>33</sup>

In the minds of reformers there was a strong line of continuity between the mid 1880s and the late 1920s. The need for accommodation was 'greater than ever' claimed the Building Fund Committee 1920-3. The honouring of W.T. Stead may also have had a practical purpose as the W.T. Stead Memorial Fund gave a donation to the hostel.

During the inter-war years interest in the issue of legal protection of girls took the form of agitation around the Criminal Amendment Act, 1922 which raised the age of consent to sixteen but also allowed men under twenty three to have reasonable cause to think that a girl was over sixteen. Feminists, such as Alison Neilans, campaigned throughout the period for equal laws for both sexes. She was concerned that women should be protected but insisted that girls should not be criminalized. Like the nineteenth century campaigners, she argued for a single standard of chastity. Other British activity in this period was around the removal of State licensed prostitutes abroad.

The Hoxton Hostel was closed in 1934, only 5 years after its opening, in spite of 'inadequate housing in the locality'.<sup>34</sup> It is likely that the organizers were out of touch with the needs of the girls. The Jewish hostel connected with Lily Montagu's club in Soho closed in 1919 because girls preferred lodgings. Local girls preferred to live with family or friends presumably because of the amount of freedom accorded to them. The hostel proved to be too expensive for factory girls - a shared room or single cubicle with full board was

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<sup>33</sup> Guild of Good Life, Annual report, 1928, p. 43, p.45.

<sup>34</sup> Typescript of Mayor's speech, 13 June, 1929.

twenty-one shillings a week. Business or professional girls were not attracted to the hostel because of the rough area.<sup>35</sup> References were also required and it seems that homeless girls who needed shelter were not catered for as it was 'impossible to mix the usual girls of that class and those who are residents of the Hostel'.<sup>36</sup> Estelle Stead gave up interest in the work and in 1935 opened a guest house with a friend in Herne Bay.<sup>37</sup>

White Slavery stories were powerful ways of describing unequal class and gender relations. They were ways in which middle class women could quite legitimately attack male power as those trafficking in women were 'other' men. They could uphold female purity as women of their own class were not usually victims. All women could be pure if it was not for the behaviour of men who were able to exploit girls and women in a vulnerable economic position. Middle class women were quite possibly aware that their protected home life was fragile as they lacked independent means and so could identify with the 'victims' of white slavery. The younger the female the more the image of the victim could be accentuated. The impulse to protect the girls meant a denial of female sexuality, control of one class over another and the enforcement of a single code of sexual restraint. As middle class daughters were carefully controlled so should working class girls be regulated. Middle class women were 'expert' in providing a good moral home and so could feel confident in extending their expertise. Seeking to protect working class girls did not challenge their own class position, in fact it affirmed it. The appeals of womanhood across the classes obscured the class

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<sup>35</sup> Guild of Good Life Annual reports, 1932, 1932.

<sup>36</sup> Guild of Good Life, Annual Report, 1931, p 7.

<sup>37</sup> Correspondence with W. K. Stead, Sept. 1932.



divisions on which society was based. However, as the example of the Hoxton hostel shows, working class girls did not always take up the offers of protection on middle class terms.

Girls were seen to need protection from men but they also needed to be protected from themselves. The First World War highlighted this 'problem'. Middle class observers were concerned about the behaviour of girls with the service men. Miss Townsend of the GFS said it was a time of 'grave moral danger'<sup>38</sup> and the YWCA reported that a large number of girls were being affected 'indescribably by the presence of troops in many Centres'.<sup>39</sup> It was imperative, they reported, to save them from the 'dangers of the time and make them a positive power for purity and temperance.' It was important to provide 'moral support for girls and women who [were] in danger of succumbing to excitement and unhealthy influence of the times.' The YWCA argued that girls clubs and the Girls Guides for fourteen to eighteen year olds should be extended to provide the 'discipline they sorely need'. By 1915 it was acknowledged that girls would go out with soldiers and that the only warm place where they could be together was the pub which was obviously undesirable. Some saw the girls indulging in 'innocent fun'<sup>40</sup> but the Evening Standard found the girls mischievous and irresponsible and saw the soldiers as 'victims'.<sup>41</sup> The National Union of Women Workers formed patrols whose job it was to control the girls on the streets. An article appeared

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<sup>38</sup> Miss Townsend, Quarterly meeting of the GFS, Bristol, Oct. 1914. Cutting in the Gertrude Tuckwell Collection. Held at the Trades Union Congress Archive, London.

<sup>39</sup> YWCA, Central Committee for Training Girls in Military Centres, 1914.

<sup>40</sup> Yorkshire Evening Post, 16 Feb. 1915.

<sup>41</sup> Evening Standard, 7 April 1915.

in The Shield suggesting that the patrols could be involved in providing clubs where the girls could bring the soldiers for games and refreshments. The girls could achieve the desired status of 'walking out' with a man in uniform in controlled surroundings.<sup>42</sup> An account of one such club followed with the comment that it was the girls who were difficult to manage as the men were in training and such training helped to work off their energy, whereas girls were subjected to repressive training in their workplace.

By 1916 mixed clubs were pronounced as successful. Three had been set up in the London area at Crystal Palace, Waterloo and Hounslow. By 1918, two clubs were opened in Woolwich called Comrades and Kitchener. Girls had to give two references to become members and the men had to give their regimental number or their ship's name. The aim was to save the men from the 'horrors of the street.'<sup>43</sup>

These mixed clubs were designed more to ensure a disciplined army than to protect the girls. All these clubs closed down by 1920 due to lack of funds or premises.<sup>44</sup> Return to peace time meant that the pre-war segregated clubs were considered adequate for the boys' and girls' needs although, as is discussed later, an interest in mixed clubs developed during the interwar years.

It was suggested above that perhaps the males were in need of protection. This was certainly the view of some of the male club leaders throughout much of the period. Clubs were places where manly pursuits, manly ideals, manly qualities could exist within male

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<sup>42</sup> NUWW Occasional Paper, no.66, Mar 1915, reprinted from The Shield. Held at the National Council of Women archive, London.

<sup>43</sup> NUWW occasional papers, no.70, 1916, no. 73, 1916, no. 77, 1918.

<sup>44</sup> NUWW occasional paper, no. 77, 1918.

comradeship. They should be places where boys could be protected from 'precocious' girls.<sup>45</sup>

Basil Henriques organized Rosa Loewe to set up a girls' club because boys would need suitable girls. A boy 'should be able to mix with female society whose standard and outlook were not unlike his own'.<sup>46</sup> Another club worker, Russell, thought that girls should attend clubs so that they would come up to the ideals set by males: 'ultimately girls and women in every rank of society are very much what boys and men make them'.<sup>47</sup> This view was shared by Lewis who thought that years of hard work among the youths would be wasted if club boys were 'carried captive by the rude charms of Pecksy, Flopsy and Dicksy from the factory' with their 'frizzled puffs of hair enclosing their ears, with betting books in their pockets and their recognized corner in the public bar. A girls' club would have a "hallmark of A1 quality"'.<sup>48</sup> Lewis' comments are interesting in that whilst he shares with female observers the distaste for certain hair styles, his observations about gambling are not echoed in female comments. Female observers did not insult girls as Lewis did and did not share the male view stated above that males took the lead in moral development. Maude Stanley who ran a boys' club before the girls' club wrote:

is it not by the women's influence [...] that the men are able to leave their homes, and is it not through the homes of England [...] that both men

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<sup>45</sup> W. Eagar, Making Men, 1953. B. Henriques, Indiscretions of a Warden, 1937, p. 82. M.A. Lewis, A Club for Boys. Why Not Open One?, 1905, p. 14, p.15.

<sup>46</sup> B. Henriques, Indiscretions, p. 79.

<sup>47</sup> C. E. Russell and L. Rigby, Lads' Clubs, 1932. A revised edition of C. E. Russell and L Rigby, Working Lads' Clubs, 1908.

<sup>48</sup> M. A. Lewis, A Club for Boys, p. 14, 15.

and women are made better citizens?<sup>49</sup>

Not all men subscribed to the view of male moral superiority. Charles Booth commented in his survey that 'girls' clubs constituted a 'far more important social movement than boys' clubs'.<sup>50</sup>

Within the protective space, the girls could experience a discipline which it was hoped would change their street behaviour and would help to develop their moral sense and enable them to take responsibility for future generations. The nature of this 'discipline' is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>49</sup> M. Stanley, Working Women's Conference, (later NUWW), 1891, p.67.

<sup>50</sup> C. Booth, (ed.) Life and Labour of the People in London, final vol., 1903, p.79.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### DISCIPLINE

The aim of many of the clubs was to provide 'discipline' for the girls. Discipline was important in the sense that girls had to be made to behave themselves and to do as they were told. Discipline was also important in that the girls had to know how to discipline their minds and bodies in order to become good workers, wives and mothers. Discipline was needed to help the girls develop spiritually. Neatness of dress, punctuality and other outward signs all indicated a disciplined mind receptive to good character development.

Different clubs emphasized discipline differently: to some like the Deptford Girls Club it seems to have been of paramount importance whereas at the West Central Club there is hardly any mention of it. In places it is hard to be clear on the distinction between discipline, protection and empowerment. Certain kinds of dress were not allowed for the girls' protection, certain activities were considered a good discipline and could lead to girls empowering themselves. The categories overlap but even amongst clubs which seem the most liberal, discipline is always present.

The Anglican Girls' Friendly society was one organization which stressed discipline. Mary Townsend, who started the GFS and remained President for many years, was wary of what she called 'false independence'.<sup>1</sup> The right kind of independence which she advocated was that both employers and employees should accept that they were servants of God. Girls should be encouraged to have the 'right spirit' towards

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<sup>1</sup> M. Townsend, The Girls' Friendly Society, 1879, p 33. Held at Girls' Friendly Society Headquarters, London.

work - to make something 'noble of the work'.<sup>2</sup> Throughout there is an emphasis on girls accepting their station in life. Praise was given to members in a large factory who 'warded off a strike'.<sup>3</sup> The Society hoped that the girls would gain by contact with the Associates who would provide a 'friendly word', 'motherly kindness' and a touch of 'sisterly sympathy' in order for friendship to develop 'even when rank and station were at opposite ends of the scale'. Associates were to encourage girls to save rather than spend money on finery and to bear a grievance rather than make much of it. The GFS made it quite clear at the outset that 'no interference with the prerogatives of employers is, or ever could be considered.'<sup>4</sup> Girls were encouraged to be loyal to employers by being given prizes for long service. At a Whitechapel club, Elizabeth Thorpe was awarded a dress for six years in one place and Caroline Evans was awarded one for five years.<sup>5</sup>

Contact with ladies was seen as one of the chief reasons for the success of the work. Lady Helen Stewart commented that the girls' manners at a club in Hoxton which had 'heretofore [been] so rude and ungentle' had changed because of the association 'with those more refined and better educated than themselves'.<sup>6</sup>

Girls were encouraged to see their future role as wives and mothers and as such purity, piety and thrift were encouraged. Mrs Townsend wrote of the 'clinging devotion of the wife'<sup>7</sup> and saw women as the central role

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<sup>2</sup> M. Townsend, Friendly Leaves, Jan. 1877, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Friendly Leaves, Sept. 1883, p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> The GFS, 1876, pp. 29-32.

<sup>5</sup> GFS Advertiser, June 1882, p. 149.

<sup>6</sup> GFS report, Work on Factory Girls, 1879.

<sup>7</sup> M. Townsend, Thoughts on the Marriage Service, 1892.

in providing a sound moral atmosphere in the home.<sup>8</sup> Ruskin's Sesame and Lilies, which had elevated women's moral and domestic role over thirty years before, was still on the GFS reading list in 1912.

Concern was voiced about the girls' reading habits and they were warned not to read medical books unless given by a trusted friend and not to read police reports. Stories 'of ladies in priceless furs in restaurants' were never 'improving'. What was improving, apart from Ruskin, was Louisa Alcott, Mrs Henry Wood and interestingly, George Eliot.<sup>9</sup>

The GFS wanted to help girls see the nobility in their work as it was work which served Christ. A good female worker was industrious, pious, chaste, thrifty and temperate. These qualities were also the virtues of a wife and mother. To encourage these qualities the GFS stood for: 'Rule and regulation, Restraint and Control - a framework around the lantern which prevents the flame doing damage'.<sup>10</sup>

Temperance was also emphasized by the Girls' Guild of Good Life in Hackney. It was run by Sara Rae who was the wife of the secretary of the National Temperance League. Signing the pledge was a condition of membership and there was strictly no dancing. Girls used to 'romping' found 'parlour meetings irksome'. If new workers were on the door, order had to be regulated by a Mr. Stringer as girls were known to 'stampede'.<sup>11</sup>

One of the earliest London girls' clubs also thought it important for girls to be happy with their station in life. Maude Stanley who opened the Greek Street Club in Soho in 1880, wanted to 'ennoble' girls

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<sup>8</sup> Friendly Leaves, Oct. 1879, p. 220.

<sup>9</sup> Friendly Leaves, Mar. 1906, Jan. 1912, Sept. 1912.

<sup>10</sup> Friendly Leaves, 1903, p. 147.

<sup>11</sup> Girls Guild of Good Life, Annual reports, 1892,3.  
Girls Club News, April 1915.

so that they in turn could ennoble the rest of their class.

Maude was the daughter of an aristocratic family whose London home was off Piccadilly. Her parents were active Liberals and her mother Henrietta was a prominent activist in women's education and was one of the founders of Girton. Before Maude went into Girls' Club work she had been involved in work with boys in the Five Dials area of central London and had been a visitor and Guardian in the St. Anne's district of Soho. Writing anonymously about her work at this stage of life, she argues clearly for a well informed visitor who should have a wide knowledge of social matters. A real knowledge of the poor should lead to admiration as well as blame or pity. A visitor/club worker's role was to bring 'real beauty and true nobleness of life... and so 'preserve [the working classes] from brutality'.<sup>12</sup> Convinced of her class superiority, she felt that 'the poor are mostly separated from everything that is noble, cultivated and refined' and that she and her kind could 'bring to them beauty, grandeur and refinement'.<sup>13</sup>

When she started her girls'club, she found the girls 'hardly civilized' and she needed to establish discipline. The exact nature of this discipline is not revealed but girls had to produce references to join the club, punctuality was insisted upon and undue familiarity with the lady helpers was not allowed. Club members had the chance to stay with ladies in their country homes but had to be helped with their wardrobe, had to be reminded about cleanliness and were warned about not being 'flighty'. Activities at the club included literacy, numeracy, singing, needlework and drill - the latter was thought to be particularly good for 'rough' girls. There were also lectures on topics

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<sup>12</sup> M. Stanley, Work Among Five Dials, 1878, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> M. Stanley, Work, p. 148, p. 151.



like physiology, nursing, history and Greek heroines.<sup>14</sup> Maude Stanley's club was possibly the first of its kind and had a strong influence on other clubs. Maude formed the London Club Union to which at least twenty nine other clubs were affiliated in 1886. Club conferences were held at the Greek Street club. Maude lectured on Girls' clubs and opened another club in Walworth. She welcomed the formation of the National Organization of Girls' Clubs in 1912 seeing it as a way of publicising 'our great movement of clubs'.<sup>15</sup>

One of the instigators of the NOGC was Lily Montagu who had been in club work since 1893. Of a younger generation, Lily Montagu opened the West Central Jewish Girls Club in Soho some thirteen years after Maude Stanley when she was only nineteen. The two women exchanged ideas about club work and the Jewish club ran similar activities plus French, German, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew and English as a Second Language.

Lily was from a very wealthy Anglo-Jewish family and like many of the Anglo-Jewish Establishment was concerned about the welfare of the newly arrived immigrant families. In the late nineteenth century, Jewish women were beginning to make their mark in philanthropy and Lily remembers the 1890s as a 'time of great changes' in which women were no longer content with small home duties and that 'there was a need to justify existence by some useful effort'.<sup>16</sup> Lily Montagu wanted to share what she possessed with others - an English education and her Jewish faith. She found that girls did not have a sense of responsibility, that they had a ready desire for amusement and that their

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<sup>14</sup> M. Stanley, Clubs for Working Girls, 1890.

<sup>15</sup> M. Stanley, Girls Club News, May 1912, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> L. Montagu, Faith of a Jewish Woman, 1943, p. 13.

faith was of the 'flimsiest' kind.<sup>17</sup> She hoped the club would counter the attractions of low dance halls and later the cinema. She found the girls 'horribly independent' and thought that they needed 'well controlled amusement'.<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to discover if discipline was an issue at this club. Lily was certainly interested in club democracy and gave lectures on the value of girls' committees. A club worker Miss H.F. remembers the club between the wars as 'committee ridden'.<sup>19</sup> It seems Lily Montagu did insist that all members join a fellowship of prayer and she laid down rules on the club holiday in Littlehampton. Everyone had to be in by nine o'clock and she recalls much later that 'picking up strange acquaintances was one of the deadliest sins'.<sup>20</sup> Mrs E.G. who grew up with the club did not remember any rules - 'you just obeyed Miss Lily'.<sup>21</sup> Lily Montagu thought it important to correct individualism and to stimulate self control and responsibility. She seems to have been effective by the power of her personality. Interviewees do not remember rules but talk of their love for 'Miss Lily' and her sister 'Miss Marian' and of their kindness. It has to be remembered that their memories have been filtered through the years and that Lily Montagu became a very important person within the Anglo-Jewish community. Lily Montagu, writing some time after the event glosses over the early club times at the club by saying that only one girl was ever rude to her. However, she does describe the difficulties she experienced when the club organized work rooms during the First World War. She had to pull

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<sup>17</sup> L. Montagu, Faith, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> L. Montagu, Girls' Club News, May 1913, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Miss H.F., 2 Feb. 1990.

<sup>20</sup> L. Montagu, Letter from the Club Mother, May 1953.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mrs E.G., 14 Jan. 1990.

girls away from throwing themselves into the arms of soldiers, prevent fights and had to deal with 'lurid language'.<sup>22</sup>

East End Jewish clubs are remembered, during the 1930s, as having rules even though the club leaders were admired and the clubs were popular. The main area which concerned club leaders between the wars was that of the girls' appearance and this caused most dissent among the members. Rose Henriques, of the Oxford and St. Georges Club is remembered for having strong views on the subject. One interviewee recalled her attitude to make-up - 'she said we were prostitutes, like the Aldgate ladies'.<sup>23</sup> Others referred to her as a prude and as old fashioned. She insisted that the girls wore hats and there is an amusing story about how this was negotiated:

a few of us would come in wearing a hat, immediately run into the cloakroom and throw a hat out of the window to girls waiting to come into the club. Thus every girl became a lady arriving wearing a hat but very unladylike going home without one.<sup>24</sup>

Rose Henriques' authority extended to the club's office administrator who was also made to wear a hat to work. Phyllis Gerson of Stepney Girls Club also disapproved of make-up but her approach was more low key: 'I used to say it wasn't very nice'.<sup>25</sup> [see Chapter Nine]

Old Brady Girls remember Miriam Moses, its manager, as being very strict: 'She ruled with a rod of iron'... I can remember to this day Miss Moses saying go

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<sup>22</sup> L. Montagu, My Club and I, 1944, p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> Conversation with Mrs G.O., 18 July, 1990.

<sup>24</sup> Celia Bulstroek, Fratres, Mar. 1990, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with P. Gerson, 30 July, 1990.

downstairs and wipe the lipstick off'.<sup>26</sup> They were not allowed to mix with boys according to one interviewee although another thought that mixing with boys was acceptable provided that they were supervised.<sup>27</sup> Miriam Moses extended her influence even to club mothers. She ran a club holiday especially for mothers of girl members to give them a rest. On holiday she kept the Jewish dietary laws even though they were not observed by everyone. Mrs M.C remembers her friend smuggling forbidden food into their room and hiding it under the bed. Even on outings to the West End, Miss Moses 'used to come with us to see if we behaved - she still thought we were her girls'.<sup>28</sup>

Rose Henriques was also strict with girls at camp. Mrs H. G. remembered it as a 'ruthless regime'. She was sent home from camp for breaking the rules and suffered verbal abuse from Rose Henriques who criticised her parents for being Socialist. Dress was still important at camp, Rosa Henriques insisted on the girls wearing thick black stockings with their camp tunic.<sup>29</sup>

Mrs H. G. also had problems because of her interest in communism but managed to sell the Young Communist paper unofficially at the club. Another club member who was active locally in the Labour Party described her relations with Rose as 'stormy'.<sup>30</sup> During the time of Mosley's fascist activity, Rose Henriques endorsed the Anglo-Jewish Establishment's suggested ban on the anti-fascist demonstration in Cable Street in 1936. Mrs H.G. and her brothers ignored this directive. Phyllis

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mrs. B.M. 18 Jan. 1991.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews with Mrs M.C. 14 Jan. 1991, Mrs A.S. 22 Feb. 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mrs. M.C. 14 Jan. 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Interviews with Mrs H.G. 18 July 1990, 5 Dec. 1990.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Mrs. C.D., 18 July 1990.

Gerson of Stepney Club had conflicting memories on this subject. She told me that she told the girls not to bother with demonstrations but in a previous interview, she said that she took as many girls as she could get into her car to hear Mosley: 'hundreds blocked his passage - it was a wonderful sight'.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to the above clubs, the Butler Street Club is remembered as being much less strict. From 1913, the club was run by an ex-member Florrie Passman, the daughter of an immigrant tailor. Florrie was very much of the same class as the girls. She is remembered as not minding about dress or make-up and for trying to get girls married off.<sup>32</sup> No one remembers prayers being compulsory. Memories of Florrie are no doubt coloured by her long presence in the East End and many may be remembering her in her older years. Nevertheless there is a general impression of her being easy-going and tolerant. [see Chapter Nine]

Catholic nuns who ran a club in Bow appeared, like Florrie Passman, to be fairly easy-going. A local priest commented in 1893 that: 'in the mutual relations between Sisters and the girls, affection takes place of restraints'.<sup>33</sup> Miss I.H. went to this club during the 1930s and does not remember any rules but felt that the nuns were very persuasive. 'The way they were - it come over to you'. She said she automatically avoided 'bad' conversation. The nuns did not approve of short skirts but she still wore them: 'I used to wear the shortest gym slip I could find. Sister used to say to me - is there anything to let down? I said no. [laughter].'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Interviews with Phyllis Gerson by S. Tannenbaum, 22 April, 1986, I. Dove, 30 July, 1990.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mrs B.D., 21 Aug. 1990.

<sup>33</sup> Richard O'Halloran, letter to the Times, 17 June 1893, p. 936.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Miss I.H., 24 May 1991.

She does not remember any restrictions on cosmetics but does not think that she or any of the girls wore make-up anyway.

Attached to this club was a hostel for business girls and a training home for servants. They were quite separate from each other. The hostel is not remembered as being restrictive. Both Sister P. and Sister M. lived there during the 1930s before they became nuns. As a teacher and a telephonist from middle class homes they probably expected certain regulations. They had to be in by ten p.m and 'wouldn't have taken a man up to your room'. They never wore make-up: 'it wasn't ladylike - those young women who did, didn't stay long'.<sup>35</sup>

Katherine Tennant who ran the Pedro Street Club in Hackney in the early thirties did not have any problems: 'I was an easy person, don't think I ever had any difficulties'.<sup>36</sup> Katherine, now Lady Elliott came from a wealthy family who mixed in government and aristocratic circles. She worked at the club after 'coming out'. After her marriage to a future government minister, she left the club but became active in girls' work at national level.

Discipline was seen as necessary to all clubs but with varying emphasis. Emmeline Pethick experienced no defiance or revolt when she joined Mary Neal at the West London Mission club in the 1890s. It seems that Mary had already quelled the girls who had torn down gas pipes and broken furniture. Emmeline believed that girls could be taught by precept and example rather than by moralizing.<sup>37</sup>

It was not uncommon for workers to experience

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Sisters P. and M., 17 May 1991.

<sup>36</sup> Conversation with Lady Elliott, July 1992.

<sup>37</sup> E. Pethick, 'Working Girls' Club', W. Reason, (ed.) University and Social Settlements, 1989.

difficulties during the first years of the club. Miss Baldwin recalls the noise, the turning out of gas and the girls calling out 'muffins' at 'the sound of a bell'.<sup>38</sup> Girls were fined 1/2d for rough language at the Acland Club where there were general difficulties in maintaining discipline.<sup>39</sup> Workers at St. George's Club, one of the clubs run by Bermondsey Settlement described the girls as 'difficult and uncivilized'.<sup>40</sup>

The Time and Talents Settlement, also in Bermondsey, experienced similar difficulties. It was 'not unknown' for strange objects to be thrown through club doors in the pre-1914 years.<sup>41</sup> Girls who were lively were expelled. Their liveliness consisted of 'waving arms and shouting like 'savages' or 'putting out the lights and knocking over forms'.<sup>42</sup> The workers had, in their view to discontinue jumble sales at one period as it was a temptation to steal.<sup>43</sup>

Kathleen Courtney, who was attempting to run the Daisy Club also in South London, experienced unruliness. Her friend, Maude Royden advised her that the only answer was to expel the trouble makers.<sup>44</sup> In her dealings with East End girls, Henrietta Barnett also experienced boisterous and uncooperative girls who turned off the gas, wrapped teachers in tablecloths and

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<sup>38</sup> Girls' Club News, June 1912, p.7.

<sup>39</sup> Acland Club, Annual Reports 1888-94. Held at Fawcett Library, London.

<sup>40</sup> St. Georges Club, Annual Report 1889. Held at the Greater London Record Office.

<sup>41</sup> Time and Talents Annual Report 1931.

<sup>42</sup> Time and Talents Scrapbook, 1901, 1904.

<sup>43</sup> Time and Talents E.C. minutes, Dec. 13 1906.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Maude Royden to Kathleen Courtney, 20 Jan. 1902.

fought amongst themselves.<sup>45</sup> Girls at the Maurice Hostel in Hackney were 'barbarous in their ways' and did not want prayers.<sup>46</sup>

Constance Maynard, who later became the principal of Westfield College, found factory girls rude. She used to attempt to read to them in their lunch hour but 'seemed to have no weapons to encounter their rudeness'.<sup>47</sup> In some cases the girls 'submitted to order' as a clerk who helped at a Factory Girls Club describes. The 'wildest' were expelled and the girls were allowed' to chat freely for a portion of the evening'. This suggests to me that there was a fairly tight rein kept on the girls but this clerk perceived the club as having 'hardly any rules'.<sup>48</sup> Another way of controlling the girls was by not allowing them to become full members of the club until the leaders were certain of the girls' behaviour as was the case with the Heartsease Club run by the Church Army. The Army also encouraged discipline outside the club by giving rewards to girls for long service in their jobs.

Flora Freeman, an active club worker and contributor to the Girls Club Journal in the first decade of the twentieth century, thought that a club worker had to be strict and patient. She advocated girls' committees in some cases but insisted upon certain rules. Every member had to attend a religious class and each evening ended with prayers because her club was a 'big family which, of course, as a well regulated household must have Family Prayers.' She also

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<sup>45</sup> H. Barnett, Canon Barnett, His Life, Work and Friends, 1918.

<sup>46</sup> The Commonwealth, June 1898, p.182.

<sup>47</sup> Constance Maynard, unpublished autobiography, 1882, p.119. Held in the Westfield College Archive, Queen Mary and Westfield College, London.

<sup>48</sup> The Enterprise Magazine, no. 13, May 1913.



insisted on eye contact when shaking hands and one girl should not remain seated whilst the other was standing. Flora had particular difficulty with 'rough' girls. Because they 'rushed around shrieking' she did not allow dancing. The girls, in her view, needed to be kept sitting with plenty of singing. They never stopped eating so could not be allowed food. Rough girls could not have girls' committees.<sup>49</sup>

The term 'rough girls' was never defined and it seems that there was a common assumption about its meaning. It applied to girls in casual trades and sometimes to those working in factories. They seem to be the noisiest and the most independent.

Discipline was a continual problem at Deptford Girls Club. This club was financed initially by the Deptford Fund, a voluntary group of West End Society who were moved to alleviate the conditions of the poor in Deptford. The Royal Patron was the Duchess of Albany and the Deptford Fund became the Albany Trust. The girls' club was just one of many of the Albany's activities. It was originally opened in 1895 for girls who worked in Deptford Cattle Market and were known as 'gut girls'. The work involved cleaning out the entrails of slaughtered animals and was relatively well paid at ten and thirteen shillings a week. This work was regarded by some as rough, unwomanly and it was thought that the refining influences of the club would help the girls find more womanly and gracious vocations.<sup>50</sup> The club was widened to include all local girls and continued well into the 1920s. Detailed reports of the club's activities have been kept by the first club secretary, Mrs Lamert until 1919. She reports nearly every month that behaviour had improved

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<sup>49</sup> F. Freeman, Religious and Social Work amongst Girls, 1901, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup> Daily Telegraph, 17 Sept. 1898.

suggesting that discipline was a problem. When the club moved into a larger hall in 1906, it was thought that stricter discipline could be maintained as teachers could 'move between the forms and so get at any trouble makers'.<sup>51</sup>

At various times, the girls were reported as naughty and restless, they talked, giggled, were troublesome and insubordinate. On one outing to Gravesend in 1901, some girls 'broke ranks' and were found in a pub. Although they sat through an account of the lessons to be learned from the life and death of the King, they booed the hymns. There was particular trouble at the Bible class where on one occasion, the girls were suspended. The whole club was warned that the Albany was a 'free gift' and entry was a privilege and not a right.<sup>52</sup> As new girls joined the club, the problem was never solved. At a summer treat at Charlton House, the home of Lord and Lady Maryon Wilson, conduct was good until flowers were distributed when there was 'disorder and disobedience'.<sup>53</sup>

There was a view, not only at Deptford, that the girls needed to be 'tamed'. According to the Countess Compton, a Church of England philanthropic worker, the girls were 'rougner than the lads' and 'hopelessly defiant'. However they were won over by 'women's ingenuity, praise and gentleness'. They learned 'to mend clothes, make a tidy apron and to trim a hat'.<sup>54</sup>

It seems to be the case that 'rougner' girls needed more controlling and it was these girls who responded

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<sup>51</sup> Deptford Fund Annual Report, 1907, p.13. Held at Lewisham Local History Library.

<sup>52</sup> Deptford Fund E.C. minutes, Feb 22 1910.

<sup>53</sup> Deptford Fund E.C. Minutes, 15 July, 1913.

<sup>54</sup> Countess Compton, 'Ragged Schools', A. Burdett-Coutts, Womens Mission. Women's Work in Connection with the Church of England, 1893, p. 81.

least to rules. Club leaders liked to rely on their persuasive personalities to effect control but this was difficult in large clubs like the Albany. There was certainly a growing recognition among some leaders that too many rules were counter-productive. It was reported in the Girls' Club News that a speaker at the Southwark Women's Diocesan Conference in May 1914, said that 'repression should be limited and not thrust on [the girls]'. Some experienced leaders like Lily Montagu certainly felt that the ultimate aim was self-discipline and that club democracy was the way to achieve it. However middle class women did experience a culture clash in their initial dealings with working class girls and had difficulties in winning their confidence. They were certain, however, that the girls could only benefit by such contact and persisted in maintaining order so that worth while activities could be pursued. These activities would lead to a disciplining of the body, mind and spirit. It is to these activities we now turn.

As part of the process of discipline and as a way of dealing with the girls' leisure hours, certain recreational activities were considered desirable. This recreation was seen throughout the period as a counter to 'amusement'. It was also gender-specific as the activities were related to the girls' future roles within the working class family. Sport, for example, was far more available during the early part of the period for boys than for girls. This partly relates to the availability of sport for middle class girls - it was something that had to be fought for within middle class girls' education. It was also thought that working class boys needed to let off steam after work and so gymnastics, drill, boxing and outdoor games were prominent. Sport was considered important for boys as there was concern about their 'stunted growth' and

'underdeveloped bodies.'<sup>55</sup> Participation in sport was encouraged rather than gambling. Sport also served to attract boys to clubs. An active male club leader advised that boxing was essential for this reason but it had to be fought by certain rules which did not encourage boys to earn their living by boxing in pubs.<sup>56</sup> Although girls also worked in cramped conditions, it was thought necessary for them to calm down because they often exhibited wild and shrieking behaviour. Drill was the one physical activity promoted because it encouraged discipline of mind and body. Clubs differed about whether it was wise to provide dancing especially with 'rough' girls. As the twentieth century progressed, some clubs did provide table tennis, swimming, netball and rambles but sport was never as prominent in girls' clubs as it was in boys.

All the clubs of the early part of the period attempted to provide basic education. In addition, sewing was nearly always present in girls' clubs with woodwork in the boys. In the 1930s boys did 'Wireless' at the Brady Club. Girls at the Soho Club did wood carving. During the early part of the period, religious classes were advocated in most clubs but it was often thought that direct religion would deter rougher boys. Lewis, however, thought that 'juvenile paganism' must be tackled.<sup>57</sup> Boys' clubs, particularly Jewish Boys clubs, exhorted their members to loyalty and patriotism but there are no similar references found in the girls' club literature.

The form of recreation in girls' clubs varied between the 1880s and the 1930s, but the underlying ethos of discipline and improvement did not change. In

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<sup>55</sup> M. A. Lewis, A Club for Boys. Why Not Open One?, 1905, p.13.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

general, the Victorian clubs often supplemented the restricted school curriculum in literacy and sewing. The need for literacy declined but sewing in some form was present throughout the period. Most clubs recognized the need for physical recreation and offered drill. This gave way to a less regimented physical training during the 1930s when other aspects of physical culture were offered including a wide variety of games and rambling. The 1930s also saw some of the clubs embracing some aspects of popular culture which were deemed healthy. The journal of the National Council of Girls' Clubs, The Signpost, reviewed popular thrillers by authors like Clemance Dane, current films and plays. Whilst religious talks or services were thought of as essential in most clubs in the Victorian and Edwardian period, an opinion was voiced in 1928 that spiritual values should underline clubs' activities but that girls would not be attracted by a religious service.<sup>58</sup>

A late Victorian club which did attract girls to religious talks was the Deptford Girls Club already mentioned above. The club used the ever popular form of the magic lantern to illustrate 'The Life of our Lord' and other lectures. There were also other talks on religious matters which demonstrated the girls' ignorance on subject. Knowing nothing of Easter, they promised not to riot on Blackheath during the bank holiday.<sup>59</sup> Apart from religion, the main activities were singing and sewing. As the club grew, over a hundred girls would sit sewing on long forms in a large hall. Unlike other clubs, drill was not offered although dancing was introduced during the First World War. The girls were criticized for not being very

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<sup>58</sup> Editorial, Newsheet, Dec. 1928.

<sup>59</sup> Deptford Fund E.C. Minutes, 14 April 1896.

graceful at the tango or waltz.<sup>60</sup> There was also no interest in girls' industrial rights as in some other clubs during the Edwardian period. Domestic service was regarded as a very desirable occupation and the clubs' curriculum was designed to encourage the womanly qualities and habits thought necessary. These same qualities were also necessary for marriage.[see plates 16 and 17]

Sewing, cooking, singing and drill were on offer at what became the Leman Street Club. This Jewish club sought to provide the kind of recreational activities that were not possible in the tenement homes of the immigrants and to give the girls a chance of 'refinement' by contact with Anglo-Jewish ladies. Hebrew and Bible Study were also offered along with Jewish history. There is a sense that the contact with the ladies in this club was more important than the activities during the early years of the club. During the twentieth century, when lady volunteers proved harder to find, the activities widened to included tap dancing, table tennis, rambles and art.

The idea of wholesome recreation as a counter attraction to low amusement continued into the twentieth century. The early part of the century was a period of social reforms and investigation into the conditions of women's work. With the establishment of women factory inspectors, issues around health, pay and working conditions were very prominent in the minds of some reformers and new demands were being made upon the State for better provision for its workers. The number of girl workers - those aged fifteen to twenty five - was on the increase and comprised about half of the female working population.<sup>61</sup> The welfare of these workers was

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<sup>60</sup> Deptford Fund E.C. Minutes, June and Oct 1918, Oct. 1919.

<sup>61</sup> C. Collet, Women in Industry, 1911. B. Hutchins, Women in Modern History, 1915.

very much to the fore as those who who were involved in the new reforms were also concerned with club work.

Club work could help provide a means of self improvement as home and work conditions militated against it. This Edwardian period extended the Victorian 'problem' of the home to include the workplace. This workplace, particularly the factory, was seen as detrimental to the girls' moral welfare as the mixing of sexes allowed the girls to be subject to what today would be called sexual harassment. Girls complained that some men in authority were 'forward' and 'spoke as they didn't ought'.<sup>62</sup> Olive Malvery claimed that the girls complained about the foreman and would sometimes 'submit to foreman's wishes rather than lose their jobs. Girls were also mixed with married women whose talking was 'unfit for the ears of young girls'.<sup>63</sup> There were also temptations to drink as rum and gin were mixed with cakes and tea on birthdays.

The 'streets' provided the only amusement for the girls. This term used by middle class observers seems to have included the physical street itself, music halls, dance halls, novellettes, pubs and later cinemas. A contributor to The Girls Club News said that a 'fiery ordeal awaited many a light hearted girl'.<sup>64</sup> Reflecting back in the 1960s, Rose Henriques of Oxford and St Georges Jewish Club said that clubs had been necessary to counter the attractions of the 'fast growing world of sophisticated commercial entertainment'.<sup>65</sup> 'Girls', her husband Basil Henriques claimed, 'had a perverted,

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<sup>62</sup> G. Cadbury et al., Women's Work and Wages, 1906, p. 194.

<sup>63</sup> O. Malvery, The Soul Market, 1906, p. 195.

<sup>64</sup> A. C Stewart Wright, Girls Club News, Feb. 1913, p.6.

<sup>65</sup> Rose Henriques, Fifty Years in Stepney, printed version of a radio talk given in 1966.

colourful vista from the movies'.<sup>66</sup> Much earlier in the century, Lily Montagu worried about 'cinematographs'. At the 1912 National Union of Women Workers Conference in Liverpool, she thought the interest in them 'too acute to be lasting, though at the moment there was considerable danger of their interfering with the more intelligent recreation provided by the clubs'.<sup>67</sup> Lily was also concerned that girls at her Jewish club read 'mawkish novels' which promoted 'hysteria'.<sup>68</sup>

It was generally agreed that the working girl needed recreation but this was to be of a wholesome nature. Clubs could provide recreation as opposed to amusement. The nature of this recreation varied with the clubs and the period but it was essentially of an improving kind and took on a moral dimension. One measure of improvement was orderly and controlled behaviour. 'Pleasures' wrote a Miss Clifford 'should be quiet. Excitement should be discouraged and voices and laughter should be restrained'.<sup>69</sup> Singing, sewing, drill and drawing were activities which were not only of value in themselves but encouraged such character building qualities as patience and discipline. These activities all helped to improve the moral tone of the girls.

Singing, especially part singing, was not merely enjoyable but developed 'discipline, helpfulness, modesty and comradeship.'<sup>70</sup> Teachers had to be careful, however, that singing and dancing did not degenerate

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<sup>66</sup> B. Henriques, The Indiscretions of a Warden, 1937, p 82.

<sup>67</sup> Girls Club News, Feb. 1913, p 11.

<sup>68</sup> L. Montagu, 'Girl in the Background', E. Urwick, (ed.) Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities, 1904, p. 242.

<sup>69</sup> Time and Talents Scrapbook, Jan. 1907.

<sup>70</sup> Girls Club News, 1 Mar. 1912, p 3.



into a 'rowdy form of amusement'.<sup>71</sup> Swedish drill was not only good for the body but also improved the girls' 'moral capacity'. Standing upright 'eliminate[d] meanness'.<sup>72</sup> Drill encouraged 'patience, perseverance and mutual help' at the Beatrice Club in South London.<sup>73</sup> and it had done much to 'steady' the girls who had been full of undisciplined energy.<sup>74</sup> Drill at Canning Town Settlement improved the 'manner and tone' of the girls.<sup>75</sup> Other physical recreation such as gymnastics was also an influence in forming 'character'.<sup>76</sup>

Sewing was promoted at most clubs. It was clearly a skill thought necessary for future wives and mothers but at the Deptford Girls' Club it was established because it was thought that girls chose not to spend their money on underwear and so were encouraged to make their own. Sewing was not only practical, it was seen by one school inspector as having a 'refining influence'.<sup>77</sup>

Clubs generally wanted to encourage girls away from cheap literature and many supplied libraries. Flora Freeman found that girls rarely asked for classics like Scott or Dickens nor did they appreciate Charlotte Yonge. Lady visitors, working in the specially reserved female section of the People's Palace library, found the girls hard to influence and difficult to please. They

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<sup>71</sup> Time and Talents Scrapbook, Jan. 1908.

<sup>72</sup> Fraulein Wilke, Girls' Club News, Nov., 1912, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Magazine, Feb. 1896, p. 19.

<sup>74</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Annual Report 1892, p. 28.

<sup>75</sup> Canning Town Settlement committee meeting minutes, 19 June, 1902.

<sup>76</sup> Miss Linck, Girls' Club News, May 1913, p.7.

<sup>77</sup> A. Turnbull, 'Learning Her Womanly Work', F. Hunt, Lessons for Life, 1987, p. 89.

mostly liked books about themselves.<sup>78</sup> Nor do girls in the 1930s appear to have been attracted to the classics - a fact which is commented upon by club workers.<sup>79</sup>

During the inter-war years there was an emphasis on wider activities. Katherine Dewar argued that girls needed more than sewing and needed mental and physical refreshment. Dewar suggested cultural activities such as going to concerts, theatre, museums and libraries. Larger clubs like Oxford and St. George's introduced the girls to high art forms such as the ballet which were much appreciated. The girls also continued to enjoy themselves at dance halls and at the cinema.

The inter-war years also brought a greater emphasis on physical culture. Drill was replaced by Physical Training or Keep Fit. More clubs were happy to include dancing and the National Organization of Girls' Clubs urged that ballroom dancing should be taught.<sup>80</sup> The West Central Jewish club was large enough to have its own separate tennis club for male and female members of all ages. This provision was thought to be necessary as many gentile tennis clubs did not admit Jewish people.

The clubs' interest in physical culture was part of a wider European fashion during the 1930s. Many organizations encouraged sport and there was government interest in the physical well-being of the nation. The Central Council of Recreative and Physical Training was formed in 1935 and the historian of that body states that 'comparisons [were] drawn between the apparent listlessness and lack of patriotic idealism [of British boys] with the well drilled Hitler Youth'.<sup>81</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup> A. Chapman, The People's Palace for East London, M.Phil dissertation, Hull, 1978, p. 223.

<sup>79</sup> National Council of Girls' Clubs Annual Report, 1932, p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> National Council of Girls' Clubs Annual Report, 1933.

<sup>81</sup> H. Justin Evans, Service to Sport, 1974, p. 22.

Physical Training and Recreation Act of 1937 established the National Fitness Council which formed the National Fitness Campaign. This campaign was to encourage voluntary organizations and local authorities with small grants to extend provision in the light of Britain's poor showing at the 1936 Olympic Games.

Apart from the government interest there was a working class interest in rambling which raised the issue of access to land in the form of the mass trespass. Hiking became very popular with young people and the Youth Hostel Association was formed in 1930. The Women's League for Health and Beauty, a commercial venture, was started in 1929 and provided working girls and women cheap access to keep fit classes. It organized huge displays at large arenas like Wembley. Archival evidence suggests that the League encouraged a club-like atmosphere amongst its groups.<sup>82</sup> The League also took part in displays abroad and Prunella Stacks, the daughter of the organizer, visited Nazi Germany to study various dance techniques. In June 1938, the League attended an international rally of physical culture in Hamburg. They were part of an official British delegation organized by the newly formed National Fitness Council: two other groups were the Y.M.C.A. and ten girls from girls' clubs. [see plate 18] The President of the National Council of Girls' clubs, Lady Eleanor Keane, was present amongst the international representatives.

The two-page report in the girls' club journal was not published until December, 1938, five months after the event and a few weeks after the infamous Nazi attack on Jewish people on 'crystal night'. No comment is made in the report about the politics of the regime. There had been some previous comment in the journal about Nazi

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<sup>82</sup> The Women's League for Health and Beauty Scrapbook. Held at the Women's League for Health and Beauty Archive, London.

Germany. In 1936, the physical activities of German youth organizations were seen as impressive but the same writer was suspicious of the nationalism espoused.<sup>83</sup> In April 1938, the writer of the political column had criticized Germany's Nazi policies. To a modern researcher the report of the visit to Hamburg stands as shocking: the writer appears to be totally uncritical and to have been completely taken in by Nazi propaganda. There were no reactions printed to the report in spite of the fact that many of the affiliated clubs were Jewish.

The rally was to celebrate 'Strength through Joy' (Kraft Durch Freude) and the girls clearly enjoyed themselves. The writer of the report was pleased to be representing the National Council of Girls' Clubs and 'even more wonderful - England'.<sup>84</sup> For many, it was probably their first trip abroad and they were well looked after by the National-Socialist Fellowship. The occasion was well stage-managed with German youth living up to the 'aryan' ideal: whilst rehearsing the girls saw 'hundreds of boys... nearly all tall, most of them fair, and all beautifully tanned - their bare backs the same colour as their brown shorts - performing exercises...'. Later on, girls were struck by little girls with fair plaits who came out to watch the procession of all the teams. When it was the girls' turn to participate in the rally they 'marched on, led by Miss Worsfeld carrying our Union Jack and gave the Nazi salute [my emphasis] while the national anthem played'. As well as taking part in the keep fit, the girls watched international folk dancing and a special display of German folk dancing. On the last day, there was a procession of all the teams, many in national costume. Germany's part of the procession appears to

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<sup>83</sup> Signpost, May 1936.

<sup>84</sup> The Signpost, Dec. 1938, pp. 3-4.

have been a fanciful, archaic 'folk' view of fairy tales with 'harvest waggons' laden with wheat and fruit and girls wearing long sweeping dresses and gold sandals. Men wore elaborate costumes - red or blue trimmed silver or gold and some wore plumed hats. The tableaux were 'lovely' and the whole visit was 'short and thrilling'.

It could be argued that the promotion of physical culture was empowering for the girls and to some extent it was. However, the discipline involved in these kinds of displays and the extent to which it could be subjected to Nazi ideology suggests that it is best considered as part of 'discipline'. The participation in the Hamburg rally should not be interpreted as evidence of incipient fascism in girls' clubs. The British delegation went within the context of appeasement but the clubs could be criticised for being insensitive to their Jewish members even if they were not aware of the full extent of the persecution. The timing of the report certainly does seem to be insensitive. Not only was it just after 'crystal night' but it was after Germany had invaded Sudetenland. At this time the British YWCA was receiving requests for help for refugees and were holding talks with Lily Montagu, the prominent Jewish club worker, about the appropriate provision that should be made in Britain.

Prunella Stack who led the Women's League for Health and Beauty delegation in Hamburg claimed that they knew nothing of the treatment of Jews. She had visited a Jewish student of hers in Germany in 1937 and was not aware of any difficulties.<sup>85</sup> The political left in Britain were well aware of the situation and so were some sections of club workers. Just a few months after Hitler's rise to power, the Quaker Bertha Bracey wrote in the YWCA journal describing the new racist laws in

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Prunella Stack, 6 Nov. 1993.

Germany.<sup>86</sup> In 1936, the uniformed Jewish Lads Brigade refused to join the delegation to the Berlin Olympics and hosted refugee children at camp in 1936 and 1938.<sup>87</sup> However, there was a view that contact with Germany was a way of preventing another war for the generation who had been so recently devastated by the Great War. Prunella Stack argued that attendance at the rally did not mean approval for the political regime and the rally was not a political congress. This may well have been the point of view of the President of the Girls' Clubs. There may also have been the belief that it was necessary for Britain to show Germany its physical prowess - this was certainly the view of an American reporter. Commenting on the rally, s/he states that the delegation of English women were there to show 'that Britons are not weaklings'.<sup>88</sup> Prunella Stack denied this interpretation. For her, it had nothing to do with politics - 'there were no political speeches'. It did not occur to participants that the Nazi state would use the rally for political purposes.

The rally was reported in the Hamburg press in conjunction with political reports on Czechoslovakia. Six photographs are displayed prominently in the sports section including one of the English delegation. One of the photographs shows a float representing Greater Germany with 'one people, one empire, one leader' inscribed on it. This is placed just above the reports of the German Czech Movement who wanted to become incorporated into 'Greater Germany'.<sup>89</sup> [see plate 19]

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<sup>86</sup> The Blue Gazette, July 1933, pp. 102-3.

<sup>87</sup> S. Kadish, A Good Jew and a Good Englishman. The Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigades 1895-1995, 1995, p. 81.

<sup>88</sup> Un-named, un-dated press cutting, Women's League of Health and Beauty Scrapbook.

<sup>89</sup> H.F. am Montag, 13 June 1938, cutting from the League's archive.

To the physical culture enthusiasts, health 'was outside and above politics'.<sup>90</sup> This kind of view enabled Prunella Stacks to entertain a leading Nazi women's organizer when she visited a League class.<sup>91</sup> In the present official history of the League, the 'Strength through Joy' rally is described as an International Festival of Physical culture.<sup>92</sup> The girls' clubs involvement was perhaps typical of many others.

'Improvement' in the 1930s meant turning out 'happy and useful citizens' but it was recognized that only thirty percent of boys and girls leaving school at fourteen went to clubs. It was important to try to discover what the young people wanted. The editorial of Newsheet, commented that young people did not want to be 'got at' or 'improved'.<sup>93</sup> Rather than refinement, the clubs in the 1930s wanted to interest girls in service to the wider community and aimed at giving them as wide a recreation programme as was possible, wider than the ability to 'produce a tidy apron' and 'trim a hat'.<sup>94</sup>

All the disciplined activities were designed to ensure empowerment of the girls which is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>90</sup> League teacher, Diana Ware, Health and Beauty, no.37, c1938.

<sup>91</sup> Newspaper cutting, source unknown, 9 Mar. 1939, League scrapbook.

<sup>92</sup> The History of the League, post 1980.

<sup>93</sup> Newsheet, Dec. 1928.

<sup>94</sup> A. Burdett-Coutts, Women's Mission, p.81.



THE DEPTFORD FUND.—ONE OF THE "SUCCESSFUL" GIRLS.

Plate 16. A 'successful girl' from the Deptford Fund Club. Ladies Pictorial, 12 November, 1898. From the cutting collection, Deptford Fund Archive.



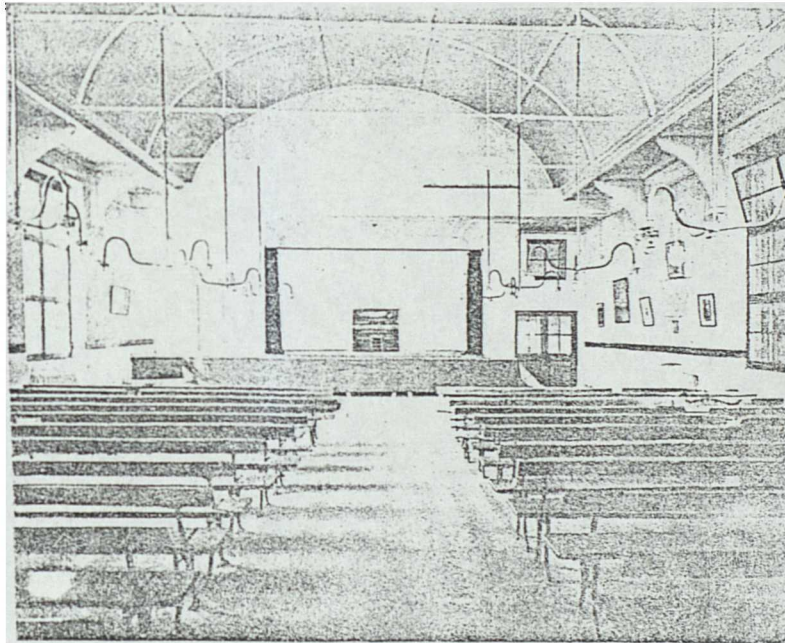


Plate 17. The Deptford Fund Girls' Club, Albany Hall, 1907. The girls did sewing on long benches. Annual Report, 1908.

MEMBERS OF THE N.C.C.C. SECTION OF  
THE BRITISH CONTINGENT

at the

# INTERNATIONAL RALLY

of the

FREUDE UND ARBEIT  
(Strength Through Joy)

at

HAMBURG, JUNE 9th—12th, 1938

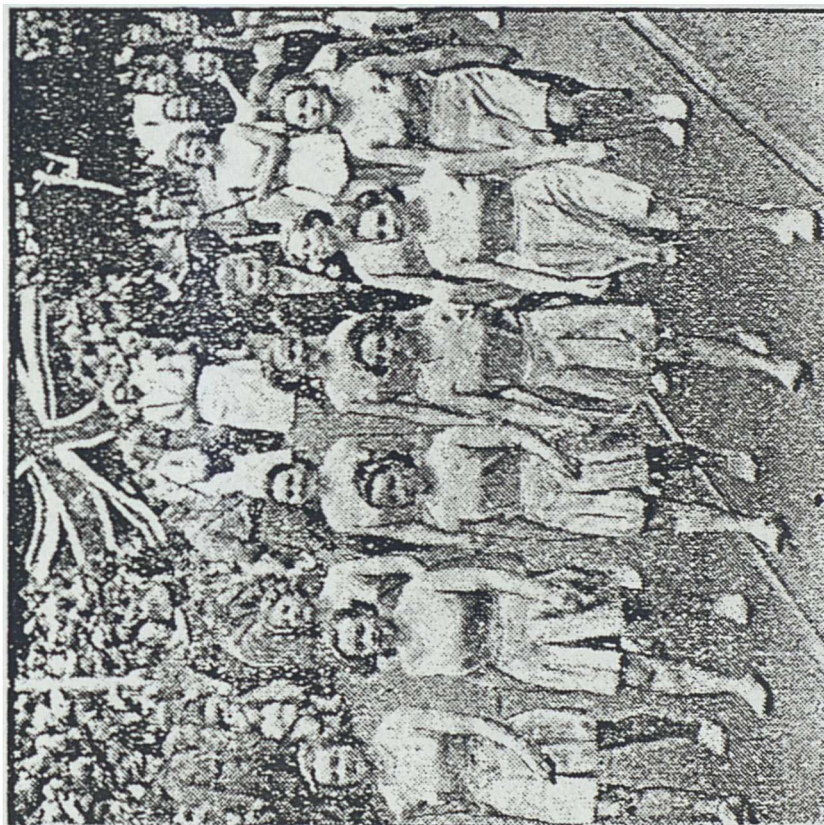


Plate 18. Girls' club members at a physical culture rally, Hamburg, 1938. Signpost, July 1938, p. 5.



## CHAPTER NINE

### EMPOWERING

The protection and discipline offered at the clubs were part of an overall aim to make the girls 'better'. The definition of 'better' varied with the differing ethos of the individuals and organizations running the clubs - whilst some wanted the girls to be better servants and to understand their place within Christianity, others sought to enable girls to secure their rights as workers and citizens. Some clubs offered girls vocational classes, cultural activities and an increasingly wide range of physical activities. Clubs with a more religious emphasis thought they were empowering the girls by helping them to develop spiritually. By helping to make the girls 'better' by whatever definition, club leaders hoped to make the girls 'better' wives and mothers throughout the period under study. The club movement, as a whole, aimed to empower girls spiritually, physically, academically, aesthetically and politically.

#### Gendered Space

Although it was almost 'natural' within the ideological notions of separate spheres for girls and boys to be separated, both male and female club workers believed that gendered space was essential for development. Eagar, a boys' club leader, was very concerned that boys should have male space and that clubs should be 'robust' and vigorous.<sup>1</sup> Neuman, another boys' club leader, hoped to produce 'educated craftsmen'.<sup>2</sup> Sara Rae of the Guild of Good Life in Hoxton wanted to produce 'wives and mothers of working

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<sup>1</sup> W. Eagar, Making Men, 1953, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> B. Neuman, The Boys' Club, 1900, p. 29.

men'.<sup>3</sup> Lily Montagu also believed the girls needed space to develop as girls. She was, however, in favour of mixed socials under supervision as were many other club leaders. Mixing at socials was considered successful at the Acland Club and at the Passmore Edwards Settlement.<sup>4</sup> Neuman found the help of ladies useful when his senior boys were allowed to invite friends on a Sunday evening. At the West London Mission, Mrs Hughes Price Hughes and co-workers invited their men friends as an 'object lesson' so as to show the way ' in which men and women 'ought to behave'.<sup>5</sup> The practice of mixed socials continued where there were neighbouring boys and girls clubs throughout the period. However, Lewis, who had experimented with a mixed evening abandoned it. Boys needed to be prevented from 'premature love making' and early marriage. He claimed that his view was that of other (male) club workers especially of those working in 'rough areas'. He also criticized Continuation Classes which were mixed.<sup>6</sup>

In general women ran girls' clubs and men ran boys' clubs. Men did not run girls' clubs although they visited as religious leaders, helped at the door at Hoxton and taught at the Quaker club. There is evidence that women did run boys' clubs: Maude Stanley ran a boys' club before she opened her girls' club in Soho and Violet Brooke Hunt ran clubs for boys. She claimed to be inspired by Charles Kingsley who urged that women should not confine their attentions to girls but should 'bestow freely on those who need it more... the boys and

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<sup>3</sup> Girls' Guild of Good Life Annual Report 1892-3, front cover.

<sup>4</sup> NUWW occasional paper Aug. 1902, p.24.

<sup>5</sup> Report of NUWW Conference, Nov. 1892.

<sup>6</sup> M. A. Lewis, A Club for Boys. Why Not Open One?, 1905, p. 5.

men'.<sup>7</sup> He believed that women would encourage boys to revere physical weakness, tenderness and gentleness. Violet Brooke Hunt claimed that women were better in getting boys to talk and that they were 'not ashamed of letting her see their softer side'. She also thought that a 'lady's influence seems to be the strongest, the most lasting and the most easily obtained'. It was easier for women to run boys' clubs because boys 'would try to help a lady'.<sup>8</sup> Violet Brooke Hunt does not sound as if she conformed to the female stereotype of physical weakness. She said that sport should be encouraged among boys as 'the training, endurance, and pluck required [was] good morally and physically'. It was an advantage if a man could be found to organize sport but there was no reason why a lady could not manage cricket, football and boating.<sup>9</sup>

Neuman wrote that the help of two or three ladies was 'invaluable' and that no club should consider its staff complete unless it includes one or two lady workers.<sup>10</sup> He cites the Hercules club which was run by ladies. Lewis thought that a 'first rate man' to be the best person to run a boys' club but that a 'first rate woman [was] not far behind'.<sup>11</sup> Eagar also refers to the 'fine effort' of a Miss Cochrane at a club but he clearly preferred men to run boys' clubs.<sup>12</sup> He thought that developing manliness was the essence of club work amongst boys.

As previously discussed, mixed clubs were advocated during the First World War in areas where soldiers were

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<sup>7</sup> Report of Working Women's Conference, 1896, p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> B. Neuman, The Boys' Club, p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, A Club for Boys, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> W. Eagar, Making Men, p. 257.

present but these were closed after the end of the War. The move towards mixing by club leaders came during the inter-war period by some of the female organizers. This move was largely resisted by the men. Eagar was particularly opposed to mixing. Mixed clubs had 'less exacting standards' and he was worried that boys would not be able to develop their manliness if they mixed with girls too soon. Henriques, who found the boy of fourteen malleable, thought that boys would lose their 'noisy, healthy, boisterous, virile characteristics'.<sup>13</sup> Any mixing, Henriques thought, should take place in the girls' clubs as 'a man is not out of place in the drawing room but a woman is definitely not wanted in the smoking room.'<sup>14</sup> One wonders at the number of drawing rooms present in the East End.

Phyllis Gerson of Stepney Jewish Girls' Club was interested in mixing but she met resistance from the boys' leaders.<sup>15</sup> Brady Jewish Club allowed limited mixing, although interviewees remember the girls' leader Miriam Moses as resistant to the idea and as one who kept a watchful eye during socials. Florrie Passman of Butler Street Club had a completely different attitude, encouraged interaction between the sexes and her club went mixed without the approval of the umbrella organization the Association for Jewish Youth. At a formal level the National Association of Boys' Clubs refused an invitation to combine with the National Organization of Girls' Clubs in 1924.<sup>16</sup>

As far as the girls were concerned, they did not question a separate space or gender specific activities. Oral evidence shows that they welcomed the chance for

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<sup>13</sup> S. Bunt, Jewish Youth Work in Britain, 1975, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> B. Henriques, Club Leadership, 1933, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with P. Gerson, 30 July 1990.

<sup>16</sup> W. Eagar, Making Men, p. 409.

female friendship. They also enjoyed the mixed events where they sometimes found marriage partners.

Same-sex friendship was considered empowering for girls although it was questioned amongst males. Koven suggests that Settlements and boys' clubs provided respectable networks for male comradeship. Koven also suggests that male club workers had many motives in working with boys but that they may also have been 'driven by the need to come to terms with their own sexualities'. Homosexuality had become a criminal offence during the 1880s and the Oscar Wilde trials in the 1890s also confirmed to some that 'cultural elitism' and a 'varsity background' were compatible with 'democratic fondness for rough lads.' Koven also suggests that whilst the fondness may have been platonic, inspired in some cases by Carpenter's idealistic view of cross-class alliances, the prevalence of gay pornography during the late nineteenth century also casts some doubt on relationships between men and boys.<sup>17</sup>

For girls, same-sex friendships were not questioned until the early twentieth century but the girls' clubs remained respectable organizations. Like other single-sex institutions, they were the accepted place for the development of future wives and mothers. The female space was seen in the context of future married heterosexual relations and was not subversive or separatist.

Recent work by Jeffrey and Oram has indicated that same-sex friendships were gradually viewed with suspicion. Ideas which privileged heterosexual desire came from the new sciences of psychology and sexology. These ideas were also prominent amongst eugenicists and

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<sup>17</sup> S. Koven, 'From Rough Lads to Hooligans. Boy Life, National Culture and Social Reform', 365-91, Andrew Parker et al., Nationalisms and Sexuality, 1992, p. 373.



those interested in the new category of 'adolescence'.<sup>18</sup> As has been noted in the discussion on femininity, various twentieth century writers expressed concern about same-sex friendship. One such commentator, Mary Scharlieb, appears to have changed her view, at least in regard to adult women, and approved of same-sex friendship in her defence of spinsters in 1929. She thought that friendship was acceptable amongst women provided that their love was platonic but recognized that passionate friendships were under criticism.<sup>19</sup>

Norah March, writing in 1916 warned against the 'undifferentiated sex impulse' - the same sex 'crush'. If this was 'unwisely fostered' it could form the 'basis for perversion' but it was usually replaced by 'normal impulse to the opposite sex'.<sup>20</sup> She specifically cited boarding schools as places where crushes should be discouraged and where boys and girls should be encouraged to meet. Same-sex friendships were starting to become a cause for concern after the War on both sides of the Atlantic as the term 'perversion' crept into the language and as the medical profession started to consider physiological imbalances as the cause of 'girlish' boys and 'mannish' girls.<sup>21</sup>

The 'unhealthiness' of middle class, adolescent female space is the subject of Clemence Dane's first novel, Regiment of Women, published in 1917. It is set in a girls' school, the atmosphere of which is like a stifling hot house compared with the fresh air of a

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<sup>18</sup> S. Jeffreys, The Spinster and her Enemies, 1985.  
A. Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-war Feminist Discourses', Women's History Review, vol. no. 3, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> M. Scharlieb, Bachelor Woman and her Problems, 1929.

<sup>20</sup> N. March, Towards Racial Health, 1916, p 32.

<sup>21</sup> P. Blanchard, Care of the Adolescent Girl, a book for teachers, parents and guardians, 1921. E. Sloan Chesser, Youth, 1928.

co-educational school. The plot hinges around a female teacher who rejects another teacher, Clare, for marriage. Clare, who hardly speaks to men and who repels them is presented as abnormal. She is left alone at the end of the novel.

In 1921, there was an attempt to criminalize lesbian behaviour and the attack culminated in the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's book The Well of Loneliness in 1929. However, as Oram argues, it was perfectly possible for single women to live together as the ideas of the psychologists, sexologists and eugenists were 'partial' and 'fragmented' and not 'hegemonic'.<sup>22</sup> This could explain why girls' clubs did not appear to be affected and could continue to provide female space which was considered respectable.

In all the club literature, I have not found any reference to concerns about female friendships. The lack of reaction may be that it was thought politic to ignore any implied criticism or that the club organizers simply did not relate to the new definitions. Interviewees took female space for granted and only one pointed out that her relationship with her club leader was a mother-daughter relationship and not a lesbian one.<sup>23</sup>

#### The National Organization of Girls' Clubs.

The question of what determined empowerment was related to the political ideas of the organizers. Some of the organizers had a high public profile and were interested in empowering the girls as workers and citizens. Some of these women were involved in the National Organization of Girls' Clubs (NOGC) which later became the National Council of Girls' Clubs (NCGC).

This umbrella organization had its roots in the

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<sup>22</sup> A Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted', p. 416.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Mrs. L., 31 Oct. 1990.

late Victorian rise of trade unionism and socialism. Apart from the impact of Stead, the 1880s saw the rise of new trade unionism along with the development of the socialist movement. Annie Besant's involvement with the 'match girls'' strike highlighted the need for middle class women to be concerned about the improvement of the the welfare of working women. Ellen Mappen describes these kind of women as 'social feminists' who were middle class women of socialist or liberal backgrounds and formed the Women's Industrial Council (WIC).<sup>24</sup> These women were part of a general trend which extended the notions of philanthropy to agitating for legislative reform. The Women's Industrial Council was the outcome of the formation of the Women's Trade Union Alliance (WTUA) which was concerned with organizing women in the East End of London. Members of the WTUA felt that a broader organization was needed which would publicize the problem facing working women and so the W.I.C. was formed in 1894. Amongst the early members were Margaret MacDonald, who was later active in the Labour Party, B.L. Hutchins who was a Fabian, Lily Montagu the club worker, suffragist and later Labour supporter and Catherine Webb of the Women's Co-operative Guild. The aims of the organization were to inquire into and to publicize women's industrial conditions and 'to promote such action as may seem conducive to their improvement'.<sup>25</sup>

This interest in the industrial life and self-improvement of working women was another strand in club thinking. Women of the W.I.C. were concerned specifically with the welfare of working girls and used the existing idea of girls' clubs as a means of encouraging leadership. To promote girls' clubs and to

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<sup>24</sup> E. Mappen, Helping Women at Work. The Women's Industrial Council 1889-1914, 1985.

<sup>25</sup> E. Mappen, Helping Women, p. 17,

obtain the confidence of the workers, the Council formed the Clubs Industrial Association (CIA) in 1899. This later combined with the Girls Club Committee of the National Union of Women Workers to form the National Organization of Girls Clubs in 1912. Lily Montagu and Edith Glover were leaders of this latter organization. The C.I.A organized lectures on industrial matters at the clubs, held conferences for club delegates to discuss industrial matters and encouraged girls to report breaches of the factory acts. Health and Citizenship classes were also established and drill was encouraged at the clubs.

The National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) had been formed in 1895 by women philanthropists who wanted to help the cause of women by promoting their social, civil and religious welfare. It had its origins in the work of the social purity organizer, Ellice Hopkins and attracted a wide variety of women who were active in many areas and of varying political persuasions. It included Settlement worker, Mrs Humphrey Ward who eventually left when the pro-suffrage faction achieved the majority.

Some of the members of the NUWW were also members of the W.I.C. Lily Montagu was an active delegate to NUWW conferences: in 1902 she gave a paper on 'Girls' Amusements' and in 1904 she talked on the influence of home life.<sup>26</sup> The concern about girls' sexual and industrial lives merged in the work of the NOGC. The logo of the Girls' Club News, the journal of the NOGC was of a young woman in loose robes blowing a horn at sunrise, combining womanliness with independence and a positive hope for the future. [see Plate 20] At a club conference in April, a Miss Towers spoke of the need to build up the girls' self esteem, to encourage self-knowledge and government. One of the ways was to

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<sup>26</sup> P. Adams, Women in Council, 1945.

provide the girls with good role models in the shape of noble women. In July 1913, three recommended books for clubs were the lives of Elizabeth Fry, Frances Willard and Joan of Arc.<sup>27</sup>

Clubs had been going for thirty years when the NOGC was formed in 1909. Lily Montagu had been involved in club work for twenty years and had strongly been influenced by Margaret MacDonald into the direction of socialist politics. It was Margaret MacDonald who had helped her see the connection between philanthropist and industrial work.<sup>28</sup> Margaret MacDonald joined the Independent Labour Party in the same year as Lily Montagu wrote an article on socialism which advocated the State ownership of land and State control of production. She envisaged a society in which the individual would freely develop.<sup>29</sup> Lily Montagu was from a very wealthy, politically liberal but religiously Orthodox Jewish background. Club work provided an outlet for her organizational and inter-personal skills and helped develop her self-confidence. She also became a religious leader, breaking from her father's Orthodox Judaism to form a new Liberal movement. By 1912, she was a dominant force in Jewish and Gentile club work as well as being one of the leaders of the Jewish League for Women's Suffrage. She continued to support the Suffrage question throughout the War, adding her name to a letter on the issue in The Times in 1916. Apart from her article on socialism she had also had two novels published. Naomi's Exodus (1901) was about a club girl and Broken Stalks (1902) featured a club worker as a heroine.

Lily Montagu and other social feminists had a great

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<sup>27</sup> Girls' Club News, April and Sept. 1913.

<sup>28</sup> J. R. MacDonald, Margaret MacDonald, 1913, p.18.

<sup>29</sup> L. Montagu, 'Position of the Individual in a Socialist State', Westminster Review, Nov. 1896, no. 146.

sense of reform, a sense that things were changing as Edwardian reforms started to move society towards more State intervention. There was also less emphasis on doing things for the poor and more on encouraging them to develop themselves. Constance Smith, one of Lily's co-workers at the West Central Club and C.I.A. delegate said that she looked forward to the involvement of the 'instructed working woman in the work of reform and regeneration'.<sup>30</sup> Clubs would help to play a part in instructing the girls and clubs could also encourage citizenship by involving the girls in their management. In 1912, the West Central Jewish Girls' Club had twenty four members who held official positions. Lily Montagu wrote articles advising other clubs on how to go about organizing club democracy.<sup>31</sup> Lily Montagu consistently urged for the girls to develop self expression through self government. At a club conference in 1921 she argued that clubs of the future must be more democratic. By 1923, she was urging that 'we' (club leaders) 'must stand aside' and 'let them move on'.<sup>32</sup> Such committees encouraged a public spirit. Competitions could also engender self-reliance and self-sacrifice. They were, said Mrs G. Cadbury, the equivalent to public school games.<sup>33</sup>

This interest in citizenship continued throughout the period of study. Writing in 1942, Pearl Jephcott thought that clubs were a 'little state in embryo' in which girls should be taught the elements of democratic government and should also be taught the advances that women had made. With an eye to post-war reconstruction, she felt that when girls are 'called upon to build a new

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<sup>30</sup> Girls' Club News, Feb. 1913, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Girls' Club News, Jan. 1913, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Girls' Club News, July 1923, p.16.

<sup>33</sup> Girls' Club News, Nov. 1912, p. 5.

world, they will build it greatly'.<sup>34</sup>

Clubs like the West Central Jewish Girls' Club encouraged girls to report breaches in the Factory Acts but they were not seen as alternatives to Trade Unions. As part of their citizenship, girls were encouraged to join Friendly Societies, Trade Unions, and Co-op Societies.<sup>35</sup> Clubs like those run by the Girls Friendly Society had been criticized by women trade unionists for being patronizing and some girls' homes and hostels run by religious organizations were thought not to be conducive to Trade Union organization.<sup>36</sup> Lily Montagu, however, was very clear on the matter of trade unions. She wrote in the Jewish Chronicle that it was her responsibility to give the girls the opportunity 'for organizing themselves and becoming part of the great British working class movement'.<sup>37</sup> Trade unions would generally work along 'the lines of peace and general progress rather than of conflict and class hatred'. The female influence in the Trade union movement would shift emphasis away from 'class antagonism' as women and girls understood the 'mutual dependence of sections of society'.

Girls' Club News attitude inclined towards trade unions and labour politics as is evidenced by some of the contributors. It carried advertisements for the Women's Labour League and prominent Labour activists like Margaret Bondfield contributed articles and spoke at club conferences on unemployment and the position of girls in industry. In 1921, Lily Montagu nominated Gertrude Tuckwell for one of the organization's

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<sup>34</sup> P. Jephcott, Clubs for Girls, 1942, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> Miss Bishop, Girls' Club News, Nov. 1912, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> G. Tuckwell, The State and its Children, 1894, p. 71.  
B. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry, 1915, p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> Jewish Chronicle, 19 April 1912.

vice-presidents and described this trade unionist as a 'champion of working girls'.<sup>38</sup> Fabian socialist Edith Nesbit contributed a story and a poem to the journal,<sup>39</sup> was on the honorary council of the Girls' Club Exhibition in 1914<sup>40</sup> and donated flowers to decorate Woolwich Girls Club in 1915.<sup>41</sup> The NOGC and the Women's Trade Union League went on a deputation to the Prime minister regarding the Factory Acts in 1913. The delegation consisted of Lily Montagu and Constance Smith of the West Central Club and Gertrude Tuckwell.<sup>42</sup>

The NOGC also encouraged discussion of women's suffrage and talks on the subject were held at clubs in 1912 and 1913. Lily Montagu was one of the vice-presidents of the non-militant Jewish League when it was formed in 1912. After the vote was gained for women over thirty, Millicent Fawcett contributed to the journal in 1922 urging support for the lowering of women's franchise age. Mrs Corbett Ashby spoke of the same subject at a leaders' conference in 1924.<sup>43</sup> In the year of the first General Election in which young women could vote, she urged readers of the club journal now entitled Newsheet to buy The New Voter.<sup>44</sup>

#### The Inter-war Years.

By the 1930s, the national organization was keen to attract modern young women and to offer activities which would help the girls' personal development. The

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<sup>38</sup> Girls' Club News, Nov. 1921.

<sup>39</sup> Girls' Club News, April 1915.

<sup>40</sup> Girls' Club News, June 1914.

<sup>41</sup> Girls' Club News, Jan. 1915.

<sup>42</sup> Girls' Club News, June 1913.

<sup>43</sup> Girls' Club News, Oct. 1922, Sept. 1924.

<sup>44</sup> Mrs Corbett Ashby, Newsheet, Mar. 1929.



frontispiece of the 1931 Annual Report showed girls actively involved in table tennis, netball, camping, swimming, dancing and dressmaking. Drill, which for so long had been the staple diet of most clubs was criticized as being too 'military' and should be replaced by 'Keep Fit and Health Slimming'. Ballroom dancing was to be introduced. The club journal, changed its name to the Signpost in 1929 with a signpost on the cover situated in a landscape with a winding road indicating a wider, fuller life. [see Plate2] The journal during the 1930s gives the impression of lively clubs welcoming the arrival of the wireless, offering activities like rifle shooting and containing articles on anti-semitism, girl unemployment and the Peace ballot. 'Great Englishwomen' were also featured like Florence Nightingale, Millicent Fawcett, Ellen Terry and Scottish Margaret McMillan. Josephine Butler was described as taking up the cause of the unmarried mother with no mention of prostitution or V.D.<sup>45</sup> The National Council of Girls' Clubs as the NOGC became known aimed 'to give a fuller life for greater service'.

During the inter-war years many sought to elevate domestic labour. Margaret Bondfield gave prizes at the League of Skilled Housecraft.<sup>46</sup> Domestic training and its values appeared to exist alongside the idea of and independent working women leading a varied life. Articles appeared on married women and work in 1932. There was concern that the married woman was in competition with the single woman but there was also the view that when wives were reasonably well paid and could afford domestic help that the home was better for it. The idea was raised that a career need not be in opposition to marriage.<sup>47</sup> Recipes also appeared in the

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<sup>45</sup> Signpost, Dec. 1933.

<sup>46</sup> Newsheet, June 1929.

<sup>47</sup> Signpost, May, Dec 1932.

paper along with health and beauty articles and articles on occupations like banking. The NCGC encouraged girls to be interested in politics but tried not to be party political. Corbett Ashby outlined the three parties' ideas on unemployment in 1929 and there was a general interest in world peace and the League of Nations with some clubs running their own League of Nations sections. The Peace Ballot was strongly supported and clubs were urged to send aid to Spain in 1938. The girl of the 1930s appears to be an active citizen but motherhood was also an important idea to the active organizers like Lily Montagu.

#### Motherhood.

Social feminists had looked to the future and felt that they were freeing themselves from Victorian ideas of female dependency and ignorance. However they still believed that married motherhood was central to a woman's role. The clubs' activities would help girls become useful citizens but they would also make them 'better equipped for wifedom and motherhood' and that they would recognize their 'duty to the coming generation'.<sup>48</sup> At a conference of the NOGC, a Miss A.C Stewart Wright spoke of the importance of the home. A neglected home, she argued, robbed youth of its purity.<sup>49</sup> Lily Montagu shared the view that good citizens also meant good wives and mothers. She thought that girls should have a high domestic standard and that motherhood was a privilege. Along with other members of the WIC, she thought that mothers should not have to be in paid work outside the home. In an ideal world, mothers should train girls but modern urban conditions gave 'no opportunity for home life'. Ultimately, 'marriage was the best thing'. Spinsterhood, she argued much later in

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<sup>48</sup> WIC, 10th Annual Report, 1903-4, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Girls' Club News, Feb. 1913, p. 6.

her life, 'denied to girls fulfillment of life'.<sup>50</sup>

Lily thought highly of motherhood as the following tribute to her friend Margaret Macdonald shows. Her final image of her friend is of Margaret with her daughter - 'an ideal picture of motherhood, inspiring to a poet or artist, but above all gripping everything that is human love'. Lily Montagu, as chair of Margaret McDonald's memorial committee, organized a statue of her to be erected in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The statue was of Margaret caring for and comforting children.<sup>51</sup>

The younger club workers shared the views of an older club leader that clubs were to fit girls for the work 'which lies before all women in their homes and families'.<sup>52</sup> It was assumed that the girls' homes were not all that should be desired and that club work could empower girls to become good homemakers. Lily Montagu thought that clubs could counter the 'unsatisfactory tendencies of the tenement homes'.<sup>53</sup> Like other club workers, she wanted to share what she possessed with those denied her opportunities of an English middle class education. Her aims were to promote self development, an alternative to 'low' dance halls and to stimulate self control and responsibility. She also sought to provide a religious atmosphere, to strengthen the faith of the Jewish girls and to make the faith empowering. She was critical of the traditional role of women within the faith and was particularly concerned that women should have a place in the Synagogue. This view was shared by Helen Franklin who taught at the West Central Club and also resented sitting in the gallery in

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<sup>50</sup> L. Montagu, Yorkshire Herald, 8 Nov. 1904. My Club and I, 1944, p. 96.

<sup>51</sup> L. Montagu, Girls' Club News, Dec. 1912, pp. 4-6.

<sup>52</sup> M. Stanley, Girls' Club News, May 1912, p.2.

<sup>53</sup> L. Montagu, 'Girl in the Background', E. Urwick, (ed.) Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities, 1904.

the Synagogue as a child. Although very spiritual, Lily was very well aware of the practical aspects of life and developed an artificial flower making workshop at the club which enabled the girls to take a share in the profits and to observe the Sabbath. Strengthening their faith would strengthen the faith of future generations.

Prior to the formation of a national organization, Emmeline Pethick and Mary Neal ran the L'Esperance Club in the Euston Road area during the 1890s. They had worked at the West London Mission, became involved in the Socialist movements of the 1890s and later became very prominent in the Women's Social and Political Union, the militant suffrage organization. After women won the vote, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence stood as a Labour candidate.

The two women had three aims: they wanted to provide a home as modern cities had taken 'the home' away from the workers, they wanted to help develop the 'realisation of womanhood' and to provide 'a training ground for the social organization of women'. Unlike other commentators, women were not to blame for the lack of good homes and women needed to develop in order to take their place in modern society.<sup>54</sup>

The L'Esperance started a dressmaking workshop where the girls, in 1895, earned double their usual earnings. The workshop was supported by 'socially aware fashionable ladies'. The club also ran a 'Provision Store' which, according to Irene Ashby, the secretary of the Working Girls' Club Provision Store and an ex-student of Westfield was 'an exercise in co-operation'.<sup>55</sup> Emmeline Pethick wanted to provide a place where girls could be encouraged to 'take part in the

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<sup>54</sup> E. Pethick, 'Working Girls' Clubs', W. Reason, (ed.) University and Social Settlements, 1898.

<sup>55</sup> Irene Ashby, Commonwealth, Nov. 1898, p. 331.

battle that is being fought for workers'.<sup>56</sup> Emmeline Pethick and Mary Neal shared the purpose which inspired Settlement workers but took it further towards socialism and the ideas of Keir Hardie and Edward Carpenter.<sup>57</sup>

Mary Neal introduced her ideas of socialism through the folk song and dance revival which interested many socialists at the time. Morris dancing, which she introduced to the club was a reaction against the 'demoralizing city life'. She taught the girls so well that they taught teachers, villagers and ladies. The girls stayed at aristocratic homes like those of Lady Muriel Paget and experienced eating with their hosts and being waited upon by servants. Emmeline was proud that she maintained contact with many of the members and that 'class distinctions' had faded away. She believed that a 'disciplined and self controlled working class was necessary to 'better their conditions' but she recognized that clubs alone would not change the system.<sup>58</sup>

The Quakers who started the Frideswide Club in central London wanted the girls to enjoy life and to find friendship. This club seems to have started because existing clubs, although excellent, did not attract all sections of girls. A Quaker writer said that the YWCA clubs did not attract girls who were not very religious and that the fees were too high. Church and chapel clubs were often denominational. Maude Stanley's club in Soho was praised as was the Guild of Good Life in Hoxton.<sup>59</sup> In 1897, there was an appeal in The Friend for Quakers to start girls clubs as the

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<sup>56</sup> E. Pethick, 'Working Girls' Clubs', p. 104.

<sup>57</sup> E. Pethick Lawrence, My Part in a Changing World, 1938, p. 74.

<sup>58</sup> E. Pethick, 'Working Girls' Clubs', p. 108.  
E. Pethick Lawrence, My Part.

<sup>59</sup> The Friend, 27 Oct. 1893.

'future of England [lay] in the hands of women' and clubs were necessary to 'refresh' their lives.<sup>60</sup> Cities were thought to be lonely places in which girls could lose their individuality. The club organizers brought into the club every thing 'to make things merry' and hoped to help the girls to be 'strong and healthy, alert and pure in mind and alive in soul'.<sup>61</sup> This club specifically emphasized friendship between members as part of the Quaker tradition of fellowship although the club was open to all. The growth of the towns which were seen to bring conditions of poverty and values of materialism could lead girls to grow up with 'narrow souls', 'untrained minds', 'weakened bodies' and without friends. The club aimed at self development as the girls entered adulthood.

The girls' adult roles as mothers and 'home builders' were unquestioned and explicitly endorsed in the Presidential addresses between 1905 and 1909. The President, George Newman, was an eminent Quaker and public health doctor and thought that the club was a place where girls should learn the 'consummate arts of making home and character'.<sup>62</sup> England looked to women to build a home in which they were to weave 'domesticity and love'. Domesticity was more than actual domestic skills but included the whole 'spirit of homeliness'.<sup>63</sup> Women, he claimed had a particular spiritual vision and the qualities of tenderness and sympathy necessary for the home.

Whilst gender roles were very much endorsed the club activities were not narrow. Cookery and needlework were available but so were crafts such as basket making,

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<sup>60</sup> The Friend, 3 Sept. 1897.

<sup>61</sup> Frideswide Club Annual Report 1904. Held at The Friends Centre, London.

<sup>62</sup> Frideswide Annual Report 1905, p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8.

Venetian iron work, chip carving and girls were encouraged to go to social evenings at Chalfont House which was a Quaker settlement. Girls took part in gymnastic displays, played cricket, rounders and terza in Pinner and went swimming. Many of the girls also attended Westminster Adult School and were able to go to concerts and lectures. The nature of the lectures is not known but the general emphasis of the annual reports appears to be more on recreational, cultural and spiritual matters rather than on matters of a political or industrial nature.

As with other clubs, members were invited to garden parties and weekends at ladies' country homes but the annual reports place much less emphasis on influence from above. The influence necessary in a club was not so much that of a lady but that of a 'noble woman with a pure heart'. She could make 'rough girls gentle, untruthful girls truthful and proud girls charitable'.<sup>64</sup> There is no mention of the refining influence of ladies and there is a much greater emphasis on friendship amongst the members. In assessing the success of the club, the 1904 annual report comments on friendships ripening, 'rosy cheeks' and 'laughter'. The official view was that they had established a 'happy association' with a 'unity of spirit'. From the inception in 1893 there was a girls' committee and the club sought to promote 'discipline and self control necessary in a democratic government'.<sup>65</sup> The reports do not mention rules or comment at all on behaviour.

There is no breakdown of the occupation of the girls but because of the location, originally in Drury Lane and then in St. Martin's Lane, they were likely to have worked in retail or small workshops. In 1908, membership was a hundred and twenty-five with an average

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<sup>64</sup> The Friend, 3 Sept. 1897, p. 577.

<sup>65</sup> Frideswide Club Annual Report 1904.

attendance of sixty-seven. In that year, when the club had been going for thirteen years, there was a reunion of married members - a possible indication of the popularity of the club.<sup>66</sup>

During this Edwardian period a purity group was formed and the girls were addressed by Mrs Ormiston Chant and Mrs Bertrand Russell. Like many other church groups, the Society of Friends had taken a very active role in social purity. Ursula and Jacob Bright had led the Friends Repeal Association in the 1870s as part of the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts campaign. In the 1880s a Quaker was secretary of the Working Mens' National League for Repeal. By 1910, the Repeal Association had become The Friends Association for the Promotion of Social Purity. Although there was this concern about social purity, protection of girls is not an explicitly stated aim of this club.

During the inter-war years the activities followed the pattern of many other clubs. The girls went on club holidays in Sussex and in 1922 joint socials were held with the men's Cromwell Club. In 1926 the club affiliated to the Federation of Working Girls' Clubs and 1932 hosted two hundred girls from eight or nine clubs in the Westminster Federation. Drama classes and performances started in 1930 and Keep Fit in 1932.

In the 1938 Annual report there was a reference to a controversy about girls' clubs. It would seem that the cinema was seen as a counter-attraction to clubs but the writer uses the opportunity to state the clubs' aims. The club is not trying to compete with the cinema and other opportunities open to girls but hopes to be a centre of 'learning and friendship'. The club was helping in the National Fitness campaign with its opportunities for gymnastics, providing handicrafts which enabled girls to 'beautify their homes' and

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<sup>66</sup> Frideswide club Annual Report 1908.



dressmaking which enabled them to 'express their personality through clothes'. The club was there to 'beautify our lives'.

During the inter-war years, there was some re-assessment of Quaker youth work. The need for boys' and girls' clubs was as great as ever because they provided opportunities for service for young Quakers. Although this work had been 'tainted with spiritual snobbery' it could lead to comradeship if one worked with the boys and girls. This comradeship could cross the class divide as public school and elementary school boys could be in the same troop.<sup>67</sup>

Working within the overall gendered ideology of women's roles, this club appears to have been gently empowering in its attitude to the individual. The idea of service appears more democratic and less tied to class than is the case with some of the other clubs. However, there are no accounts either from club members or from workers as to how this club was perceived.

#### Political Reform

Club work was influenced by a view that society could be reformed by giving girls access to information, education and to ideas of democracy and co-operation. It was also influenced by the demands of the suffrage movement brought to a head during the Edwardian period. Women were concerned about other women and the solutions to problems were being couched in terms of politics rather than philanthropy. Although Socialist and Liberal ideas were prominent in the national organization, it would be wrong to suggest that all club leaders wanted any radical re-structuring of society. The aims of many of the club leaders were voiced by Ruth Lousada in the NOGC journal which were to improve the 'conditions of industrial work for girls' and to 'make

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<sup>67</sup> T. C. Eliot, 'Adolescent and the Modern World', Friends' Quarterly Examiner, 1930, p. 133.

their lives a little happier'.<sup>68</sup> Flora Freeman, who was interested in the industrial welfare of the girls and believed that incidents of unfairness in the workplace should be taken up, was a long way from socialism. She regarded 'rough' factory girls as 'born socialists, having no respect for a person on grounds that they belong to the educated classes'.<sup>69</sup> Olive Malvery was a Conservative who was very critical of the way women were treated in society but did not find Socialist solutions useful. As discussed in previous chapters she helped at many clubs in this period, eventually setting up a hostel for girls and women as well as being active in anti-White Slavery legislation. Olive thought that Socialism gave rights to the unfit, the lazy and the self indulgent. She also understood 'Free Love', which she associated with Socialism, as putting a low value on women, offering them nothing but 'sensual servitude'. They would be 'breeding cows' with the State as fathers. She believed that Socialism offered women and children nothing.<sup>70</sup>

There was an assumed non-socialist stance at the Time and Talent Settlement in Bermondsey. A sympathetic review was given to a biography of the Labour MP, Will Crooks but it was stated that 'we might disagree with him'.<sup>71</sup> Constitutional agitation for the vote was supported by Time and Talents but Suffragettes were deplored.<sup>72</sup>

Settlements did not have stated political aims although Liberal and Socialist sentiments can be

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<sup>68</sup> Girls' Club News, 1 Mar. 1912, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> F. Freeman, Religious and Social Work amongst Girls, 1901, p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> O. Malvery, A Year and a Day, 1912, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> Time and Talents News, July 1907.

<sup>72</sup> Time and Talents, Jan. 1907.

detected at some. These settlements intended to be empowering. They were to 'recreate the healthier tradition of English country life in which rich and poor, educated and uneducated live side by side, mutually dependent and well known to each other'.<sup>73</sup> Canning Town Women's Settlement wanted to 'interpret east to west; west to east'.<sup>74</sup> Lady Margaret Hall (LMH) sought 'active co-operation between the classes' and was motivated by 'a desire to learn'.<sup>75</sup> A Miss Butler of LMH said that they wanted to be 'pioneers not patronizers'.<sup>76</sup> Urwick, who later became a professor at LSE, reinforced this point. Settlement workers, he wrote, wanted to be 'neighbours not patrons'.<sup>77</sup> How far the women's Settlements achieved these aims is not easy to discern. They were very active with girls' work and many of the clubs lasted through generations.

#### Water into Wine

One of the settlements which had specific religious origins was the Time and Talents Settlement. It was designed to be empowering for all involved and was formed so that 'girls of leisure and education can use their time and talents in the service of others'.<sup>78</sup> Centres were formed throughout England and Scotland.

The settlement at Bermondsey was originally started in Whitechapel but with the increasing numbers of Jewish immigrants it was moved to 187 Bermondsey Street. One

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<sup>73</sup> anon., St. Hilda's East, n.d. c1940, p. 24.

<sup>74</sup> Canning Town Womens' Settlement Policy, 1927.

<sup>75</sup> G. Bailey, The History of Lady Margaret Hall, 1923, p. 123, p.117.

<sup>76</sup> Miss Thicknesse, unpublished account, n.d. LMH archives.

<sup>77</sup> E. Urwick, COS Review, Mar. 1902.

<sup>78</sup> M. Daunt, By Peaceful Means. The Story of Time and Talents 1887-1987, 1987.

of the aims was to bring 'beauty into the lives of the girls'.<sup>79</sup> It was believed that within every girl lurked the 'love of nature'. Since Bermondsey girls worked in factories rather than in service, it was thought necessary to 'attack' with 'weapons' of flowers. The ladies used to visit the factories distributing flowers. It was claimed that one could 'hear voices from behind the stacks of tins saying "Teacher, have you got a flower for me?"'. The Settlement workers hoped to fit the girls for service and to 'win each one for Christ'. They wanted to enrich the girls 'by bringing a ray of sunshine into the otherwise dark and dreary lives'. It was thought that the 'common bond of sisterhood' would enable them to overcome class differences.<sup>80</sup> Club work was to build up a character that would 'make for sound, healthy and holy home life'. Settlement work was to turn 'water into wine'.<sup>81</sup>

Apart from visiting factories the Settlement ran a girls' club and, in 1903, opened a second club in the poorer part of Bermondsey at Dockhead. In 1913, they opened a girls' hostel. They continued developing premises and facilities for adults in the inter-war years and still continued after the Second World War on a smaller scale.

The religious imperative was still strong during the inter-war years. The Annual Report in 1932 stated that 'family prayers plays a real part in helping potential home-makers of Bermondsey' but some attitudes had changed. The purpose was not to bring the spirit of Christ but to 'find him here where he has always been'.<sup>82</sup> The emphasis was not entirely spiritual - the

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<sup>79</sup> Conference Paper, 1898, T&T. scrapbook.

<sup>80</sup> Articles in T&T. scrapbook, 1899, 1901.

<sup>81</sup> M. Clifford, Time and Talents News, 1907, p.14.

<sup>82</sup> T&T Annual Report, 1932.

Settlement was aware of the material conditions of the girls. During the local strikes of 1912 and the General Strike of 1926, the clubs were kept open to feed the girls. In 1921, the Dockhead Club was used as a training centre for unemployed girls. Girls were also taken on subsidized outings and holidays which would have normally been outside their finances.

Although the intentions of the Settlement workers are clear it is difficult to assess if they were able to enrich the lives of the girls in the way they intended. There are favourable comments in the Annual Reports from girls but these are not necessarily representative. One girl in 1902 wrote that 'it's so nice to have someone to care for you. I've felt so different since I joined the club'.<sup>83</sup> Another wrote in 1921 that the club was a 'cheery place' and that she was 'glad [she] belonged to a club'.<sup>84</sup> The long existence of the Settlement and its expansion of activities indicated that it fulfilled a social need in the area. The extent of its spiritual influence cannot be assessed.

#### Latin and Cantatas

Time and Talents was not the only settlement in Bermondsey. Bermondsey Women's Settlement was established in the 1890s in Rotherhithe. It was part of the Bermondsey Settlement pioneered by the Wesleyan Scott Lidgett. The Women's Settlement concentrated on work amongst females and ran several clubs. These clubs were intended to empower not only the girls but the whole community. Scott Lidgett, writing in the annual report of the Settlement thought that 'the moral, spiritual and social progress of neighbourhoods like this largely depend upon the progress of young women.' Clubs were 'the surest way to secure the higher being of

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<sup>83</sup> T&T Annual Reports, 1902, p.6.

<sup>84</sup> T&T Scrapbook, 1921.

the families of the future' and were places where 'educated and devoted women could secure the most efficient means of dissipating the apathy of the community'.<sup>85</sup>

One of the earliest clubs was the Beatrice Club which attracted the 'better class of girl' who was 'intelligent and fairly educated'.<sup>86</sup> There were seventy five members in 1911. Drill, drawing and music were the main activities. The club worked for the 'education of heart, mind and body' and noted the 'cultivating and elevating forces at work'.<sup>87</sup> How much the girls enjoyed being 'cultivated' is difficult to know but they took part in events like a cantata entitled the 'Rose Queen' in 1899. They wore white dresses and flowers and presented twenty six musical items.<sup>88</sup> Drill competitions were also popular and drawing classes sometimes took the girls to the seaside, where, according to their teacher, their 'eyes were opened to the world around them'.<sup>89</sup>

Other subjects taught at Beatrice were Latin and Algebra, although there is no indication of their popularity. Girls were encouraged to read magazines like Queen and The Strand. They also went on rambles and visited art galleries.

Girls from the Beatrice Club helped at the rougher St. George's Club which was situated near the river where the girls were employed in casual work such as rag sorting and wood chopping. They were 'hatless' girls and were full of 'undisciplined energy'.<sup>90</sup> Beatrice

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<sup>85</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Annual Report 1897, p.23.

<sup>86</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Annual Report, 1898, p.28.

<sup>87</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Magazine, 1896, p.19.

<sup>88</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Magazine, Feb. 1899, p. 28.

<sup>89</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Magazine, Dec. 1895, p. 105.

<sup>90</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Annual Reports 1898, 1900.

girls were clearly ones who were receptive to the club's aims. One went on to be an assistant matron in a Training Home for girls. Another obtained a certificate from the British College of Physical Education whilst Mrs Beatrice Drapper, one of the club's original members became the first woman Mayor of Deptford in 1927. She claimed that her whole success in life was due to the Settlement and the club.<sup>91</sup> She certainly had a long history of public service. From 1902 she was a school manager and in 1906 she became a Guardian. She was elected as a Labour councillor in 1919 and became a JP in 1921. Her interests were those of health, women and children. Her husband was also a councillor.<sup>92</sup>

The Settlement ran several clubs for all classes of girls. Girls who went to the South Bermondsey Club were mainly from the Lipton's Jam Factory and were seen to need to be distracted from the 'demoralizing influences of streets'. It is not known if sewing, drill, singing and games were appreciated but 'many of the girls [had] given evidence of their attachment to the Club and to the ladies'.<sup>93</sup>

Beatrice, however was the superior club which developed the settlement's aims of cross-class links. Miss Simmons, the head of the Settlement in 1897 noted the 'sense of mutual dependence and obligation' and the 'companionship and confidence' between the classes.<sup>94</sup> The Beatrice Club moved into new premises in Princes Street in 1904 called Beatrice House. This became the 'centre of work for girls and women', under the management of a Miss Robinson who was a friend of Anna Martin, the feminist and suffragist who also worked at

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<sup>91</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Annual Report 1927.

<sup>92</sup> J. Kimber, Famous Women of Lewisham, 1986.

<sup>93</sup> Bermondsey Settlement Annual Report 1897, p.21.

<sup>94</sup> Miss Simmons, The Bermondsey Settlement: some account of Womens' Work, 1897, p. 13.

the Settlement.<sup>95</sup>

### Girls' Voices

It is not easy to establish whether the girls thought the clubs to be empowering because of the lack of evidence from the working class viewpoint. The strongest evidence comes from interviews conducted with women who remember the Jewish clubs. Although retrospective oral evidence, like other evidence, needs to be treated with caution, one cannot ignore the fond, enthusiastic memories of the eighteen interviewees. The level of affection for club workers and the club is high.

Mrs E.G. was the daughter of an immigrant tailor and went to the West Central Club at the beginning of this century.<sup>96</sup> She loved 'Miss Lily', she was 'lovely' but she loved her sister 'Miss Marian the best'. The club was the main social life for Mrs E.G. who lived near the club in Soho. There was nowhere else for a respectable girl to go. The club widened her horizons with classes in subjects like shorthand. Constance Lewis, the third worker at the club helped Mrs E.G. find her first office job. Although Mrs E.G. did not regard her family as very poor, the club provided her with opportunities which they could not have afforded and Mrs E.G.'s move into a white collar job was helped by the club.

Some club members became paid club workers as was the case with Miss H.F.<sup>97</sup> She had gone to the Butler Street Club in Whitechapel as a young girl but in 1916 she started to go to the West Central when she was about sixteen as her immigrant tailoring family moved to Islington. Mrs H.F. gave up her dressmaking

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<sup>95</sup> Bermondsey Settlement, 1911.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Mrs E.G. 14 Jan. 1990.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Miss H.F. 2 Feb. 1990.



apprenticeship to teach at the club. She, too, was very fond of Lily Montagu and kept her memory alive long after her death by running the Montagu Circle. She 'adored her [...] We had what in those days was called a G.P - a Grand Passion'. Lily and Marian were 'forward looking people' who 'didn't talk down'. The club was 'part of one's life' and a 'wonderful place for friendship'.

Butler Street Club in Whitechapel was also a vehicle for Florrie Passman. Daughter of immigrants, she went as a girl to this club, founded by the Anglo-Jewish establishment. After having worked as a military embroiderer and briefly as a clerk, she became club manager in 1913 and stayed till the club closed in the 1950s. She is remembered as 'motherly' and 'wonderful' and she remained a communal worker in the East End until well into the 1970s.<sup>98</sup> Interviewees who went to the club during the thirties talk of her tolerance and do not remember her being restrictive about dress or contact with boys. Having fun is remembered on the holidays at the seaside and the one rule recalled is that girls were only allowed to swim under supervision - even though the supervisor, Florrie, could not swim!<sup>99</sup>

Other clubs had far more rules and there was more of a social distance between the workers and members but they are still remembered with affection. Oxford and St. George's, in Stepney was 'a home from home'. This large club, which was started in 1915 as a boys' club, provided a range of cultural and recreational activities to both boys and girls during the 1930s. It also ran a summer camp and provided free medical care and hot

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<sup>98</sup> J. White, interview with Florrie Passman, 22 Nov. 1973. Thanks to Jerry White for the transcript.

<sup>99</sup> Interviews with Mrs S. 13 Sept. 1990, Mrs B.C. 23 July 1990, Mrs E.S. 4 Oct. 1990, Mrs B.D. 21 Aug 1990. Unrecorded conversation with Mrs. T.A. 23 July 1990.

baths. Rose Henriques who ran the girls' part of the club and was called 'the Missus' is remembered as a snob who disapproved of socialism, cosmetics and current fashions. Two interviewees who had left-wing views had difficulties with Rose but gained from the club. Mrs C., who was a member of the Labour Party, had been an East London Suffragette and was an early post-war member, described her relations with Rose as 'stormy' but maintained a life-long connection with the club as it became an adult club.<sup>100</sup> Mrs G., who sold the Young Communist paper unofficially at the club during the 1930s, said that she had 'benefitted from the Missus' wisdom'. She still wears her camp dress and sings camp songs at reunions although Rose Henriques once made her leave camp because Mrs G. had asserted her independence.<sup>101</sup> Rose's interest in bringing 'high' English culture such as ballet to the East End girls was appreciated and girls were prepared to circumvent some rules in order to enjoy the friendship and sense of solidarity that the club provided.

The clubs provided a chance for some girls to become acquainted with things outside their immediate environment. Mrs M. remembers the early days of the Stepney Jewish Girls Club in the 1920s as a means of furthering her education.<sup>102</sup> It enabled her to meet people 'outside the normal circle of East Enders'. This club was initially run by a women's lodge of the philanthropic B'nai B'rith. Anna Schwab, a leading member, was 'elegant' and 'well dressed'. Mrs M. enjoyed going to tea with her as 'it helped me to appreciate nice things...I wanted this knowledge of the better things in life... I wanted to meet people I could learn from.' Mrs M. was proud of the fact that she was

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Mrs C. 18 July 1990.

<sup>101</sup> Interviews with Mrs G. 18 July 1990, 5 Dec. 1990.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Mrs M. 23 Nov. 1990.

widely read, enjoyed her art classes and could appreciate Wedgwood pottery and Waterford glass.

Stepney Club provided an important opportunity for Phyllis Gerson, a middle class young lady who did not think she was clever enough for teaching and had no secretarial skills. She was appointed as club leader in 1932 and excelled at club work. She did a professional training course at the London School of Economics.

There was a wide social gap between her and the members of the club. She was not familiar with Yiddish or Orthodox customs and was totally ignorant of bad language. The girls were unable to shock her.<sup>103</sup> This social gap does not seem to have been resented by the girls. Mrs L., who maintained a life long friendship with Phyllis, wanted to be rich and educated. Phyllis encouraged her to take a club leaders' course and later involved her in refugee work abroad. Mrs L. later became an American university teacher and never returned to the East End.<sup>104</sup>

Miriam Moses of Brady Girls' Club in the East End is remembered during the 1930s as being very strict. [see Chapter Eight] She has, however, a very special place in the hearts of those interviewed. Four of the interviewees were part of a special group whom Miss Moses used to entertain in her flat on Friday nights and no doubt this special relationship has influenced the women's memories. The evenings were 'very happy times',<sup>105</sup> 'it was lovely' and 'a big thing in those days'. Mrs A.S. had never left the club as she remained in contact with the post-war adult club, holding at times, the post of treasurer. The club was still important in the lives of some of the women in the

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Phyllis Gerson, 30 July 1990.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Mrs L. 31 Oct. 1990.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Mrs A.S. 22 Feb. 1991.

1990s: 'we still meet - us girls'.<sup>106</sup> The club was influential: 'we are what we are for having been Brady Girls... Brady has made us what we are'.<sup>107</sup> The club was a 'wonderful institution' which had 'something very special - the Brady spirit'. It was very 'Jewish' and a 'way of life'.<sup>108</sup> For one woman, Miriam Moses was a strong role model: 'her approach was nice' and 'we learnt an awful lot from her'. Mrs M.C.'s involvement in voluntary work was inspired by Miriam Moses: 'it is because of Miss Moses - her - tuition - helping other people is something instilled in us by her'. It 'goes back to the things we were taught at Brady'.<sup>109</sup>

Jewish clubs provided a sense of Jewishness and were in touch with the communal values of immigrant life. They offered a wider view of society and a way out of poverty. The clubs offered a safe, respectable environment for Jewish girls and enabled them to continue their education as English girls. Although the class gap was registered, this was not resented as the community aspired to improve themselves. The English middle class culture offered at the clubs was part of the process of assimilation to which many of the community aspired. The clubs furthered the aim of the Anglo-Jewish establishment which was to produce English people of Jewish faith. For the women interviewed, the clubs during the inter-war years were places of friendship with home-like qualities. The clubworkers were remembered as having something to offer as the values of the clubs were shared by members and workers and the women do not feel that anything was imposed upon them. The interviewees had a strong sense of their own

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Mrs B.M. 18 Jan. 1991.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Mrs S.W. 18 Jan, 1991.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Mrs E.G. 16 Jan. 1990.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Mrs M.C. 1 Feb. 1991.

worth, and regarded themselves as English and Jewish. The clubs contributed to this as part of the total communal Jewish experience of that generation of children of immigrants.

Whilst the popularity of the Jewish clubs is apparent, it has not been very easy to discover the views of girls who attended other clubs. One very enthusiastic account comes from Emily Cannon who went to the Malvern Mission in Canning Town around 1920. This mission was founded in 1894 by Malvern College but was developed by an Edwardian voluntary worker, Reginald Kennedy-Cox into the Dockland Settlement. By 1937, it had six branches. It was originally concerned with boys' clubs but, after the First World War, a Miss Oliver developed the women's work there.

Emily Cannon records in her unpublished autobiography that 'that club was one of the best things that happened to me'. She 'lived for the evenings at Dockland Settlement' where she was 'learning all the time'. Emily admired the clubworkers whom she described as ex-debutantes. There was Miss Oliver, Miss Teasdale, Miss Le Pelly and Miss Shepherd who were all 'lovely looking'. She was fond of one especially: 'I loved Miss Teasdale'. Emily always went to entertainments as her 'darling Miss Teasdale was there. I think I had what is now called a 'crush' on her'. They were taught 'high class' music like "Orpheus in the Underworld" and were taken to Shakespearean plays. Emily was once chosen to go to Lyons to meet two actresses, Gladys Cooper and Rosalind Russell, the actor Gerald du Maurier and Frederick Lonsdale, the playwright. The club also ran holidays at Herne Bay and organized sport. Emily played netball in the winter which she enjoyed. Emily clearly enjoyed the high culture, wider opportunities and close

association with the 'ladies'.<sup>110</sup>

Club life was also a positive experience for Mrs J.R. who went to the Dockhead club run by the Time and Talent Settlement in Bermondsey. Mrs J.R., who was born in 1903, started going to the children's club in about 1911 and maintained a life-long contact with the Settlement. Dockhead was considered to be in a 'rough' part of Bermondsey but Mrs J.R. came from a respectable family. Her mother ran a small grocer's shop and her father had a regular job as a lighterman. When she left school at fourteen she worked in an ammunition box factory, later moving to ironing collars where she stayed for forty years. The girls' club provided various activities such as sewing and drill which Mrs J.R. enjoyed but the opportunity for friendship is the main focus of her memory now. Contact with the clubworkers - the ladies - is also appreciated. She enjoyed going to their houses, going on outings and on holidays. She accepted compulsory prayers and recognized that you had to 'behave yourself' but did not recall any imposition of rules. She found the ladies easy to get along with: 'they were just like you... they used to buy fish and chips and eat them in the street'. Some of the ladies became godmothers to the girls' children and one member, Ada Tate, worked for one of the ladies as a nanny and also got a job in the settlement. Jumble sales to which the ladies donated were appreciated as members were able to acquire 'good stuff' cheaply.

Mrs. J.R. does not remember much rebellion - not many 'got barred' and there was sufficient interest for girls' committees. The ladies were highly thought of by the girls and Mrs J.R. suggests that a memorial fountain which was dedicated to Miss Violet Tritton, the head of

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<sup>110</sup> E. Cannon, We Slept Three in a Bed, n.d., unpublished manuscript held at Newham Local Studies Centre.

the club is an indication of her popularity. She was 'ever so nice'. Mrs J.R. did not move out of the area nor climb the socio-economic ladder. The club did not appear to change her attitudes or her nominal Christianity. It did, however offer her some enrichment by reinforcing peer group friendship and by providing some wider social experiences.<sup>111</sup>

The Time and Talents Settlement had some credibility with the community as different generations came in contact with its various services. The Roman Catholic community in the East End also had well established facilities by the 1930s. One such facility was the home, hostel and club for working girls in Bow Road, Bow which was started in 1891 by Cardinal Manning. It was run by a French order of nuns, the Sisters of Marie Auxiliatrice, who, according to the Archbishop of Westminster, had given themselves to those 'without God in the world'. He regarded the East End as the 'China of England'.<sup>112</sup> The nuns were engaged in 'rescue and salvage' work. They provided needlework, the three Rs and reasonable amusement and recreation. The home trained girls as servants and it was a place where the out-of-work or sick could lodge. It was a place where girls could rest, eat, laugh and pray. The Bow club aimed to 'humanize and Christianize' the girls.<sup>113</sup> An entry in Booth's notebooks stated that the aim was the 'material and spiritual improvement of working girls and women' and that it was open to all girls irrespective of creed.<sup>114</sup>

Miss I.H. went to the Bow club in the 1930s. She only went there for three years but remembers it well

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Mrs J.R. 27 May 1992.

<sup>112</sup> The Tablet, May 1893, p. 739.

<sup>113</sup> The Tablet, June 1893, p 858.

<sup>114</sup> Booth B179.

and with affection. From an East End Roman Catholic family, she left her Roman Catholic School at fourteen to work in a shirt factory in the City Road for ten shillings a week. She generally went twice a week to the club for games, needlework, to work in the garden and to use the gymnasium. This was 'a real gym - a proper gym with a gym teacher'. She also enjoyed day trips with the club and the friendly and happy spirit. The nuns were very welcoming. She remembers Sister Mary Edmund and Sister Matthias and felt that the nuns were there to help and that she could go to them if she had any problems. She did not find them patronizing and feels that they must have had a big influence on her later decision to become a nun. However in her mid-teens she was quite worldly: she used to love going dancing where she enjoyed mixed company and live music for six pence. She joined a non-catholic Girl Guide company which meant her going to a non-catholic service. She should have been made a 'Child of Mary', a pious girls' organization but she did not attend all the meetings because she loved dancing. She combined the world of the club with other recreation and was quite happy with the all-girls atmosphere at the club.

Some of the girls were 'Cockney Irish' and they used to bring Irish culture to the club. They had Irish dancing and St Patrick's day was celebrated. Irene also remembers annual Corpus Christi processions where her parish combined with the Italian community. The local reaction was one of interest but not hostility.

Miss I.H. left home at sixteen because she wanted a room of her own and she worked at a convent. Going against her father's wishes, she became a nun when she was twenty one, joining a contemplative Order and remained with it for twenty six years. After she left the Order she worked for social services and the Catholic community and has remained a devout Roman



Catholic.<sup>115</sup>

Both Sister M. and Sister P. were associated with Bow in the 1920s. As a teacher and a telephonist from the London suburbs they stayed in the hostel run by the Order which ran the club. The hostel was quite separate from the Home where girls were trained for domestic service. The two young women knew very little about the Home although they were aware that the girls were usually not local and were sometimes from Wales or Ireland. Sister M. remembers a girl of thirteen coming from Ireland 'with nothing - nothing'. The girls at the Home learned 'housewifery and laundry'. Sister P. had some contact with the club as she helped with the younger children, not with the working girls' activities. The hostel was clearly for 'business girls'.

Sister P. was from a Roman Catholic family and taught in a Roman Catholic school. Sister M. was a Roman Catholic convert and went to the hostel because it was recommended from work. They both enjoyed their stay at the hostel: 'we loved being hostel girls... the nuns were marvellous'. The hostel had a 'homely atmosphere' and the nuns were there for us...[there was] always someone there... [it was] a real home'. They were very impressed by the care the nuns took of them and they subsequently entered the Order themselves, unaware that convent life meant, among other things, rising at five twenty in the morning.<sup>116</sup>

For these three women the club and hostel helped to reinforce their religious beliefs and was part of their community of shared values. The nuns who ran the hostel were remembered as caring, understanding and in touch with worldly young women.

The three institutions run by this Order reflect

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Miss I.H. 24 May 1991.

<sup>116</sup> Interviews with Sister M. and Sister P. 17 May 1991.

the class and ethnic divide of society to some extent. The middle class girls were kept fairly separate from the local girls except when they helped at the club. The girls from the Home were kept quite separate from the local working class and middle class girls.

From the (limited) oral evidence, the clubs provided an important space for friendship and, in some cases, the friendships lasted a life time. The women's lives were enriched by the educational and recreational experiences offered by the clubs: experiences which were not easily available to working class girls. Contact with club workers was generally valued and the 'ladies' sometimes provided role models for the girls. From the evidence, it is not easy to assess the nature of the 'crush' or the 'Grand Passion' but it is clear that some of the girls found some of the 'ladies' attractive. The 'ladies' were associated with luxury, kindness and goodness and offered the girls glimpses of another world. Class differences were registered but interviewees, speaking with hindsight, do not consider them important. The women do not feel that they were being improved in a way that undermined their own values and they welcomed what was on offer.

The clubs have strong, positive places in the memories of those interviewed and with whom I had informal conversations. However, the sample does not warrant an overall conclusion that the clubs were wholly empowering. Empowerment, discipline and protection were all entwined in club life.



Plate 20. Logo of NOGC journal used on the cover of Girls' Club News, 1912-1928.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis demonstrates that it is not possible to categorize clubs as either centres of sisterhood or instruments of surveillance. In general, the clubs encompassed both concepts, as one necessitated the other. Club organizers were motivated by a concern for other women's lives and were guided by what they regarded as universal notions of womanhood. Often prompted by religious attitudes of equality before God, they felt the bond between themselves and poorer women to be of the utmost importance. Although only too aware of class differences, it was thought that these could be surmounted by personal contact. The 'ladies' believed that the values and culture they wanted to pass on were self-evidently for the best. Since their teenage years had required supervision, it was therefore necessary that working class girls should also be recipients of the same supervision, guidance and education. As social mothers, the ideas of sisterhood rested on concerns that working class girls should achieve womanhood as defined by the middle classes and not by any working class definition. The girls were there to be instructed and it was hoped that they would realize the validity of that instruction. They were not taught to challenge the class nature of society or their place within it.

In order to exercise sisterhood, surveillance was necessary. Sisterhood necessarily involved surveillance because of age, gender and class. The girls were seen to be in need of middle class adult guidance, protection and education. Uncontrolled, independent working class females presented a threat to the dominant ideology.

The clubs were part of an overall intrusion into working class life carried out by philanthropists, social investigators and the State. They were voluntary and as such could never provide a total form of

surveillance. They could not have the impact of one of the biggest state agencies - the Board Schools. Rather, they added to the work of the schools, continuing the girls' education on gender and class lines. The girls' clubs shared some of the attitudes of those involved in running London's Board schools. The girls were deficient but could be improved. Clubs, like the schools, were civilizing and humanizing and had a focus on thrift, neatness and order. The street was viewed with suspicion and dependence on and deference to adults was thought necessary. The space was gender-specific and 'Englishness' was taken for granted. However, the girls did choose to come, gaining from the clubs aspects which suited them. The clubs did not necessarily supplant the streets but provided an additional form of recreation. If the girls came to the clubs it was because they enjoyed the activities, the friendship, the treats, the cheap refreshments or the warmth. The surveillance could be ignored or negotiated, the values absorbed or rejected.

The nature of club provision was very much determined by the organizers' attitudes to class, race and gender. Although these attitudes were not monolithic, some common strands can be traced. The belief that girls' characters and behaviour could be 'improved' in order that they could lead 'better' lives, influence their families and ultimately the whole class was a dominant motivating force. 'Improvement' was based on the assumption of middle class English values.

The protection, discipline and empowerment provided by the club organizers was done in the belief that working class girls were capable of improvement. This belief was part of a general trend of thought in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Although the working classes inhabited a strange country with different mores from the middle class reformers, they were nonetheless seen as susceptible to influence.

Englander<sup>1</sup> suggests that positivism raised a new optimism about the possibility of working class advance and that members of that class were capable of being made into rational and moral beings. Philanthropists and social investigators such as Mayhew, Booth and Hill had great faith in such a possibility. Octavia Hill, whose focus was on housing, believed that the working classes could be reformed if they had sufficient contact with middle class ideas.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the language of Social Darwinism, Charles Booth seems to have believed that people were products of experience and circumstance and not of irreversible biological mutation.<sup>3</sup> Booth strongly believed that even if some of the parents were past help their children could be educated and, as Marsden points out, he claimed that the London School Board had done well in providing schools which were a force for social improvement.<sup>4</sup> Booth also praised girls' clubs in 1903 because they had produced girls whose conduct was 'restrained', whose conversation was less 'flighty' and who were likely to postpone marriage.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1880s, the working classes were regarded as so foreign that Charles Booth mapped the London poor as

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<sup>1</sup> D. Englander, 'Introduction', D. Englander and R.O'Day, Retrieved Riches. Social Investigation in Britain 1840-1914, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> J. Lewis, 'Social facts, theories and social change: the ideas of Booth in relation to those of Beatrice Webb, Octavia Hill and Helen Bosanquet', D. Englander and R. O'Day, Retrieved Riches.

<sup>3</sup> J. Harris, 'Between civic virtue and social Darwinism: the concept of the residuum', p.79, D.Englander and R. O'Day, Retrieved Riches.

<sup>4</sup> W. Marsden, 'Charles Booth and the social geography of education in late nineteenth-century London', p. 259 D. Englander and O'Day, Retrieved Riches.

<sup>5</sup> C. Booth (ed.), Life and Labour of the People in London, 1892-7, vol. 7, pp. 79.

explorers chartered the unknown lands. His famous map with streets categorized by wealth and moral character, no doubt helped to make London comprehensible. As we have seen, clubs come into being when there was a growing climate of social investigation, either 'official' like that of Booth or 'unofficial' like that of Olive Malvery. The importance of getting to know the girls was emphasized by the club organizers and by Settlement workers as a means of making them more comprehensible.

The social gap between the classes was wide and one of the main difficulties encountered was the comparative independence of the working girls. As Anna Davin has shown, working class children were very involved in the family economy and knowledgeable about adult concerns.<sup>6</sup> Although all working class experience was not the same, working class children were not in the dependent position of middle class children. Compulsory education was starting to change the nature of working class childhood but young people of fourteen were not dependent and had not led the sheltered lives that the club organizers themselves had led. The difficulty of getting to know the girls must have been enormous but the organizers persisted because they believed 'improvement' was possible. Not only was it possible but it was essential as female improvement, as we have seen, was believed to be necessary for the improvement of the working class as a whole.

The wide cultural gap led the club workers to misunderstand the needs of the girls and to emphasize certain activities which may not have been considered so important by the girls. Working class girls appeared to be deficient in possessing appropriate domestic skills, but it is clear from Anna Davin's account of their socialization that they had a wide experience of

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<sup>6</sup> A. Davin, Growing Up Poor. Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914, 1996. Chapters 6, 9, 10.

domesticity and of running a home and family. In addition the Board schools spent a high proportion of curriculum time on domestic skills although Clara Collett thought that the schools should be more practical. Nevertheless, the making of what might have seemed unnecessary garments was often one of the main activities in the early clubs.

The aspect of working class life which the ladies found most worrying was the girls' desire for street amusements. The streets were dangerous places physically and morally - the entertainments found there were either pointless or degrading. The clubs were to provide rational recreation where the girls would spend their time usefully. Above all, the clubs provided a safe place where friendships and behaviour could be supervised. For the girls, the streets gave them the opportunity to develop their own friendships, exercise some physical freedom and to enjoy showing off their best clothes after confining days in work clothes. This perceived freedom was likely to be short-lived as most girls expected to marry quite early. It did not necessarily mean that the parents did not have some control over their daughters' lives but this may not have been apparent to the middle classes.

As discussed, the girls' appearance was seen as symptomatic of their moral development. The cheap finery indicated a frivolous, if not immoral attitude to life but to the girls it was important to be smart and fashionable in their few hours of free time.

Undeterred, the club organizers continued. It is probable that many small clubs folded either from lack of members or voluntary workers. However, many nineteenth century clubs did continue and new ones continued to be opened during the twentieth century. Clubs claimed success as the girls' sewing improved and improvement was also noted in behaviour, manners and dress. Girls competed in inter-club competitions, in



singing and drill, demonstrating a sense of club loyalty and discipline.

Whilst club managers with socialist inclinations blamed the industrial, capitalist system for the poor homes and wanted girls to be informed of their industrial rights, there was generally no move for political changes. The emphasis was largely on the need for the improvement of the character of the girls - for them to imbibe middle class values within the existing class structure.

The idea of improvement was also applied to other ethnic groups as 'Englishness' was taken for granted and self-evidently superior. The English middle class values which had to be transmitted were seen as normal and universal. They were not seen as specific to a class, religion or ethnic group. Englishness did not have to be defined.

It is important to note that the clubs developed at a time when some historians have argued that a sense of national identity was being developed. National unification meant internal colonization and the interest in the poor is an example of this. The establishment of a uniform education system, the railways, the introduction of Greenwich Mean Time all helped to create a national identity. Some of the 'oldest' traditions were invented in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The National Portrait Gallery, the National Trust, the National Gallery of Modern Art were all founded in the 1890s. Agitation for a National Theatre started in the 1870s and the idea of studying English Literature at university was introduced at this period. The beginning of the twentieth century also saw the introduction of the first permanent immigration laws which restricted access to Britain by aliens.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> J. Bourke, Working Class Cultures in Britain 1880-1960. Gender, class and ethnicity, 1994. R. Colls and P. Dodd, Englishness. Politics and Culture 1880-1920, 1986. R.

Doyle argues that the men's Settlement work was part of this new collective sense of Englishness<sup>8</sup> and it seems too that the girls' club work could also be a part of this process. The establishment of such a hegemony involved negotiation and active consent of various social groups. Groups such as the poor were to be incorporated into the system. There were no overt appeals to national identity - the women may have been quite unconscious of their Englishness. However the initial language used to describe the poor was similar to the language used to describe non-English races. National identity was fragile, however, for women of all classes of this period as they lost their British nationality if they married a foreigner whereas the British male retained his British nationality on marriage to a foreigner.

Britain, and more often England, was seen as having a civilizing mission throughout its Empire. For some, the belief in the superiority of the English 'race' was coupled with the belief that the 'indigenous races' of the Empire were at an earlier stage of development but were capable of improvement. Like children, they had to be taught civilized (English) ways and Christianity was part of the civilizing process. It is possible that club organizers were influenced by the kind of missionary and educational activity of women like Hannah Kilham and Annette Ackroyd who treated women of Africa and Asia as if they were deficient English women.

These attitudes to 'race' were relevant to club organizers working in multi-cultural London. As has been discussed, the poor were likened to those of an alien culture but nineteenth century London also

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Samuel, (ed.), Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identities, vol. 2. Minorities and Outsiders, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> B. Doyle, 'The Invention of English', R. Colls and P. Dodd, Englishness.

included foreigners - Irish, Italian, German, Asians, Africans, Chinese and Jews from various parts of Europe. The Jews were the largest single ethnic minority group to form girls' clubs. Faced with the arrival of 'foreign Jews, the established Anglo-Jewry's aim was Anglicization. Whilst retaining their religious faith, Anglo-Jewry's practice and behaviour largely resembled their middle and upper middle class Christian counterparts. The gap between them and the new immigrants or foreign Jew was as wide as the gap between the classes. Much of the anglicization was achieved through the Jewish and Board schools of the 1880s to the extent that the Jewish writer, Zangwill commented that Jewish girls knew more about British history than that of their own history.<sup>9</sup>

The Board schools never referred to children by race and treated all children as English, categorising them by their parents income and employment. Anglo-Jewry made no demands on Board Schools to promote a curriculum which would reflect Jewish culture or enhance Jewish identity. The clubs continued this process of Anglicization whilst maintaining the Jewish faith. The clubs were not centres of resistance to anti-semitism, not strongholds of Zionism, nor did they promote East European culture or the Yiddish language. Within the Jewish community the same class differences were operating as in the wider community as well as the belief that the division could be overcome by the personal influence of 'ladies'.

The Jewish Clubs organizers were totally convinced of the need and possibility of improvement. Early clubs provided literacy and English classes for new immigrants but as the generations settled into English schools, the club's curriculum differed very little from the Gentile clubs. The Club organizers wanted to pass on the best

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<sup>9</sup> A. Davin, Growing Up Poor, p. 202.

of the English education that they had received.

Jewish leaders in the club movement, such as Lily Montagu, were highly regarded in the wider organization particularly in the Edwardian period. There is a general stress in the clubs on the development of the moral character of young working English womanhood through wholesome recreation, the need to strengthen private religious faith as well as the practical need to equip the girls with vocational and domestic skills. Oral evidence certainly attests to the fact that Jewish women found the clubs empowering, enabling them to feel secure in both their English and Jewish identities.

The Jewishness of the club leaders was sufficiently English to engender respect for the Jewish faith amongst the gentile workers. The whole style of Anglo-Jewry was to ensure that latent anti-semitism was not roused. This seems to have been successful at the organizational level of the girls' club movement. In spite of much day-to-day anti-semitism which was rife in London, Englander argues that 'Jews occupied a special position in Protestant thought as the most powerful witnesses to the fulfilment of prophecy and the truth of revelation'.<sup>10</sup> It was largely with club workers of the Protestant tradition that leaders like Lily Montagu worked.

Jewish and Gentile clubs co-existed, taking part in inter-club competitions and sharing a holiday home. In the light of this, further investigation into the Jewish reaction to the club delegation to Nazi Germany would be interesting.

Oral evidence suggests that Jewish immigrants welcomed the chance for their daughters to become anglicized as it was associated with social mobility. Jewish families who allowed their daughters to go to

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<sup>10</sup> D. Englander, 'Booth's Jews: the presentation of Jews and Judaism in Life and Labour of People in London', D. Englander and R. O'Day, Retrieved Riches.

clubs shared the values of Anglo-Jewry. The clubs did not reach those families who were more traditional in their child rearing practices. Zionists sent their children to the newly formed Habonim club during the 1930s. The oral evidence emphasizes the voluntary cooperation of the club members with the processes of assimilation. The participation by some members in anti-fascist activities in spite of the official Anglo-Jewry attitude also shows that anglicisation and assimilation were conducted on the immigrants' own terms. Feldman observes that there was a greater assertion of East End Jewish identity and that the East End Jews developed their own perspectives on becoming English.<sup>11</sup> Club membership may well have been a part of this.

As we have seen, Irish girls new to Britain were trained in Homes associated with Roman Catholic Convents and some London-born Irish girls went to the few Roman Catholic clubs. As with the Jewish clubs, the faith was upheld but the clubs aimed to encourage English middle class values by association with ladies. Roman Catholic workers did not get involved in the wider club movement.

Whilst there is evidence of the presence of English speaking girls of African origin in London, there is no record of their involvement or otherwise in clubs. Nor have I been able to find any reference to clubs for girls of any other ethnic origin. In some cases the numbers of settled Chinese or Asian families may have been too small to be noticed or they may not have wanted to attend English speaking clubs. In the case of the Italian community, they may have organized themselves informally without any reference to wider community.

The establishment of a small but wealthy urban

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<sup>11</sup> D. Feldman, 'The Importance of being English. Jewish immigration and the decay of liberal England', D. Feldman and G. Stedman Jones (ed.), Metropolis London: Histories and representation since 1800, 1989.

Jewish elite plus the specific Jewish immigration patterns are factors which explain the strong presence of Jewish clubs. The English Jewish club organizers' policy of producing good citizens and religious Jews was premised on the idea of the possibility of improvement along the same lines as their English Christian counterparts.

The improvement of girls as girls, had to take place within a gender specific place. Club organizers had clear ideas on what constituted appropriate roles for men and women in society. In middle class society men and women had clearly defined separate roles and boys and girls were socialized and educated separately. It is therefore not surprizing that clubs developed separately and that activities within them were gendered in order to produce adults who were equipped to perform their 'feminine' and 'masculine' roles.

Boys and girls were perceived different ways. Whilst both were considered precocious and in need of guidance away from 'low' amusements, their street behaviour was commented upon differently. Boys hung around the streets and indulged in smoking, gambling and drinking whereas girls seemed to indulge in raucous behaviour and numerous comments were made about their dress. The inter-war years also brought comments about cosmetics. No comment was made about the boys' dress although there were observations about their stunted growth. There were worries that boys at *best would end* up in blind alley jobs and at worst, as criminals. The main concern was that the girls' sexual morals were loose and they could so easily 'fall'.

Koven notes a change of concern amongst boys' reformers at the beginning of the century. Prior to that there was a certain admiration of 'rough' boys in the 1880s and 1890s but the 'rough' boy turned into a 'hooligan' and a social problem at the beginning of the twentieth century during and just after the Boer War.

Reformers had lost confidence in the Arnoldian rhetoric of 'sweetness and light' and were confronted with disorderly youth behaviour at the relief of Mafeking celebrations.<sup>12</sup> I have not traced any such change of attitude amongst girls' reformers. 'Rough' girls, those employed in factories or in casual labour, were considered difficult throughout the period but were all potential wives and mothers. If anything, the Boer War showed the need for 'good' mothers if they were to be able to produce healthy males.<sup>13</sup> Increasingly, the working class family was seen as important in preventing the rise of hooliganism and there was a general move toward State intervention during the beginning of the twentieth century. Boys' club workers such as Morant, Masterman, Braithwaite, Jackson helped shape such state intervention as civil servants or politicians.<sup>14</sup>

Organizers of boys' and girls' clubs placed a high emphasis on the presence of the friendship of a middle class adult. Both boys and girls were seen as lacking an appropriate role model and this model could be provided by ladies and 'varsity' men. It is interesting, however, that in some instances women could have a valuable role in boys' clubs but that men were not generally advocated in girls' clubs.

Whilst opinion about the role of women in boys' clubs is divided, I did not find any suggestions that men should organize girls clubs. Men's influence on girls was not addressed. There is a reference to a man on the door of the Guild of Good Life in Hoxton and religious leaders visited clubs. Men were not required to bring out any aspect of girls' characters. This may

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<sup>12</sup> S. Koven, 'Rough Lads to Hooligans: Boy Life, National culture and Social Reform', Andrew Parker et al, Nationalisms and Sexuality, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> A. Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', History Workshop Journal, no. 5, 1978.

<sup>14</sup> S. Koven, 'Rough Lads', A. Parker et al, Nationalisms.

well be related to the stereotypical Victorian father who had very little to do with his children's education and if he did it was with older boys. It is also likely that the all-male experience of school and adult West End clubs was a contributory factor. It may also be related to sexual propriety and sexual protection of girls.

Up until the First World War, separate space was considered necessary if males and females were to develop successfully. Mixed socials and dramatics were allowed under supervision. The War brought a particular response to a specific situation. Girls were seen as harming the war effort and the provision of mixed clubs were seen as the solution. These clubs were closed after the war ended when there were no men in uniform to provoke undesirable behaviour. The interest in mixed clubs by female club organizers, which grew in the inter-war period, may be an unconscious reaction to the sexologists and their emphasis on heterosexual desire but it may also have been the wish to break with the Victorian past, to acknowledge the reality of young working class culture.

Mixed youth clubs became the norm in post war Britain but the idea of girls' space became of interest to female youth workers during the 1970s and 1980s. A new generation of women who had been influenced by the 'new wave' of feminism were conscious that boys dominated the scene and thought that girls should be given the opportunity to develop as autonomous beings. Some of these workers looked back to the history of girls clubs in order to find the roots of girls' work.<sup>15</sup> This interest in girls' only space has been echoed in women-only events and classes run by women's groups and local authorities.

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<sup>15</sup> V. Carpenter and K. Young, Coming in from the Margins, Leicester, 1986. J. Dixon, 'A Short History of the Girls' Club Movement in London', unpubl. essay, 1981.



The question of male domination was not an explicit concern of earlier club workers. Since gendered roles were largely accepted, club leaders were concerned about the appropriate ways to develop girls into wives and mothers. As women's role has been questioned, late twentieth century club workers have considered ways in which girls can develop their abilities in order to confront stereotyping and male domination.

Although the social and economic conditions changed during the period under study and the clubs of the 1930s might have looked very different from those of the 1880s, there is a strong sense of continuity. The idea of woman's ultimate role being that of wife and mother is one which did not change and was not challenged by the clubs. Nor was the belief in the superiority of the English race ever put under scrutiny.

The clubs relied on a degree of philanthropy throughout the period. Although by the 1930s, there were government funds available and more paid workers with opportunities for professional training on offer, the voluntary spirit was still very important. As Pedersen and Mandler have argued, the descendants of the Victorians did not reject Victorian values and believed that the state had a duty to shape national life.<sup>16</sup>

The religious commitment of the workers was also present throughout. Overt religious activity was less common during the inter-war years and many clubs adapted their activities to the popular culture of the day with dancing becoming less controversial and more acceptable.

By the the 1930s, the poor became more 'knowable' and there is hardly any reference to the 'rough' girl after 1920. Many clubs had become well established and were supported by local generations in a community. However, as has been noted, Jones felt the need to go

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<sup>16</sup> S. Pedersen and P. Mandler, After the Victorians, private conscience and public duty in modern Britain, 1994, preface, p. ix.

into disguise to study homeless women as late as 1926. The social gap between the club organizers, settlement workers and the girls was still wide.

Girls were still seen to need to be protected from male lust as the White Slave stories told in Hoxton in 1926 demonstrate. They still needed to be protected from themselves: the First World War had created further anxieties about their street behaviour and the cinema and popular fashions were considered bad influences. Cosmetics and fashions still caused comment as had the cartwheel hats of the 1890s.

As the franchise was gradually extended to all women, club literature reflected an interest in citizenship but this was not entirely new. The impulse to develop girls as citizens had been present since the Edwardian period.

The inter-war period opened up job opportunities especially in light industry but the position of the married women worker was fragile as some professions operated a marriage bar and married mothers in paid work were rare. The club literature did sometimes debate combining a career with marriage but motherhood still appeared to be the ultimate goal. The obvious contradiction that many of the club organizers who were not married was not addressed in the recorded literature. An interviewee remembers a moment when she was cross with Miriam Moses of Brady club (who was also the first women Mayor of Stepney), and told her that she would rather be a mother than a Mayor.<sup>17</sup> It was a remark which she now describes as 'unkind' but one which indicates that career and marriage could not be combined and that marriage for women was superior. Although motherhood was considered superior, the idea of social motherhood was a motivating force for the club workers.

Ideas of English middle class womanhood about which

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<sup>17</sup> Mrs A.S., 22 Feb. 1991.

working class girls needed to learn were prevalent throughout the period. The relationship between the club organizers and members was not based on equality and 'mothering' is probably a more apt metaphor than 'sisterhood'. Eileen Yeo has applied the idea of social mothering which used the strategies of protecting, disciplining and empowering to the overall treatment of adult working class women by social reformers and philanthropists.<sup>18</sup> She claims that working class women were seen as deficient or passive victims who were scolded and infantilized. If this was the case, then it is even more likely that the girls were seen to need special adult guidance. Although some of the club workers were not much older than the girls themselves - Lily Montagu was only nineteen when she opened her club - they were able to exercise maternal authority through their class position. Not as sisters but as voluntary mothers, confident of their authority and beliefs, they attempted to nurture and educate the girls. In order to do this they attempted some policing within the clubs but had no control outside of them. The Board Schools had far greater control but they were not absolute. The discipline varied but it is difficult to agree with Eileen Yeo that the system created was 'cruel and heartless' as far as clubs were concerned.<sup>19</sup> However, I agree that 'their practice of social motherhood posed real problems for the creation of sisterhood with working class women'.<sup>20</sup>

Clubs were a product of the late nineteenth century manifestation of philanthropy and early twentieth century social reform. The working class was

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<sup>18</sup> E. Yeo, 'Social Motherhood and the Sexual Communion of Labour in British Social Science, 1850-1950', Women's History Review, vol. 1, no. 1, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 63.

differentiated and encompassed immigrants who had come from different social and economic situations; it was neither monolithic nor passive. Women, some through ideas of religious 'sisterhood' and others through feminist ideas of furthering women's progress, attempted to cross class and ethnic boundaries. Their attempts at cultural imperialism were partial as the girls who came attended the clubs on their own terms.

It is impossible to speculate on the degree of personal feelings of 'sisterhood' which might have existed. Some club leaders found the work difficult, whilst others clearly gained something from their work. There is a sense of fear, bewilderment, criticism and admiration especially in the early literature. Oral evidence, with all its problems, suggests a love of the clubs with some respect for some of the leaders. The 'surveillance' is not remembered as irksome and could be negotiated. Earlier evidence, however, shows that it was resisted. Surveillance was integral to the middle class mission but as it was within the voluntary sector its effects were minimal.

This thesis has concentrated on London but further research into clubs in other English cities such as Birmingham might yield interesting comparisons. The work done on the Manchester clubs suggests some similarity with London. Both of the clubs in Goodman's study assume a domestic role for girls but one club had a slightly broader view of female development which included ideas about rights and citizenship.<sup>21</sup> Reading lists of clubs might also bear further investigation as Montgomery's research reveals an interesting collection

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<sup>21</sup> J. Goodman, 'Leisure for Girls: Girls' clubs in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester', History of Education Bulletin, no. 60, 1997.

of feminist books gifted to a Manchester club.<sup>22</sup> More research into clubs organized by the British in the Empire might reveal more about the nature and legacy of Imperialism. It would also be interesting to investigate club work in other parts of Europe to see if the specific configuration of political, immigrant, religious and feminist traditions led to a different or similar type of club. Although crossing the political and religious spectrum, clubs in London were most prominent within the Protestant and Jewish tradition, with Liberal and Labour women providing active organized support that turned club work into a movement in Britain. Comparisons with elsewhere might indicate if notions of womanhood were universal and if they were used as instruments of control or of subversion.

Whilst not wanting to adhere to crude periodization, 1939 is a convenient place to stop. Post war Britain with its new Labour Government, the decline of the Empire, the establishment of the Welfare State, an education system that was thought to be more egalitarian saw a crystalizing of trends already started before the war. Society was changing as there was a move away from philanthropy with fewer leisured ladies and more professional social workers. The raising of the school leaving age increased the dependency of children on adults and post war youth clubs became places for older school children. They were not for working girls. State aided youth clubs became mixed, were recreational and provided opportunities for heterosexual friendships to develop. The immediate post-war period, with its growing secularism, new housing developments and concerns about delinquents would be an interesting area of study as would the later period of

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<sup>22</sup> F. Montgomery, ' "Women who Dids, and all that kind of thing..." Male Perceptions of "Wholesome" Literature', in C. Parker, (ed.) Gender, Politics and Sexuality,

the so-called 'sexual revolution' and new wave feminism.

This thesis has presented a London whose working class was multi-cultural and has highlighted the assumptions about the superiority of English middle class values. It has considered whether ideas of a common gender could surmount class divisions. It has also considered to what extent middle class philanthropy was a site of policing and the working class reaction to any policing. Working girls' clubs were part of the process of the remaking of the working class within a capitalist, patriarchal system and women played an active role in shaping class relations. The clubs were not obvious places of subversion or coercion. Attention should be paid to the benefits that the clubs produced for the middle class organizers, ensuring them a place in the public world and also to the opportunities for self development taken up by some of the members. Working class agency is difficult to assess because of the continual problem of the lack of recorded working class voices. The intentions of many of the club organizers are clear but success is less easy to determine. Whilst it is clear that there was no wholesale rejection of women's ideological role, it is by no means clear that middle class respectability was totally absorbed.

APPENDIX

## APPENDIX.

There were numerous clubs in London during the period under study. I have listed the principal independent ones below and some of the ones run by larger organizations. The list is by no means exhaustive. In some cases I have only indicated the numbers of clubs in existence at a given time. Clubs lasted varying lengths of time and many opening and closing dates are unknown. Many small clubs were run by local churches. To give an idea of the total number of clubs one can look at the affiliations to the umbrella organization at a given date. During the period before the First World War, there were three umbrella organizations. In 1909 sixty clubs were affiliated to the Federation of Working Girls' Clubs. In 1912, there were ninety-four London clubs affiliated to the National Organization of Girls' Clubs. There was also the London Union of Girls' Clubs but no affiliation figures are available for that period. In 1935, however, there were 96 clubs affiliated to the London Girls' Club Union and the number of clubs affiliated to the above-mentioned Federation of Working Girls' Clubs had increased to 126. A new organization was formed in 1939, the London Union of Girls' Clubs which was probably an attempt to pull together all London clubs. There were 234 clubs affiliated to this Union from most London boroughs and also from the Greater London areas of Essex and Middlesex. There was a concentration of clubs in some areas such as Bethnal Green where there were twenty two clubs listed in 1930. [see plate 22]

### INDEPENDENT CLUBS

#### Christian Clubs

Most clubs had a general Christian ethos although the extent to which they inculcated Christianity varied. Christianity was generally assumed but many clubs were



not concerned about denomination.

Soho Club, Central London.

Possibly the first girls' club in London. Started in Greek Street in 1880 by Maude Stanley who also started the London Club Union. It continued as a girls' club until Maude Stanley's death in 1915. It then became a club for actresses. Today it houses homeless women. Girls from this club helped at one in Spitalfields.

L' Espérance, Euston Road, Central London.

Started in 1890s by Emmeline Pethick and Mary Neal. Both women were socialist and later became very active in the suffrage movement. Mary was also involved in the folk dance revival and Emmeline was later active in the Labour movement. They shared a holiday home with the West Central Jewish Club, called the Green Lady in Littlehampton.

Honor Club, Central London.

This club aimed at the 'better class' working girl. this club started in the 1890s and was affiliated to the NOGC in 1912. [see plate 23]

Deptford Girls' Club, Creek Road, Deptford, South East London.

Run by the Deptford Fund, later termed the Albany Institute, it opened in the 1890s. Mrs Lamert was the principal worker until the 1920s. The club was originally opened for girls working at the slaughter house - the 'gut girls'.

Working Girls' Club, Wellington Street, Woolwich, South East London

This was opened in 1915 mainly as a response to war time developments in munitions. The writer Edith Nesbit, who was living fairly locally, showed some interest in it.

Girls' Guild of Good Life, Hoxton, East London

Founded in the 1880s by Mrs Sara Rae, wife of a Temperance leader. W.T. Stead was on the managing committee. His daughter was involved in running the club's hostel during the 1920s. The club was active

throughout the 1930s.

Clifden House Institute, Bow, East London.

This was opened in 1893 for the factory girls at Bryant and May.

Working Women's Club, Bow, East London.

This was run briefly by Annie Besant for the 'match girls' at Bryant and May. It was opened in 1890 and was financed by the theosophist, Madame Blavatsky.

Working Girls' Institute, Bow.

This was opened in 1878.

Welcome Home and Restaurant, Aldersgate.

This club was opened during the 1880s for women in city factories.

Enterprise Club, City of London.

This was started in the 1880s and aimed to attract clerks.

**Roman Catholic Clubs.**

Bow Club, East London.

Started in 1891 by the Sisters Maria Auxilitrice and it ran through out the period.

Girls' Club, Commercial Road, East London.

Run by St. Cecilia's House.

Catholic Girls' Club, Deptford, South East London.

This club was mentioned in 1902.

Wandsworth Working Girls' Club, South London.

This club was in existence in 1880.

**Quaker Clubs.**

Only one was found.

Frideswide Club, St. Martin's Lane, Central London.

This was started in 1893 in Drury Lane. By 1895 it moved to St. Martin's Lane and continued there throughout the period. The President was George Newman who was an eminent public health doctor.

**Agnostic Clubs.**

Chesterton Club, Homerton.

Started in 1892, it was run by a Miss Johnson described

as an agnostic but doing really Christian work. It became the New Chesterton club in 1911 and was still in existence in 1923.

#### CLUBS RUN BY ORGANIZATIONS

##### Settlements

##### Women's University Settlement, South London.

Founded in 1887. The Blackfriars Club opened in 1890 and became known as the Acland Club in 1894. Settlement workers also helped at other clubs in the area.

##### Robert Browning Settlement, Walworth, South London.

In 1898, Jessie Spicer started a club for factory girls.

##### Bermondsey Women's Settlement, South London.

At one time they ran nine clubs. The Beatrice was the first in 1894 and was running throughout the period. This eventually amalgamated with the White Heather and Speedwell Clubs in 1907. These clubs were for 'respectable' girls whilst St. George's at the riverside was for 'rough' girls. St. George's opened in 1897 and continued throughout the period. Ada Brown was an early worker at St. George's who later became the first woman Mayor in London. Five other clubs were in existence between 1897 and 1905.

##### Lady Margaret Hall Settlement, Kennington, South London.

They ran the Salamanca and Daisy Clubs. The latter was started by the Lambeth Association of the Royal Holloway College in 1891. Katherine Courtney helped at the Daisy Club before going on to pacifist work. The Daisy Club was operating from the early 1900s and was still in existence in 1937. The Salamanca ran from at least 1911 through to the 1930s.

##### Time and Talents Settlement, Rotherhithe, South London.

After moving from Whitechapel, they ran two clubs, one which attracted more 'respectable' girls in Bermondsey and one by the river at Rotherhithe which was intended for rougher girls. Mrs Violet Tritton was an early worker. Both clubs were in existence in 1939.

##### United Girls' School Settlement, Camberwell, South

London.

A club run by the above settlement was listed in 1899 and 1914.

Gonville and Caius College Mission and Settlement Battersea, South West London.

A club run by the above settlement was listed in 1914 and 1939.

Wellington College Mission, East Street.

Founded in 1885, this mission ran a club which was listed in 1914.

St. Hilda's East.

Founded in 1889, this settlement ran two clubs, the St. Hilda's and the Daffodil Clubs which were still in existence in the 1930s. The settlement was linked to Oxford University and Cheltenham Ladies' College.

St. Margaret's Settlement, Bow, East London.

Founded in 1888, it ran a girls' club from St. Margaret's House which was still in existence in the 1930s. It was specifically non-Jewish.

Maurice Hostel, Hoxton, East London.

Ran a girls' club at least before the First World War.

Canning Town Women's Settlement.

This Settlement started in 1892. Rebecca Cheetham, a leading figure ran a club for factory girls, for young women in business and domestic servants from 1894. The club continued throughout the period.

Malvern Mission, Canning Town.

This mission opened a girls' club after the First World War. Miss Oliver and Miss Teasdale were volunteers during the 1920s.

The Women's Presbyterian Settlement, Poplar, East London.

They ran the Victoria Docks Girls' Club and Millwall Girls' Club which were active between the wars.

Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel, East London.

Mrs Barnett ran a lunch time club for factory girls at least during 1914.

St. Mildred's Settlement, Isle of Dogs, East London.

A girls' club was listed in 1914 but club work was likely from the settlement's inception in 1897.

Rugby House, Notting Hill, West London.

This settlement was founded in 1885 and ran a club which was listed in 1914.

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Girls' Friendly Society.

I have found thirty clubs in Central, East, South East and South London run by the Anglican GFS between 1877 and 1922. Clubs in Bethnal Green, Whitechapel and Hoxton were specifically aimed at factory girls whilst others were for those 'in business', for shop assistants, dressmakers and servants.

East London Association for the Care of Friendless Girls.

This association which was inspired by the social purity worker, Ellice Hopkins, ran clubs in Walthamstow, Stepney, Stratford, Dalston, Whitechapel and Bow during the 1880s.

Y.W.C.A.

They ran at least fifteen institutes in various parts of London from the 1880s. One section - the Factory Helpers' Union - ran clubs for factory girls. This developed into the Federation of Working Girls' Clubs.

Church Army.

They ran the Princess Club in Bermondsey, the Heartsease (renamed the Alexandra in 1909) and the Barmaids' Rest in Edgware Road.

United Suffragists.

Evelyn Sharp notes that this organization started a women's and girls' club in Southwark during the First World War.

Independent Jewish Clubs

West Central, Soho, Central London.

This ran from 1893-1944 and was started by Lily and Marian Montagu. It moved from Dean Street to just off

Tottenham Court Road in 1912 and developed into a large club for all ages. Lily Montagu was an important figure in club and religious work. [see plate 23]

Butler Street Club, Spitalfields, East London.

This was started in 1902 and was housed above a Jewish Soup Kitchen.

It was managed by Florrie Passman, an ex-member, until the 1950s.

Brady Girls' Club, Hanbury Street, East London.

Started in 1925. Lady Janner was a leading organizer. It was managed by Miriam Moses - the first woman Mayor of Stepney.

Stepney Girls' Club, Stepney, East London.

Started by B'nai B'rith Women's Lodge. Anna Schwab appointed Phyllis Gerson in the 1920s who continued working there well after World War Two.

Oxford and St. Georges, Stepney, East London.

Girls' club was founded in 1915 by Basil Henriques and Rosa Loewe. Rose, who ran the girls' club was known as the 'Missus'. The club continued as part of the Settlement throughout the period.

Leman Street, Whitechapel, East London.

Possibly the earliest Jewish club in London, founded 1888. It was started by Lady Magnus. It originally met at Gravel Lane Board School before moving to 17 Leman Street. Was active throughout the period.

Other Jewish Clubs: Beatrice, Notting Hill, c.1906-1938  
Kilburn Girls' Recreation Club, opened 1912, Daffodil Club, Bethnal Green, opened 1913, Bethnal Green Girls', opened in 1928, North London Jewish Club, in existence from about 1912 to 1939.

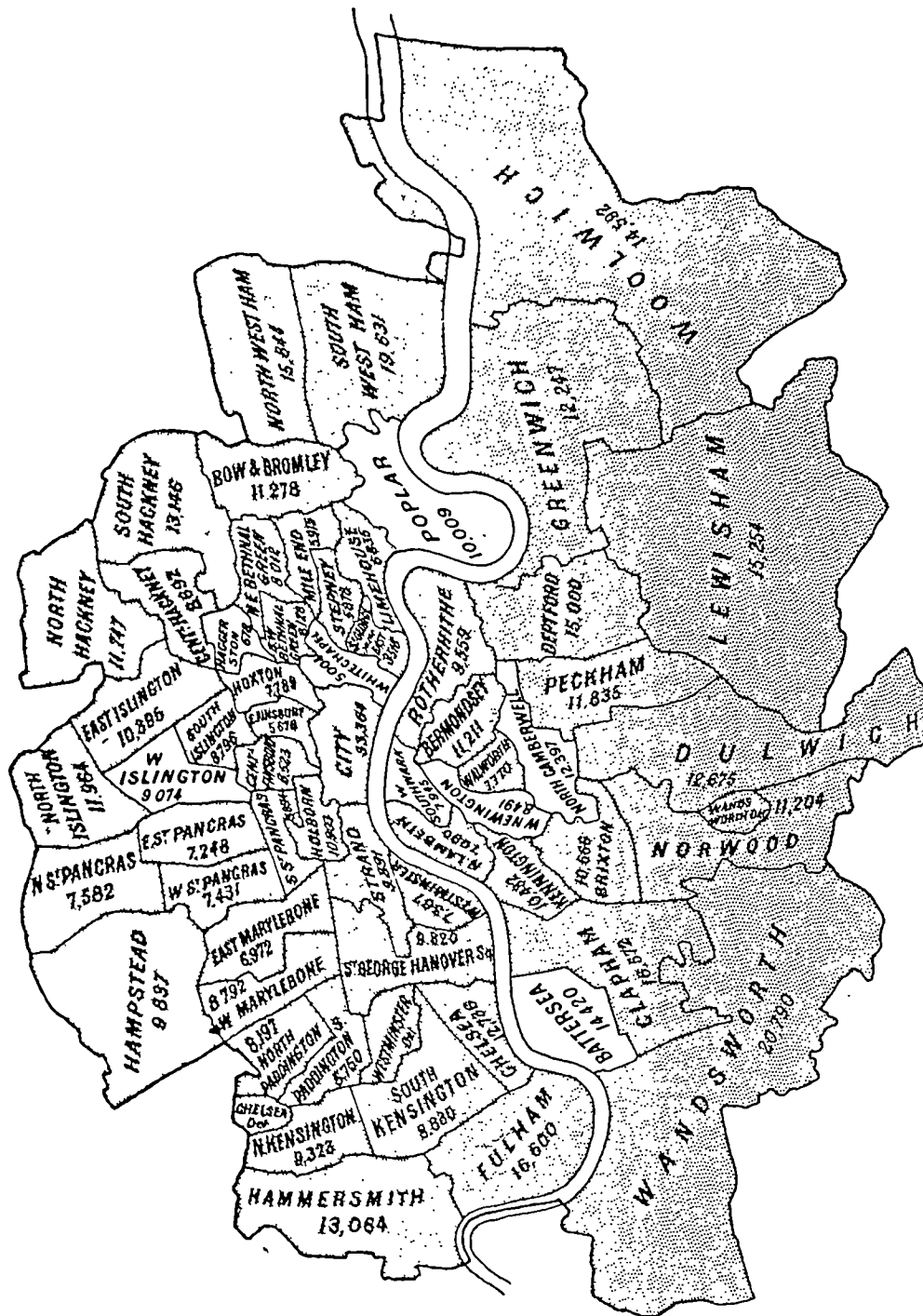


Plate 21. Map showing borough boundaries and political composition of London. Unshaded areas returned Liberal MPs. Shaded areas returned Conservatives. Figures indicate number of electors at 1900 General Election. R. Donald (ed.), The London Manual, 1903.

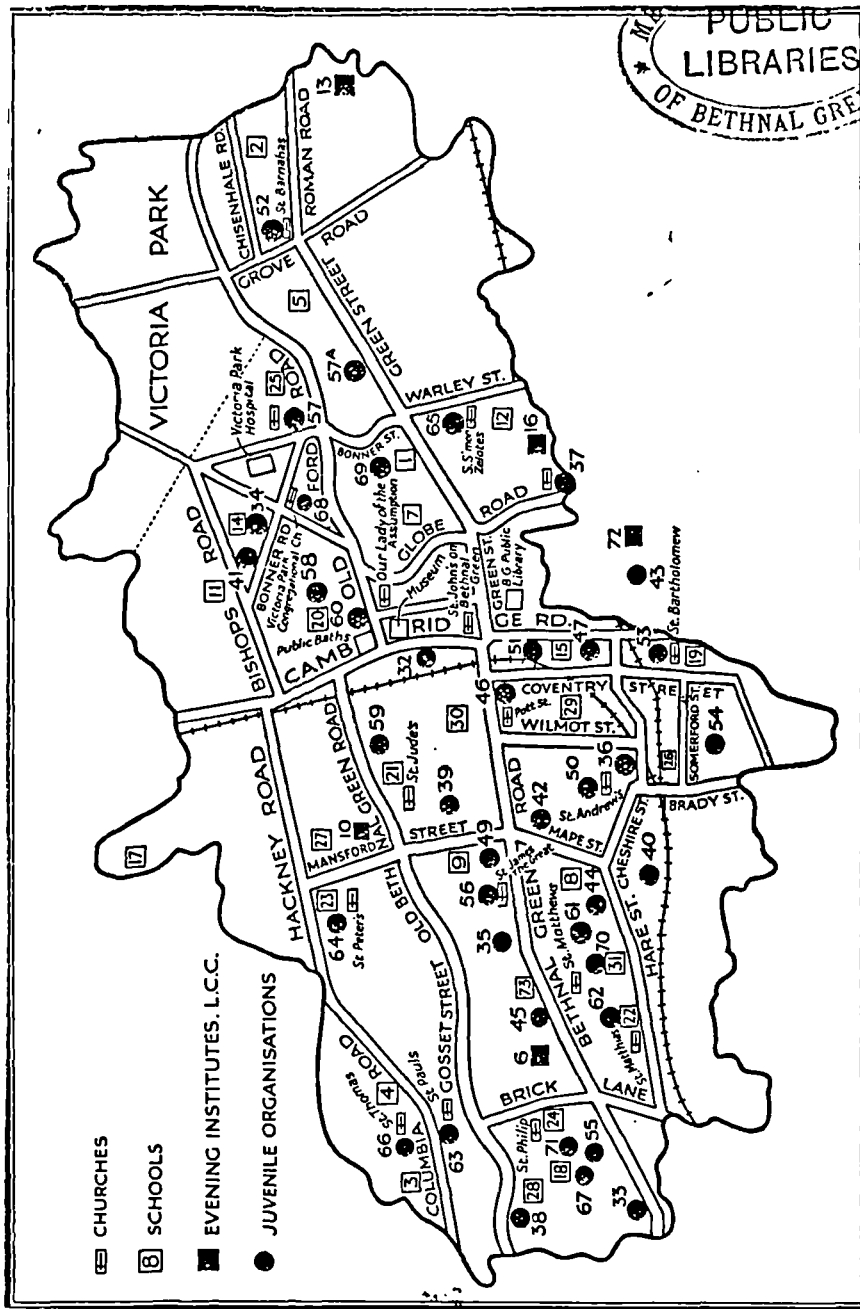


Plate 22. Club provision in Bethnal Green in 1930. Of the 36 juvenile organizations, 22 were girls' clubs. Local Association of Care Committees, Recreational Possibilities for Boys and Girls in Bethnal Green, 1930.





Plate 23. Three Working Girls' Clubs in 1905. The Jewish Working Girls' Club, Soho (top), the Honor Club, Fitzroy Square (centre), and St. Mary's Church Club, Stepney (bottom). G. R. Sims, Living London, vol. 1, 1905.

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