

**Feminism, citizenship and social activity: The role
and importance of local women's organisations,
Nottingham 1918-1969**

Samantha Clements, B.A., M.A.

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ABSTRACT

This local study of single-sex organisations in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire is an attempt to redress some of the imbalanced coverage given to this area of history thus far. A chronological study, it examines the role, importance and, to some extent, impact of a wide range of women's organisations in the local context. Some were local branches of national organisations, others were specifically concerned with local issues. The local focus allows a challenge to be made to much current thought as to the strength of a "women's movement" in the years between the suffrage movement and the emergence of a more radical form of feminism in the 1970s. The strength of feminist issues and campaigning is studied in three periods – the inter-war period, the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, and the 1950s and 1960s. The first two periods have previously been studied on a national level but, until recently, the post-Second World War era has been written off as overwhelmingly domestic and therefore unconstructive to the achievement of any feminist aims. This study suggests that, at a local level, this is not the case and that other conclusions reached about twentieth century feminism at a national level are not always applicable to the local context.

The study also goes further than attempting to track interest in equality feminism in the mid years of the century by discussing the importance of citizenship campaigns and the social dimension of membership of women's organisations. The former has been introduced into the academic arena by Caitriona Beaumont and her ideas are assessed and expanded upon. As a result the thesis makes strong claims that citizenship activity was of vital importance to the empowerment of British women in the twentieth century. The importance of a single-sex social sphere in allowing women to develop as individuals, is also recognised in each of the three periods.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EAW	Electrical Association for Women
NCW	National Council of Women
NFWI	National Federation of Women's Institutes
NSCWO	Nottingham Standing Conference of Women's Organisations
TWG	Townswomen's Guilds
WI	Women's Institute
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Edwardian suffrage campaign and the re-emergence of a vocal and organised feminist movement in the late 1960s and 1970s have long been recognised as periods when some women organised themselves and campaigned passionately for equality of rights and opportunities, yet the years in between have sometimes been written off as a period of stasis or even decline in the history of organised women in Britain. More recently, this view has been challenged by a number of studies which have contributed to a deeper and more nuanced picture of women's activism during the mid twentieth century and have begun to highlight the continuities which have existed even in periods of "decline". This study will build on that literature by arguing that many women were involved in many different campaigns to improve the day-to-day lives of women throughout the whole of the twentieth century, through membership of local organisations and local branches of national organisations. The study will argue that the activities of these local women's organisations need to be analysed both in terms of "feminism" and with regard to the notion of "citizenship". Throughout the twentieth century local women in a range of organisations voiced demands that can be described as explicitly feminist, confronting issues of inequality and male privilege and working to achieve equal rights and economic opportunities for women. The continuity of these aspirations and demands, particularly where married women were concerned, were consistently seen by some to be threatening to family life and social order, and regularly evoked hostile reactions from the letter columns of

the local press. Yet such hostility did not work to quash the demands in the mid years of the twentieth century.

More broadly, by engaging in a range of local causes, women were also working towards the long-term feminist goal of promoting female citizenship. Frequently the same women in the same organisations also engaged in other campaigns, both national and local, ranging from welfare reform to better sports facilities for local women, combining a concern for improving the lives of women that was often labelled “new” or “welfare feminist” with a concern for bettering the community at large. These wider interests can be seen as working towards developing a greater understanding of women’s role as active citizens. “Citizenship” was a term widely used in this period and was one that could be claimed by both feminists and those whose sole focus was to promote women’s involvement in public life. While equal citizenship was the fundamental basis of a feminist ideology, the concept also appealed to a wider constituency of women, many of whom chose to reject the more controversial connotations of “feminism” throughout the century. Even organisations whose campaigning role was modest and whose challenge to the prevailing gender norms was at best muted could claim to be promoting female citizenship by providing opportunities for female sociability and civic education – opportunities that may well have been empowering for members unused to a public voice of any sort. In addition, the opportunities provided by such organisations for single-sex sociability can also be

seen as empowering, even of many individuals engaged with these opportunities to a much greater extent than campaigning.

The study will also attempt to explore the extent to which *local* activity and organisation were vital factor in the development of feminist agendas and to the achievement of equality of opportunity. Many studies of twentieth century women have examined and analysed national patterns of behaviour, yet the local picture is often ignored. If the national picture is to be analysed, and perhaps challenged, the local perspective is necessary. Without a local insight it is impossible to examine the impact of organisations and their concerns on their branches and individual members. Without this awareness it is difficult to make any generalisations about the strength of a feminist “movement” and the enthusiasm for citizenship gains of the women of Britain between 1918 and 1970. This study, therefore, hopes to enhance our understanding of women in the twentieth century by focussing on women who were active in single-sex organisations in Nottingham at this time.

A number of themes and issues will be explored. As will be clear from the survey of literature below, the history of feminism and the history of women’s organisations in the twentieth century is not a balanced one. A great deal of work has been done on the inter-war period, including local studies, yet the post-war period is almost entirely neglected. The period of the Second World War is often

studied in isolation, thus denying the reader the opportunity to recognise changes and continuities and work on the 1950s has often dismissed the idea of feminist action during this decade. Thus this study will adopt a chronological timespan from 1918 to 1969 which is vital in allowing a greater sense of the cumulative changes that occurred over the middle years of the century. By doing so we can examine the individual campaigns and events which led to specific changes in women's status but we can also begin to see the adoption of some feminist and citizenship concerns into mainstream political thinking.

The literature on women in the twentieth century does present us with a number of over-arching narratives. Work on women through the century includes that by Jane Lewis who has published a number of books and articles which cover changes both to family life and the working environment for women and others, including Sue Bruley who have attempted to survey the whole century of women's lives, encompassing the legislative, social and economic developments that affected them.¹ Others such as Olive Banks and Martin Pugh have focussed specifically on the history of feminism in the twentieth century, with Banks producing a comparative study with the American movement which highlights the strength of the British movement, and Pugh focusing on the inter-war period but

¹ S. Bruley, *Women in Britain since 1900* (Basingstoke, 1999); A. Holdsworth, *Out of the Doll's House: The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1988); J. Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Hemel Hempstead, 1984); J. Lewis (ed), *Labour and Love: Women's Experiences of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Oxford, 1986); S. Oldfield (ed), *This working-day World: Women's lives and culture(s) in Britain, 1914-1945* (London, 1994); J. Purvis (ed), *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945. An Introduction*. (London, 1995); P. Thane, 'What difference did the vote make? Women in public and private life in Britain since 1918', *Historical Research* 76/192 (2003) 268-285; I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow, 2001).

also examining the strength of feminism after 1939 and arguing an inexorable decline in the 1950s.² There are also narratives that describe some of the larger organisations across the century and work that goes beyond the narratives commissioned by the organisations themselves towards a more analytical study of their impact on the lives of women members such as Gill Scott's work on the Women's Co-operative Guild and Alison Golby's work on the British Federation of University Women.³ Pamela Brookes has examined a specific group of women important to the development of women's rights in this period, the women MPs, producing a comprehensive survey of their concerns, roles and influence.⁴

² O. Banks, *Faces of Feminism: a Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (Oxford, 1981); B. Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford, 1997); D. Doughan, *Lobbying for Liberation: British feminism, 1918-1968* (London, 1980); C. Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England, 1880-1939* (Oxford, 1989); M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement, 1914-1959* (London, 1992); J. Purvis and S.S. Holton (eds), *Votes for Women* (London, 2000); S. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against it* (London, 1973); H. Smith (ed), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 1990).

³ J. Davis Smith, 'The voluntary tradition: philanthropy and self-help in Britain 1500-1945', in J. Davis Smith et. al, *An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector* (London, 1995); J. Gaffin and D. Thomas, *Caring and Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild* (Manchester, 1983); A. Golby, 'A Socio-Historical Study of the British Federation of University Women, 1930-1957', unpublished PhD thesis (Portsmouth, 1999); O. Hickman, *Outline History of the National Council of Women of Great Britain* (London, 1974); M. Llewelyn-Davies (ed), *Life as we have known it by Co-operative Working women* (London, 1931); A. Logan, 'Making Women Magistrates: Feminism, Citizenship and Justice in England and Wales, 1918-1950', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Greenwich (2002); C. Merz, *After the Vote: The Story of the National Union of Townswomens Guilds in the year of its Diamond Jubilee* (Norwich, 1988); T.M. Proctor, 'On my Honour: Guides and Scouts in interwar Britain', in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 92/2 (2002); C. Pursell, 'Domesticating modernity: the Electrical Association for Women, 1924-86', in *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32 (1999) pp47-67; G. Scott, '“Trade Union for Married Women”: the Women's Co-operative Guild 1914-1920', in Oldfield (ed), *This working day World*; G. Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London, 1998); C. Webb, *The Woman with the Basket: The History of the Women's Co-operative Guild, 1883-1927* (Manchester, 1927).

⁴ P. Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament, 1918-1966* (London, 1967).

DEBATES ON FEMINISM AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT BETWEEN THE WARS

The proposition that the post-suffrage period was an important epoch for women's public activism is now well-established and the period between the two world wars continues to attract a great deal of study and debate. This work includes work on life for women before the Second World War by Carol Dyhouse, who focuses on the domestic experience for women, and that by Helen Jones, who has studied women in public life.⁵ Specifically, feminism in the interwar period has been viewed with a blossoming interest during the past decade with a number of differing interpretations as to the importance of the period in the history of women. Some scholars writing on this period are convinced that it was the nadir of twentieth century feminism and that it represented a break in the development of women's rights which had started in the mid-nineteenth century – Susan Kingsley Kent arguing that by the end of the 1920s, “feminism as a distinct social and political movement no longer existed.”⁶ Johanna Alberti's work has argued that the women's movement is characterised by cycles of activity; that sustained activity was manifest only in the Edwardian period and then again in the 1960s and 1970s. The inter-war period had been dismissed as one of relative stagnation and inactivity, with women's groups working within a context that would not respond to a “short, sharp campaign” but would demand “many more

⁵ C. Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family*; H. Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914-1950* (Harlow, 2000)

⁶ S. Kingsley Kent, ‘The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War One and the demise of British feminism’, *Journal of British Studies* 27 (1989) 232-53; see also S Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton, 1993)

years of persistent work” from its activists.⁷ Much writing in the 1980s and early 1990s on the interwar period agreed that the inter-war period witnessed a decline in the women’s movement as characterised by the demise of militant action.⁸

There was to be no repeat of arson and window breaking, no more “storming” of Parliament, and very few personalities to match those of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.

Indeed, the inter-war period saw a renewed emphasis on domesticity and, from some quarters, quite virulent anti-feminism. It did not see the coordinated single-issue campaigns that had dominated the Edwardian period and many women appeared to lose interest in active campaigning once the vote was won.⁹ Instead feminism appeared to become fragmented with feminists falling into two camps – the “equal rights” feminists who carried the banner of Edwardian feminism forward, demanding equal pay and improved access to education and the professions, and the “new feminists” who campaigned for changes to women’s lives within the boundaries of the accepted place of women in society, focussing on birth control, family allowances and other welfare issues. This “split”, it is claimed, resulted in a movement that lacked “the apparent cohesion of the suffrage campaign,” and one that was much less visible in the national

⁷ Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*. Other work by Joanna Alberti which develops this theory can be found in J. Alberti ‘British feminists and anti-Fascism in the 1930s’, in Oldfield (ed), *This working-day World*; J. Alberti, ‘“A symbol and a Key”’: The Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1918-1928’, in Purvis and Holton (eds), *Votes for Women*.

⁸ J. Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-1928* (Basingstoke, 1989); B. Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists between the Wars* (Oxford, 1987).

⁹ Holdsworth in *Out of the Doll’s House* has acknowledged that the “romantic struggle for the vote had been replaced by dreary committee work.” p. 191.

consciousness.¹⁰ However, more recent work examines whether or not this split was so pronounced and whether this truly represented a decline or simply a new challenge for the movement. Indeed, recent work, as outlined later in this section, has attempted to redefine what feminism and women's rights meant to the women of the interwar period, and how this empowerment could manifest itself within a society still immured within a structure of class distinction, gender divisions and limited opportunities.

Perhaps the most vehement proponent of the theory of a decline in feminism is Susan Kingsley Kent whose work is primarily concerned with gender relations and the impact of the First World War upon them. She argues that the movement was weakened and attributes this solely to the "impact of war on the cultural perceptions of gender."¹¹ In her opinion the 1918 witnessed a rapid reversal of the more liberal gender ideology of wartime Britain and a renewal of the notion of the domestic ideal. Post-war Britain anxiously demanded a return to normality and a stability characterised, partly at least, by marriage and the family as the bedrock of society. A strong society would have at its base a family cared for by a wife who excelled in her own private sphere but made no efforts to transcend it. This separate spheres ideal was reinforced by romantic notions of men as heroic fighters and women as those bravely keeping the home fires burning. Kent sees this trend as a reaction to the blurring of gender lines in wartime, especially as increasing numbers of women were called on to leave the home for work. As

¹⁰ Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*, p. 218.

¹¹ S. K. Kent, 'Gender Reconstruction after the First World War', in Smith (ed), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*; S. K. Kent, *Making Peace*.

peace returned the reestablishment of order was seen to be dependent on establishing even stricter gender boundaries. This was perceived at the time and Cicely Hamilton admitted in 1927, “the peace in our time for which we all crave will mean a reaction ... against the independence of women.”¹² Once the war had ended there was a desire to avoid a sex war at all costs; the women’s movement, according to Kent, perceived this and embraced the return to a Victorian separate spheres ideology which “championed rather than challenged the prevailing ideas,” and abandoned the ideology and legacy of the pre-war feminists. Kent claims this as a retrograde step and one that damaged feminism until the 1950s. She argues that the “new” feminism of the 1920s, “espousing an ideology of sexual difference and separate spheres for women and men, could not sustain itself ... and soon became swallowed up and disappeared... By the end of the 1920s feminism as a distinct political and social movement had become insignificant.”¹³

Others have also discussed the appetite in post-war British society for a return to normality, characterised by the desire for social stability – “a search for a path that would avoid the horrors of war and ameliorate its ... consequences.

[Feminists] did not doubt the importance of continuing the struggle against society’s failure to recognise women’s political identity, but they did not always see this struggle as their first priority.”¹⁴ Any changes to women’s lives which occurred during the inter-war period are argued to have “extended and

¹² C. Hamilton, ‘The Return to Femininity,’ *Time and Tide* (August 12, 1927)

¹³ Kent, ‘The politics of sexual difference’, p. 7; p. 245; p 4.

¹⁴ Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*, p. 7.

institutionalised the pre-war conceptions of women ... as associated primarily with the domestic sphere,” and that the women’s organisations were unwilling or unable to challenge this.¹⁵ The problems of the inter-war years only served to exacerbate this problem – economic crisis and continued international anxiety resulted in people desperately clinging to traditional notions which had come to represent the stability of the prosperous nineteenth century.¹⁶

Other historians have highlighted the “strategic and practical problems” which faced the first generation of enfranchised women and Olive Banks talks of women being trapped in, and weakened by a “cult of domesticity” between 1920 and 1960, the “years of intermission when ... feminism seems to have come to an end.”¹⁷ Harold Smith has declared that, a decade after winning the vote, feminists were “a beleaguered band, very much on the defensive,” and rapidly losing influence over other women.¹⁸ Martin Pugh has constructed a convincing case which also has the renewal of domesticity as the reason for the decline of the movement, but also points to the failings of the political parties and to the splits

¹⁵ N. Berkovitch, *From Motherhood to Citizenship: Women's Rights and International Organisations*. (Baltimore, 1999), p. 16.

¹⁶ Carol Dyhouse in her *Feminism and the Family* talks of “deepening resentments and antagonisms of social class” and “ominous tendencies in world politics.” p. 193. Harrison in *Prudent Revolutionaries* argues that feminism was “submerged by class and foreign policy issues.” p. 148. Pugh has reinforced this by asserting that “prolonged depression and mass unemployment had steadily whittled away male tolerance of women’s aspirations.”; M. Pugh, ‘Domesticity and the Decline of Feminism’, in Smith (ed), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*.

¹⁷ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p. 301. Harrison has listed many reasons why feminism came into decline in this period, including: the political parties, the lack of youth interest in feminism, the lack of encouragement for female political candidates and splits within the movement. Banks. *Faces of Feminism*, p. 149. This “cult” of domesticity is vital in understanding the context in which women’s organisations were compelled to work and will be examined in full later in this study.

¹⁸ H. Smith, ‘British feminism in the 1920s’, in Smith (ed), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*.

within the movement itself. By 1928 they had achieved all they were likely to and the movement had nothing on which to sustain itself.¹⁹

Other historians, however, have started to question the idea of an actual decline in feminism. True, interwar feminism did not share the characteristics of its earlier manifestation but some argue that a change in emphasis is not necessarily commensurate with a decline.²⁰ Kent's assertion that the war devastated the movement does not always stand up to scrutiny and Mary Stott had already avowed that there has "always been a women's movement this century."²¹ Even with Banks' assertion that women were restricted by a renewed emphasis on domestic ideals, she still maintains that the women's organisations were lively, "feminist in intent" and that feminism in the 1920s at least was "by no means a spent force." Rather she sees the period as one of "intermission" but one in which it is "possible to trace the major developments in feminism."²²

"First wave feminism as a mass movement was dead, but issues were still doggedly pursued by a dedicated group of predominantly middle-class women."²³

Women were continuing to make advances against difficult odds and many historians have started to examine what women's organisations were doing rather

¹⁹ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p. 235.

²⁰ Barbara Caine, in *English Feminism*, has argued that many historians have been duped into believing the theory of feminism's decline simply because the movement lacked the drama of the suffrage movement. Cheryl Law has argued that "using the militant phase as a yardstick for all subsequent political activity has undermined a sincere portrayal of women's participation." C. Law, *Suffrage and Power: the Women's Movement 1918-1928* (London, 1997) p. 2.

²¹ Mary Stott speaking to Dale Spender and recorded in Spender, *There has Always been a Women's Movement...*

²² Banks, *Faces of Feminism*, p. 177; pp. 163-4; p. 153.

²³ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 59.

than judging them solely by how successful and visible they were to the public. The movement did become fragmented as groups focussed on a wider range of issues and this makes it more difficult to study a national, unified movement. After conceding the problems that the movement faced Harrison has argued that we can only judge the women's movement fairly if we lower our expectations.²⁴ He compares the Representation of the People Act of 1918 with the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts; after these it still took decades for the working classes to establish themselves as politically important but this does not mean that the labour movement was in decline. Change is not synonymous with decline and legislative success is not the only indicator of the strength of any political movement; instead we need to examine the actions and motives of the individuals involved in any organisation who declare themselves to be representing women.²⁵ In fact the movement was not dead, it just lacked a specific focus and individual groups continued to work as hard as they had ever done. Harold Smith has conducted a number of studies into interwar single issues and his work on the 1930s campaign for equal pay has revealed a movement that, despite being "beleaguered," was still active, even if its activities no longer occupied the front page of national newspapers. Women's organisations came together to undertake lengthy campaigns such as this and the lack of ultimate success cannot be allowed to mask the fact that women were working together and achieved small victories in

²⁴ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*.

²⁵ Harrison has claimed also that the feminist movement has undergone periods of both boom and calm. The boom periods have been 1866-72, 1879-84, 1903-12, 1916-20, 1940-45 and 1964-76, whilst other times have been quieter.

Parliament.²⁶ Indeed the women's suffrage movement had very limited success until 1918 yet we have not declared that Edwardian feminism was a failed movement. The fact that other battles, such as that for the legalisation of abortion, did not bear fruit until the 1970s should not be allowed to mask the fact that women had been fighting for it for decades.

Martin Pugh has even gone so far as to suggest that “what looks like a decline from one perspective appears as an evolutionary development from the other.”²⁷ Women, once they had been given the vote, had to re-evaluate their position and change direction – “the vote was a beginning not an ending, and they set about re-defining their goals and rechanneling their efforts to meet new demands.”²⁸

Alison Golby describes the period of one which witnessed a “wealth of feminist activity.”²⁹ As Eleanor Sidgwick commented in the 1920s,

If in a rising tide we watch to see when a sandcastle will be overwhelmed, we shall see one little wave after another approaching and receding without apparently affecting anything ... But the failure of these waves does not set back the tide ... inevitably a wave does at length reach and overwhelm the castle.³⁰

Women's organisations, ranging from those who considered themselves feminists to those who did not consciously adopt the term, could not ignore the renewed

²⁶ H. Smith, ‘British Feminism and the Equal Pay Issue in the 1930s’, *Women's History Review* 5/1 (1996) 97-106. Smith points to the 1936 vote in Parliament which initially approved equal pay for women.

²⁷ Pugh (1992), *Women and the Women's Movement*.

²⁸ Mary Stott to Dale Spender in Spender, *There's always been...*

²⁹ Golby, ‘A Socio-Historical Study of the British Federation of University Women’, p. 22.

³⁰ H. Fowler, ‘Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick, 1845-1936’, in E. Shils and C. Blacker (eds), *Cambridge Women: Twelve Portraits* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 26.

emphasis on domesticity but their challenge was to continue to improve the lives of women within the constraints they found themselves in. It is here that a focus on women as active citizens becomes more useful. For the inter-war period Catriona Beaumont has made the distinction between the concepts of citizenship and feminism and has argued that it is a distinction adopted by women's organisations, especially in the immediate post-suffrage era.³¹ These women felt they needed broad support for their campaigns and that this would be limited if they labelled themselves as feminist. If we look for declarations of feminist intent in the organisations of this period, especially at local level, we will find little. Yet, if we analyse what it is women actually worked for, we see many aspirations that self-confessed feminists shared.

That said, historians need to be cautious when seeking to reclaim women's organisations for feminism. Maggie Andrews ventures into this territory, using a comprehensive study of a particular organisation to contribute to the overall debate about the nature and strength of feminism. Her work on the Women's Institutes (the largest post suffrage women's organisation in Britain) is a wide-ranging study of personnel and activity but is also a definite attempt to place women's organisations within the context of a developing feminist movement.³² Andrews argues that the WI was an empowering organisation that was feminist because it assisted women both in forming a separate gender identity and in

³¹C. Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organisations in England, 1928-1939', *Women's History Review* 9/2 (2000) 414-20

³² Morgan, 'The Women's Institute Movement - the Acceptable face of Feminism?'; Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement*. (London, 1997)

learning how to balance the various domestic demands placed upon them with leisure time for craft and discussions. Andrews has claimed that working to improve a woman's domestic circumstances is a feminist activity and that the WI, by its desire to raise domestic work to the level of skilled work within the national consciousness, was improving the role and status of women. She claims, "the Women's Institute movement's feminism lies in the capacity such a large and diffuse organisation has for women to ... renegotiate the boundaries of femininity."³³ Her theories, however, are somewhat over-stated as she attempts to assign motives to the WI that were not necessarily there (she struggles to make the case that the WI encouraged women to challenge their socially constructed role). Her argument is that women were working together to change things and therefore were feminist, even though many were avowedly not. Rather than look for women who were challenging the relative positions of men and women in society, she argues that feminism is challenging "the boundaries of feminine behaviour" – if women were involved in anything beyond their home this was a challenge and therefore feminist.³⁴ She does however, demonstrate the links between the WI and other women's organisations over issues such as birth control, builds a case for the W.I. as an agent for constructing an "alternative female culture" and her work is of interest as it continues the debate into the nature of feminism. The distinction between her work and this study is that this will argue that citizenship campaigns and leisure activities were empowering for

³³ Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, p. 39.

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 5.

women, even if they cannot be described as feminist, rather than forcing all women's activities into the same box.

Beaumont's work on the relationship between "mainstream" women's organisations, citizenship and feminism is particularly relevant for the present study.³⁵ Through studying organisations at a national level, she has concluded that the fear of being branded "feminist" led many mass membership organisations to draw sharp distinctions between feminism and the "citizenship" agenda in which they were engaged. She argues for a conscious demarcation between the two types of campaigns and her work is an important development in the study of the complexities of the women's movement between the wars as she is one of the few engaging with a wide diversity of women's organisations from the Mothers Unions to the Women's Freedom League. Rather than settling in either "camp", she argues that a women's movement was still active, but that its focus was radically different to enable women to achieve objectives more politically and socially acceptable to a society damaged by the experience of war and economic crisis. The evidence of this study, however, suggests that such a conscious demarcation with its accompanying anxieties about sex-war, is not one witnessed at a local level. Here women's organisations were pursuing campaigns which could fit in each category and there is no evidence of local women consciously discussing "categories" of any sort. Organisations would frequently campaign on issues concerning equal pay whilst simultaneously campaigning for higher

³⁵Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists'; C. Beaumont 'The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship, 1918-1950s', in I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed) *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*. (Harlow,2001)

standards in food production. There is little evidence of organisations cataloguing the types of their campaigns, or even expressing fears that particular campaigns may be too “feminist” for society’s taste.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH: CONTINUING DEBATES

The last war put women up one step, gave them equal rights wherever women had exceptional intelligence and push, elevated them from administrative non-existence. This war will bring them another and probably larger step up.³⁶

The period of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath has also been the focus of many studies. Many of these have focused on government actions during the war and their impact on the lives of women of all social classes and family circumstances³⁷ but there has also been debate over whether this period was a time of feminism.

However, whereas the interwar feminist movement has received much attention in recent years, work on women during the Second World War and its immediate

³⁶ M-O A: TC32/1/A/3 Women in Wartime January 1940.

³⁷ Bruley, *Women in Britain since 1900*; S. Carruthers, ‘“Manning the Factories”: Propaganda and Policy on the employment of women, 1939-1947’, *History* 75 (1990) 232-256; V. Douie, *Daughters of Britain: an account of the work of British women during the Second World War* (Oxford, 1949); J. Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950*, J. Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Postwar Years* (Oxford, 1992); R. Minns, *Bombers and Mash: The Domestic Front 1939-1945* (London, 1980); D. Morgan and M. Evans, *The Battle for Britain: Citizenship and ideology in the Second World War* (London, 1993); M. Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914-1959* (1992); M. Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (London, 2000); D.Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of Child and Mother* (London, 1983).

aftermath has largely focused on the immediate impact of the war on the practicalities of women's day to day lives. There are a large number of published works which explain what happened to women, both on the Home Front and in the services, and which describe the return to the domestic ideal that was balanced with the need for part-time women workers in the later 1940s. The debate in this period is less about the relative strength and ideological aspects of new and equality feminism, and more concerned with whether the feminist effort survived the national emergency and whether it was able to make any gains during a period when real war replaced any perceived sex war. There were new opportunities provided by the war but some historians, including Harold Smith, have argued that there were also continued limitations and that any adjustment in society was temporary.³⁸ Despite this work, and that of Kirsty Parker on the women MPs during the war, there is still a large gap in the literature as to whether this was a period of empowerment for women.³⁹ Yet, locally there is evidence to suggest that women's organisations flourished and continued to challenge the inequalities faced by women once the war was over.

Some of the evidence on which this work on the Second World War is based has been derived from the Mass-Observation archives. Mass Observation was set up in 1937 by journalist and poet Charles Madge and anthropologist Tom Harrisson to survey the opinions and lifestyle of the nation, and during the war they encouraged volunteers to write diaries of their experiences, the most famous of

³⁸ H. Smith, 'The effect of the war on the status of women', in H. Smith (ed), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*. (Manchester, 1986).

³⁹ K. Parker, Women MPs, 'Feminism and Domestic Policy in the Second World War', unpublished DPhil thesis (University of Oxford, 1994).

which is that written by Mrs Nella Last.⁴⁰ Mrs Last has left us a frank and detailed diary in which she charts her progress from wife to more enlightened citizen – her enlightenment being facilitated by the war work she engages in through the Women’s Voluntary Service.

I reflected tonight on the changes the war had brought ... Several times I’ve not had tea quite ready when he has come in ... and I’ve felt quite unconcerned. He told me rather wistfully I was ‘not so sweet’ since I’d been down at the [WVS] centre and I said, “well! Who wants a woman of fifty to be sweet anyway?” And besides, I suit me a lot better!⁴¹

Mass Observation provides a rich resource for historians but is reflective of the wide variety of opinions and experiences of women at this time and provides us with no consensus view about the impact of the war on women.

Other work on organised women in this period has included that by James Hinton who has examined the class basis of the WVS and Women’s Sections of the Labour party – the former being overwhelmingly middle-class until the Housewives’ Service branch was introduced, and the latter being resolutely loyal to the party at the expense of members joining other organisations.⁴² Hinton’s work also examines the local work of the WVS (although not in Nottingham) and the local networking of organisations through the war years. Also of key importance because of its focus on the local experience of war is Helen Jones’

⁴⁰ R. Broad and S. Fleming (eds), *Nella Last’s War: A Mother’s Diary, 1939-45* (Bristol, 1981).

⁴¹ Broad and Fleming (ed), *Nella Last’s War* p. 45 – diary entry for 14th March 1940.

⁴² J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War* (Oxford, 2002).

work on local wartime culture. Jones discusses the impact of the war years on a developing sense of local community, enhancing people's attachment to their local district.⁴³ Sonya Rose has developed her study of sexual behaviour during the war into one of the importance of the concept of women's citizenship at this time. Rose explores the notions of citizenship that existed and argues there was no single concept of national citizenship, because society was affected by class and gender. As a result the war witnessed "conflicting and oftentimes contradictory constructions of wartime womanhood."⁴⁴

Using research into government actions, economic changes, the working patterns of women and the role of the media, the most relevant debate during this period is over whether feminism and campaigns for medium-term change were able to transcend the day to day difficulties of the war, and whether the campaigns that did occur during the war were able to produce lasting gains for the women of Britain. It can be argued that the primacy of the domestic was never undermined, and indeed was highly visible once the men returned from battle and needed their jobs back. Many women always maintained their focus on domestic concerns and felt unable or unwilling to express their opinions about politics or policy when asked by Mass-Observation, though, interestingly, they were asked, demonstrating some expectation that women could take an interest in such

⁴³ H. Jones, *British Civilians in the front line: air raids, productivity and wartime culture, 1939-1945* (Manchester, 2006).

⁴⁴ S. Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War Two Britain', *American Historical Review* 103 (1998) 1147-1176; S. Rose, *Which people's war? National Identity and Citizenship in wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003), p. 137. Rose's work is a full exploration of the ambiguities that existed between citizenship and domesticity, including the conflicting demands of the war-time situation and how feminism was discussed in the cultural arena, and will be analysed further later in this chapter.

matters.⁴⁵ Some research published on the impact of the war on women suggests that it was not as fundamental a change as some suggested at the time. Denise Riley's work argues that women were feted for their war work and contribution to keeping the "home fires burning", but that their capacity was never seen as going beyond what their domestic natures could prepare them for.⁴⁶ She argues women were allowed to extend their role as carers and domestic managers to temporarily manage the country whilst men were off doing the male work of defending the nation, but that their work was "characterised as exceptional and valiant .. .from which women would thankfully sink away in peacetime."⁴⁷

The fact that women were not able to use their power as workers to push through changes to the sexual division of labour by making demands of the state, employers and their husbands, underlines the limited nature of the gains for women in the war.⁴⁸

Women were allowed to temporarily change their behaviour but elemental economic change was not seen; sex divisions still existed, both in the home and the workplace. Changes in gender roles and expectations were seen as part of the hiatus in normal life and thus a part of the experience that would need to be remedied later. It has also been argued that "the demands of war also cast a new light on women's traditional roles; providing homes for evacuated children and cooking with rationed goods became matters of patriotic duty."⁴⁹ As a result of

⁴⁵ M-O A: TC32/1592 *Women's Opinions* February 1943.

⁴⁶ Riley, *War in the Nursery*.

⁴⁷ D. Riley, 'Some Peculiarities of Social Policy concerning women in Wartime and Postwar Britain', in M. R. Higonnet, J. Jenson, S. Michel and M. Collins Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, 1987), p. 261.

⁴⁸ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 121.

⁴⁹ Parker, *Women MPs, Feminism and Domestic Policy*, p. 25.

this focus on the importance of the domestic on the Home Front, some historians have argued that feminism was not able to become a mass movement and was not able to produce any viable challenge to mainstream opinion which viewed woman as an entirely domestic being.⁵⁰

Others go further and argue that this process served to reinforce women's traditional roles, in a similar vein to Kent's arguments about the impact of the First World War. Early work by Harold Smith argued that there was only limited change during the war and that it was completely undermined by the immediate post-war atmosphere.⁵¹ Women, he says, did not want to work, jobs were strictly segregated and sex roles were nowhere abandoned. Women were rarely autonomous workers and often met male resistance to their very presence. Even in 1943 there were still more full-time housewives than full-time working women and when the government surveyed women in their 1943 Wartime Social Survey most young women expressed a preference for marriage and children over a career:

You can't look on anything you do during the war as what you really mean to do; its just filling in time till you can live your own life again.⁵²

Smith also argued that wartime feminists "experienced more defeats than successes" and uses the fact that they did not succeed in achieving equal pay for

⁵⁰ The temporary nature of economic change is supported by the 1942 Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act which made it clear that the dilution of skilled labour was not to last beyond the war, when women were expected to return to their homes and husbands.

⁵¹ H. Smith, 'The effect of the war',

⁵² quoted in Smith, 'The effect of the war', p. 218.

all women despite a Royal Commission being appointed, as evidence of this.⁵³ Other historians do touch on the women's organisations within their general surveys, but they are dealt with in a paragraph or two and often described as inactive. When discussing the women's organisations, Mary Evans and David Morgan have stated that "an autonomous and independent women's movement did not exist in the wartime years," seemingly dismissing the work of the WVS and other organisations that flourished during the war as outlined in Chapter Four. This work directly contradicts Martin Pugh who claims that the war revived the movement from the sluggishness of the 1930s.⁵⁴

The impact of the war can only be examined by looking at its immediate aftermath and other historians have stated that the post-war era could be described as the nadir of British organised feminism with "grass-roots activity" at a low ebb and women continuing to work in low paid and unskilled work with few career prospects.⁵⁵ Pugh himself argues that the death of Eleanor Rathbone in 1946 symbolised the "waning" of the organised movement in Britain.⁵⁶ Whilst the "housewives" groups of the WI and Townswomen's Guilds grew, equality feminism suffered. Although this period has not received the attention of the inter-war era, there is a definite school of thought that claims the war had no lasting positive consequences for feminism and thus did nothing to improve the status of women.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 223.

⁵⁴ Morgan and Evans, *The Battle for Britain*; Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992), p. 275.

⁵⁵ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992), p. 301.

Other historians, however, have argued at the other end of the spectrum - that the war brought fundamental and lasting change to the way society viewed its female citizens, and to how those women viewed themselves. Arthur Marwick's argument is that married women's participation in the workforce, and the achievement of some equal pay agreements, constituted lasting gains. These were enhanced by an increase in female self-respect initiated by increased public visibility and leading to lasting emancipation of women.⁵⁷ Sue Bruley contends that the war brought a "renewed interest in feminist issues," although she acknowledges that this interest did not lead to legislation designed to tackle sex discrimination.⁵⁸ Sonya Rose contests even this. She argues that the war gave women a "heightened awareness of their unequal status" and "stimulated and reinvigorated feminist activity ...[creating] the conditions and opportunities for feminists to energise equal rights protests."⁵⁹ It is Rose who emphasises the first direct example we can find of feminist activity resulting in legislative change - the campaign led by the women MPs and supported by the women's organisations which resulted in equal compensation for injured women. Throughout this study it will become apparent that the link between activity and impact is difficult to quantify, but here we see a direct result of feminist lobbying. The organisations remained active. In January 1940 twenty-one women's organisations attended a conference organised by the WFL to co-ordinate their campaigning efforts during the war, demonstrating the continued strength and determination of the women's

⁵⁷ A. Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1974).

⁵⁸ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 108.

⁵⁹ Rose, *Which people's war?* p. 113; p.117.

organisations. The war highlighted discrimination in pay and jobs and women found the confidence to tackle the new grievances such as inequality in compensation. The feminist Six Point Group and Women's Freedom League both attracted new, younger, members, the Mothers' Union, Women's Institutes and Townswomen's Guilds thrived and the new Women's Voluntary Service secured a huge membership.⁶⁰

Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, writing in 1956 and credited with re-invigorating feminism, claimed that the war had increased the recognition of women as full citizens of the nation, deserving of the rights as well as the responsibilities that entailed.⁶¹ Vera Brittain, writing in the early 1950s was categorical in her claim that feminism had been enhanced by the war, and had been embraced by men as well:

The Second World War further established the right of women to equality and their capacity for full comradeship with men ... making the once despised "women's questions" an important part of the programme by which the Labour party won popular support in 1945.⁶²

Though we must acknowledge Brittain's openly feminist position, the very fact that she felt confident in claiming it must surely mean that there were some that felt that the war had a lasting beneficial impact for women. Caitriona Beaumont's recent work also takes this stance, claiming that the war "marked an important revival in the fortunes of the women's movement in Britain," although, as

⁶⁰ Various sources including Bruley, *Women in Britain*

⁶¹ A. Myrdal and V. Klein, *Women's Two Roles*.

⁶² V. Brittain, *Lady into Woman: A history of women from Victoria to Elizabeth II* (London, 1953), pp.194-5.

previously discussed, her work is based on a broader view of what constitutes the women's movement, going beyond the traditional equality feminist organisations.⁶³

Women's organisations and the female MPs were working hard through the war years for social and economic reform to benefit women and although the postwar period was a time of greater challenge, they continued to use the wartime momentum to campaign and achieve successes. Other recent work has also acknowledged the lasting benefits of the war for feminism. James Hinton talks of a "modest revival of feminism and some diminution of the clash between equal rights and maternalist demands which had been so debilitating for feminism between the wars," whilst Golby lists the advances made by and for women during the war, such as "the removal of the marriage bar in some professions, entry to the Diplomatic and Consular Services and the introduction of family allowances. Furthermore, issues such as equal pay had been raised and kept on the agenda and war had revived interest in the woman question."⁶⁴

For the post-war era Blackford is also positive about the strength of feminism, producing a "more sympathetic reading of self-identified feminism" and listing a number of active feminist groups during the era of the first full Labour

⁶³ C. Beaumont 'The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship', p. 269

⁶⁴ Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War*, p. 179; Golby, "A Socio-Historical Study of the British Federation of University Women", pp. 87-8.

government.⁶⁵ Although there was evidence of a national craving for normality once the war had been won, women were not this time forced from work. In fact, research supports the contention that women returned to the homes because they wanted to – for 58% of women workers it was their choice to return to pre-war normality to “forget the hardships and drudgery of wartime.”⁶⁶ Some women thus had the opportunity to make their own decisions and shape their own futures. They chose to leave the factories but that does not mean they chose domestic drudgery – many had had their eyes opened by the wartime experiences and demanded more from their lives.

The middle ground is being forged by Penny Summerfield.⁶⁷ Her argument is that the war was a source of personal empowerment to many, especially the young, but that for the majority, especially those who had domestic commitments, any change was short-lived. Work continued to be segregated along sex-lines, with

⁶⁵ C. Blackford, ‘Wives and Citizens and Watchdogs of Equality: Post-war British Feminism’, in J. Fyrrth (ed), *Labour’s Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain, 1945-51* (London, 1995). She lists as openly feminist: the Association of Social and Moral Hygiene, the London and National Society, the Married Women’s Association, the Open Door Council, the Six Point Group, the Women’s Freedom League and Women for Westminster (later the National Women’s Citizens Association)

⁶⁶ L. Clarke, *Women in the Hosiery Industry in Leicester during the Second World War* (Leicester, 1986); P. Summerfield, ‘Women, war and social change: women in Britain in World War One’ in A. Marwick(ed), *Total War and Social Change* (Basingstoke, 1988).

⁶⁷ G. Braybon and P. Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars* (London, 1987); Summerfield ‘Women, war and Social Change’; P. Summerfield, ‘Approaches to women and social change in the Second World War’ in B. Brivati and H. Jones (eds), *What Difference did the War make?* (Leicester, 1993); P. Summerfield, ‘Women and War in the Twentieth Century’, in J. Purvis (ed), *Women’s History, 1850-1945: An Introduction* (London, 1995); P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing women’s wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998); P. Summerfield, ‘“It did me good in lots of ways”: British women in transition from War to Peace’, in C. Duchén and I. Bandhauer-Schöffmann (eds), *When the War was Over: Women, War and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956* (Leicester, 2000); P. Summerfield, ‘“They didn’t want women back in that job!”: The Second World War and the construction of gendered work histories’, in F. Montgomery and C. Collette (eds), *The European Women’s History Reader* (London, 2002).

few women in higher grade positions or those designated as “men’s” jobs and thus better paid. The post-war reemphasis of the domestic ideal and panic about the falling birth-rate resulted in a mass push of women back towards the home.⁶⁸ More women did work, and participation rates of married women were much higher, but society’s perception of women as almost entirely domestic beings did not alter. Yet their status inside this sphere was rising and within this changing status there were some important changes that were the building blocks for future change. These included equal pay for some and increased opportunities for part-time work - Summerfield contends that the war had “changed the expectations of a significant group of women.”⁶⁹ Though she does not specifically discuss the individual women’s organisations she describes how they worked together during the war.⁷⁰

For some individuals the war brought lasting liberation, for others the experience of being full and active citizens during a time of national crisis was one they were unwilling to sacrifice on the return of peace. The individual nature of change is key to this study – building the argument that the women’s organisations in the local arena harnessed these individuals’ desire for change and empowered them to fight for it. This study maintains that for many women the war was a temporary break from a primarily domestic existence, but that throughout this period interest in feminist issues and those that concerned women as active citizens continued to exist, if not grow. It will demonstrate that although many women at grassroots

⁶⁸ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, pp. 283-286.

⁶⁹ Summerfield, ‘Women and War in the Twentieth Century’, p. 325.

⁷⁰ *ibid*

level turned their fundraising and whist drive efforts to salvage and knitting socks, their interest in feminist and citizenship issues continued; in fact there is evidence to suggest that the war gave the movement a boost – it was an “accelerator” if not always an “innovator”.⁷¹ If, as has been previously argued, the empowerment of women is seen as a vital part of the feminist struggle, then World War Two contributed to this a great deal. Women were given the opportunity to mix with other groups of women for sustained periods of time, which gave them the social space to discuss issues that were important to them. The war changed their “perception of themselves and what they were capable of doing.”⁷²

Not all women joined organisations, especially those who were facing the challenges of balancing home and family with a husband away, but for many the opportunity to work outside the home was a form of liberation. The larger local organisations continued to meet regularly for social, educational and campaigning activities, and members maintained their membership of the older groups whilst also working for newer organisations such as the WVS. Women had a new role as vital members of the national community and some responded to this new role by developing a new voice; they were politicised by their experiences of a world outside the domestic sphere and were determined to improve their lives and the lives of others. Because the campaigns of the feminist organisations were necessarily dwarfed by new war-time concerns, much historical study has focused on the impact of war on women rather than on groups of women, but this study

⁷¹ Morgan and Evans, *The Battle for Britain*.

⁷² Clarke, *Women in the Hosiery Industry*.

will argue that the local branches grappled with the issues raised by the war and used the changes in women's lives to push for greater opportunities.

FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS 1950-1969, NADIR OR REBIRTH?

Compared to the period up to 1945, the 1950s and 1960s have been relatively neglected in histories of British women and their organisations. There is also an abundance of literature written by women involved in the later Women's Liberation movement which examines the atmosphere of the late 1960s, but this tends to suggest that they were forging new ground, making no mention of the more traditional feminist activity of the 1950s and 1960s.⁷³ This activity has previously been dismissed as ineffectual but the 1950s are now beginning to attract more attention and there is now a slowly growing body of work on the feminist movement before the development of a more radical strain of feminism in the late 1960s.⁷⁴ There are a number of general studies of British society at this time which touch on the political, social, economic and cultural changes which

⁷³ Examples include S. Rowbotham and J. McCrindle, *Dutiful Daughters: Women talk about their lives* (Middlesex, 1977); S. Rowbotham, *Women in Movement* (New York, 1992); A. Sebestyen (ed), '68, '78, '88: *From Women's Liberation to Feminism* (Bridport, 1988).

⁷⁴ A. Black and S. Brooke, 'The Labour Party, Women and the Problem of Gender, 1951-1966', in *Journal of British Studies* 36/4 (1997) 419-452; S. Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s', in *Journal of Social History* 34/4 (2001) 773-795; J. Freeguard, 'It's Time for the Women of the 1950s to stand up and be counted', unpublished DPhil thesis, (University of Sussex, 2004); J. Lewis, 'Myrdal, Klein, Women's Two Roles and Post-war feminism, 1945-1960', in Smith, *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*; E. McCarty, 'Attitudes to Women and Domesticity c.1939-1955', unpublished PhD thesis (Oxford, 1994); E. Meehan, 'British Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s', in Smith *British Feminism*; Birmingham Feminist History Group, 'Feminism as femininity in the 1950s?', in *Feminist Review* 3 (1979) 48-68.

had a substantial impact on changing lives of women⁷⁵ and a number of contemporary surveys and studies which give us an indication of the lived experience of many of the women of this period.⁷⁶ Among the former are Thane's study which uses the equal pay issue to examine the changing lives of women and a further work which sees the emergence of the New Look fashion as a sign of women's empowerment.⁷⁷ Recent PhD work by Joyce Freeguard has built on the few dissenting voices to argue that this period was an important time for women campaigners and for the development of women's rights but the literature on this specific aspect remains scant.⁷⁸

Until recently the decades have been written off as stultifyingly domestic – a depleted period before feminism proper emerged in 1969. The traditional view of the 1950s and early 1960s is that it was another period of stasis in the history of the feminism – “a low ebb as far as the feminist movement is concerned,” stifled

⁷⁵ Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945*; A. Marwick, *British Society since 1945* 3rd ed. (Middlesex, 1996); P. Thane, 'Towards Equal Opportunities? Women in Britain since 1945', in T. Gourvish and A. O'Day (ed), *Britain since 1945* (London, 1991); P. Thane, 'Women since 1945' in P. Johnson (ed), *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London, 1994); E. Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain, 1945-1968* (London, 1980).

⁷⁶ H. Gavron, *The Captive Wife* (London, 1966); J. and E. Newson, *Patterns of Infant Care in an Urban Community* (Middlesex, 1963). A further example was Ferdynand Zweig's *Women's Life and Labour* which surveyed 445 women workers to discover “how the three fields of women's life – work, home-life and leisure – coincide or collide with each other.” (F. Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour* (London, 1952) p. 9). The most famous and influential study of women's lives at this time was *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* by Viola Klein and Alva Myrdal, which studied the lives of working women, but which has also been claimed as a “conduit channelling the feminism of the early part of the century to the later.” (A. Myrdal and V. Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* (London, 1956 – 2nd ed 1968); quote in Thane, “Towards Equal Opportunities”, p. 199). The interest in women's lives was further stimulated by feminist philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir who told her audience “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman”, challenging the hegemony of natural femininity and the domestic ideal. (S de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Paris, 1949) quoted in S. Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London, 1997) .)

⁷⁷ Thane, 'Towards Equal Opportunities', Thane, 'Women since 1945'.

⁷⁸ Freeguard 'It's Time for the Women of the 1950s to stand up and be counted'.

by a society holding a “fundamentally conservative view of women.”⁷⁹ While there was a new acceptance of women who combined paid work with family, and some middle-class women were even able to combine motherhood and a career, the domestic ideal was raised to new heights by women’s magazines, cinema and new media. Martin Pugh had argued that the period was one of consistently “declining fortunes for organised feminism ... a gradual decline of the earlier generation of feminists,” whilst Jane Lewis tells us “the activities of the organised feminist movement were very limited.”⁸⁰ Even Andrews, who has attempted to define all female collective action as feminist argues that the campaigns of national organisations, and specifically the WI, were made obsolete by the establishment of the Welfare State. The WI, she claims, made a “retreat from the national political arena” and were marginalised into concerns about litter and public toilets.⁸¹

The view of the 1950s up to the late 1960s as a period of stasis for women’s empowerment is thus still widely held. However, this view has come under challenge from two directions. On the one hand, some historians have sought to re-interpret the meanings of domesticity for women in this period. While not denying the strength of the cult of domesticity in the 1950s, they stress the importance of the domestic role in giving women a sense of power and space in society:

⁷⁹ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 119, p. 118.

⁸⁰ Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement* (2000 ed), pp. 301-12; Lewis, ‘Myrdal, Klein...’ p. 182.

⁸¹ Andrews, ‘For Home and Country’, p. 128.

The relationship between women's emancipation, feminism and domesticity at this time was not simply dichotomous and antagonistic.⁸²

Full-time housewifery was a power base since husbands were as dependent on female domestic skills as women were on male earnings.⁸³

Langhamer goes even further when re-evaluating domesticity:

The assumption that domesticity and 'traditional' gender roles were mutually reinforcing needs to be challenged ... domesticity is increasingly viewed as a rational choice for women, a possible source of delight and an opportunity to exercise real skill.⁸⁴

The domestic role, it is argued here, gave women a new power which could be guided by an organised women's movement. Many women accepted the mother as the centre of family life, though they also accepted the right of that mother to work outside the home. There was also evidence of the companionate marriage and sharing of some domestic duties which would go some way to easing a woman's burden in the home:

Marriage today is ideally envisaged as a partnership in which husband and wife share each other's interests and worries, and face all major decisions jointly ... At a time when he has more money in his pocket and more leisure on which to spend it ... the head of the household chooses to sit at his own fireside, a baby on his knee and a feeding bottle in his hand: the modern

⁸² McCarty, 'Attitudes to Women and Domesticity', p. 21.

⁸³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, pp. 104-5.

⁸⁴ C. Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', in *Journal of Contemporary History* 40/2 (2005): 356-7.

father's place is in the home ... The emancipation of women in one generation has been followed by the domestication of husbands in the next.⁸⁵

Other historians' refusal to write off this period as a time of stagnation for feminism is based on their evaluation of women's public campaigning has having even in this period some force and momentum. For Olive Banks,

There were... even during the unpromising 1950s, signs that equal rights feminisms was not only alive but struggling to make itself heard.⁸⁶

More recent work has made an attempt to reclaim this period as one of continuity and some dynamism. It has been claimed that it is the period's proximity to a much more dramatic phase that has made it difficult to look at the 1950s and 1960s objectively. Whilst it is conceded that "the aims, objectives, strategy, rhetoric, and style of the feminism of Women's Lib in the 1970s bore almost no relation to that feminist activity which continued ... after the war" this does not necessarily indicate that post-war feminism did not exist.⁸⁷ Joyce Freeguard describes a movement that had to operate within a strict cultural setting, but which nevertheless was able to campaign for gender equality in social, economic and political spheres in campaigns including equal pay, women Peers and divorce legislation:

Women of the 1950s should be seen as a vital part of the history of women's demands for gender equality because of the relentless work of some of them for the improvement of women's lives in every sphere ... Also, they kept up

⁸⁵ Newson, *Patterns of Infant Care*, pp. 133-147.

⁸⁶ Banks, *Faces of Feminism*, p. 221.

⁸⁷ Caine, *English Feminism*, pp. 222-225.

“work in progress” on such issues ... which women campaigned for in the inter-war years and again in the 1970s and 1980s ... demonstrating a constant, progressive demand for gender equality.⁸⁸

Beaumont describes a “vibrant and diverse” women’s movement by the end of the 1950s; though it was a movement not yet challenging women’s domestic role.⁸⁹

Harold Smith, scathing of the lack of feminism during the war has described the 1960s as “the most important flowering of the British women’s movement since pre-1914” as old groups were reinvigorated, new groups developed to challenge patriarchy outright, and women “developed a new consciousness of their oppression.”⁹⁰

At a time when feminism was supposed to be at its nadir, there were still people publishing works discussing it and still women meeting to campaign. The national organisations continued to pass resolutions and lobby government, new organisations emerged to meet the growing interest in issues such as nuclear weapons and some significant legislation was passed – all at a time when feminism seems at its least visible. This paradox raises the question as to the exact relationship between feminist activity and the changing role of women in society. Was this the final fruiting of the demands of the early agitators from before the war? Was it a result of fundamental social change caused by the war? Or was it because both new and existing organisations continued to push for these changes, campaigning quietly but consistently and influencing politicians more than

⁸⁸ Freeguard, ‘It’s Time for the Women of the 1950s’, p. 193.

⁸⁹ Beaumont, ‘The Women’s Movement’, p. 275.

⁹⁰ H. Smith, ‘The Women’s Movement. Politics and Citizenship, 1960s-2000’, in I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*.

general society? This is a question to be addressed more fully later. Some commentators have been too quick to dismiss the decades as dominated by the domestic, yet we shall see that this was a period of substantial change in the lives of women. For example, by the end of it women were able to seek a divorce, have a legal abortion and make a claim for equal pay. The legislative change does not support the argument that women were constrained by domesticity, unable to break away from their labour-saving devices.

Pat Thane has summarised the period:

An active women's movement was less evident between the end of the war and the 1960s than at the beginning of the century, or in the inter-war years ... or from the later 1960s. Yet we have seen women protesting ... Women asserted themselves in other ways ... A thin thread of overt protest about gender inequality survived through the 1950s.⁹¹

The true problem when studying this period is the lack of attention it has been given by historians. Unlike the first half of the century, few historians have worked to examine the nature and importance of women's campaigns, making this an area ripe for further development, and one too quickly written off in the past. An interesting point has been raised by Hera Cook that this was a period in which women's organisations became part of the mainstream.⁹² She makes this intriguing comment in the conclusion of her work on the sexual revolution of the 1960s but it is not expanded. Like Beaumont writing about the earlier period, we

⁹¹ Thane, 'Women since 1945', p. 404.

⁹² H. Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English women, sex and contraception 1800-1975* (Oxford, 2004), p. 316.

are given a glimpse into possible new avenues of study for women in the twentieth century, but are left to ourselves to ascertain exactly what they mean. With Beaumont we are presented with a national picture that lacks the nuances of local understanding; with Cook we are presented with an entirely new interpretation of the strength of the national organisations with no supporting explanation.

QUESTIONS, PROBLEMS, METHODS AND SOURCES

This study will make extensive use of the terms feminism and citizenship. Feminism and citizenship have emerged as key concepts for historians seeking to analyse the ideas and campaigns of organised women after 1918 and they will be key concepts in this study. Even though the main contention of this study is that local organisations did not exclusively choose one or the other type of campaign, there was a clear contemporary distinction between the two concepts. But each poses problems of definition.

Definitions of feminism have been contested since the advent of campaigns to redress the social and political imbalances to which women have been subjected. Reaching a definition of feminism has been the goal of many writers – both historians and those from the fields of social science.⁹³ One prevailing view of feminism has been that which is concerned with achieving absolute equality with men – in the areas of politics, the law and the economy. Within this tradition a

⁹³ The development of this search for a definition was outlined by Karen Offen in 1988 – ‘Defining Feminism: A Comparative historical approach’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14/11 (1988): 119-157.

distinction has been drawn between different types of feminist with those calling for absolute equality being lauded as the true believers. Sociologist Karen Offen calls this “individualist feminism” as it challenges any idea of there being a difference between men and women, therefore arguing there is no justification for society treating them differently. Other feminism has been described by Offen as “relational” – this insists that women are distinct from men, but that their different roles should be regarded as equal to the roles played by men.⁹⁴ Late nineteenth-century feminists – in Europe and elsewhere – included both those who sought absolute equality and those who sought the “celebration of sexual difference.”⁹⁵ The Edwardians “referred far more often to the ‘rights of women’ than to ‘rights equal to those of men’ . This is a subtle but profound difference.”⁹⁶ These tensions and differences were carried over into the interwar period, with some starting to differentiate between different strands of the feminist movement – between an “old” feminism striving for absolute equality, and a “new” feminism that fought for change that would benefit women in their domestic role. Yet, “different philosophies and approaches need not be mutually exclusive ... feminist activities of one organisation or campaign may not fit comfortably within one framework” and it is the thesis of this study that this does not prevent such activities being both empowering and influential.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Offen, *Defining Feminism*, pp. 136-139.

⁹⁵ Ibid pp. 123-124.

⁹⁶ Ibid p. 128

⁹⁷ Golby, ‘A Socio-Historical Study of the British Federation of University Women’, p. 16.

Historians have grappled with definitions of feminism in an effort to do justice to the diversity of strategies and aims pursued by those who have sought to remedy gender inequality and enhance women's status. Some people have broken feminism down into its constituent parts, be it Marxist feminism, liberal feminism or lesbian feminism.⁹⁸ Sociologist Karen Offen, by contrast, is concerned that any definition of feminism needs to be inclusive and has called for a much broader definition of what actually constitutes feminism. For the purposes of this study, for an action to be seen as feminist it needs to have "identified a problem in the social relationships existing between men and women" and be willing to "do something, however small, to redress that balance"; it needs to demonstrate the desire to "critique and improve the disadvantaged status of women relative to men."⁹⁹ Joyce Freeguard has developed this idea by arguing for a broad definition – that it should be any action that advocates the rights of women, whatever they want the right to do.¹⁰⁰ It is still useful, however, to maintain a conceptual understanding of the different strands of feminism – equality and welfare – without dismissing the latter as somehow less radical in quality. Jane Lewis has made a convincing argument that the ability to work within the domestic arena to make real changes to the day-to-day lives of women was a much more radical approach than even that attempted by the suffragettes.¹⁰¹ A feminism that affirmed women's domestic role could indeed be radical: it was an approach that

⁹⁸ C. Beasley, *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory*. (London, 1999). She identifies the more recent divisions within feminism and describes the main traditions. She lists liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, postmodern/poststructural feminism and ethnicity feminism.

⁹⁹ Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England*, Logan, *Making Women Magistrates*, Offen, *Defining Feminism*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁰ Freeguard, 'It's Time for the Women of the 1950s to stand up', p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Lewis, *Women in England*; Lewis (ed), *Labour and Love*.

recognized a basic sexual division of labour within the family while challenging abuses of power within it and arguing that mothers should have greater rights and better material support. This was a complex message but one that was essentially different from a conservative and uncritical affirmation of motherhood and domesticity.

This study recognises the radical potential of both equality and welfare feminism. Both could aim at “a rebalancing between women and men of the social, economic, and political power within society” and represent a “frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization, and control mechanisms.”¹⁰² On many occasions women in Nottingham’s organisations clearly voiced demands that came under this definition of feminism. At the same time, this study seeks to show that some campaigns were more explicitly feminist than others. It would be inaccurate to characterise women’s organisations as exclusively “feminist” organisations when overt feminism constituted only one part of their work, and was only one facet of their agendas. Other work is more reliably defined as that to enhance their roles as citizens.

T.H. Marshall, writing in the 1950s identified three rights necessary to ensure citizenship:

- 1) Liberty – freedom of speech, the right to justice etc
- 2) The right to participate in the political process and exercise political power

¹⁰² Offen, *Defining Feminism*, pp. 151-152.

3) The right to share in the economic and social life of the country¹⁰³

As Pattie et al. have argued, citizenship concerns itself not only with political rights, but also with social and economic welfare, education and leisure.¹⁰⁴

Citizens are allowed a relationship with the State, local governing organisation and the community in which they live – they are not excluded from any arena. These are the rights fought for both by many women who labelled themselves feminist, and many who did not. Logan argues that citizenship is the aim of feminism and therefore cannot be divorced from it, but there were many perceived differences which need to be acknowledged.¹⁰⁵

Specific work using the term citizenship in the context of twentieth century women's organisations has been undertaken by Caitriona Beaumont who has studied key campaigns such as those to improve the lives of women as wives, mothers and consumers. As outlined earlier, Beaumont found evidence of national organisations consciously distancing themselves from feminism to focus on raising the living standards of women, and in informing society that the concerns of women were as relevant as the concerns of men.¹⁰⁶ Despite not making the same distinction, it is citizenship activities that the WI were engaged with in Maggie Andrew's work - "quasi-political activity [carried out] in order to achieve

¹⁰³ T.H. Marshall writing in 1950 and quoted in R. Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, 1997).

¹⁰⁴ C. Pattie, P. Seyd and P. Whiteley, *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy* (Cambridge, 2004).

¹⁰⁵ Logan, 'Making Women Magistrates', p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists', Beaumont "The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship" in Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed) *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*, p. 269, p. 267.

the conditions necessary for them to carry out their domestic tasks efficiently ... domesticity continued to be an assertive form of citizenship.”¹⁰⁷

There seems to us to be little distinction between the ideals of citizenship – allowing women the right to make their own choices and the right for their concerns, domestic or otherwise, to be heard – and the ideals of the welfare or new feminist. The pursuit of citizenship gains for women was indeed proclaimed by feminists to be the ‘next stage’ in their enterprise after the vote was won. Eleanor Rathbone summarised citizenship as that which makes women “not just house-proud but ‘town-proud’ in their own interests and those of their children.”¹⁰⁸

Citizenship was a prize worth the fight; the vote must be used. This meant that women must be organised and educated in their own interests ... Citizenship meant having a voice, locally and nationally, and women must learn to raise that voice ... Citizenship required knowledge, of your rights and of the world in which you would exercise them ... Women as citizens had an important role in achieving ends that would benefit women and society in general ... a distinct role for women as legitimate political actors.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ M. Morgan, ‘The Women's Institute Movement - the Acceptable face of Feminism?’ in Oldfield, *This working-day World*; M. Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*; M. Andrews, ‘“For Home and Country”: feminism and Englishness in the Women’s Institute movement, 1930-1960’ in R. Weight and A. Beach, *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930-1960* (London, 1998), p. 130.

¹⁰⁸ E. Rathbone, ‘Women’s Citizen’s Associations’, in *Common Cause* June 1916.

¹⁰⁹ S. Innes, ‘Love and work: Feminism, Family and ideas of equality and citizenship, Britain 1900-1939’, unpublished PhD thesis (Edinburgh, 1998).

For all its connections with a feminist tradition, the ideal of female citizenship nevertheless had a broad and seemingly ‘neutral’ appeal as a term. It appealed both to women who rejected any allusion to the sex war, and also to a society that remained cautious about a direct challenge to the gender status quo. The term ‘feminism’ evokes the question of gender and power in a way that ‘citizenship’ does not, even when citizenship campaigns sought to improve the lives and opportunities of women. Many organized women rejected the former term and feel much more comfortable with the latter. As Pat Thane has explained,

Throughout the past century many women have been willing to commit themselves to equal pay, equal work opportunities and other aspects of gender equality while refusing to call themselves feminists, because to them feminism means aggression, confrontation and a hostility to men which they do not share.¹¹⁰

Despite the acceptance of these broad categories, it remains a challenge to historians of women’s organisations to analyse the nature and goals of women’s organisations in this period. We find a plethora of women’s organisations pursuing a plethora of goals, some of obvious relevance to women’s status in society, but which also tackle general social problems. Some of these are easily identifiable as primarily feminist organisations from their programmes, language and activities, but others with a more eclectic mix of goals and priorities are harder to classify. For many organisations we are able to find scattered references to them pursuing campaigns to rectify some issues of injustices and inequalities

¹¹⁰ Thane, ‘What difference did the vote make’, p. 279.

affecting women, but there is little sense that feminism is the overall priority of the organisations. Thus the category of citizenship is useful in allowing us to make the distinction between different types of activity, and also to acknowledge the importance of work which allowed women to contribute to social debate and social reform on a wide range of issues affecting them as citizens.

What was universal through the organisations studied for this thesis, is the belief that women had an important contribution to make to wider society and that it was important that they had an opportunity to voice their concerns and objectives:

Society needs the contribution of women to all its manifold activities – not simply as an audience to be asked at intervals for comment or approval, but as participators in its work, active in places where decisions are taken which shape the course of events and the character of social life and progress.¹¹¹

There is little evidence of solely “feminist” or solely “citizenship” organisations within the local context. Yet the hypothesis of this study is that the conceptual distinction between the two is important for a more precise analysis of the organisations considered here.

This study also suggests that leisure activities had the potential to function as a form of empowerment for women and so, in addition to the study of the campaigning nature of Nottingham’s organisations, it pays some attention to the importance of the leisure opportunities offered by these groups – an area of

¹¹¹ O. W. Campbell, *Report of a Conference on the Feminine Point of View* (London, 1952), p. 44.

women's history that has not yet been developed.¹¹² Recent work by Selina Todd, has included a study of the importance of leisure in the lives of young working women, but these women are by no means the core membership of the organisations studied here.¹¹³ Andrew Davies' work on working-class culture in Manchester has shown that working-class women had no choice but to develop their own, independent culture, in the face of a deeply-entrenched male culture, but his work does not consider the importance of single-sex organisations in providing this cultural space.¹¹⁴

Todd emphasises the importance of the social network of the workplace; this study will examine the key role women's organisations played as a social network for those who often did not engage in paid work outside the home.

To come together in a group organised around a particular issue (even if that issue was ... needlework) was to replace the informal and covert with the formal and overt ... [It was] a mild assertion of women's right to public space.¹¹⁵

¹¹² The only specific work has been that of Claire Langhamer and her focus is not on the empowering nature of leisure. C. Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960* (Manchester, 2000). Most other work focuses on the culture of the individual – that of literature, fashion and cinema – rather than organised social groups eg T. E. Faulkner (ed), *Northumbrian Panorama: Studies in the History and Culture of North-East England* (London, 1996); M. Andrews and M. Talbot (eds), *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture* (London, 2000). The Andrews text argues that shopping bridges leisure and citizenship by involving women in consumer concerns.

¹¹³ S. Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England, 1918-1950* (Oxford, 2005).

¹¹⁴ A. Davies, *Leisure, gender and poverty: working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham, 1992).

¹¹⁵ P. Gordon and D. Doughan, *Dictionary of British Women's Organisations, 1825-1960* (London, 2001), p. 2.

Although social activities were hardly an attempt to challenge the gender balance of the country or community, they were a key part of what the organisations had to offer – a way of drawing in new members to work on more focussed campaigns – and of creating what Andrews has referred to as “an alternative female culture.”¹¹⁶ It is hard to reconcile the sombre and depressing depiction of the inter-war years as a slough of feminine despondency with the buoyant sense of excitement and release which animates so many of the more broadly cultural activities which different groups of women enjoyed.¹¹⁷

Given the hybrid nature of most of the organisations as acknowledged above, and the fact that different organisations were more active at different times, it is a challenge to measure the strength and impetus of feminist and citizenship campaigning across periods. It is not simply a question of examining membership numbers and counting campaigns but a more difficult judgement about how determinedly feminist demands were pursued and what impact they had. Along with the records of the organisations concerned, the local press can be used as a barometer when giving clues about the changing cultural context and shifting attitudes towards women’s issues. A careful reading of the local newspapers can help assess how “legitimate” local society considered feminist and citizenship demands to be.

¹¹⁶ Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, p. 152.

¹¹⁷ A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the wars* (London, 1991), p. 9.

A LOCAL STUDY

It was in their neighbourhoods and local communities that most people, particularly women, practised their politics.¹¹⁸

Much of the previously discussed work has been undertaken at a national level. However, a number of historians have recently turned to local studies as a means to enhance our understanding of national developments. National conclusions can be both reinforced and challenged by the study of local archival material and specific studies have enabled scholars to gain a more nuanced understanding of the developing lives of women and the key roles played by women's organisations. Much of this work is being done on the local branches of the Labour Party and has examined women in local and regional settings to gain an insight into interwar women's activism. Annmarie Hughes has worked on the role of Labour women in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. She has examined the impact of the class and political loyalties of former suffrage campaigners on their ability to work with local Labour party branches. In addition, Matthew Worley has edited a collection about local labour politics around the country including a chapter by Karen Hunt on local Labour women and their impact on Labour party branches in Manchester.¹¹⁹ Sue Innes has written on the inter-war work of the Edinburgh Women's Citizen Association and makes much of the connections

¹¹⁸ K. Hunt, 'Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour Women in Interwar Manchester', in Worley (ed), *Labour's Grass Roots*.

¹¹⁹ A. Hughes, 'Fragmented Feminists? The Influence of Class and Political Identity in relations between the Glasgow and West of Scotland Suffrage Society and the Independent Labour Party in the West of Scotland, c.1919-1932', *Women's History Review* 14/1 (2005) 7-31; M. Worley (ed), *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of local Labour Parties and their Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005).

between citizenship and feminism.¹²⁰ Yet there has been no comprehensive study of a range of organisations operating within a single local environment. Such a study is necessary to understand the priorities of a range of women, rather than those who were specifically politicised through membership of political parties. This study will use local history to add to the growing canon of twentieth century women's history - to augment our knowledge of twentieth century women's lives, and specifically, of what women were doing to improve their own lives. It will allow us to get a better understanding of what was happening at "grass roots" level rather than focussing solely on the programmes and resolutions passed nationally. Through this medium we will be able to draw some conclusions about the strength of what has been described as "the women's movement", the impact of social and political change on local groups of women and the ways in which these women responded to and shaped that change.

A local study allows us to build on Beaumont's work in looking at a range of women's organisations after 1918. It gives us the chance to explore how women at a local level responded to and engaged with national trends and debates. It gives us a local perspective on electoral and legislative change, and the impact of such on the lived experience of women. It also allows us to examine how women operated in relation to a local context – responding to a local political situation and dealing with issues of importance to local people – housing, education, health and work. Finally, the local arena is where women were generally most active; if they were involved in public affairs it was overwhelmingly within local politics or

¹²⁰Innes, 'Love and Work', pp. 186-7.

groups. It was concern about local issues that encouraged many women to participate, thus making a regional study ideal for testing to what extent women were able to develop as citizens. In this context Nottingham and Nottinghamshire were chosen as an example of provincial England. A county with a mixed economy, it experienced huge change through the twentieth century, and within the county boundaries we can see many of the changes that have affected the whole nation – the decline of primary and manufacturing industry, the growth of the commercial sector, the increased role of local and national government, especially in the areas of health and housing.

English provincial towns sustained a substantial and complex female public sphere in which social, educational, charitable and political activities were promiscuously mixed.¹²¹

The approach in this thesis has been to be as inclusive as possible when considering local women's organisations, with the intention of representing as many different groups of women as could be found. This approach allows the reader to have a unique panorama – to be able to see what issues were of concern to women of different social, religious and economic background – as well as giving the author the evidence to reach strong conclusions. The Nottingham branch of the National Council of Women was very active throughout the period and as an essentially middle-class organisation, was a link with a paternalistic tradition trying to help the less privileged. Groups were also found that represented professional women (the Soroptimists and the Federation of Business

¹²¹ Hinton, *Women and Social Leadership*, p. 39.

and Professional Women) and the rural housewife (Women's Institutes). Political women were studied through local branches and Women's Sections of the Labour and Conservative parties. Religious groups, girls' organisations and single issue groups such as the Electrical Association for Women were all examined to provide a range of views on what was that concerned local women at different times in the twentieth century and what they did to address these concerns. By looking at the widest spectrum of single-sex organisations – large and small, long-lasting or fleeting - within a single local context we are able to make an assessment on a range of issues. We can examine the choices available to both rural and urban women who wanted to participate in single-sex organisations, whether they were seeking an outlet for public service, campaigning opportunities or simply a structured form of leisure or self-improvement. An inclusive approach allows us to examine to what extent different types of organisations engaged with issues of equality feminism – issues of equal rights, equal pay and political representation – or of “welfare feminism” –addressing issues that disadvantaged women, especially in their role as mothers, such as nursery provision, maternity care and the welfare of vulnerable women and girls. Finally, it allows us to assess how far these organisations, whether or not explicitly feminist, were vehicles allowing women to participate in local affairs as citizens, working collaboratively to express a woman's perspective on a range of issues such as housing, consumer rights and the environment, and how far they were successful in these aims. Or alternatively, whether they were primarily vehicles to allow women space to socialise outside of the home – an important social phenomenon but one that

could only make limited gains in terms of allowing women to develop as full citizens.

There are a number of challenges that present themselves when attempting to discuss a range of activities within a particular place. Many Nottingham women's organisations have deposited many papers in local archives and many of these papers consist of minute books from meetings held and social events arranged. These can contain vast amounts of detail about the concerns and campaigns of these organisations and have been used widely in this study. The dangers involved in their use, however, must be acknowledged. We have no way of verifying the minutes made – we do not know if everything was recorded faithfully or whether other aspects have been misrepresented. We have no method of establishing the motives of the minute taker – she may have a desire to heighten the importance of issues which appealed to her and which advanced the wishes of her and her friends. There are a number of examples when an inordinate amount of time is given in minutes to an issue of organisation politics and a guest speaker addressing women on their new rights is barely crammed in at the bottom of the page. Therefore minutes, although very valuable, cannot be seen as entirely unproblematic records.

In addition, only a few organisations have left extensive records. Some have left incomplete minute books and other evidence such as financial records and scrapbooks that can be scrutinised for an indication of who joined the

organisations and what they saw as their main aims and concerns. Others have left nothing, and we only know of their existence through mentions in the press, or in the correspondence of other organisations. As a result, some of the evidence is patchy, although this range does give us a good indication of the real diversity of organisations that existed – from the highly recorded, long-lasting ones, to the less formal, possibly single-issue groups.

One key area of research, and one which has rarely been utilised, is the amount of detail about women's organisations and the context in which they operated that can be extracted from the local press. A survey of local newspapers was undertaken for this study and proved to be a rich resource, although there is very little written about its use in ascertaining local opinion or reflecting local concerns, and often focuses instead on the American experience.¹²² To avoid the painstaking and unnecessary work of reading every issue of every local newspaper printed in this period it was decided to use a sampling method. For the daily papers two dates were chosen from each month and read in detail. The dates differed from paper to paper to try to ascertain what women were doing throughout the month and avoid finding the same news in each paper. The weekly papers were all read. This proved valuable in two distinct ways. Firstly it gave an important insight into Nottingham society between the wars. It allowed us to examine the concerns and attitudes of ordinary people towards women and the issues and campaigns connected to them. Again, as with those who volunteer to

¹²² B. Franklin and D. Murphy, *What News? The Market, Politics and the Local Press* (London, 1991); N. A. Walker (ed), *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender roles and the popular press* (New York, 1998).

share their memories with oral historians, those who write to the editor's page of a newspaper are a self-selective group and not representative of all those who live in an area, but the view expressed by contributors and journalists about "women's issues" are vital in gauging the atmosphere in which local organisations worked. Secondly, many organisations had their activities reported in the local press and this supplements the minute books to allow us an insight into what was concerning women at the time and how active and influential they actually were. This combination of evidence has allowed the researcher to construct a picture of local gender attitudes and expectations and to examine the role and influence of women's organisations in Nottingham.

The press also allowed us an insight into the cultural outlets for women through this period, with columns and pages specifically for women. These often reinforced the view that what women wanted was domestic tips and fashion ideas, but there is also evidence that the local press could operate as a forum in which a different view of women could be expressed, or even, especially in the 1950s, where women could exercise their own voice in a column with a more advanced and ambitious notion of gender politics than previously seen.

The study itself will consider the period 1918-1970 in three episodes: 1918-1939, 1939-1949 and 1950-1969 and will be largely chronological. As previously touched upon, this allows the study to draw conclusions about the cumulative product of female activism, as well as allowing us to dismiss once and for all

various assumptions that exist about this substantial period between prominent bursts of feminist activity. It sets in context the often neglected post war decades from the mid-1940s to the late 1960s against the background of interwar developments and the Second World War, thus allowing us to ascertain the impact of social, economic and cultural change, reflected in a local community. Specifically this also allows us to assess whether this later period deserves its characterization as the nadir of British feminism. Chapter Two considers the interwar period in greater detail and begins by looking at the national context – the lives of women and the issues of concern to the national women’s organisations. It then proceeds to examine how this was reflected in the myriad of Nottingham’s women’s organisations. Chapter Three details the important role the local press played in both shaping and revealing local women’s interests at this time when the women’s organisations were searching for a new identity. It then examines the activities of the local organisations in more detail – analysing the feminist, citizenship and leisure activities and the impact these had on the local community and on local women. Work in this chapter also acknowledges that the organisations were not able to completely overcome the continued voices of anti-feminism.

Chapter 4 focuses on the period of World War two and the post-war Labour government. Women’s experiences of the war and the impact of these experiences on women’s organisations, both national and at branch level are examined. Their representation in the local press during the “national emergency” is assessed and

their continued campaigning voice and their involvement in specific war-time activities is used again to examine the feminism and citizenship aims of many women, as well as the importance of a social network in times of need. The distinction between the glorification of women during the war, and the re-emergence of the domestic ideal and some anti-feminism immediately afterwards is also made.

Chapter 5 examines the 1950s and 1960s, a period often written off as a time of stultifying domesticity before “true” feminism was able to emerge in the 1970s. Yet, as indicated earlier on, continued study of the local press, and close examination of the archival material reveals that this was also a period of significant social and legislative change, and the local evidence reveals a vibrant movement, increasingly coming together to push for feminist and citizenship changes. Though it was a period of falling membership for some organisations, it was also a time of dynamism and expanded opportunities, all helpfully described by important women’s columns in the local press.

CHAPTER TWO: THE INTERWAR PERIOD – NATIONAL PATTERNS AND LOCAL REFLECTIONS

As outlined in the introduction, the debate about the strength or otherwise of feminism between the wars is now well-established, with much research being published which increasingly argues that organised feminism was not in the decline that had been previously assumed. Some research has gone even further in arguing that activities that have hitherto been thought of as encouraging domesticity have actually been feminist in intent and application.¹²³ Within this research it is above all the role of national women's organisations that has been examined.¹²⁴ The purpose of the next two chapters is to present an outline of the interaction between the national trends that affected women and their organisations and the local context, focusing on Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, in order to examine the specific impact and importance of some of these organisations. This focus will enable us to examine the experiences of the rank and file members of these organisations and the type of work, campaigns and activities these members participated in. The study has encompassed a wider range of organisations than have yet been studied in depth and allows us to interrogate the different hypotheses thus presented about the national interwar

¹²³ Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*

¹²⁴ Beaumont 'Citizens not feminists'; Beaumont 'The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship'; H. Frances, (2000). ' "Dare to be Free!": the Women's Freedom League and its legacy', in J. Purvis and S. S. Holton (eds) *Votes for Women* (London, 2000); Gaffin *Caring and Sharing*; J. J. Matthews 'They had such a lot of fun: The Women's League of Health and Beauty between the wars', *History Workshop* 30 (1990): 22-50; Merz *After the Vote*; Scott 'A "Trade Union for Married Women"' ; Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*

picture. It will become clear that, on a local level, “feminist” goals and demands were often combined with broader social concerns within the agenda of a single organisation. Women were engaged in a wide range of activities with the intention of improving the lives of other women in the local, national and international context – some of which are evidently concerned with achieving equal rights for women, others concerned with developing the scope of women’s citizenship, and yet others focused on educating women about wider society. We can thus see local organisations, pursuing a range of aims, who were very active in the years after the vote.

The distinctions between different traditions of feminism have been highlighted by the literature discussed in the introduction and they are also apparent at the grass roots level in terms of different types of demands and campaigns as will be detailed in Chapter Three. Yet the significant difference is that we do not see the organisational rifts and divisions that appear to characterise the national movement. By studying a range of organisations we can also emphasise the importance of those who provided improved opportunities to women who were wives and mothers, and those targeted at developing the role of women as active citizens in the local arena, an area not given prominence in the national studies. In addition we can see how these local organisations worked to either challenge or reinforce a traditional division of labour between the sexes in a period of rapid social, political and cultural change and we can begin to examine the impact of their work on local women and national developments.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT: NEW FREEDOMS AND CONTINUED OBSTACLES, 1918-1939

Undoubtedly, the post-war era was one of rising opportunities for women. A substantial increase in the volume of legislation directly affecting women could be seen as one consequence of the enfranchisement of women and the concern of political parties to attract women voters. Twenty laws specifically concerning women were passed between 1918 and 1925, compared with only six between 1898 and 1918, and the legislation was introduced and pushed through by male MPs – women MPs in the early 1920s were largely a novelty and not remembered for their campaigning zeal on behalf of women.¹²⁵ During the 1920s women were granted the right to sit as MPs, become JPs, obtain a university degree, enter the professions, gain access to divorce and ensure the custody of their children.¹²⁶ Employment opportunities for middle-class women widened, and although pay

¹²⁵ There were 21 women MPs between 1918 and 1929, one of whom never sat due to her Irish nationalism. An account of their concerns can be found in Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992) Chapter 6 and in Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*. This point is also illustrated further later in this chapter.

¹²⁶ Pugh *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992) lists the legislation:

1918 – Parliamentary Qualification Act; Registration of Midwives Amending Act; Affiliation Orders (Rise of Minimum Payment) Act

1919 – Sex Disqualification Removal Act; Nurses Registration Act

1920 – Married Women's Property (Scotland) Act; Maintenance Orders (Facility for Enforcement) Act

1922 – Married Women's (Maintenance) Act; Infanticide Act; Criminal Law (Amendment) Act; Law of Property Act

1923 – Matrimonial Causes Act; Bastardy Act

1925 – Guardianship of Infants Act; Widows, Orphans and Old Age Pensions Act; Summary Jurisdiction (Separation and Maintenance) Act

1926 – Adoption of Children Act; Registration of Midwives and Maternity Homes Act

1927 – Nursing Homes Registration Act

1928 – Equal Franchise Act

1929 – Age of Marriage Act

and opportunities were nowhere near equal, things were improving. Nancy Astor became the first woman MP to take her seat only a year after women had been granted the vote, and by the time of Second World War Britain had its first female Cabinet Minister. Fifteen women MPs were elected in 1931.

However, despite legislation delivering new opportunities for women, the lives of many of them seemed to continue with very little alteration.

Women remained, in spite of their more equal political, legal and economic status, something of a sub-class. While a few women arrived at the top in politics, the professions and the arts, the numbers were very small indeed compared with men. Women might possess the vote, Amy Johnson might have set a new record for a solo flight from England to India, and women might no longer be regarded as scandalous for smoking in public, but there were still only sixty-seven women parliamentary candidates (nine elected) in the last election before the Second World War.¹²⁷

The volume and pace of legislation slowed as the politicians began to realise that women did not constitute a powerful electoral force capable of working together to overthrow governments. The impact of the legislation was often also minimal – by 1931 for example, there were still only 200 qualified women lawyers. The paradox is that as the women's organisations grew in strength and experience, legislative advances began to lessen, especially once the franchise was equalised.

¹²⁷ Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945*, pp. 174-5.

In the 1918 election women constituted 39.6% of the electorate and by 1931, following the equalisation of the franchise in 1928, they formed the majority – 52.8%. In the first election in which women were able to stand there were only seventeen candidates in Britain and only one, Countess Markievicz, a member of Sinn Fein who did not take up her seat, was elected. Thereafter the number of female MPs grew gradually but once in the House of Commons few female MPs were overtly feminist. No more than seventy female candidates were ever put forward in a national election. The number of MPs did not exceed fifteen at any one point during this period and thus they were easily “absorbed” or “neutralised” by the male members.¹²⁸ The total number of women elected over the course of the inter-war period was 36 and most of these held their seats for less than three years. Only a third of these were married and most were university educated, and therefore not representative of the vast majority of British women. They spoke on welfare issues but never on contentious issues such as birth control or abortion.¹²⁹ The Labour members, especially, dedicated little time to questions of feminism. They toed the Party line and rarely united across party over any issue. The Consultative Committee of Women’s Organisations, established by Conservative MP Nancy Astor in 1921 did have some impact and women did fare better in local politics, being elected as JPs, councillors and, in the 1920s, Poor Law

¹²⁸ Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries* p. 309.

¹²⁹ Although the Duchess of Atholl and Eleanor Rathbone spoke in the House against the practise of clitoridectomy in Kenya I believe this a more an example of a desire to speak against primitive cultural practices in colonial parts than an attempt to introduce feminism onto the agenda for British women. Abhorrence of sexual mutilation is not a particularly radical standpoint.

Guardians.¹³⁰ Despite their increased involvement, however, they still only made up 15% of locally elected officials.

The Domestic Ideal

As outlined previously, a degree of antifeminism emerged after the First World War. Women had worked and experienced a measure of freedom that many returning veterans were not comfortable with. For some it seemed that violence and women's freedom were somehow linked and that the prospect of peace could only be achieved when women were restored to their "natural" role.¹³¹ This attitude was not solely confined to the anti-feminists. Despite emerging freedoms for young, unmarried women, the majority of society seemed to re-embrace the Victorian ideal of the "angel of the home" who would create a domestic idyll based on feminine conduct and maternal instincts. Inter-war Britain anxiously sought a return to stability, and normality was symbolised, at least partly, by marriage and stable families cared for by women who excelled in the domestic sphere. This separate sphere ideal, which the Edwardian feminists had spent years battling against, was reinforced by romantic notions of men as heroic fighters and of women as those bravely keeping the home fires burning. Post war commentators wasted little time in persuading women of the joy to be found in their "natural" roles: "you are the queens of the home ... you have to regulate

¹³⁰ Jones, *Women in British Public Life*.

¹³¹ Kent, 'The Politics of Sexual Difference', p. 252.

these homes ... you must bear in mind that all things, which up to the present have been your charge, must continue to be your charge.”¹³²

In wider society the sexes were increasingly polarised by all manner of “experts”; the growing popularity of Freud and the credibility given to biological explanations for sex differences did largely dismiss the stereotype of women as meek and silly, but were still used to emphasise key differences between the sexes. Freud claimed that a woman would only experience happiness if she had children, and that if she chose otherwise she could be labelled sexually pathological. As part of a eugenic impulse after the war the nation wanted happy, healthy mothers to raise strong, healthy children to replace those who had lost their lives. A “cultural cacophony of motherhood” awarded women increased recognition, and did result in the legislation discussed above, but it was also a dogmatic ideology – no other choice was seen as viable or responsible.¹³³ The “surplus” women who remained unmarried (1,174,000 in 1921) were viewed with suspicion and the *Daily Mail* suggested emigration.¹³⁴

Much of the legislation passed can be viewed as formalising this new concern with domesticity.¹³⁵ When the vote was granted in 1918 it was given to those over 30, those more likely to be wives and mothers rather than young female war workers, and another study of the legislative programme reveals that much

¹³² Dr Wakefield, Bishop of Birmingham, in *The Times*, 11 Oct 1921, p. 5.

¹³³ Kent, *Making Peace*.

¹³⁴ *Daily Mail* 1926

¹³⁵ For details on the “domestication of politics” see Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement* (1992) Chapter 5.

feminist legislation was concerned with their women's role as mother (see note 139). The divorce laws were equalised in 1923 but grounds for divorce were not changed until 1937 meaning that a deserted wife was still unable to file for divorce. Issues pursued by feminists such as birth control and the marriage bar were not successful in the legislature.

Work

An increased awareness of birth control and a change in attitude towards family size resulted in most women having fewer children and births being increasingly concentrated in early married life. The average family size in 1890 was six children; by 1940 this had reduced to two. Work by Jane Lewis demonstrates that the number of married women workers slowly increased but that this work was largely confined to the semi-skilled work of the working class.¹³⁶ By the 1930s the proportion of women, both married and single, in the workforce was rising. New industries provided new opportunities and increasing numbers of women were employed in light, assembly-line work, and in clerical and service work, leaving the back-breaking work of domestic service behind them.

The number of women workers did increase in the inter-war period but this does not mean that it was easy for women to find meaningful, adequately paid work. The immediate post-war period saw thousands of men returning to Britain to find women had replaced many of them in the workplace. The call went up for these women, previously acclaimed as saviours of the home front, to vacate their jobs

¹³⁶ Lewis, *Labour and Love*..

immediately. 750,000 women war workers were laid off by November 1919. Those who did not were increasingly attacked – “from being the saviours of the nation, women in employment were degraded ... to a position of ruthless self-seekers depriving men and their dependants of a livelihood.”¹³⁷ Although the number of women workers increased over this whole period the percentage of women in the labour force in 1921 (29.5%) was lower than it had been in 1911.

Married women were restricted by a widespread marriage bar which denied them access to teaching, the civil service and other professions. This bar was supported by the TUC as a method of reducing male unemployment in the depression years and MPs rejected the abolition of the bar in 1927 with one MP describing working mothers as a “travesty of nature.”¹³⁸ The proportion of older married women in the workforce fell in the immediate post-war period.

Participation levels of married women in the workforce (per 1000)¹³⁹

	Age 18-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54
1911	137	129	106	106	105
1921	150	132	99	93	88
1931	196	193	138	105	88

¹³⁷ I. Clephane, *Towards Sex Freedom* (London, 1935), p. 201.

¹³⁸ Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 101.

¹³⁹ *ibid* p. 150

Most assumed that a woman would only work until she could find a husband and this attitude was reflected in the types of jobs many women found themselves engaged in, and in the wages they were paid for them. One third of all working women in this period worked in domestic service; the proportion of women working in the professions did not change.

Percentage of women in occupations in England and Wales¹⁴⁰

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Personal Service	42	39	33	35
Clerks/ Typists	1	2	8	10
Professional / Technical	7	8	7	7
Textiles	30	27	33	19

On average, a woman working in industry was likely to be paid less than half what a man would be paid – in some industries less than a third. Only in textiles did women earn higher wages – 56.1% of an average male wage in 1924. In the paper and printing industry, in 1935, women earned 37.3% of the equivalent male wage. On average, women in 1931 were earning 48.3% of what men were.¹⁴¹ The new consumer industries did give women opportunities for work but often in basic assembly line work where they could be paid less than men and were not unionised. Opportunities for career advancement were often non-existent. If a woman was out of work the government also treated them differently to men. If

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 156.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 164; p.170. This differential received official approval when the 1919 War Cabinet Committee on Women Employment accepted the basic premise that men and women should receive different pay for the same work.

single benefit claimants were all but forced into domestic service; if married it was felt that their husbands should be supporting them and the 1922 Unemployment Act and 1931 Anomalies Act excluded many eligible women from receiving their benefit because they were engaged in domestic duties.¹⁴² Trade Union membership remained low – women were 10.6% of trade union membership in 1911, 15.1% in 1921 and 16.4% in 1931. Women were represented on the TUC – a Women’s Advisory Council was established in 1931 – but they continued to be seen as marginal by the wider movement and no representatives were sent to mainstream Congress in 1930. Class issues and unemployment came to dominate the movement in the face of economic catastrophe and in such a context women were unlikely to win support for equal pay.

Housing

One key development that changed the lives of many women was the slum clearance which took place after the First World War. Many urban slums were demolished and new housing estates were constructed to replace them. Families moved out to these suburbs where women could expect to run a house with indoor plumbing and adequate heating. Four million new homes were built during this period and young couples could enjoy a home of their own. This was a step forward for many working-class women but there has also been much discussion on the impact of this on neighbourhood life. Removed from the close-knit communities where problems were discussed over the garden fence, many

¹⁴² Smith, ‘British feminism in the 1920s’, p. 54.

working-class women began to feel that the path to respectability required you to keep yourself to yourself, and as a result many suffered from loneliness and a new “suburban sadness”.¹⁴³ Leonora Eyles, writing in 1922 complained of the new little “cages” where women were forced to endure endless ritual labour and in 1938 *The Lancet* contained an article recognising “suburban neurosis”.¹⁴⁴

New consumer products, including household appliances such as electric irons and vacuum cleaners, brought changes to middle-class households. Whilst this helped alleviate much of the heavy work of running a home it also raised expectations as to what a perfect wife should be able to achieve and what her house should look like. Yet for many women housewifery in the inter-war period continued to consist mainly of drudgery. An increase in rent meant less money to spend on food. In addition, not all working class women escaped the slums, as Vera Brittain wrote in 1932:

The wage-earning classes of this country still live in badly planned, inconvenient little houses which harbour dirt, involve incessant labour and are totally unequipped ... Women with poor tools and no modern equipment fight a perpetual losing battle against the ever-accumulating detail of domesticity.¹⁴⁵

Most working-class married women continued to be solely absorbed with the maintenance of family, and home, wherever that home was.

¹⁴³ The literature on this is discussed in M. Clapson, ‘Working-class Women's Experiences of Moving to New housing Estates in England since 1919’, *Twentieth Century British History* 10/3(1999) 347-50.

¹⁴⁴ L. Eyles, *The Woman in the Little House* (London, 1922).

¹⁴⁵ As quoted in D. Gorham, ‘“Have we Really Rounded Seraglio Point?”: Vera Brittain and Inter-war Feminism’, in Smith (ed), *British Feminism*, p. 88.

The comfortable, modern, well-equipped home, deftly managed by a well-turned-out housewife, was a vision that remained beyond the means of the mass of the population. Nevertheless, this ideal – together with the products that helped to constitute it – was promoted by the print media and began to permeate all social classes. One woman writing to the Women’s Co-operative Guild wrote:

Working-class women have grown more refined; they desire better homes, better clothes for themselves and their children, and are far more self-respecting and less humble than their predecessors. But the strain to keep up to anything like a decent standard of housing, clothing, diet and general appearance, is enough to upset the mental balance of a Chancellor of the Exchequer.¹⁴⁶

Increasingly the newspapers began to include Women’s Pages to instruct women on housework, clothing, cookery and childcare. New popular women’s magazines rewarded their avid readership with tales of marriage and a happy home. The study of these magazines takes us into a complex area. *Woman’s Own* (first published in 1934) told women that being a wife was the best job a woman could do and that she should devote her life to keeping her man happy. The magazines, also including *Good Housekeeping* (established 1922) and *Woman* (established 1937) were not, however, antifeminist and they fulfilled a cultural role never filled before.¹⁴⁷ What women made of the domestic propaganda targeted at them

¹⁴⁶ As quoted in Stevenson, *British Society*, p. 161.

¹⁴⁷ For an examination of the new magazines see Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement* (1992) chapter 7

must remain a matter for speculation. It is plausible that women were not simply passive recipients of these messages: magazines also enabled women to reflect on their lives and develop a greater sense of their own selfhood. Moreover, the messages themselves were not merely promoting domestic labour but suggesting to women that they might become "technicians in charge" of their homes, using instructional material in the media to help them perfect this role.¹⁴⁸ Most women did fulfil a domestic role and the magazines raised the profile and importance of this role within the cultural arena. At the same time the magazines' focus on the domestic did not mean that these were the only concerns of those women. Unmarried women were also catered for and career advice was offered to "Miss Modern", demonstrating that it was increasingly relevant for a woman to have a satisfying career, even if most women would give that up to marry.¹⁴⁹

WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS AND THE NATIONAL AGENDA

Suffrage organisations underwent substantial change once a limited franchise had been achieved and two seemingly different strands of feminism emerged. The split in the movement occurred when the large suffrage organisation had to decide in which direction it was now going to face. There were those groups who wanted to continue campaigning for women's equality with men, which meant equalising all areas in which women were treated differently – the "old" feminists including the Six Point Group (SPG), the Women's Freedom League (WFL) and the Open Door Council (ODC) which involved Winifred Holtby and militant suffrage

¹⁴⁸ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁹ P. Tinkler, 'Women and Popular Literature', in Purvis (ed), *Women's History*.

campaigners Elizabeth Abbott and Cicely Hamilton.¹⁵⁰ The SPG was established by the suffragist Viscountess Rhondda and continued to use the militant language of the suffragette era. The ODC wanted women, especially middle-class women, to have access to all which they were denied and their literature mythologised and glamourised the Edwardian suffrage movement.¹⁵¹

Others shifted their focus to solving the problems that impacted on the day-to-day lives of British women such as child welfare and family allowances. These “new” feminists were criticised by the older campaigners for focusing too heavily on the notion that women’s primary role was as wives and mothers. The leading organisation here was the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, the renamed National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies. NUSEC was led by Liverpool’s social campaigner Eleanor Rathbone and focussed on social welfare reforms. NUSEC seemed to distance itself from equality feminism and instead concentrated on women’s rights and responsibilities as equal citizens.¹⁵² It was an acceptance that the agenda of the feminist movement needed to be widened and the needs of the majority of women met alongside the claims for full equality, but it was perceived, by some, as reinforcing gender boundaries and reducing expectations. Rathbone herself argued that “the majority of women working are only birds of passage in their trades. Marriage and the bearing of children are their

¹⁵⁰ The WFL had been established in 1907 by dissident WSPU members. The Six Point Group wanted an end to child assault, protection for the unmarried mother, equal guardianship of children, equal pay for teachers and civil servants, and equal suffrage. Its medium was its journal *Time and Tide* which launched political campaigns such as black and white lists of candidates during national elections.

¹⁵¹ H. Kean, ‘Searching for the Past in Present Defeat; the construction of historical and political ideology in British feminism in the 1920s and 1930s’, *Women’s History Review* 3/1(1994).

¹⁵² S. Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (Yale University Press, 2004)

permanent occupation.” She later said, “there is scarcely a department of human activity in which the physiological differences between women and men ... have not some effect ... upon the outlook of the two sexes.”¹⁵³ At the 1925 NUSEC Annual Conference Eleanor Rathbone introduced the concept of “new” feminism or campaigns which focused on making the lives of women as wives and mothers easier - “we can demand what we want for women, not because it is what men have got but because it is what women need to fulfil the potentialities of their own natures.”¹⁵⁴ This was less of a desire to achieve formal equality and more an aspiration to address the special domestic problems of women and to create for them a better position within the family. She disparaged equality feminism as “me too feminism”.¹⁵⁵ Members saw themselves as advancing the legacy of Josephine Butler in connecting feminism with practical social reform. The journals of the various organisations reveal an increasingly bitter battle of words. The catalyst for a full blown split over aims and campaigns was over protective legislation for women workers. Feminists were divided over the issue with some “equality” feminists rejecting any legislation which treated women differently to men, arguing that this weakened their position in the workforce. The Open Door Council passed a resolution in 1926 that opposed any legislation based solely on sex, arguing that limiting the hours women could work effectively limited the jobs they had access to in the factories. Rathbone’s argument was that women did

¹⁵³ E. Rathbone, ‘The Remuneration of Women’s Services’, in *Economic Journal* March 1917 p.65 quoted in Kent, “The Politics of Sexual Difference” ; E. Rathbone, “What is Equality?” in *Woman’s Leader* 11th Feb 1927 quoted in Kent, ‘Gender Reconstruction after the First World War’, in Smith (ed), *British Feminism*, p. 78.

¹⁵⁴ H. Land, ‘Eleanor Rathbone and the Economy of the Family’, in Smith (ed), *British Feminism*, p. 115.

¹⁵⁵ Rowbotham, *Women in Movement*.

require specific protection in the workplace. At the 1927 NUSEC Annual Council Meeting eleven of the twenty-five members of the executive committee resigned when NUSEC passed a resolution to campaign for protective legislation for women factory workers.¹⁵⁶

The “split” between these divisions of the movement has, however, been somewhat overstated. It is with hindsight that some criticise the “new” feminists for conforming to stereotypes and although some women complained of this at the time, there was a great deal of cross-over between the two “factions”. Virginia Woolf, for example, was a member of both the Women’s Co-operative Guild and the W.I. Different organisations worked together on campaigns for equal suffrage and family allowances. NUSEC, despite later disparaging equality feminism, worked for equal pay, women MPs and equality in the professions alongside widows’ pensions and equal guardianship of children. The *Woman’s Leader* in 1926 tried to diminish the tension:

There is the feminism of pure equality, and the feminism of equivalent opportunity ... and there is the feminism which says: women have a certain specialised part to play in the world, let us see that they play it with same measure of consideration which men regard as necessary when they have a specialised part to play. The programmes are not mutually exclusive ... but they do involve ... a difference of emphasis.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ The splits in the movement have been described in detail in Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement*

¹⁵⁷ *Women’s Leader* 31st December 1926. Quoted in Law, *Suffrage and Power*, p. 165.

The split between feminism and citizenship is thus one that was perceived at the time, but by no means was it an uncrossable chasm. In Nottingham, as nationally, organisations worked on a range of campaigns that would now be divided by the labels “equality” and “new”. Thus the local study is vital in helping to challenge an over-simplified division between two “strands” of feminism.

Towards the end of the 1920s the national feminist organisations began to founder. NUSEC divided into two separate organisations – the National Council for Equal Citizenship and what became the National Union of Townswomen’s Guilds. The latter flourished on a diet that included home-making and craft skills; the former dwindled rapidly. In 1920 NUSEC had 220 affiliated societies, by 1929 the number had dwindled to 90 and by 1935 it was 48. Equality feminist groups such as the Six Point Group and the Women’s Freedom League became increasingly marginalized and the latter had only 3,000 members by 1939.

Younger women seemed increasingly uninterested in feminism and working-class women resented any whiff of middle-class paternalism. Labour women focused instead on the co-operative movement or on campaigning for the living wage for men to improve living standards for the majority of working-class families.¹⁵⁸

Thus, ideological, political and generational differences resulted in fragmentation.

¹⁵⁸ P.Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working Class Politics, 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1994).

However, despite the split, many women's organisations and explicitly feminist groups remained active.¹⁵⁹ In the face of dwindling membership and mass lack of interest the organisations continued to launch campaigns, co-operate with each other and further the woman's agenda. It had become clear that the vote had not opened the door to full equality and that it would need "many more years of persistent work" before objectives were achieved, but this persistent work had characterised the nineteenth century and Edwardian campaigns as well.¹⁶⁰ Feminist and women's organisations had never shared a single common aim and objective. Indeed, splits within the suffrage movement had been even deeper than those that affected this period.

Away from the feminist organisations, a range of other groups were working to improve the lives of women. Rural women found opportunities within the Women's Institutes, an initiative which came from Canada, via Anglesey in 1915. Between the wars Women's Institutes were opened at the rate of five per week. Classes, examinations and competitions acknowledged the craft and home-making skills of women but they also encouraged involvement in local campaigns and discussed social and political issues at their meetings. Andrews' claims for the WI as feminist organisation have already been discussed but others have also

¹⁵⁹ For a detailed history and membership figures for women's organisations in the inter-war period see Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992) pp. 62-6; Beaumont 'The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship' cites healthy membership figures for many groups during the 1930s: Labour Party Women's Section – 250,000 members; Mother's Union – 538,000 members; NUSEC – 48 branches; National Union of Townswomen's Guilds – 54,000 members; National Federation of Women's Institutes – 238,000 members; Women's Co-operative Guild – 90,000 members; Women's Freedom League – 26 branches; Women's Unionist Association – 940,000 members.

¹⁶⁰ Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*, pp. 218-9.

claimed for them a liberating role: “as places where women could meet other women, organize charitable and other activities, as well as broaden their horizons through speakers and outings, they provided further evidence of the growth of women’s self-help organisations.”¹⁶¹ Campaigns of interest include those for women police, analgesics for rural women in childbirth, equal pay (in some areas) and improved rural housing. In the latter campaign the W.I. worked closely with the Women’s Labour League to assess local needs.

The National Union of Townswomen’s Guilds became the smaller urban equivalent of the WI. With a motto of “After the Vote, the Education of the Woman”, in 1939 it had 54,000 members taking part in social, educational and recreational activities. This focus seemed to attract many more members than “the formidable task of pressing for economic equality,” which concerned the more overtly feminist and it rescued many women from the suburban isolation of the new housing estates.¹⁶² The Townswomen’s Guilds have been somewhat dismissed as being irrelevant to a feminist movement, but their rapid increase in membership meant that they were an important aspect of organised women in this period. Beaumont makes a similar claim about their impact as Andrews does about the WI:

There is no doubt that this organisation avoided many controversial issues [such as]divorce and equal pay ... Nevertheless, the Guild did provide women with an important opportunity to extend their interests beyond the

¹⁶¹ Stevenson, *British Society*, p. 172.

¹⁶² Merz, *After the Vote*; Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*, p. 220.

home and learn about the contribution they could make as citizens to their communities.¹⁶³

The explicit distinction Beaumont draws is that between feminism and citizenship. In her work she is not forcing the TWG into a category in which they do not sit comfortably, but acknowledges that their role went beyond that of a social club. This is an interesting proposition and the role of organisations in pushing for women's citizenship rights was a key and important one. Beaumont, however, does not develop the links that existed between feminism and citizenship – the latter often being a preferred term for action that might be justifiably described as feminist.

Working-class feminism was largely concentrated in the Women's Co-operative Guild which had been founded in 1883 and articulated the needs of working class women from within their communities. In 1914 it had 30,000 members and by 1921 50,000; by 1939 it had over 87, 000 members in 1819 branches – predominantly working class housewives who shopped at co-operative stores. Issues of concern to members ranged from birth control to divorce reform, from clean milk to equal pay. The 1934 Congress even passed a resolution in favour of access to abortion. They campaigned both for equality for women who worked and for the social resources to help those at home. The Guild seemed to provide a “vital window on a much wider range of issues and attitudes than was available in their home surroundings,” but the movement was not universal in working class areas and it would be inaccurate to assume that all working class women had the

¹⁶³ Beaumont, 'Citizens not Feminists', p. 419.

opportunity to learn and develop due to its influence.¹⁶⁴ After 1921 the Guild became part of the Co-operative Party and thus drifted closer towards the men's movement and was gradually overshadowed by the Labour Party.¹⁶⁵

Christian women continued to be represented by the Mothers' Union, the Catholic Women's League and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The former was concerned with strengthening the sanctity of marriage, improving standards in the raising of children and ensuring the centrality of prayer in the lives of its members and the wider community. It was a conservative organisation which opposed many of the feminist demands of the interwar period, including the liberalisation of divorce and abortion, and did not add its support to the campaign for equal pay. "A mother's first place is in the home – not the only place but the first," claimed the *Mother's Union Journal* in 1934, and the other places a woman was expected to go were those which would encourage other women to accept their role as Christian citizens maintaining the conservatism of the Church of England.¹⁶⁶ The role of the YWCA was to provide education and recreation for young working women and although they supported the equal franchise and improvements to working conditions they kept their distance from overtly "political" groups such as the Six Point Group and controversial issues such as divorce and birth control¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Rowbotham, *Women in Movement*, p. 245; Stevenson, *British Society*, p. 171.

¹⁶⁵ Scott, 'A "Trade Union for Married Women"' ; Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*.

¹⁶⁶ *Mother's Union Journal* quoted in Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists', p. 415.

¹⁶⁷ Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists'.

Other organisations also sprung up in the inter war period, including the Women's League for Health and Beauty which promoted the new national craze for keeping fit and gave mass demonstrations in parks and concert halls. Founded by Mary Stack, it was an all-female organisation which promoted health and women's service alongside exercise, movement and a concern for eugenics. Its peace work has led some to claim it as a feminist organisation, but there is little other evidence to support this.¹⁶⁸

Political Parties

Many of the larger women's organisations shared personnel and it was not uncommon for a woman to be a member of a number of different groups. The political parties, however, were often very separate to the other women's organisations, some of which frowned on their members also being active in party politics. Women who wanted to be politically active often had to choose between a political party and a feminist organisation as the parties demanded full loyalty to their campaigning agenda.

The Conservative Party reacted to the initial enfranchisement of women by aiming propaganda at women voters. Jarvis has produced a study of the Conservative magazine *Home and Politics* which was produced by the party between 1923 and 1930.¹⁶⁹ The magazine included stories about charladies discussing the political issues of the day within metaphors of day to day life, for

¹⁶⁸ Matthews, 'They had such a lot of fun'.

¹⁶⁹ D. Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty; the Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History* 5/2 (1994) 129-52.

example comparing free trade with allowing strangers to steal flowers from your garden. This was only one of the approaches adopted by the Conservatives - the Primrose League flourished and Conservative Women's organisations were set up alongside the Men's association though often the accepted domestic role of women overwhelmed much political involvement and the women's groups were usually simply responsible for raising money and providing teas for the men. Conservative propaganda linked feminism with socialism and *Home and Politics* counselled moderation with sorry tales of independent career women meeting disaster. Instead women were the centre of the domestic power base, the "family chancellors" who exercised sober responsibility and family values.¹⁷⁰ But there is evidence of Conservative women pursuing campaigns for widows' pensions and equal guardianship of children.

During the inter-war period the Labour Party became the second party in British politics. It increased its female membership by 150,000 between 1918 and 1924 and attracted many feminist women. The Women's Section of the Labour Party did campaign on feminist issues such as the abolition of the marriage bar and ease of access to birth control and on welfare issues such as education, housing and food. However, the attitude of many of those in the Party was that gender was always subordinate to class and the needs of working class *men* dominated; Labour women campaigned for a "family wage" rather than "family allowances"; many did not work and so were not at the very heart of the Labour movement. Like the Conservatives, socialist men were not above expecting female members

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*

to make the tea and wash the dishes – the women’s section was conceived as “separate but equal” but this did not always translate into reality.¹⁷¹ Fund-raising and social events increasingly became the women’s responsibility. The Party nominated few Parliamentary candidates and the campaigns of the Women’s Section were not always taken seriously. If the Party leaders deemed an issue unimportant in the context of class struggle then campaigns which concentrated on it for too long were frowned upon. Conferences held between 1924 and 1927 passed resolutions calling for birth control and family allowances; the Labour leadership responded by accusing the women of separatism. In 1928 the Labour Women’s Conference responded to a passionate speech from Arthur Henderson and rejected their own resolution on birth control for the sake of party unity. As the economic crisis of the 1930s deepened many Women’s Sections found themselves unable to operate and closed.

There is little work on the attitude of the Liberal Party towards women and those who do mention it assert that it was far too involved in trying to halt its own demise than in promoting female parliamentary candidates. Yet recent research cites that the Women’s National Liberal Federation had 88,000 members.¹⁷² The Communist Party also had a Women’s Section, mainly joined by members’ wives rather than working women.¹⁷³ Overall, “in the constituencies women were having a hard time being taken seriously in the political parties, let alone being

¹⁷¹ Graves, *Labour Women*.

¹⁷² Beaumont, ‘The Women’s Movement, Politics and Citizenship’, p. 266

¹⁷³ S. Bruley, ‘A Woman’s Right to Work? The role of Women in the Unemployment Movement between the Wars’, in Oldfield (ed) *This working-day World*

selected for any seats.”¹⁷⁴ Politically active women found it difficult to free themselves from the constraints of those directing party policy. However, membership of political parties did also politicise women – in the local context we see examples of wives and daughters attending branch meetings and subsequently joining Women’s Sections and Luncheon Clubs. They were gaining an education in debating and public speaking which was built upon by subsequent generations and which was key to their development as active citizens participating in their local community.

The issues of concern

Equality feminist issues, many of which had had been a concern before the First World War, were pursued by many of the organisations mentioned above. The issues that replaced the vote for many inter-war feminists included equal pay and the end of the marriage bar as part of a part of a desire for economic reform. Alongside these there were campaigns for widows’ pensions, and the opening up of previously male-only professions was a continuing struggle. The fight for equal enfranchisement still remained a priority, as did campaigns to elect more women MPs, and the continuing campaign for more women on local government and other public bodies. The NCW developed campaigns for women police, equal pensions, improved housing, enhanced maternity services, birth control and family allowances. The London and National Society for Women’s Service led the campaign for equal pay, concentrating on achieving this in the civil service

¹⁷⁴ Holdsworth *Out of the Doll’s House* p. 190

and expanding from there.¹⁷⁵ Although it is clear from both the national and local evidence that such issues were not a priority for all women's organisations, some feminist issues provided the opportunity for the numerous organisations to work together.

There were also a number of new concerns that roused post World War One women's groups. Family Allowances were seen as a method of giving women economic independence and reducing child poverty. A wide range of women's organisations supported the campaign for them which evolved from Eleanor Rathbone's Family Endowment Society, including the Women's Institutes, the Women's Co-operative Guild and the Six Point Group – the latter demonstrating the ability of women from the two different “sections” of interwar feminism to work together with a common aim. They demanded that women receive allowances as independent citizens to assist in bringing up their children without having to rely entirely on their husbands. Feminists argued that men were often not providing women with enough money to raise their children adequately and that the concept of a living wage was of little comfort to widows and orphans. Not all feminists agreed – Millicent Garrett Fawcett argued that they would reduce paternal responsibility and resigned from NUSEC over this issue – but others countered it by emphasising the prevention of economic subjugation. A case has been made that family allowances were a strategic step on the road to equal pay as they undermined the concept of a “family wage” for men, and Rathbone herself made this claim in her discourse on the subject in *The Disinherited Family*

¹⁷⁵ The campaign is examined in detail in Smith, ‘British feminism and the Equal Pay Issue’.

published in 1924,¹⁷⁶ though others have argued that the campaign only served to reinforce women's traditional role as childrearer.¹⁷⁷

The campaign for birth control was part of a desire to release women from the tyranny of multiple pregnancies and as such was a feminist desire to improve the lives of women. Hannah Mitchell, writing in her autobiography *The Hard Way Up* declared that, "although birth control may not be a perfect solution to social problems, it is the first and simplest way for the poor to help themselves, and by far the surest way for women to obtain some measure of freedom."¹⁷⁸ Marie Stopes' *Married Love*, first published in 1919, brought this delicate subject to the attention of the British public but the issue proved emotive and divisive, even amongst feminists. In the 1920s there were approximately twenty birth control clinics open in Britain but ignorance and the lack of privacy meant that many working class women had no access to birth control information and were thus trapped in a dangerous and debilitating cycle of pregnancy, childbirth and the demands of bringing up too many children. In 1924 the Labour Women's Conference set up the Workers' Birth Control Group with great support from the Women's Co-operative Guild and larger feminist groups including the NCW had the issue on their agendas throughout the 1920s. However, by 1937 only 95 of the 423 maternal and child welfare clinics had birth control centres.¹⁷⁹ Campaigners

¹⁷⁶ J. Lewis, 'Gender, the family and women's agency in the building of "welfare states": the British case', *Social History* 19/1(1994) 37-55; Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*.

¹⁷⁷ Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace*.

¹⁷⁸ As quoted in Stevenson, *British Society*, p. 161.

¹⁷⁹ Lewis, *Labour and Love*

on this issue had to tread carefully so as not to offend and thus had to adopt the rhetoric of a desire to maintain domestic stability, rather than free women, in an attempt to convince the undecided.

International politics and the rights of women in Britain's empire also increasingly attracted female campaigners. The League of Nations, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (established in 1915) tapped into a growing interest in international affairs and the campaign for peace. Women were working on movements such as those to secure the vote for Indian women and the end of circumcision for African girls.¹⁸⁰ The inter-war period also witnessed an increase in international organisations campaigning for the rights of women. These include the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Open Door International and Mother's International. Some of the feminist publications turned their attention fully in this direction – for example *Time and Tide*, the magazine of the Six Point Group, had very few articles on feminist campaigns after 1929 but many on the international situation.

NOTTINGHAM: THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Nottingham's women's organisations worked within a dual context – that of the campaigns and debates about women's issues at a national level and the local political and social context of the city and county. Between the wars Nottingham underwent many of the economic, industrial and housing changes that were

¹⁸⁰ Rathbone's work in this area is described in Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*.

replicated in small cities nationwide and it is as a response to these changes, whether to encourage them further, alleviate their negative effects, or attempt to hold back change, that many of the women’s organisations worked. National histories tell us of the changes that took place in many small cities in this period between the wars. It is a story of declining primary industry and the development of light industry and the commercial sector. Nottingham witnessed this as the lace factories began to close and many went to work in bicycle manufacture at Raleigh or pharmaceuticals at Boots. National surveys also tell us of a move towards the suburbs and this is also witnessed in Nottingham as will be outlined later in this chapter.¹⁸¹

The population growth of the city, which had been dramatic during the nineteenth century, slowed after the First World War as a programme of slum clearance was embraced.¹⁸² Between 1918 and 1939 Nottingham City Council supervised the construction of 17 000 new houses on twenty new estates, each comprising between 200 and 3000 households. This earned the city the accolade of being “one of the most vigorous municipal housing authorities ... its new estates were

¹⁸¹ J. V. Beckett, *City status in the British Isles, 1830-2002* (Aldershot, 2005); E. Hopkins, *Birmingham: The Making of the Second City 1850-1939* (Stroud, 2001); B. Lancaster and T. Mason (eds), *Life and labour in a twentieth century city : the experience of Coventry* (Coventry, 1986).

¹⁸² Population of Nottingham 1911-1971

Date	population	Date	population
1911	259 901	1951	306 008
1921	262 624	1961	311 899
1931	276 189	1971	300 630

Source: S. Brazier et al., *A New Geography of Nottingham* 2nd ed (Nottingham, 1988). For more on the slum clearance programmes see J. Burnett *A social history of housing : 1815-1985* 2nd ed. (London, 1991).

regarded by many as an example to admire and emulate.”¹⁸³ Indeed, the inhabitants of these new, often Tudor style, homes enjoyed many services and conveniences¹⁸⁴. In 1926 95 565 Nottingham households were supplied with electricity and 12 890 had mains gas. By 1937 these figures had increased to 101 000 and 120 000 respectively.

However, the construction of social housing did not inevitably lead to greater social mixing and the city maintained its exclusive areas such as the Park, an upper-middle class housing estate. This was bought from the estate of the Dukes of Newcastle in 1938 by Oxford University but maintained its “aloof detachment” by maintaining its own private gates.¹⁸⁵ Other suburban areas of the city also seemed to possess a “genteel” concern for setting themselves apart from the council housing estates, thus doing little to encourage working class families to believe that moving to their new homes marked the beginning of social and economic equality. And Nottingham still had its share of the very poor - in 1937 25% of families were surviving on an income of less than £1 10s per week.¹⁸⁶

Nottingham was a typical provincial city in many ways. However, it was untypical in its high levels of female participation in the workforce. 40-45% of Nottingham women were economically active during the inter-war years which

¹⁸³ R. L. Silburn, ‘People in their Places’ in *One Hundred Years of Nottingham Life: the Centenary Lectures delivered at the University of Nottingham, 1981* (Nottingham, 1981), p. 28.

¹⁸⁴ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*.

¹⁸⁵ K. Brand, ‘The Park Estate, Nottingham: the Development of the Nineteenth Century Fashionable Suburb’, *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire* 88 (1984) 54-75; K. Brand, *The Park Estate, Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1985).

¹⁸⁶ J. Beckett (ed), *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Manchester, 1997) p.37

was 10% higher than the national average; in 1921 67% of Nottingham women under the age of 35 worked.¹⁸⁷ Along with their new homes, the women workers of Nottingham witnessed a profound change in their place and manner of employment during this period. Victorian Nottingham had been dominated by lace making and the textile industry and by 1911 22 000 full time workers, including large numbers of women, were engaged in making lace – thus comprising half of the industry’s national workforce.¹⁸⁸ As the demand for lace declined in the inter-war years many of the women involved in the industry were forced to transfer their skills into the new industry of ready-made clothing, or into meeting the new demand for hosiery as women’s hemlines rose. These could not, however, absorb the necessary numbers – in 1911 25% of Nottingham’s workers were employed in some area of textile production or finishing, 17% in 1931 and by 1950 this had fallen to only 10%; other important industries such as box making, leather manufacturing and brewing and malting had also declined.

Other Victorian companies, however, did survive into the twentieth century and Nottingham’s employment was dominated by three companies – Players and Sons (tobacco), Boots (pharmaceuticals) and Raleigh (bicycles). The factories of the latter grew in response to the cycling craze of the 1880s and 1890s and went from producing 50 000 cycles a year in 1919 to 500 000 by 1938. Boots moved to a huge new site in the Beeston area to the south west of the city in the 1920s and Players met the growing demand for ready rolled cigarettes. These “Big Three”

¹⁸⁷ National averages to be found in Lewis, *Women in England*.

¹⁸⁸ G. Trease, *Nottingham: A Biography* (London, 1970).

proved to be key for the development of Nottingham, and especially in the employment of women. By 1937 70% of Boots' 8000 employees were women, 50% of the Players' employees were "Players' Angels" and 10% of the workforce in the Raleigh factories was female. As Nicola Verdon has stated, "the visibility of women workers in Nottingham was striking and added to the local perception of the city as feminine."¹⁸⁹

The experiences of women in work did, of course, vary. During the years of depression unemployment amongst women was much lower than that amongst men – in 1931 13.7% of the male workforce was unemployed compared to only 6% of women. This, however, does not mask the stark fact that Nottingham women still worked within a strict sexual division of labour and were rewarded with lower pay and fewer opportunities. The cheap labour that women provided can explain why they were laid off less, as can the fact they often worked in the unskilled sections of industry. Even in a city where their labour was so important, in the first half of the twentieth century women were employed only in light, semi or unskilled work. They were segregated from the men and received about half of the equivalent wage per week. Even the few women who rose to the rank of supervisor had relatively little authority, never over the men, and always answering to a male overseer. Boots and Players operated a strict marriage bar, which the older textile industries rarely did, and this further limited women's development outside the accepted domestic sphere.

¹⁸⁹ N. Verdon, "The best firms to work for ...": The Employment of Women in Nottingham's Manufacturing Industries between the World Wars', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire* 101 (1997) 175-186.

The political complexion of Nottinghamshire and its surrounding county reflected the level of affluence and industrial make-up of each of its constituencies. The rural constituencies of Newark and Rushcliffe consistently returned Conservative members throughout the period – in fact Rushcliffe has only ever had two periods of representation by members other than Conservatives, and one of those was Nottingham’s first woman MP Florence Paton, elected in the Labour landslide of 1945. The mining areas of Bassetlaw and Mansfield were mostly Labour (Bassetlaw consistently so from 1935 until present, Mansfield since 1922); the city itself was equally divided by the two parties except during the crisis in 1931.¹⁹⁰ However the city’s print media was dominated by the Conservative party and, during the inter-war period, the Conservatives dominated local politics through the City Council.¹⁹¹ Politically, women formed the majority of Nottingham’s electorate after they were awarded equal franchise in 1928 and had

¹⁹⁰ Nottinghamshire MPs 1922-1945

Constituency	1922	1923	1924	1929	1931	1935
Nottm Central			Cons	Cons	Cons	Cons
Nottm East		Liberal	Cons	Liberal	Cons	Cons
Nottm South		Labour	Cons	Labour	National Labour	National Labour
Nottm West			Labour	Labour	National Cons	Labour
Broxtowe	Labour	Labour	Labour	Labour	Labour	Labour
Bassetlaw			Cons		National Labour	Labour
Rushcliffe			Cons		Cons	Cons
Mansfield	Labour	Labour	Labour	Labour	Labour	Labour
Newark	Cons	Cons	Cons	Cons	Cons	Cons

Sources: *Kelly’s Directory of Nottinghamshire* 1925, 1932, 1936, *Nottingham Journal Ready Reference and Date Book* 1929, 1930.

¹⁹¹ The City Council was held by the Conservatives in 1924, 1926, 1928, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935 and in 1937. In 1929 and 1930 it was hung with the balance of power being held by ten Liberal members. Sources: *Nottingham Journal Ready Reference and Date Book* 1925, 1927, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938.

been in local politics since the early 1920s.¹⁹² This visibility, however, was not comprehensive and constant. Women had been involved in local politics as Poor Law Guardians since the late nineteenth century but women candidates were still in the minority. Nottinghamshire saw no female MPs between the wars although a number of women candidates did stand. In the Coupon Election of 1918 (in which sixteen women stood nationally and one was elected) the Liberal activist, lifelong public servant and anti-suffragist Violet Markham bid unsuccessfully for her brother's former constituency in Mansfield; in 1921 Margaret Wintringham stood as the Independent Labour candidate at the Louth (Lincolnshire) by-election in place of her late husband and although she won the by-election she failed to regain her seat in 1924 and never sat in Parliament again. Markham, standing as an Independent Liberal, came in third place, polling only 4 000 of the 20 000 votes; Margaret Wintringham's by-election result was published in the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* and was commented on because she was the first English woman MP and because she had given no speeches during her campaign due to her bereavement. The *Guardian* nicknamed her the "silent candidate" and she was elected with a majority of 751. Fellow MP Lady Astor responded to her election with joy declaring that it would be good for "putting forward the women's and children's point of view."¹⁹³ In 1929 Mrs Barton stood in the Nottingham Central constituency for the Co-operative and Labour Party and lost by only 3000 votes (electorate: 45045) and Miss Florence Widdowson stood for

¹⁹² The 1929 Nottingham electoral roll for local elections included 56,666 men and 65,956 women; the national electoral roll figures were 79,411 and 95,197. *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 26/10/29.

¹⁹³ Markham's bid is described in Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*; *Nottingham Daily Guardian* 24/9/21 p10;

Labour in Rushcliffe and lost by 3086. In 1931 the same candidate, now Mrs Paton stood and lost by 22494.¹⁹⁴

Nottingham was therefore a city in some ways typical of inter-war Britain, although it did have its distinctive features. It was a city facing a decline in its main industry, textiles, with a council responding to the challenges of housing a growing population away from the Victorian slums. Women were prominent in the workforce and middle-class women were emerging as an element of the city's public life through becoming active in important and influential organisations. Nottingham had a sense of itself as being a modern, future-facing city, as reported in the City Council handbooks published each year which made grand claims about the high standard of Nottingham's housing and its abiding sense of community – a sense that was reflected the ways in which the city “pulled together” during emergencies such as the General Strike.¹⁹⁵ The city itself was able to cope with the strike quite easily. There were no local newspapers for a week, but the buses still ran and the post-mortem analysis of the strike by the local press reveals pride in a city that was not “defeated.”¹⁹⁶ In the Nottinghamshire coalfields an organisation of blackleg miners broke the strike locally, a pattern that was to be repeated in the 1980s. The lack of militancy during the 1926 crisis, and few strikes during this period, also gives us an

¹⁹⁴ *Nottingham Daily Guardian* 27/10/31 p5; *Nottingham Daily Guardian* 28/10/31. Florence Paton was to be Nottingham's first female MP in 1945.

¹⁹⁵ The official handbooks of Nottingham: (1927) *Nottingham "The Queen City of the Midlands" Nottingham, Nottingham Corporation*; (1937) *The City of Nottingham "Queen of the Midlands" Official Handbook*. Nottingham, Nottingham Corporation.

¹⁹⁶ *Nottingham Daily Guardian* 13/5/26.

indication that Nottingham's labour movement was not particularly strong or militant.

NOTTINGHAM'S "ORGANISED" GIRLS AND WOMEN: FRAGMENTATION, OVERLAP AND PATTERNS OF CO-OPERATION

Numerous and diverse women's organisations existed in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire between the wars.¹⁹⁷ Few of these were explicitly feminist. Nottingham had had a quite vigorous Edwardian women's suffrage movement, with Christabel Pankhurst travelling to the city in 1912 to attempt to recreate the Reform riots arson attack on Nottingham Castle.¹⁹⁸ The campaign for the vote was passionately fought and the leader of the WSPU in Nottingham, vicar's daughter Helen Watts, was imprisoned and force-fed for marching on Parliament. This left a "cultural memory" of women's campaigning action on the city. However, the key leaders of the local movement – including Watts - were lost to the capital and this resulted in a lack of "old" feminist networks in the local area. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in Nottingham became the Women's Service League rather than NUSEC. It had a membership of between 60 and 70 members in 1924 but has left no records.

¹⁹⁷ A number of the organisations have deposited minute books and other material in the local archives. The material available for consultation also mentions other organisations for which we do not have archival material, but which were active at this time.

¹⁹⁸ C. Chambers, 'Hidden from history : an account of the suffrage movement in the Nottingham area and the women's fight for the vote', unpublished MA dissertation, University of Nottingham (1999).

Many of Nottingham's women's organisations in the interwar period were almost solely focused on one aspect of women's lives – be it religious work, handicrafts and sports. Others were more widely encompassing and worked on a number of issues of interest to women. The evidence points to a new era of mass volunteering and participation in the city – a period when women had more spare time and a greater inclination to do something for themselves. Traditional Victorian charitable and religious groups had expanded and been joined by political organisations at the turn of the century; these now developed further and were joined by mass-membership movements such as the Guides and Brownies for girls and the new Women's Institutes for rural women. Single-focus groups in Nottingham include the Women's Committee of the Nottingham branch of the National Playing Fields Association which concentrated on organising women's teams for football and hockey, and on organising fund-raising events such as the 1934 Playing Fields Day which was supported by 64 Women's Institutes and local branches of the National Union of Girls' Clubs.¹⁹⁹ On a parallel spectrum groups such as the Mothers' Union attracted high numbers for social events, religious discussion and fund-raising for the needy. In fact, there was a huge variety of options for the girl or woman who was interested in joining a single-sex organisation in the city. It could be argued that this array of options resulted in a fragmentation of any organised "women's movement" which might have developed within the city. There were, however, patterns and similarities between the various groups, and there is also evidence of some women joining many

¹⁹⁹ DD.RC/17/7 *Minutes and Reports of the Nottingham Branch of the National Playing Fields Association 1933-1936*

different organisations, thus sharing knowledge, contacts and expertise around the city and county. These organisations reflected their members' essentially middle-class values and attitudes, but also displayed a range of issues that were of interest to feminist groups of the era. None of the groups studied were solely feminist in intent and it is difficult to pigeonhole any one of them due to the multitude of activities and campaigns in which they were involved. What does emerge, however, are interests and actions that can be categorised as feminist, those concerned with promoting female citizenship, and those which enabled women to pursue cultural and leisure activities outside the home.

Organisations for girls

The Committee which ran the Nottingham Girls' Evening Homes was an active one, with 98 subscribers in 1921, 78 of whom were women. They took young working women on visits to the coast and places of historical interest. They raised money to build huts at Chapel St Leonard's, close to Skegness on the Lincolnshire coast, and to donate to local Guide and Brownie packs. For the rest of the year they provided a meeting place where "girls can be helped and cheered in the routine of their daily lives, and receive instruction in sewing, singing, cooking and other useful and healthy occupations."²⁰⁰ A similar service was provided by the Nottingham Poor Girls' and Boys Camp Society.

A wider range of interests were pursued by those involved in organising clubs for young women and girls. The National Association of Girls' Clubs was established

²⁰⁰ *Nottingham Guardian*, 14/11/25, p. 7.

nationally in 1926, although Nottingham had been co-ordinating its girls' club since 1924, with 30 000 members in the county.²⁰¹ It aimed to provide girls with a social life and an arena where they could develop their own gifts and talents, holding annual festivals where the girls could demonstrate their skills. It also placed great emphasis on teaching girls their rights and responsibilities as citizens. In 1934 the Nottingham Juvenile Organisations Committee was set up and organised by Lady Belper, Lady Readett-Bayley and Mrs Player. They were concerned that the old network of caring for working class girls had been dismantled by slum clearance and that organisations needed to be established on the new estates. Within a year their list of affiliated societies included the Girl Guides, the YWCA, the Girls' Friendly Society, the Girls' Evening Homes and the Nottinghamshire and Notts. Union of Girls' Clubs.²⁰² There were also one thousand Girl Guides in Nottinghamshire, in 31 companies, in 1928. They were also led by Lady Readett-Bayley and the Association included Maud Rolleston, Mrs Dowson (both of whom were local Chairs of the National Council of Women) and the Duchess of Newcastle. The aim of the movement was to

develop good citizenship amongst girls by forming their characters; training them in habits of observation, obedience and self-reliance; inculcating loyalty and thoughtfulness ...;[and] to promote their health by physical training.²⁰³

²⁰¹ *Nottingham Journal*, 2/4/24, p.6.

²⁰² CATC 10/121/1/48/6 *Nottingham City Council – Nottingham Juvenile Organisations Committee 1934*.

²⁰³ DD1163/57/5 *Programme for the Grand Demonstration Nottinghamshire Guides 1936*.

“Improving” organisations

In addition to working to improve the lives and experiences of girls, Nottingham women were active in many “good works”. The Nottingham Charity Organisation Society (later the Nottingham Social Service and Charity Organisation Society) was effective throughout this period. It was a mixed gender organisation: fourteen of its 36 executive officers were women and all of the volunteer workers, who visited people in their homes and raised money, were female.²⁰⁴ Solitary charity events were common, especially in the 1920s and many demonstrate the activity of Nottingham women. In 1925 Mrs Birkin organised, with the patronage of Lady Loughborough and the Countess of Huntingdon, a matinee “in aid of the Widows and Orphans fund of the National Union of Journalists”.²⁰⁵ Of particular interest to many women was the fund-raising needed for the new Women’s Hospital and the women’s wing of the General Hospital. Many charities were named after women although they were run by men indicating that charity was still considered to be a largely feminine virtue and an arena where women were able to work.²⁰⁶

Women also continued to work outside the traditionally feminine philanthropic sector and established organisations to improve women’s access to education. The Workers’ Educational Association flourished in Nottingham, with 315 classes in 1921, and research has found that there was an active Women’s Section which

²⁰⁴ DD.CSS/4 *Annual Reports of the Nottingham Charity Organisation Society 1915-1933* 1919 Report.

²⁰⁵ DD1168/24/34 *Programme for Mrs Charles Birkin’s Matinée* 26/11/25.

²⁰⁶ Account sheets for many charities are stored in the County Archives. Examples of those named after women include the Elizabeth Hanlon Charities, the Priscilla Potter Charity, Miss A.J. Carver’s Charity, Penelope Bryan’s Charity, Miss E. Wakefield’s Charity, Elizabeth Crossland’s Charity and Mrs Alice Needs’ Charity amongst many, many others. (DD.CC/1).

conducted classes specifically for women, supplied female teachers and lecturers, and toured women's groups including the YWCA and the Co-operative Women's Guild.²⁰⁷ Women were well represented on the Executive Committee, formed half of the membership and in 1930 the Vice Chair of the Nottingham WEA was a woman.²⁰⁸ Classes were set up at the Boots and Players factories and on the new Lenton Abbey and Aspley Estates in order to bring education to the working classes. Women were also represented on the Nottingham Education Committee within the Ladies Sub Committee on Elementary Education, although this particular sub committee only had two members – Mrs Field and Miss Guilford – in 1920.²⁰⁹

Religious groups

Religious groups for women flourished in Nottingham and its surrounding areas. The Mothers' Union in Southwell was set up in 1892 and Nottinghamshire had 8060 members by 1926 and 10 000 by 1934, making it the largest women's organisation in the region at this time. It was specifically designed to represent all social classes, with a special council representing wage earners, and women could choose from a number of faith-based committees on which they could work if they wished to, including Temperance and the "Fellowship of Marriage".²¹⁰ There

²⁰⁷ R. C. Tilman, 'Adult Education and Women: with particular reference to Mothers' Groups and their development in Nottingham', (Thesis presented for the Diploma of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, 1997).

²⁰⁸ DDWEA/2/1/2 *Minutes of the Nottingham WEA 1929-1935* Meetings held on June 4th 1930, 13th January 1934.

²⁰⁹ CA.CM/ED 11/2/1 Occasionally only one of those attended a meeting! By 1927 there were five members of the Ladies Sub Committee.

²¹⁰ K. Keyworth, *The Mothers' Union Centenary 1876 – 1976: The Southwell House Story* (Nottingham, 1976).

were a number of “Ladies’ Sewing Meetings” established at Anglican, Baptist and Methodist Churches with teas and speeches, the Christian Alliance for Women and Girls provided meeting space, and religious assembly was also available for girls in the form of their Friendly Societies. The emphasis here was on purity and “extension work” or social service.²¹¹ Women were also involved in ToCH which had developed during the war to help the troops through prayer and had 71 branches in the United Kingdom by the time Nottingham formed its own branch in 1921. By 1937 the ToCH League of Women Helpers was flourishing. The YWCA was also active and spent much of the 1920s on its Blue Triangle Forward Movement to raise money for new premises, a café and an activity centre. It had 502 members by 1933.²¹²

Trade unions and professional associations

The evidence of female trade unions in Nottingham is unclear (although a Miss Spencer, representing an organisation of women hosiery workers spoke at a 1923 Peace Demonstration) but there were professional and trade organisations representing and operated by women.²¹³ One such, the Association of Secretaries to the British Chamber of Commerce, organised a motor tour of the city for its female members in 1929. It included the new Sherwood Housing Estate, the Typewriter Works, local Parks, the University and the Embankment. Their annual dinner, in the same year, however was addressed solely by men and contained

²¹¹ DD 142/13/1 *Minutes of Meetings of the 1st Warsop Branch Girls’ Friendly Society* 1938.

²¹² *Daily Guardian*, 12/2/27, p. 6, 12/3/31, p. 4, 27/4/33, p. 8.

²¹³ *Daily Guardian*, 28/5/23, p. 8.

nothing specific to women.²¹⁴ In 1926 The Nottingham District Nursing Association reported to the Town Clerk's Office on the need to raise money for District Nursing as part of the National Memorial for Queen Alexandra.²¹⁵ In 1920 the female Nottingham and District Association of Certificated Teachers met to discuss sex and health education under the direction of a woman President; in 1922 the Nottingham Lace Workers sent a delegate to the TUC Conference on female unemployment; and in 1934 the secretary of the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, Miss Goodwin, wrote an article demanding equal pay.²¹⁶ Unfortunately, archival materials on these organisations is scarce and many are simply mentioned in passing in the local press. Beyond the fact that they contributed to local government enquiries and organised large events little can be said about their activities, their membership and their overall aims. Further groups whose existence we know of through other evidence include the Business and Professional Woman's Club and the Nottingham Federation of University Women.²¹⁷

One increasingly active group established for professional and business women in Nottingham for which records do exist was the Soroptomist Club. It was founded in 1935 following the establishment of a branch in Leicester, with 22 members,

²¹⁴ DD1168/24/49/2 *Programme for the 1929 Motor Tour of Nottingham organised by the Association of Secretaries to the British Chamber of Commerce*; DD1168/24/49/1 *Menu for the Annual Dinner of the Association of Secretaries to the British Chamber of Commerce 1929*.

²¹⁵ CATC 10/125/6 City of Nottingham, Town Clerk's Office, correspondence about the National Memorial for Queen Alexandra 1926-1927.

²¹⁶ *Daily Guardian*, 27/3/20, p. 6; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 6/3/22, p. 6; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 5/3/35, p. 5.

²¹⁷ The latter are mentioned due to their links with the Electrical Association for Women.

all of whom were, of course, unmarried.²¹⁸ It had 46 members by September 1936 and 52 by April 1937. Its activities were similar to those of the Rotary Club and it held two meetings a month – one at lunchtime and one in the evening for those who worked full-time. At its inaugural dinner it stated its determination

to encourage and foster high standards in business and professional life, to promote a true spirit of friendship ... to encourage civic movement for the betterment of general social conditions and to encourage ... international peace.²¹⁹

It represented educated and socially powerful women who were willing to work collaboratively with others to improve the opportunities of their female peers.

Political parties

Nottingham women continued to be involved in the political parties in this post-enfranchisement era.²²⁰ Membership for the Women's Section of the Labour Party in Newark (in the north of the county) was 23 in 1932.²²¹ We do not have the minutes for the Women's Section in Broxtowe (a large Parliamentary constituency to the west of the city and the only one to have left minute books in the local archives) but women are mentioned in the general minutes – in 1918 four of the 25 executive officers were women and this continued through the

²¹⁸ Its founder members included an art dealer, civil servants, nurses, teachers, musicians, a chiropodist, government inspectors and a solicitor. DD.SO 2/1 *Minutes and Reports of Meetings of the Soroptomist Club of Nottingham 1935-1937*.

²¹⁹ DD.SO 2/1 16/3/36.

²²⁰ Nottinghamshire archives has records of the Rushcliffe Women's Section of the Conservative Party going back to 1902.

²²¹ DD.PP/16/2/1 *Minutes of the Newark Labour Party Women's Section Meeting in July 1932*.

1920s.²²² All of these were married to Party members and there was no single female Executive Committee member until 1938. The section elected women to divisional councils, District Women's Councils, Women's Conferences and as candidates for local bodies. Male and female members paid the same membership fee although male delegates to Conference received payment of 30/- a day and female delegates only 10/-. The female members were active and interested – they were addressed by Mrs Fawcett in July 1922, April 1924 and June 1925 and Ellen Wilkinson in March 1924. Mrs Fawcett, in fact travelled around the division addressing women in small villages throughout the locally organised “Woman Weeks”.²²³ In 1931 the Executive Committee gave a £1 grant to any woman who wanted to attend a specially organised weekend schools and Broxtowe women went to these in places such as Swanwick (1933) and Lyme Regis (1934).²²⁴

Conservative women were active in the Primrose League, and both the Unionist and Conservative Associations. Mansfield Women's Unionist Association was formed in 1924 and within the year was supporting four branches; between 1924 and 1928 Carrington Women's Unionist Association had increased its membership from 39 members to 212.²²⁵ Each of the local government wards had their own Women's Conservative Associations, although some were more active than others, and divisional councils were set up in Parliamentary constituencies

²²² DD.PP/6/1 *Broxtowe Parliamentary Division Council Minutes 1917-1925*.

²²³ DD.PP/6/1 Meetings on 15th July 1922, 15th March 1924, 16th May 1925.

²²⁴ DD.PP/6/3 *Broxtowe Parliamentary Division Council Minutes 1925-1931* Meeting on 6th June 1931; DD.PP/6/4 *Broxtowe Parliamentary Division Council Minutes 1931-1944* Meetings on 29th July 1933 and 9th June 1934.

²²⁵ *Daily Guardian*, 27/3/25, p. 6, 12/10/28, p. 5.

such as Rushcliffe and Broxtowe. Whist drives, garden parties and outings were their favoured activities. 1925 saw mention in the press of branches of female conservative organisations in Robin Hood Ward, Bridge Ward (150 members), South Normanton, Broxtowe, Hucknall, Sherwood and Mansfield.²²⁶

Women were also campaigning in Liberal Associations and Liberal Unions – the Nottingham branch of the latter included Lady Florence Boot (of the pharmaceutical family) as a member and discussed international, national and local politics in addition to canvassing support for female JP candidates.²²⁷ In addition, women were represented on the Nottingham Co-operative Party Executive regularly addressing meetings and arranging raffles and they also stood as Communist candidates, as did Mrs Rosina Smith in 1929 in Mansfield.²²⁸

The NCW, the WI and other single-sex organisations

Perhaps the most active organisations in Nottingham at the time, and the ones for which we have a substantial amount of archival evidence, were the National Council of Women and the Women's Institute.²²⁹ These organisations were very

²²⁶ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 5/2/25, 20/2/25, 20/3/25, 20/5/25, 20/10/25 and 20/11/25.

²²⁷ *Notts Weekly Express*, 27/2/20, p. 7.

²²⁸ DD.PP/13/1 *Minutes of the Central Division of the Joint Committee of the Nottingham Co-operative Party*; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 20/5/29, p. 4.

²²⁹ The local evidence for the growth and activity of the WI and NCW can be found in a number of sources. Initially overviews of the movements, largely published by the organisations themselves can be very helpful. M. E. Alford, *During Six Reigns: Landmarks in the History of the National Council of Women of Great Britain* (1953); M. O. Gordon, *Historical Sketch of the National Council of Women of Great Britain* (1937); I. Jenkins, *The History of the Women's Institute Movement of England and Wales* (Oxford, 1953). Of even greater interest in the local context are those privately published histories of local activities of the organisations. Derbyshire Federation of Women's Institutes, *Derbyshire within Living Memory* (Newbury, 1996); J. Taylor, *A History of the Women's Institutes in Nottinghamshire, 1917-87* (Nottingham, n.d.); A. Walton, *A*

different – the NCW had an urban, influential, upper-middle-class membership whilst the WIs consisted of small rural groups who acted independently of each other except at the time of the annual County Federation meeting. The NCW had replaced the National Union of Women Workers (established nationally in 1895) in 1918 and has been described as an organisation ‘much concerned with protecting young women against sexual exploitation, [one] very prominent in rescue and preventative work, child welfare etc.’ Indeed, many of its campaigns appear to originate in philanthropic, largely conservative ideals.²³⁰ Nationally, in 1918 there were 126 NCW branches and 156 societies affiliated to it, and much of their campaigning time was directed into issues such as the establishment of a women’s police force, child and maternal welfare, cinema censorship and the work of the League of Nations Union²³¹.

The Nottingham branch of the National Union of Women Workers was set up in 1910 as a response to the Trade Boards Act and its initial work in Nottingham was to inform and help lace and home workers. After the First World War its attention (as the National Council of Women) shifted from women workers to women citizens. The Women’s Citizen Association was an early affiliate of the NCW, as was the Freedom League, the Mother’s Union and the YWCA.²³²

Brief History of the Derbyshire Federation of Women’s Institutes (Derby, 1984); J. Crane, P. Else, V. Lee and M. Stevenson, *Fritchley Women’s Institute, 1923-83* (Derby, n.d.).

²³⁰ D. Doughan and D. Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: an annotated, critical bibliography* (Sussex, 1987) p. 20

²³¹ Alford, *During Six Reigns*

²³² The number of affiliated societies grew rapidly and by 1937 included : The Nottingham and Notts Congregational Women’s Guild, girls’ clubs, Women’s Adult Schools, the Young Wives Fellowship and the Sisterhood Movement. DD 748/14 *Report and List of Officers and Members of the Notts and Nottingham National Council of Women January 1937*

Essentially a respectable and non-partisan middle- class organisation, the NCW was very active throughout this period. It had 150 members in 1929 and each meeting saw new members, by 1932 membership had nearly doubled to 291 and in 1937 it had 458 members. (Table 1). The increase in subscriptions and donations to the Nottingham branch is also interesting - £2 13 2 was collected in the financial year 1925-6, £3 5 7 in 1929-30, £5 10 7 in 1931-2 and £17 in 1935-6.²³³

Table 1. Local membership of the NCW, and the number of affiliated societies it attracted, 1918-38²³⁴

Date	No. of NCW members in Nottingham	No. of local societies affiliated to Nottingham branch of NCW	Date	No. of NCW members in Nottingham	No. of local societies affiliated to Nottingham branch of NCW
1918-19	145	65	1927-8	144	54
1919-20	143	63	1928-9	144	54
1921-2	160	62	1929-30	160	50
1922-3	158	62	1930-1	160	57
1923-4	160	62	1931-2	279	38
1924-5	100	60	1935-6	407	36
1925-6	100	60	1937-8	458	43
1926-7	100	60			

²³³ DD 748/5.

²³⁴ Source: National Council of Women of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, *Handbook and Report of the National Council of Women, 1918-20* ; *Handbook of the National Council of Women, 1921-36* ; National Council of Women, *Nottingham Branch Committee Meetings: Minutes and Papers, 1927-36*

These came from all areas of the city and the county and included, in 1937, 135 unmarried women, 305 who were married, eleven titled women and seven doctors.²³⁵ Its members worked on many issues and were represented on many other bodies in the city. For example, a member became the first “lady” governor of Nottingham High School in 1928.²³⁶ There were also branches of the NCW in Mansfield (120 members in 1935), Newark (66 members in 1936, rising to 114 within a year), Chesterfield (105 members in 1937) and Lincoln (227 members in 1937). These all came together in an annual East Midlands Regional Committee meeting.

Nationally the WI movement had migrated to Britain from Canada, with the first Institute formed on Anglesey in 1915. Initially a government-financed organisation, by 1925 it had 250,000 members and was the ‘largest post-suffrage woman’s organisation in Britain.’²³⁷ It was a non-sectarian, non-political organisation designed to help rural women, and had a number of prominent members including Virginia Woolf and Margaret Wintringham (MP for Louth for a short time). It worked largely through the County Federations and the work of Volunteer Organisers, and campaigns included those for improved housing and water supplies, and those in support of the National Savings movement.

Nottinghamshire saw one of the earliest Women’s Institutes in the country - in Southwell village in 1917 – and saw the establishment of eight further WIs in

²³⁵ DD 748/14 Of the 452 members in 1934 9 were JPs, 7 doctors, 8 wives of Lords, 5 had higher degrees, 2 MBEs and 1 local Councillor. They were not representative of typical Nottingham women.

²³⁶ DD 748/5 *Minutes of the Nottingham Branch of the National Council of Women 1927-1936*

²³⁷ Doughan and Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals* pp. 29-30

1918 (the year in which the Nottinghamshire County Federation of WIs was established), three more in 1919 (the year in which the local Federation began to train Volunteer County Organisers - the mainstay of the WI's educational capacity) and nine further in 1920. By 1929 Nottinghamshire had 46 WIs, with 2,699 members, and by 1932 the County had 64 Institutes (table 2).

Table 2. Women's Institutes and Membership in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, 1919-36²³⁸

Date	WIs	Members
1919	13	
1923	29	1700
1924	32	
1926	34	
1927-8	46	2304
1934	68	
1936	72	

In addition to the NCW and the Women's Institutes there were other single sex campaigning groups active in the city and the region during the interwar period. One particularly active organisation was the Electrical Association for Women (EAW). Its national aim was:

²³⁸ National Federation of WIs, *Annual Reports 1919-* ; Taylor, *History of the WI in Notts*.

to make provision for the education of, and to give training to, women and others with regard to electrical energy, and in all other branches of domestic science, hygiene and social welfare.

Thus it can be construed as a citizenship organisation, giving lectures, setting exams and issuing publications designed to enhance women's understanding of their domestic role.²³⁹ Other organizations can also be identified from relatively scant sources. The National Council of Social Service (established in 1929) had 50 affiliated women's clubs and organisations from the East Midlands by 1935. In the regional conference held in Skegby near Mansfield they surveyed the interests of these clubs, which were mainly social and recreational.²⁴⁰ The Over Thirty Association was formed in 1939 to help older women find jobs, training and housing. There were local branches of the British Women's Temperance Association and the Women's Imperial League. Single issue groups also emerged, including the Nottinghamshire Women's Police Court Association which helped women released from prison to find lodgings and sent women to court every morning to ensure women were treated fairly.²⁴¹ Towards the end of this period women were beginning to become involved in the Women's Voluntary Service, which was to become an important organisation through the war years and beyond.

²³⁹ Further detail on the national activities of this organisation can be found in Pursell, 'Domesticating modernity: the Electrical Association for Women, 1924-86'.

²⁴⁰ National Council of Social Service (1936) *Unemployment and Community Service* (NCSS, London).

²⁴¹ *Notts Weekly Express*, 7/2/19, p. 5.

Overall, therefore, a wide range of women's organisations active in the Nottingham area during the inter-war period. This brief panorama has highlighted a number of issues which will be important throughout this study. Every class of woman was represented – from the working woman or worker's wife, to the privileged, titled lady. For example, working-class women were involved in the WEA and the CWG. Yet many of these organisations were for the comfortably-off middle-class woman. The Annual Dinner for the Secretaries to the British Chamber of Commerce was a lavish affair serving eight courses.²⁴² Even if an organisation was avowedly for helping working women, this does not necessarily mean those women were able to participate in their own "salvation", given constraints of time, education and energy. Many organisations met on weekday lunchtimes, with extended meals and after-lunch speakers. These, therefore, were not designed for the working girl or the professional woman, but for the wives of working and professional men. A wide range of women joined organisations and attended social events, but many of the organisations themselves were run by a core of middle-class wives.

For these female leaders local and regional networks developed. For example, the President of Southwell WI, Mary Handford, was also the Chair of the Nottingham NCW, as well as Nottingham's first woman magistrate. Caroline Harper, who was also involved in both organisations, has the illustrious distinction of being the first woman Councillor in Nottingham, the first woman JP, *and* the first woman

²⁴² DD1168/24/49/1. On the menu was "hors d'oeuvre Parisienne, Petite Marmite, Sole Mignonette, Lamb Renaissance, Roast Partridge ... Iced Pudding Alexandra, Cheese Soufflé and Coffee".

Sheriff (the latter in 1931-2).²⁴³ We, therefore, need to be aware that this shared personnel may inflate the membership figures of our organisations – we cannot simply add them all together to get an idea of the participation rates of Nottingham women. What we can deduce from this, however, is the roots of collaborative work between local organisations which became increasingly important as the century progressed. Similarly, we do not have the evidence for participation rates and impact of groups that have left no substantial records such as the Jewish Girls' Club, the Young Wives Fellowship or the Co-operative Women's Guild, the latter also having nothing specific to Nottingham deposited in their own national archive. Reports on collaborative work give us a glimpse of other activity. For example, the Nottingham Charity Organisation Society worked with the Women's Central Club, the YWCA, the Nottinghamshire Women's Police Court Association, the National Council of Women and the Soroptomists to provide services for the poor. Links between organisations could result in a sharing of expertise and a real strength in numbers – in 1922 Mrs Dowson, the Secretary of the Nottinghamshire Women's Service Association, wrote to demand answers to key women's questions from the candidates standing in the General Election the next day. The letter was signed by the Secretaries of the NCW, the YWCA and the Co-operative Women's Guild and the combined pressure of these organisations, in addition to a respect for the importance of the female vote in the early 1920s, resulted in every candidate answering the questions.²⁴⁴ The personnel of these organisations was shared between those who had plenty of time to be

²⁴³ Angel Row Library, Nottingham, *A History of Nottingham Scrapbook*, vol. 45, p. 61.

²⁴⁴ *The Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 14/11/22. The questions asked are discussed in the next section.

involved in four or five organisations. It is fair to say that many of the organisations were dominated by the elite of Nottingham society. This, in turn, is likely to affect what was discussed and done in their name but also gave the organisations a core of leadership talent who had the benefit of education and resources and experience of committee work and public speaking.

Having examined both the national and local context of interwar women's organisations in Nottingham it is now time to investigate whether, and in what ways, the concerns of the national groups were mirrored at a local level.

CHAPTER THREE: FEMINISM, CITIZENSHIP AND LEISURE IN INTERWAR NOTTINGHAM

Nottingham possessed a diverse spectrum of local women's activism which cannot easily be reduced to straightforward categorisations, and which is richer than a focus on national splits would suggest. Some of the issues Nottingham women discussed can be classified as feminist, concerned with promoting women's interests as a group within society, some as citizenship, concerned with promoting women's participation in activities to improve their own lives and the well-being of the community, and some as leisure, allowing women the opportunities to relax in the company of other women and celebrate their skills and interests. To examine these issues further, this chapter will examine the work of this wide variety of women's organisations in Nottingham to develop an understanding of what life was like for local group members and which issues drew their attention. The evidence of activities by organised girls and women points to the existence of a diverse subculture of voluntary activism, local campaigning, sociability and female networking. These features of organisational life played an important role in the experiences of many women, especially those from the middle classes, in the city of Nottingham and its surrounding county. Essentially the majority of these women did not challenge the conservative gender ideology of the period, but they did work within it to develop the opportunities and status of women – raising their profile in public life, widening their opportunities in the workplace, or providing new forms of group-focused leisure.

Thus, they offered an alternative to the mainstream political and cultural focus on women's duties as housewife and mother within the domestic sphere. The interests and activities of a range of groups will be scrutinised carefully to determine whether each group can be said to reinforce or contradict the theory that organised feminist activity was in decline; how and whether these groups enabled women's participation as citizens in local affairs; and whether the groups simultaneously pursued both a feminist and a citizenship agenda.

Organisational records provide an insight into the diverse goals and aspirations of organised women in the inter-war period. What is much less clear, however, is how these goals and aspirations reflected broader currents of opinion in wider society. One possible hypothesis is that the modest goals of many organisations in the inter-war period reflected the immovable barrier of the primacy of the domestic role. Yet the very fact that these organisations worked to overcome the most restricted conceptions of women's lives, even if they did not fully embrace feminism, was a representation of a conscious decision to go beyond the prevailing norms towards an alternative way of thinking. Another possibility is that the broader mainstream of public opinion was also shifting: not to embrace sex equality or the need to destroy male privilege, but at least to accept the idea that some women should be able to work, have a profession, or play a role in public life.

The local press can be used to ascertain the nature of this widespread conventional thinking. The local newspapers, in addition to reporting on the activities of local groups, allow us to see what was being thought, taught and discussed about women in the local context and whether the fear of change and renewal of the separate spheres ideology was as marked here as it has been argued to be nationally. It also allows us to see what was being published specifically by and for local women. The local press was avowedly Conservative – it condemned the General Strike, praised the National Government in the 1930s and always encouraged its readership to vote Conservative at election time - and the local organisations had to work alongside its social conservatism if they were to be respectfully acknowledged by these vital local media. By exploring the coverage of organised women’s activities and of issues relating to women more widely, the context within which women’s organisations were operating can be better understood.

We have seen that there were a myriad of organisations for girls and women and it is time to turn our attention to the areas that most concerned them. As outlined in Chapter 1 the campaigns and interests of Nottingham organisations will be discussed in three broad categories – feminist, citizenship and leisure. The first are the campaigns that were likely to be described as “old” or “equal rights” feminism by contemporaries. These were concerned with achieving equality with men in its most absolute form – equal pay, equal access to education and employment, the equal franchise. The second group of activities were those

involving the use of the vote and increased political awareness to improve the rights and experiences of women as citizens. These activities would include those labelled as “new feminist” such as birth control and family allowances, but also those that would allow women to play a fuller role in society – as public speakers, political organisers and campaigners on local issues. The development of women as citizens would also encompass improving domestic education for girls and empowering the housewife with enhanced housing and better access to labour-saving services and devices. These campaigns included women who recognised that the domestic role women played was of crucial importance to them and that work was needed to improve women’s lives within that sphere. Many were still challenging the balance of expectations between men and women but were doing this in the domestic sphere, tackling the boundaries that existed within the home by renegotiating the roles and expectations of women as wives and mothers and embracing the ideal of the companionate marriage where household tasks were occasionally shared and women had a right to make decisions about their own lives and the lives of their children. These organisations were “helping women to use the vote” in order to improve their lives – thus fulfilling the suffrage campaigners’ dreams of allowing women to make extensive use of their rights as full citizens.²⁴⁵

The third category will examine the importance of the leisure activities provided by women’s organisations. Although coffee mornings and handicrafts could be dismissed as doing nothing to empower women, it will be argued that giving

²⁴⁵ Thane, ‘What difference did the vote make?’ p. 271.

women the vehicle to enjoy their own leisure time in the company of other women provided a female space that was not purely domestic. The inter-war era appears to be a “Golden Age” of joining and women were not excluded from the trend. Although some of the groups that organised these activities did not often talk about women’s role in society that was because they had a different focus, and it cannot be assumed that they were deliberately shunning feminist thought. There has been very little historical research into this area – that which has been done has concentrated on male leisure or class-based leisure activities.²⁴⁶ The most relevant to this study is the work done by Claire Langhamer on the leisure time of working-class women between the wars. She does not explicitly discuss the feminist or empowering nature of women’s leisure opportunities but we can build on her research to argue that taking part in organised leisure outside the home was a conscious decision by a woman to do something for herself – a recognition of her right to be something other than a wife and mother. She may have had to fit it in around the timetables of others but she saw the importance of allowing herself some time away from the family to talk to other adult women, even if it was about those she had left at home.²⁴⁷ Therefore, the study of leisure opportunities is a legitimate area for allowing us to gain an insight into the development of women’s lives between the wars and also allows us to further scrutinise the function and purpose of women’s organisations. What can be

²⁴⁶ G. Cross (ed), *Worktowners at Blackpool : mass-observation and popular leisure in the 1930s* (London, 1990); J. Hill, *Sport, leisure and culture in twentieth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2002); A. Tomlinson, *The game's up: essays in the cultural analysis of sport, leisure and popular culture* (Aldershot, 1999); J. K. Walton, *The British seaside : holidays and resorts in the twentieth century* (Manchester, 2000); J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830-1950* (London, 1978)

²⁴⁷ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*.

concluded is that many of the groups covered all three aspects – they believed that women had different roles and campaigned to develop them all, thus undermining the theory that the women’s “movement” was in decline.

THE LOCAL PRESS AND ITS COVERAGE OF “WOMEN’S ISSUES”

From the end of the First World War until the beginning of the 1970s there was a remarkable uniformity and continuity in the British local press... They almost all described themselves as independent or conservative.²⁴⁸

Examining the local press allows us to further understand the cultural context in which the organisations were operating, and also allow us to examine the issues and campaigns that concerned women of the time. One way of exploring the activities and goals of women’s organisations in relation to the climate of public opinion is to measure how much coverage their activities attracted in the Conservative-inclined local newspapers; were they prominent or only marginal figures in the reporting of local community life? Another is to examine how a conservative-dominated local press covered “women’s issues” and whether even the limited aspirations of inter-war women’s organisations challenged local “public opinion” as manifested in editorials, letter pages and features. Alternatively, newspaper evidence may show that organs of local opinion were required to sometimes shift with the times to recognise and affirm the rights that

²⁴⁸ Franklin and Murphy, *What news?* p. 1, p. 2.

women gained at the time of the First World War, and the growing rights that women were awarded through the inter-war period.

Nottingham between the wars had no less than three daily newspapers supplemented by a range of weekly and fortnightly publications. A study of these newspapers enables us to trace changing patterns and trends in how the media reacted to and dealt with “women’s issues” in this provincial city. We can study the varied contents of these papers and thus construct a picture of what life was like for women between the wars, what sort of context women’s organisations were operating within and how the “ordinary” people of a provincial city were reacting to the enfranchisement of women and all that stemmed from it.

Therefore, the archival research can be enhanced by a study of the letters pages of the newspapers, and an examination of the newly fashionable women’s pages, to examine what concerned Nottingham people in the context of gender relations and to examine what women wanted to learn about or what initiatives they were being fed by the media. Articles, advice columns and advertisements can help us to understand whether or not women were presented with any alternative to the domestic sphere and articles and features can illuminate what was being reported about local women’s organisations to give a view on whether they were influential groups, taken seriously by the media, or simply used to fill column inches.

The three daily newspapers published in Nottingham between the wars comprised two morning papers and one published for the evening reader. The *Nottingham Journal and Express* (later the *Nottingham Journal*) and the *Daily Guardian* were published each morning. The latter gave the Nottingham public national and regional news, covering especially events in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire in addition to what was happening in London and internationally. It contained political coverage, an extensive sports section, a lively daily letters page and detailed economic news. Each evening saw the publication of the *Nottingham Evening Post* (the *Guardian's* sister paper) which gave its readership a comprehensive round up of national and international news, sport, classified ads and local gossip (including who was divorcing who and why) alongside its reporting of local events. These newspapers often revealed political affiliations in their editorial columns at election time, and especially during the General Strike which they all opposed and during the National Government which they all supported. This political Conservatism was reflected by a conservative response to many of the social changes of the day.

There were also a number of newspapers published on a weekly basis. Some of these only had a short shelf life, such as the *Nottinghamshire County Chronicle* – a “real life local paper” – which was published in 1925 only and *The Nottinghamshire Weekly Express* which was available from 1919 to 1921. Others maintained a readership throughout the period, such as the *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* which reported local news and “happenings” from the city

and all its suburbs throughout the 1920s. It included gossip (such as who was in rent arrears), local council business and farmers' columns, alongside serialised fiction and advice on playing bridge. It often published anti-socialist cartoons and was keen on reporting the business of local branches of the Primrose League suggesting that its political leaning was also to the right of the political spectrum. In fact, none of the local papers seemed to have much time for the Labour Party and demonstrated little acknowledgement that it was the second party in British politics.²⁴⁹

Nottingham also had its own specialist press, such as the *Nottingham and Midland Catholic News* which was published until 1934. This publication was less of a local newspaper, however, containing very little local news. It consisted instead of a summary of what was occurring in Ulster and the Free State, and news events which affected Catholics.²⁵⁰ All of these newspapers were studied using a sample process whereby the same dates were studied each month and patterns, trends and details recorded. Each paper was studied on different dates to get an overall picture of what was happening in Nottingham, and especially within the women's organisations, throughout each month.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ This is not to say that leftwing newspapers were not published, just that they have not been preserved in the local archives or in the British Library newspaper archive at Colindale. The local Labour Party did publish *The Citizen* for six months in 1919 but it contains few references to women and was not regularly published again until the 1960s.

²⁵⁰ The paper gave local Catholics relevant news through columns such as "Catholic News of the World" and "News from Ireland". It contained no references to local organisations.

²⁵¹ The *Guardian* was studied on the 12th and 27th of each month and the *Evening Post* on the 5th and 20th. The *Nottingham Journal* was studied on the 16th of each month and the four page *Nottingham Evening News* on the 9th. Any stories or letters of particular interest were pursued on the previous and subsequent days. The weekly papers were not sampled but were read

One illuminating area within all these publications was their letters page. Women by no means featured in these every day, either as correspondents or as a subject for discussion, but when the issues concerning women did arise it was often a cause of controversy and lively debate as we shall discover later. The local newspapers were both politically and socially conservative and this would have an effect both on the articles published and on the presumed attitudes of the readership and letter-writers. At each election during the inter-war period both the *Evening Post* and its sister paper the *Guardian* openly called for their readers to vote Conservative. On election day in 1924 the *Guardian* exhorted “Vote Today – and Strike a Blow at Socialism”, and once the results were out declared, “Nottingham votes the right way: Conservatives gain two seats.”²⁵² They openly bemoaned local Labour victories.²⁵³ These newspapers dominated the whole local market – there was no left-wing alternative – so we can also assume that people of all political affiliations could be included in the readership of all of these periodicals. The attitude of the press to the General Strike is interesting here. The press could not afford to alienate potential readers and so there was no condemnation of the impending strike before hand. The papers were not printed during the strike, as Nottingham battened the hatches against no trams and a curtailed bus service, but once the Strike was over the local papers dismissed it as silliness and applauded the “Victory for Common Sense”. They printed letters of

completely. The specialist press was scanned for any mention of women and their activities in the local context.

²⁵² *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 29/10/24, 30/10/24.

²⁵³ *Daily Guardian*, 2/11/34.

thanks for those who had helped each other during the strike, but no letters of censure.²⁵⁴ They later expressed support for the Jarrow marchers who stayed in Mansfield on the 19th October 1936 and in Nottingham the next day.²⁵⁵ Thus the Nottingham local press, although conservative-leaning, did have a commercial need to cater to a wider readership.

The apparent change in customs which allowed young women to cut their hair, raise their hemlines, smoke and ride bicycles sparked a storm of controversy amongst the older generation, with letters ranging from those condemning the morals of modern women to outright attacks accusing the “superfluous women” of trying to turn themselves into “undeveloped men”, thus losing the right to be treated with “deference and respect”. It was even suggested that the police should lock them up.²⁵⁶ A letter to the *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* of September 1924 asserted that, “woman ... in gaining her liberty has lost her beauty,” and, in the same year, the citizens of Nottingham became uneasy about “trotters” – young women who used their leisure time to parade the Embankment by the River Trent of an evening – or “picture slaves” who would remain “useless puppets in life’s vanity bag.”²⁵⁷ Women wearing make-up were even accused of becoming like “savages” as this writer fumed in 1933:

²⁵⁴ *Daily Guardian*, 13/5/26, p. 2, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 10th May – 17th May 1926.

²⁵⁵ *Daily Guardian*, 20/10/36

²⁵⁶ *Daily Guardian*, 12/2/20, p. 7; 12/11/19, p. 7; 14/11/19, p. 6; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22/7/33, p. 5.

²⁵⁷ *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News*, 13/9/24, p. 6; The “trotter” issue was discussed in response to a report by the YWCA published in the *Nottingham Evening Post*. Outrage at the idea of forcing women to stay in was expressed by women: “he evidently lives mentally in the early Victorian age of my poor bygone sisters who were so tightly laced they could not walk but only trot.”

One regrets the lowering of status of women, by those glaringly red lips, heavily rouged cheeks, dyed hair ... They can only be classed as poor imitations of the aborigine.²⁵⁸

The *Nottingham Journal* lavished attention on working women through their annual “Pretty Girls at Work” photo competitions, but, of course, all the women featured were unmarried. The *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* reported on a women’s football match and told readers, with some degree of incredulity, that, “the females showed that they had more than a passing knowledge of the game.”²⁵⁹

There were general articles written about women in the news in the mainstream pages of the newspapers, but these were relatively rare. They were more likely to be found at the beginning of the interwar period when the new rights of women were big news – in 1919 the *Notts Weekly Express* published articles applauding the enfranchisement of women and demanding increased wages for women working in agriculture. Katherine Tynan wrote an article about the 16 women candidates who stood nationally in the Coupon Election, including Violet Markham in Mansfield, and declared that, “the women beaten this time will come back again and be elected.”²⁶⁰ Carol King wrote articles demanding housing reforms – “*The Home I Want*” - and family endowment - to “feed the children” - and Jane Ramsay-Kerr wrote about the “Problems for the DeMobilised Woman”

There were plenty of people, however, who supported the view that women needed to stay in to protect their morals and to prepare themselves for married life. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 19th January – 9th February 1924.

²⁵⁸ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26/7/33, p. 9.

²⁵⁹ *Nottingham, Notts. And Bulwell Local News*, 1/5/21, p. 5.

²⁶⁰ *Notts. Weekly Express*, 14/2/19, p. 3.

claiming that, “at last Eve has known the camaraderie induced by a common interest.”²⁶¹ Mary Lester wrote a strongly worded article entitled “Inferior Women” in which she argued,

Thousands of women today think they are inferior to men. They are, simply because they have not had the chance in life ... Let us raise women to their true standard ... with equality for effort and intellect.²⁶²

In 1919 these articles were appearing every week, and although they rarely had a specific local perspective, they were meeting a perceived need to appeal to the newly enfranchised woman.

In October 1919 the paper contained an article by R. Burke Bloor appealing for the governors of the city of Nottingham – that he labelled the “largest feminist in Britain” – to provide adequate, respectable accommodation for its women workers. He goes on to say that, “since the Great Calamity the world stands panting for the healing of a woman’s hand.” Bloor seems to have adopted the term “feminist” to describe a city where women were economically important, even if their political influence had not yet been felt. He was picking up on the feeling that existed in the immediate post-war period that the women, en masse, were a force to be reckoned with and acknowledged.²⁶³ Elsewhere in the press, editorial decisions were taken to appeal to women readers. The *Nottingham Guardian* also responded to the uncertainties about women’s position at the end of the war by making appeals to the newly enfranchised and declaring that they

²⁶¹ *Notts. Weekly Express*, 14/2/19, p. 3; 22/8/19, p. 4; 7/3/19.

²⁶² *Notts. Weekly Express*, 29/8/19, p. 3.

²⁶³ *Notts Weekly Express*, 24/10/19, p. 5.

had always supported votes for women on the grounds that “the admission of women to the franchise will tend to uplift and elevate public life.”²⁶⁴ Later articles included criticisms of the way women were treated in Islam and praise for Nottingham’s first female doctor, Dr Sarah Gray. The Nottingham University seminars on careers for girls were reported in which Miss Popert, Chief Women’s Officer in the Midlands Division of the Ministry of Labour told girls they could do anything they wanted to do, and this at a time when historians have told us the economic crisis was restraining women from working, unless they were being used specifically to provide cheap labour.²⁶⁵ The *Evening Post* was the most likely to report national news of women including legislation affecting them and what the national feminist organisations were campaigning for. It also included articles about Nottingham women workers, including one about the poor pay of Nottingham’s nurses in May 1927. It declared 1932 to be “Woman’s Year of Triumph” reporting the successes of aviator Amelia Earhart, the seven women in Britain who were awarded Masters of Surgery (some of whom were married with children), the first national Doctor of Music, the increased number of scholarships in Latin to Oxford, the first British woman appointed to the Bar and the advances in sports such as motor racing.²⁶⁶ They ‘praised’ the first woman to swim the English Channel – the “young, though hefty” American, Miss Gertrude Ederle.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ *Nottingham Guardian*, 11/11/22, p. 6.

²⁶⁵ *Nottingham Guardian*, 12/1/24, p. 5; 27/10/26, p. 4; 13/2/33, p. 6. For an evaluation of the impact of the Depression on women’s work see G. Holloway, *Women and work in Britain since 1840* (Abingdon, 2005)

²⁶⁶ *Evening Post*, 20/12/32.

²⁶⁷ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7/8/26.

The press paid lip service to this theme of women's achievements even as they began to drop the feminist articles in favour of providing women with specially targeted women's columns which were almost entirely domestic. In this they were accepting that aspects of feminism might suit individuals, but that they did not necessarily suit family women and so could be given token attention. The issues facing working mothers, which were increasingly important to a number of women, were nevertheless not particularly newsworthy and were not covered in the press. The same newspapers applauded the Nottingham tram girls who had resigned to make way for the returning soldiers and contained an article on how women were seen by the Nottingham and District Signalmen's Vigilance Committee as "constitutionally unfit" to work in signal boxes. The tram girls were a feature of the Nottingham press in 1919-1920. In the *Nottingham, Notts. And Bulwell Local News* on 5th June 1920 one commented,

When we volunteered during the war we did not expect at the termination of our service that we should be rewarded [by being] pulled to pieces by a set of fellow workmates ... We do not wish to stand in the way of ex-service men but what we do want is this – the approval of the general public for whom we have worked for five years.²⁶⁸

The tone of the papers towards their newly enfranchised female readership was often condescending. In 1923 the *Guardian* published a letter instructing women to overcome their shy diffidence to vote Conservative and when they did vote the paper thought nothing of gently poking fun at the silly women voters.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ *Notts Weekly Express*, 3/1/19, 24/1/19, 31/2/19.

²⁶⁹ *Daily Guardian*, 6/12/23; *Daily Guardian*, 31/5/29 contains a report on women voting for the first time:

Our understanding of this local context can be further enhanced through study of the provision made for female readers of these newspapers. Women's pages or columns gradually emerged in all of the newspapers studied.²⁷⁰ There is evidence that these specially dedicated arenas did make an attempt at encouraging women to widen their horizons beyond the domestic sphere, as shall be discussed later in this chapter. Interestingly, however, these columns contained nothing specific to Nottingham and were more than likely nationally franchised. The columns appear to be written for a general audience rather than targeting the local community, and they are often first published in London and reproduced in many regional newspapers.²⁷¹ The fact that the editors of Nottingham press chose to print them demonstrates that there was an appetite for such fare amongst the women of Nottingham, although there is no evidence of any active responses to the articles on the letters pages. Interest appeared to be diminishing when the *Guardian*

One said "I am voting for Mr Churchill's party because his dog belongs to the Wagtails Club and my dog is a member too."

Another young elector came away from the polling booth almost tearfully. "I have changed my mind," she exclaimed. "I thought Mr Lloyd George was a Conservative" ... The powder box first – the ballot box a good second.

²⁷⁰ The *Notts County Chronicle* had a column entitled "Entirely Feminine". The *Nottingham and Midland Catholic News* had "Woman's World" as did the *Notts Weekly Express*. The *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* had "Mother's Own Column" and later "Lady's Realm". Name changes to columns were frequent, although not explained. The *Nottingham Journal* had women's pages entitled, "Modern Woman and her Interests", "Topics and Interests Feminine", "Woman's Notes" and "Woman's World". The *Evening Post* had a daily column entitled "Woman's Ways", later "Women and their Ways" (making it clear that women were a separate 'species' to men!). The *Nottingham Guardian* made no specific provision for its women readers until 1934. It is unclear why it took them so long but we can speculate that they did not see the need until the mass market in women's magazine began to develop (for more detail on women's magazines in the interwar period see Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992) chapter 7). When the columns did appear they published two – "Moods and Modes of Eve" and "Women's Wear and Work". In 1936 they also added a women's column into their Saturday supplement entitled "Feminine Reflections"

²⁷¹ The *Times* Digital archive reveals that many of these articles appeared in the *Times* before being aired in the provinces.

published a one-paragraph only article on women achieving equal franchise in 1928.²⁷² Indeed, the appeal to women as electors could be seen to arise more from the press's desire to ensure the women did not vote Labour, than from a desire to appeal to the whole range of political views held by women.²⁷³ Only later in the century do we see local women's columns written by prominent local women (see Chapter 5).

An interesting issue, which deserves further analysis elsewhere, were the methods employed by advertising to attract female custom. They can add illumination to the understanding of what women were perceived to be and want by society in general.

In 1919 "Dr William's Pink Pills" published a series of advertisements disguised as articles praising women's war work and advising them to take their pills to keep their strength up.²⁷⁴ 1927 saw a campaign by "Wills Gold Flake cigarettes" which recognised a new attitude amongst some women whilst trying to sell them cigarettes:

Said Mr Gold to Mr Flake – [outside a church, after a wedding]

"Did you hear her say 'Obey', Mr Flake?"

"I did not, Mr Gold."

"Did you expect to, Mr Flake?"

"I did not, Mr Gold. Nowadays all women have Wills of their own."

²⁷² *Daily Guardian*, 3/7/28, p. 3.

²⁷³ During the 1929 General Election the *Daily Guardian* published an article calling women to vote Conservative entitled "What you owe to Mr Baldwin". 30/5/29, p. 4. It said, "women voters should remember that it is to the Conservative Party that they owe their admission to the franchise on equal terms with men."

²⁷⁴ Found in the *Notts. Weekly Express*, 21/2/19.

This could be seen both as a satire on the new freedoms women were assuming, but it is also a recognition that things were changing. In 1929 an advert for “New World Gas Cookers” acknowledge the new demand on women:

“There! I’m ready now! While the dinner’s cooking I can take the tram to the polling booth and on my way back I can do all my shopping ... the ‘New World’ does all the cooking ... The best vote I ever recorded was for the ‘New World’”²⁷⁵

However, by the late 1930s the washing powder company Rinso suggests that things had returned to a more domestic perspective with their campaign for their new washing powder – using Rinso saves a woman from drudgery, impresses the neighbours and reinvigorates a marriage.²⁷⁶

FEMINISM AND THE “SEX WAR” IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Although the inter-war period is often seen as one of decline in feminism’s appeal and influence, there are signs that the immediate aftermath of the war witnessed a heightened awareness of issues of sex equality, and that these issues were being voiced quite powerfully, even if the organisations themselves had to regroup after the achievement of the vote. The call for equal rights continued to inspire a number of groups and individual women and feminist concerns were expressed by the organisations and reflected to a certain degree within the press.

²⁷⁵ Advert in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 29/5/29.

²⁷⁶ Gold Flake advert in *Evening Post*, 20/6/27; Rinso adverts in *Evening Post*, 20/1/37 and 5/4/38.

The organisation most consistently pursuing a feminist agenda in the local context was the Nottingham branch of the National Council of Women. The NCW was dedicated to ‘the removal of all disabilities of women whether legal, economic or social,’ – an explicit commitment to feminist goals alongside their work pursuing broader social aims.²⁷⁷ The 1925 NCW National Conference passed feminist resolutions concerning women police, equal franchise, widows’ pensions, women in the civil service and equal pay.²⁷⁸ Locally, members were told that “women are at least equal to men intellectually ... If you gave women the same opportunities as men they would be better in everything.”²⁷⁹ The local branch was lectured on “the Present Economic Situation” and the “Importance of Women in Today’s Political Society”.²⁸⁰ The Nottingham NCW’s Sectional Committees (established to lobby Parliament, politicians and local councils over particular issues) in 1919 included Industrial, Public Services, Legislative and Women Patrols. NCW members served on local housing committees, hospital boards and prison administration. They campaigned through luncheons, fund-raisers, committees, delegations and reports to the press. They also co-organised campaigns with other local groups: in the early post-war period they launched campaigns with the Women’s Freedom League branch, the Women’s Citizen Association, NUSEC, as well as with the Nottinghamshire Federation of W.I.s on a range of issues touching on women’s rights in the legal, political and economic spheres.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ National Council of Women, *Handbook of the NCW, 1926-7*.

²⁷⁸ National Council of Women, *Handbook of the NCW, 1925-6*.

²⁷⁹ DD 748/5, 5th March, 1928.

²⁸⁰ DD 748/5 January 1932, July 1932.

²⁸¹ In 1929 the Nottingham branches of NUSEC and the NCW campaigned together for the passage of the Local Government Bill. NAO DD 748/5.

One identifiably “feminist” issue that concerned many women’s organisations was that of women police officers. It was another issue where the local NCW took a lead – and it was one where women’s campaigning activity had some measurable impact in the interwar period. Before the Great War courts of law were wholly male including all jury members and police officers, even if the accused or the victim was female. The NCW launched a campaign to appoint women police officers so those women who had suffered abuse could report that abuse to a female officer. The Nottingham branch of the NCW campaigned for greater numbers in the city from 1918 through to the eve of World War Two. Nottinghamshire WIs also saw the issue as important and lobbied local Councillors over the issue. This was a successful campaign and by the mid-1930s 10% of officers in the courts were women.²⁸²

Equal pay and other issues relating to women’s economic equality also resonated with Nottingham’s organised women. The NCW campaigned for equal pay for civil servants working within Nottinghamshire County Council and supported resolutions for equal pay for teachers.²⁸³ In this they were joined by the Soroptomists and the YWCA. In addition, educated local women in the Soroptomists raised money for a women’s careers advisory service and prepared detailed reports, including the 1938 one on “the Status of Professional and Business women”. They had lectures on the emancipation of Chinese women and

²⁸² Thane, “What difference did the vote make?” p. 272.

²⁸³ DD 748/6/1 *Minutes of the Nottingham Branch of the National Council of Women 1937-1940* – equal pay for civil servants was discussed on 29th June, 1937.

discussed ending the marriage bar and improving housing.²⁸⁴ In 1937 the speaker at the Soroptomist annual dinner declared that:

We can help women realise their own power and if we can do that we shall have started one of the greatest forces ... the world has ever known.

As already indicated, some of the feminist demands raised by local organised women found an echo, albeit a limited one, in the local press. The newspapers gave a certain amount of space to letters and articles expressing feminist viewpoints and demands. In 1919 there was a letter calling for support for widows' pensions, in 1921 an ex-WAAC wrote to the *Post* about the lack of dole for women, in 1931 a group of women teachers wrote complaining about their poor pay and in 1937 a woman wrote to ask other woman to write to their MPs about lack of equal pension rights for women.²⁸⁵ In April 1926 the *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* contained a letter by a man calling for women preachers in the Church of England because "women are more capable of dealing with certain problems than men."²⁸⁶ Most of these letters did not receive published replies but their very selection by the editor indicates that the issues discussed were seen as relevant and important to local people. The letter previously mentioned from Mrs Dowson, the Secretary of the Nottinghamshire Women's Service Association and NCW member to the General Election candidates of 1922 identified the following issues as key for women voters: equal

²⁸⁴ DD.SO 2/1; DD.SO 2/2 *Minutes and Reports of Meetings of the Soroptomist Club of Nottingham 1937- 1942*.

²⁸⁵ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 5/4/19, p. 5; 20/8/21, p. 7; 19/9/31, p. 6; 5/6/37, p. 9.

²⁸⁶ *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News*, 3/4/26, p. 7; 10/4/26, p. 7.

franchise, equal guardianship, equal sexual standard, support for the League of Nations, support for women police, and support for proportional representation. These were the key feminist issues of the era, expressed by the Secretary of an organisation whose origins lay in the suffrage movement and whose main agenda was service to the community.²⁸⁷ What is particularly noticeable is that the letters are not written in response to articles that are published in the local press and thus the writers are wanting to highlight issues that are affecting local women – perhaps issues that have been highlighted to them by the women’s organisations. Many of the letters are, unfortunately, anonymous so it is impossible to see if the writers were members of the groups we have records for.

The women’s pages in the local press also reflected a local interest, if a somewhat sporadic one, in feminist issues throughout the 1920s. The *Nottingham Journal* had articles on women’s entitlement to the franchise, nurseries for working mothers, careers advice for girls and included advice to married women about their income tax.²⁸⁸ The “Feminine Reflections” column in the *Nottingham Guardian* included a series of articles detailing the history of important women and the “Lady’s Realm” in the *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* included an article about women peers campaigning to sit in the House of Lords.²⁸⁹ The *Evening Post* included articles in “Woman’s Ways” on how to balance work and pleasure, how to get ahead in the office, Egyptian feminism and

²⁸⁷ *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 14/11/22, p. 4. Previous reference to be found in final section of Chapter Two.

²⁸⁸ *Nottingham Journal*, 2/1/23, 15/4/19, 16/2/23; *Notts. Weekly Express*, 11/4/19.

²⁸⁹ *Nottingham, Notts. And Bulwell Local News*, 9/8/24.

on how mothers could benefit from brief holidays away from the home and children.²⁹⁰ Indeed, the *Post* of 1926 saw a rash of feminist articles written by one Anne Fayre. These included “the Case of the Married Woman Worker”:

in spite of all the economic difficulties and anomalies ... there is something wrong when a brilliant woman has to resign a career and become nothing but a glorified servant and a nervous wreck,

a series of articles entitled “What is your daughter going to be?” and a denunciation of the “eternal Handicap”:

it seems to me that until the end of time a woman will be handicapped by the fact of her sex ... Woman can never be dissociated in the minds of some people from the word Domesticity.²⁹¹

This series of awareness boosting articles did not continue, however, beyond the mid-1920s, suggesting that these sentiments were seen as out of fashion and local press realised there was no mainstream demand for them. The conclusions we can reach about feminism in the local press is that editors were particularly receptive to it in the immediate post-war period, but that its relevance is seen to decline after the mid-1920s and women could be appealed to in an alternative way – appealing to them in their domestic role - which is covered later in this chapter. The local press acknowledged that some women were calling for greater equality, but continued to denounce any idea of sex war – a standpoint that reflects the contemporary tensions and reveals the conservative nature of the media.

²⁹⁰ *Evening Post*, 20/5/24, p. 5; 20/9/24, p. 7; 5/7/24, p. 6.

²⁹¹ *Evening Post*, 20/1/26, p. 7; 1/2/26, p. 7; 3/3/26, p. 6.

LOCAL FEMINISM AND LOCAL POLITICS

In her 1939 Presidential address to the Soroptomists, Miss Storey asserted,

There is, perhaps, no greater need in the world today than that of the services of intelligent women, qualified and well trained, if social and political problems are to be attacked with any degree of success ... We want more women on our local councils and in Parliament ... This world ... is at present run by men, and what a mess it is in.

Since 1918 when the national vote was awarded to women over 30, women had been seeking to move into more wide-ranging political work than the options of Poor Law Guardian or Education Board official had presented them with. Local government appeared an ideal place for women to start, “not least because service in local government was more compatible with family life.”²⁹² The NCW and its sister organisation, the Women Citizens’ Association, spent 1919 lobbying energetically for women to stand as candidates in municipal elections.²⁹³ The Women’s Service League (previously the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies) organised deputations at polling stations and sent questions to prospective parliamentary and municipal candidates to ensure that they would be representing their female constituents if elected.²⁹⁴ In 1922 Newark Labour Women worked to mobilise the women’s vote and in 1924 they started their

²⁹² Thane, ‘What difference did the vote make?’ p. 274.

²⁹³ DD 748/4 *Minutes of the Women Citizens’ Association, 1918-1919*; The WCA records were deposited with the NCW records and the two organisations co-existed after the franchise was awarded until they merged in 1920.

²⁹⁴ DD PP/4/1 *Committee Minute Book of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies 1909 – 1924*.

campaign to equalise the franchise; Broxtowe Labour Women also campaigned vigorously for the extended franchise for women and were involved in numerous local rallies and demonstrations – the one in 1924 being addressed by Ellen Wilkinson.²⁹⁵

Perhaps due in part to these efforts, women did break into the sphere of local government in Nottingham in the interwar period, but not to any spectacular extent. In the 1920 elections for the city council 24 candidates were nominated but none of them were women and the elections for county councillors witnessed the same pattern in 1923.²⁹⁶ Yet at other times women candidates did emerge – in the 1927 municipal elections four of the thirty two candidates were women –two for the Labour Party, one for the Conservatives and an Independent. In 1928 Mrs Eggleston, the director of the Nottingham Co-operative Society and President of the Co-operative Women’s Guild in the city was elected in the municipal elections on a platform of welfare clinics and greater political involvement by women..²⁹⁷ Overall, the City Council had a steadily increasing number of female members, from both the Conservative and Labour Party, with two of the 64 councillors being women in 1924 to six in 1933.²⁹⁸ Nottingham Council also set

²⁹⁵ DD PP16/2/1; DD.PP/6/1.

²⁹⁶ *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 26/10/20, p. 3; 27/11/23, p. 5.

²⁹⁷ *Daily Guardian*, 12/10/28, p. 7.

²⁹⁸ Female Councillors, Nottingham City Council 1924 – 1937:

up a Women's Advisory Committee in 1934 which requested evidence and solicited opinion from the different women's organisations on political issues and women's politics was developing in the city – women were chairing meetings, addressing meetings and leading co-operative ventures to improve the lives and opportunities of women.²⁹⁹

Meanwhile, efforts continued to get women elected. In 1935 the urban council elections for Beeston saw two female candidates.³⁰⁰ In 1934 Mrs Pilsworth was adopted as the Conservative candidate for the Trent ward of the local elections but she did not speak, instead allowing her husband to explain what his wife was like and what views she would be adopting, a situation that was reported without

Date	Name	Party	Date	Name	Party
1924	Caroline Harper	Cons	1933	Caroline Harper	Cons
	Annie Shepherd	Ind		Susannah James	Lab
1926	Caroline Harper	Cons		Elizabeth Hyatt	Lab
	Annie Shepherd	Ind		Bertha Hazard	Cons
	Elizabeth Webber	Cons		Martha Cattle	Cons
	Elizabeth Hyatt	Cons		Sarah Purser	Lab
1928	Caroline Harper	Cons	1934	Caroline Harper	Cons
	Elizabeth Webber	Cons		Susannah James	Lab
	Elizabeth Hyatt	Lab		Elizabeth Hyatt	Lab
1929	Caroline Harper	Cons		Bertha Hazard	Cons
	Elizabeth Webber	Cons		Sarah Purser	Lab
	Elizabeth Hyatt	Lab	1935	Caroline Harper*	Cons
	Susannah James	Lab		Susannah James	Lab
1930	Caroline Harper	Cons		Elizabeth Hyatt	Lab
	Elizabeth Hyatt	Lab		Bertha Hazard	Cons
	Susannah James	Lab		Sarah Purser	Lab
1932	Caroline Harper	Cons	1937	Susannah James	Lab
	Susannah James	Lab		Bertha Hazard	Cons
	Eliza Scattergood	Cons		Sarah Purser	Lab
	Bertha Hazard	Cons		Agnes Hamilton	Cons
	Martha Cattle	Cons			

* Caroline Harper died in office in 1937

Sources: *Nottingham Journal Ready Reference and Date Book* 1925, 1927, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938.

²⁹⁹ DD PP2/3/1 *Minutes and Reports of the South Division Conservative Association's Women's Section, 1935-1949.*

³⁰⁰ *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 12/3/35, p. 4.

comment by the local press.³⁰¹ Nottingham had three female magistrates in 1920 and the small town of Ilkeston, which sits on the border of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire had its first female mayor in 1938.³⁰² These successes were reported in the local press but the elected women never seemed to develop a voice and their contributions are not to be found in the few council minute books that are available for consultation. Paradoxically, this modest progress of women gaining a foothold in local politics came at a time when feminism had seemingly ceased to be a newsworthy topic for the local press.

CITIZENSHIP AND WELFARE

Other work pursued by local organisations was largely concerned with improving the lives of women as citizens of the local and national community. These were not explicitly feminist campaigns in terms of pushing for absolute equality, but they were part of a desire to improve the lived experience of women as wives, mothers and members of a local community. As we have seen, local women were discharging their responsibilities as citizens, and they continued to push for the rights that should accompany them. The inter-war period saw the emergence of opportunities for women to join their own organisations – an opportunity which many had not enjoyed before. These organisations pushed for changes to improve women's lives from within a common-sense acceptance that most women were wives and mothers and wanted to be wives and mothers, so work in this area was more likely to benefit most women. Those who campaigned for citizenship rights

³⁰¹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 20/10/34, p. 7.

³⁰² *Nottingham Evening Post*, 20/7/20, p. 6; 5/1/38, p. 9.

had a “vision ... capacious enough to include the concerns of women who [were] married as well as single, women who [were] mothers as well as women who [did] not choose motherhood.”³⁰³ Yet citizenship was more than a fulfilling domestic life just as it was more than being given the franchise – it was concerned with allowing women to play a full role in society, whichever role(s) they chose to take. The Electrical Association for Women described it as “making women free in a way ... political enfranchisement could never free them” by giving them opportunities and information.³⁰⁴

As Beaumont has outlined, many of the organisations studied rejected the label of “feminist” – from the WIs to the Soroptomists there was an aversion to attaching themselves to a term which had become nationally linked to sex war, the latter insisting it was only about “fellowship and the ideal of service”.³⁰⁵ And, as Thane has commented,

feminists have sometimes criticised women campaigners in the inter-war years for focusing too narrowly on welfare issues concerning women in the home – underestimating how important these issues were given the appalling living conditions of all too many at the time.³⁰⁶

Yet, we see organisations using their newly given political voice to push for change on the social issues that had been of concern for some time – the very

³⁰³ Offen, ‘What is Feminism?’ p. 157.

³⁰⁴ Pursell, C. ‘Domesticating modernity’.

³⁰⁵ DD.SO 2/2 address by Miss Phillips on 14th February 1938.

³⁰⁶ Thane, ‘What difference did the vote make?’ p. 275.

concerns that many women wanted to resolve. A contemporary article commented:

Women have at last won recognition in public life, and now paradoxically, they are turning their attention towards their position in the home and the new growing women's movement is now a purely domestic one.³⁰⁷

The article then goes on to mention the work of the “trade union for housewives” – the Housewives Association which, sadly, has left no records. The “paradox” was recognised at the time as surprising to some, but the campaigns of this new domestic movement were essential in improving the lived experience of women between the wars. To repeat what Eleanor Rathbone said in 1927, “we can demand what we want for women, not because it is what men have got but because it is what women need to fulfil the potentialities of their own natures.”³⁰⁸

Again, a survey of the press allows us to trace the emergence of citizenship concerns in the local arena. Letters in the press dealt with a number of “new feminist” and citizenship issues including debates over birth control and pleas from political agents imploring women to use their votes.³⁰⁹ The *Nottingham, Notts. and Bulwell Local News* reported on a meeting held by the Conservatives to educate women voters. The women who ran the lunchtime meeting told the

³⁰⁷ *Nottingham Journal*, 10/4/28 ‘The Science of Housekeeping: The New Women’s Movement and its Aims’, p. 7.

³⁰⁸ Repeat of quote note 178 chapter 2. Land, ‘Eleanor Rathbone’, in Smith (ed), *British Feminism* p. 115.

³⁰⁹ *Daily Guardian*, 12/5/24, p. 6; 27/10/24, p. 8. The letters on birth control were mostly about the morality of sex outside of marriage but the fact that the issue was being discussed indicates that national and women’s organisations had raised the issue in the local political consciousness.

women present, “when choosing a member of the House of Commons you should do it with as much care as when choosing a husband.”³¹⁰ In 1924 a letter to the *Nottingham Evening Post* on the eve of the election stated:

I would urge the women of Nottingham to be careful tomorrow how they dispose of their country, and their children ... keep England for your children.³¹¹

Part of the duty of the female citizen was to make the world better for future generations.

A Nottingham woman, in 1935, wrote a letter to the local press asking,

what could give a true woman more joy than to look around a shining house and feel it is her efforts that have made it so?³¹²

Along with the often facile praise of the joys of domesticity there were real arguments to be made and campaigns to be waged to improve conditions in the home. Many women activists recognised that campaigns to improve working conditions within the home and make the life of those in the domestic sphere easier was truly work that changed people’s lives. These issues resonated well in the local press as the “acceptable face” of campaigning women. Lunch meetings that called for improved infant welfare and the achievement of family allowances were more widely reported than any calling for sex equality. The women’s columns and domestic tips could be seen as part of this acceptance that women

³¹⁰ *Nottingham, Nott. and Bulwell Local News*, 28/5/22, p. 6.

³¹¹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28/10/24, p. 3.

³¹² *Daily Guardian*, 27/9/29, p. 7.

deserved to have a life that was easier, although the fact that this columns became the dominant feature of female visibility in the press shows that the forces of domesticity were still keen to confine women to their “separate sphere”.

In 1930 the NCW set up a new section – the League of Household Service – to recognise and reward increased efficiency in the home – homes where, for many of the members, they no longer had resident servants. They successfully campaigned to encourage the Ministry of Labour to establish training centres to train young women in “home occupations”. The desire to improve the living and working conditions of the housewife enthused also those women who joined the Electrical Association for Women and studied for qualifications in maintenance and repairing electrical equipment. Although this was essentially rewarding domestic prowess, this elevation of the status of “women’s work” was challenging their place as a second-class member of the home; it was encouraging the separate but equal agenda of the New Feminist.

Elsewhere, girls were being told of the importance of “laying the foundations of thousands of future happy homes” and the importance of developing an ethos of service to others.³¹³ Thus inter-war citizenship was conceived in terms of motherhood and service to the community as well as the need to be politically well-informed. Girls in Warsop’s Friendly Society were encouraged to be involved in a variety of “departments” including literature, citizenship and

³¹³ *Daily Guardian*, 28/1/23 reporting on Mayor Manning’s remarks to the Nottingham Girl Guides Association Rally, attended by over 1000 girls; *Daily Guardian*, 27/10/24 reporting on the Bishop of Southwell’s sermon addressed to girl guides.

employment.³¹⁴ Girl Guides were awarded badges in many domestic disciplines and the girls' clubs festival showcased girls' achievements in crochet, knitting, embroidery and story telling.³¹⁵ The Guides also, however, rewarded practical skills such as tent pitching, team work and life saving. In 1931 only one of the eighteen badges for character and intelligence was offered for "home-maker"; the others being awarded for astronomy, surveying, Braille and interpreting.³¹⁶ Girls were not expected to be quiet, demure and gentle but instead to be active and self sufficient. In 1936 the local aim of the movement was,

To develop good citizenship among girls by forming their character; training them in ... self reliance; ... to promote their health through physical training.³¹⁷

Domestic skills were here part of a broader agenda of equipping girls for adulthood. The women who ran such groups were also developing their own gender awareness and became increasingly involved in feminist issues such as improving the position of women in Palestine and developing themselves as participating citizens.³¹⁸ The connections between educating girls for life and promoting the acquisition of domestic skills were also evident in other campaigns to improve girls' elementary education. The Nottingham Education Committee established specialist "Domestic Centres" to educate working girls and

³¹⁴ DD 142/13/1 *First Warsop Branch Girls' Friendly Society*

³¹⁵ DD 1663/7/1 *Commissioners and Secretaries Minute Book*, Nottingham and Notts Girl Guides Association – Programme for Rally 24th October 1927. Domestic badges included basketworker, lacemaker, knitter, milliner, needlewoman, cobbler and dairymaid; DD 1566/1/12 *Minute book of the Nottingham Girls' Clubs Festival 1924-1946* 8/2/24.

³¹⁶ DD 1663/65/4 *Brown's Girl Guide Diary* 1931

³¹⁷ DD 1663/57/5 Nottingham and Notts Guides Association *Programme for Grand Demonstration 1936*.

³¹⁸ DD 1566/1/1 *Minutes of the Nottingham and Notts Union of Girls' Clubs 1935-1946*.

supplement the facilities of schools. In 1920 1512 girls completed tests in laundry work, 1301 in cookery and 677 in basic housewifery whilst proposed courses in physical instruction were cancelled.³¹⁹ The women also had to decide the curriculum for evening schools for senior girls and here too we find a schedule of domestic subjects on offer. A young woman in Nottingham could study Advanced Needlework, Domestic Handicraft, Dressmaking, Nursing, Continuation Cookery and Deportment and Speech.³²⁰ The training schemes run by Southwell House offered similar subjects to train “fallen girls” how to become domestically proficient.³²¹ A focus on perfecting these skills among girls of all classes, supported by local councils and other key groups, elevated domestic aptitude – it became worthy of study and a woman could aspire to have her domestic proficiency rewarded with qualifications. Such qualifications allowed women to have their skills recognised by the wider community: they were presented as laying the basis for a life of domesticity but also for one of active citizenship. The two were presented as compatible and the high numbers of middle-class women involved in Nottingham organisations suggests that the members also viewed the two as harmonious.

³¹⁹ CA.CM/Ed 11/2/1 *Minutes of the Ladies Sub Committee (Elementary School Committee Section) 1910-1920* Nottingham Education Committee_24/2/20; CA.CM/Ed 11/2/2 *Minutes of the Ladies Sub Committee (Elementary School Committee Section) 1920-1930* Nottingham Education Committee.

³²⁰ CA.CM/Ed 11/3/1 *Minutes of the Ladies Sub Committee (Secondary School Committee Section) 1910-1923* Nottingham Education Committee 29th May 1919, 6th December 1922; CA.CM/Ed 11/3/2 *Minutes of the Ladies Sub Committee (Secondary School Committee Section) 1923-1931* Nottingham Education Committee.

³²¹ DD 1038/6/2/1-9 47th *Report of Southwell House Training Home and Moral Welfare Centre* (1932); DD 1038/1/1 *Minutes of the Annual Meetings of Southwell House 1916-1952* has the Bishop of Southwell complaining that, “greater freedom and independence of the modern girl made rescue work today extraordinarily difficult,” (15/3/29) .

The citizenship campaigns were based on the belief expressed by the Lord Mayor addressing the Soroptomists in 1937:

women have a point of view which men could never hope to have. They have a part in civic, social and private life which is essential to the welfare of the world ... there is so much in civic duties which concerns and belongs entirely to the province of women.³²²

The conviction that a womanly perspective was needed on issues affecting the whole community was also characteristic of the NCW, who sought to rally women to action on Temperance, the care of the mentally ill, the raising of the moral standard, and the importance of training girls in domestic skills. They also formulated resolutions on prohibition, Poor Law Reform, housing, adoption, child safety and cinema censorship.³²³ In the later 1920s, even as membership declined, there was still vigorous discussion of contemporary issues including campaigns for the Playing Fields Association, slum clearance, the examination of the Kellogg Peace Proposals and education for the new women voters - 'it is our responsibility to endeavour through our organisation to make sure that the female voter shall be an informed voter.'³²⁴ These were not "feminist" aspirations but such campaigning work educated women about public speaking, fund-raising and lobbying politicians –all part of a wider citizenship education.

³²² DD.SO2/1, 17/3/37.

³²³ DD 748/3 *National Council of Women (Nottingham Branch), Executive Meeting Minutes of the National Union of Women Workers, 1910-June 1921*; DD 748/6/1 22nd July 1937, 7th March 1938.

³²⁴ DD 748/5 11 March, 1929.

Similar aspirations for women's involvement in community issues, especially practical concerns, were shared by the Nottinghamshire WIs. Women, in the eyes of the WIs, held the primary role of rural wife and mother, and the immediate needs of such women were more important than equal suffrage, or issues such as the campaign against the marriage bar. Focus was centred on campaigns concerning food, heating, housing and post offices. Yet, the 1930s saw Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire WI members also discussing and making resolutions on issues such as food contamination, school milk, prevention of war, women's employment, and even birth control.³²⁵ They were discussing how to get the best out of fruit, but they were also looking around them to see what needed to be improved, and making efforts to secure those improvements. Feminist aims were considered, especially when they were seen to affect women's various roles as citizens.³²⁶ Fritchley WI was successful, in 1924, in winning a half day holiday for their local postman, which although not 'feminist' in itself, gave the local women their first taste of planning and executing a specific campaign.³²⁷ Nottinghamshire WIs campaigned successfully against proposals to build a railway line through Sherwood Forest in 1925.

Family policies were of particular interest to many groups and the campaign for family allowances was well-supported in Nottingham. They were discussed and

³²⁵ Taylor, *History of the WI in Notts*. Archives of the Derbyshire Federation of WIs; *Derby Evening Telegraph*, February, 1934.

³²⁶ The issue of the female vote, and how best to use it was discussed annually at the County Conferences, and reported in the *Handbooks and Annual Reports* published throughout the period by the Nottinghamshire Federation.

³²⁷ Crane et al., *Fritchley WI*.

supported by the NCW, Soroptomists, WIs and Labour Women's Sections.

Proficient, patriotic housewives could save the nation from terrible hardship in the 1920s as the ex-suffragette Flora Drummond wrote to the *Nottingham Evening Post* in March 1931,

When women have the use of the money they spend it wisely enough; they can afford to do no other ... Their influence is great and I want to ask them to use it to the utmost for the sake of their country and their homes.³²⁸

The NCW was concerned with improving the standard of parenting and in January 1930 the members discussed "Knowledge of the Techniques of Marriage, Mother-craft and Father-craft." The importance of a man's role in raising his children was a challenge to the traditional idea of women being responsible for all areas of child-rearing except, perhaps, for discipline.³²⁹ Child welfare was also on the agenda of a number of WIs including Shottlegate, where an Infant Welfare Centre was set up for the mothers of the village, and Hucknall Nursing Association who organised "mothercraft exhibitions".³³⁰

The Women's Sections of the local political parties did a great deal of work on maternity care and infant welfare. In 1935 the Women's Section of the Broxtowe Labour Party campaigned for the establishment of more maternity hospitals and wrote to local MPs demanding a National Health Service that would improve the

³²⁸ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 12/3/31, p. 8. "General" Flora Drummond was a leading member of the WSPU and formed the Women's Guild of Empire between the wars.

³²⁹ DD748/5 January 1930.

³³⁰ *The History of Shottlegate and District Women's Institute* (Alfreton, 2000), p. 21.

health of the nation's children.³³¹ The Nottingham NCW sent a resolution about maternal mortality to its national conference in 1935 and worked to improve the lives of children through its campaign to give birth certificates to illegitimate children. It also contributed to the successful passage of the 1922 Criminal Law Amendment Bill, and the exclusion of Clause 2 which allowed men to escape punishment if they claimed they *believed* a girl they had had sex with to be over sixteen.³³² Broxtowe Labour Women had debates and discussions on birth control, widows' pensions, married women's benefits.³³³

The Nottingham NCW were confident and established enough to discuss issues such as birth control and abortion. In fact, they established and ran Nottingham's first birth control clinic in March 1930 after lobbying local MPs through letters and meetings. Later that year Mrs How-Martyn addressed the branch on the importance of encouraging birth control to prevent women becoming the "prey of the abortionist".³³⁴ Birth control was another of those "new" feminist issue that attracted wide support throughout the city and county with a wide range of organisations discussing it – including the WEA.³³⁵ It was an issue that would improve the lives of countless women, and was essential in allowing them to move away from the constraints of repeated childbirth towards development as a full citizen.

³³¹ DD.PP 6/4 .

³³² DD 748/5 May 1935.

³³³ DD.PP/6/3; DD.PP/6/4.

³³⁴ DD 748/5– November 1930. The discussion of the birth control issue was a regular feature of meetings and discussions throughout the 1930s. Resolutions on the issue were sent to National Conference every year.

³³⁵ DD WEA/2/1/2 *Minutes of the Nottingham WEA 1929-1935*.

A NEW AVENUE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIABILITY

Now we have the vote, perhaps in time we may get a tennis court!³³⁶

The final area of activity that the organisations developed was that of leisure provision for women. These groups empowered women by providing them with a female space in which to pursue their own interests and enjoy their own leisure time. These women made an active decision to take advantage of the leisure opportunities and, although by no means were these activities feminist or campaigning ones, they were still an important part of the support provided to women by their own organisations. The need for organised leisure partly arose from a need for social support networks in the new suburban estates but also from a recognition that women were entitled to an outside interest, even if that interest gave her hints for when she returned home. Selina Todd has written about the importance of work as a place of sociability for young working women; the organisations of Nottingham were providing this same vital role for many other women in Nottingham, many of whom were not engaged in paid work outside the home.³³⁷ For the first time many of these women were given a collective voice through membership of an organisation. They were acting independently of men and were empowered by the education, activity and friendship with which they were now surrounded. Some historians remain highly dismissive of the ‘leisure’ function of women’s activism in the public sphere. Jarvis, writing about Conservative women, is scathing about the ‘sociability’ dimension of their

³³⁶ Letter from “Trentside Flapper” in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 29/5/29, p. 5.

³³⁷ Todd, *Young Women*.

activities, declaring that “bazaars, fetes, whist drives and cottage meetings were all very well ... but they could scarcely deal with the socialist threat.”³³⁸

However, there are signs that some historians are seeking to re-evaluate ‘sociability’ as an aspect of public involvement and engagement. Karen Hunt has argued that it is the social aspect of the organisations, in particular the Labour Party, that allowed women greater visibility in the community.³³⁹ It is not the contention of this study that leisure opportunities were a challenge to the social order, but the lack of campaigning zeal within them is also not a reason to ignore their importance completely. They were an important factor in attracting members – once there, women were able to engage with other women and access the other opportunities the organisations afforded them.

The *Nottingham Guardian* published a letter in 1921 which included the following appeal:

I am only a girl ... but I take an intelligent interest in a newspaper ... girls, after their work is done, have nowhere to spend their leisure time.

The respondents suggested various city centre Girls’ Clubs for the provision of physical exercise, singing lessons and instructive lectures for teenagers.³⁴⁰ Many of the women’s organisations provided educational opportunities for their members, often through the form of the weekly or monthly lecture. Although these occasions were often not the basis of future campaigns, they did educate

³³⁸ D. Jarvis, ‘The Conservative Party and the Politics and Gender, 1900-1939’, in M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Barielowska (eds), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996), p. 181.

³³⁹ Hunt ‘Making Politics in Local Communities’.

³⁴⁰ *Daily Guardian*, 8/11/21, p. 9.

women about wider issues – “not only did they offer a chance to get out of the house for serious and commendable motives, but they often put women in touch with masculine subjects.”³⁴¹ The press were willing to publicise the social events of the women’s organisations, even if they did not report the decisions of strategic meetings. Whist drives, garden parties and evening lectures all appeared in the “local happenings” sections of the press. The county’s WIs had lectures on such diverse topics as the National Savings Movement, the League of Nations Union, and the need for Family Allowances through the NFWI’s “Guild of Learners”. The popularity of such lectures implies that rural women were prepared to look outside their own community, and although it cannot be denied that in many local Institutes handicrafts were the most popular activities, and that they constituted much of the public face of the WI movement, this does not indicate that this was all members cared about. The provision of education for working women by the WEA also suggests that women wanted more than lectures on how to make the perfect casserole or sew the neatest hem. In the 1930s women were offered classes on “women in leadership”, the history of science, the philosophy of religion and political theory.³⁴² The local council began to recognise this shift and also began to run courses which offered an alternative to domestic accomplishment. Secondary age girls were presented with the opportunity to study accounts and, in 1920, adult women were offered classes in citizenship – an acknowledgement that there was a demand for education to prepare women for

³⁴¹ Pursell, ‘Domesticating modernity,’ p. 65.

³⁴² DD WEA/2/1/2 *Minutes of the Nottingham WEA 1929-1935*.

their more active role in society.³⁴³ The city saw the establishment of a number of “Advance Clubs” for women who wanted to pursue more intellectual interests – they had 297 female members in 1927 and offered citizenship classes twice a week in addition to opportunities to study French, art, debating, business English and psychology.³⁴⁴

Handicrafts and the acquisition or showcasing of other domestic skills such as jam-making and cake-baking played a large role in the social life of WI members with local and national exhibitions held regularly. Classes to educate women in rural skills were organised by County Federations, and in the 1920s Fritchley WI saw classes in, amongst others, embroidery, needlework, upholstery, fruit bottling, cake icing and country dancing.³⁴⁵ A recently composed poem about interwar WIs emphasises the domestic and recreational nature of many groups:

Started in the year of peace,
Thankful when the war had ceased ...

Laughed and cooked, competed, won,
Scrubbed and worked to carry on.

Talks and lectures, lantern slides,
Country ventures, more besides.

Garden parties, picnics, trips,
Whist drives, crafts and lucky dips ...

World War Two they prepared their pans;

³⁴³ CA.CM/Ed 11/3/1 Nottingham Education Committee 29 May 1919, 3 June 1920.

³⁴⁴ CA.CM/Ed 11/3/2 Nottingham Education Committee 28 April 1927; 29 May 1930.

³⁴⁵ Crane (et. el.) *Fritchley W. I.* p. 5.

Collecting fruit and making jams ...³⁴⁶

Newark Labour Party Women's Section also held sewing nights for its members.

The existence of special sections of the press for women was also in recognition of the fact that women deserved a cultural space where their needs and interests were catered for. Part of the inter-war leisure boom for women was the development of such specialist articles, alongside the boom in women's magazines.³⁴⁷ Although the columns in the local press contained many household tips, they also included an acceptance that women should have the time to focus solely on themselves – their clothes, their beauty, and their cultural interests.

The social aspects of Nottingham's women's organisations cannot be ignored as they were essential in allowing the organisations to flourish. Undoubtedly most members of the organisations demonstrated little interest in the strategic committee meetings, but a large part of their desire to join was for the social aspects of meeting up with like-minded women for the purposes of diversion and relaxation.

THE DOMINANCE OF THE DOMESTIC: STIFLING OR AFFIRMATIVE?

Even when women were full-time housewives, there is little sign that women were confining themselves to home and family in the period between the wars.

³⁴⁶ Vivien B. Deauville Lane, 1988 as quoted in *The History of Shottlegate and District Women's Institute* p. 13.

³⁴⁷ Ferguson, *Forever Feminine*.

Even if they valued their domestic role and spent time discussing dressmaking and preserve bottling, they also had time to pursue wider interests. The historian studying the activities of organised women in Nottingham between the wars finds a huge diversity of campaigns, some of which were unmistakably targeted at achieving equality and enhancing the role of women as citizens in public life, through campaigns such as that for the equal suffrage and improved professional opportunities. Others were much more clearly focused on affirming and valuing the domestic and family role of women – of improving conditions for homemakers through the fight for family allowances and the need for access to birth control. Interpreting and evaluating this “domestic” dimension of the organisations’ work has, as we have seen, provoked much disagreement among women’s and gender historians, on a spectrum from Berkovitch’s claim that the organisations did nothing to challenge the domestic sphere and were thus ineffective, to Maggie Andrews’ claims that a desire to improve rural milk supply was really indicative of feminist intentions.³⁴⁸ This study seeks to reconstruct the local context of women’s campaigning, including public opinion as reflected in the local press, in order to illuminate and better understand the concept of the “domestic” within organised women’s campaigning. It is therefore also important to recognise the extent to which the local press expressed a view that did not so much celebrate and affirm domesticity as an enriching choice for women, but instead – particularly after the achievement of full suffrage in 1928 – offered a prescriptive, moralising and deeply conservative view of women’s place in society. In essence this view was focused on the proper role of the married

³⁴⁸ Berkovitch, *From Motherhood to Citizenship*; Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*.

woman – it might be acceptable for young wage-earners and single professional women to ask for more equality in their roles, but such equality had no place within the domestic sphere.

The inter-war years saw, in the press, a local mirroring of the national antagonism towards women who did not give up their war work for the returning men and the depression years saw anger at women who were accused of allowing employers to keep wages low. Throughout the two decades resentment of the married woman worker was pronounced. Women's capacity to be successful as workers was questioned and the upsetting of the natural balance whereby a man supported his woman was bemoaned.³⁴⁹ The female readership did not write back in their own defence (or were not published) and when they did express anger about anything their annoyance was quickly neutralised by respondents quoting the Bible or "natural law".³⁵⁰ A writer calling himself "a layman" wrote, Investigations prove that man is the superior animal and likely to remain so. It is customary to pretend many nice things about women, but science sweeps pretence aside.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ "I find women a dead failure in business ... inclined to be hysterical ... inefficient and frivolous," wrote a reader of the *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News*, 26/2/27, p. 7. A correspondent to the *Nottingham Evening Post* wrote that, "it is an understood thing in England that a man should maintain his wife." 5/7/33, p. 7.

³⁵⁰ A woman wrote to the *Daily Guardian* on 12th July 1933 expressing outrage that two nurses had been dismissed for the act of wearing trousers. She was answered by a reader who asserted that, "there has always been a natural instinct that the male and female should be distinguished by dress. It is so in the animal kingdom." p. 8. On the issue of women wearing trousers "Mere Man" wrote to the *Nottingham Evening Post* to quote the Bible (Deut. 22.5) "the woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man." 27/7/33, p. 8.

³⁵¹ *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News*, 17/9/27 p. 7.

The domestic ideal became something to aspire to, and something that was incompatible with other “freedoms”,

If a girl requires constant excitement, late hours and jazz, she should avoid marriage as she is unfit to make a good wife or mother.³⁵²

Indeed, column inches were more likely to offer women what the newly emerging magazines offered them – tips on how to be a better housewife and mother – and thus reinforced the place of women as being firmly in the home. These tips were not the training offered by some educational groups, but strategies for keeping your husband happy and brightening your room with loose fabrics. Cooking, gardening, fashion, childcare and gossip were the staple ingredients of the columns. In September 1925 the *Notts County Chronicle* published an article entitled “What women ought to know” but, rather than telling women about politics or news it advised women on how to choose pearls and why small hats were preferable to large ones. These pages were aimed at middle-class women or the aspiring working class wife, and women were commended for understanding how to create a domestic idyll. Labour saving devices were lavishly praised, handicrafts were extolled and romance was king. The *Nottingham Guardian* included a daily fashion plate and its columns in 1934 included articles on pink bedrooms, eyebrows, children’s frocks, neck care, cocktails and how to ensure you were not dull for your husband. 1937 saw articles on wrinkles, almond paste icing, saving soap and fur coats.³⁵³ The *Evening Post* produced much the same.

³⁵² Ibid. 19/2/27, p. 7.

³⁵³ *Nottingham Guardian*, 27/7/34, 28/8/34, 12/2/37.

Articles in “Woman’s Ways” included “possibilities of the gooseberry” in May 1926, “autumn schemes for curtains” in April 1927 and “continental ways with onions” in November 1933. Serialised fiction was common, with a dominant message that marriage was the key to a happy and fulfilled life.³⁵⁴

Girl readers were also increasingly catered for. The *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* included a section on its women’s page that advised girls on love and life, counselling them to be “natural” and “well trained for domesticity”.³⁵⁵ In an article entitled “Does a flapper make a good wife” the female author writes,

No man wishes to marry an exhausted, weary, sophisticated, physically burnt out wife to cure her of cigarette smoking, drinking and excessive rouging,

and in 1928 girls are warned,

there’s a lot of talk, lately, about freedom for women ... we like to see girls take an interest in outside things, so long as they don’t neglect the essential at home.³⁵⁶

When the *Evening Post* advised girls on the four elements of being an active citizen, it taught litter picking, the use of umbrellas, not cheating and not

³⁵⁴ *Nottingham Guardian*, 13/6/36. The *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* published a series of stories in 1926 with edifying titles including “Wives Worth Winning”, “Winning a Man” and “Charm that is Real”.

³⁵⁵ *Nottingham, Notts, and Bulwell Local News*, 29/11/24, p. 7.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 10/4/26, p. 6; 11/8/28, p. 7.

loitering.³⁵⁷ In 1925 the *Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News* issued the “Ten Commandments for a Happy Marriage”. These included:

1. Dress and act as well after marriage as you did before.
2. Cook wholesome food and serve it attractively.
3. When he gets a holiday don't make him use the time to do ...
housecleaning but urge him to have a complete mental change.
6. Join him in his admirations – even though they be of a prettier woman.
9. Nagging is usually the first cause of a divorce

Mother shall not boss the house and family ... Every man craves to be a hero to some woman.³⁵⁸

In 1932, there was an article about the attack on female teachers in Nottingham by Councillor W.E. Hopkin where his views on women as being lacking in enterprise and ambition were reported without comment or challenge.³⁵⁹

Finally, even as the international crisis developed the women's pages continued, seemingly oblivious, so the August 1939 articles in “Woman and her Ways” in the *Evening Post* included dinner dresses, gold jewellery, savoury rice and day beds, reinforcing the view that national and international politics were not the concern of women. The 4th September had articles on that season's colours and the correct length of skirt.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ *Evening Post*, 17/6/26, p. 6.

³⁵⁸ *Nottingham, Notts. And Bulwell Local News*, 3/1/25, p. 7.

³⁵⁹ *Nottingham Guardian*, 12/2/32, p. 6.

³⁶⁰ *Evening Post* 7th, 8th, 14th and 17th August 1939.

Interpreting this apparent trend in the local press towards a narrower interpretation of women's interests poses a challenge. It is clear from the evidence on organized women's activities and the topics of their discussions that there were many women with broader concerns than food, fashion and winning a man. It could be argued that the narrow range of topics presented to women as 'their interests' in the local press merely reflected the editorial decisions of men with little appreciation of the diversity of interests and aspirations currently engaging Nottingham's female population. However, it may be that women readers viewed such fare as a harmless distraction and an enjoyable, frivolous accompaniment to their continued interest in news and current affairs catered for elsewhere in the daily paper. After all, it is not unusual today for educated, politically active women to take an interest in beauty or gossip magazines. Therefore it cannot be definitely said that these pages represent women's only concerns. What is evident, however, is that the pages continued to attract readers and, perhaps more importantly, advertisers. The number of them grew as our period progresses suggesting that they either met some need or provided an ideal for Nottingham women.

The organisations were also exposed to such views - in 1929 the members of the Nottingham branch of the NCW were treated to a lecture entitled "Women from a Bachelor's Point of View" in which Bernard Johnson, a musician, told them,

Women are a trifle deficient as a rule in logic, but they make up for it by a certain quality which we call courage ... The best type of man continues to admire most the really feminine women.³⁶¹

Even when women's political work was recognised it was often reduced to being an extension of their accepted role. So, for example, when the League of Nations Union was addressed in 1922 the women were told that it was good for them to work for the League because it would benefit their children.³⁶² Speaking to the Primrose League in 1923 Mrs Mitchell referred to women as the future political power brokers as they were, "the mothers of the men that rule."³⁶³ In 1928 the Beeston Conservative Association almost appointed a woman President but at the last moment they decided against it as it was not a "woman's role" and the Long Eaton Labour Party discussed the need to reinforce to young women that they were "potential mothers" and should behave accordingly.³⁶⁴ Of the 26 resolutions discussed by the Broxtowe Labour Party in 1925 only one concerned women specifically – that of equal suffrage – and women's concerns were not routinely mentioned at meetings. The political parties were far too keen to use their Women's Sections as tea providers and raffle organisers rather than genuine colleagues in fighting for political change.

Interpreting the evidence of organised women's priorities and activities in the light of this conservative climate could lead one to several different conclusions.

One could take the view that the domestic emphasis of many of the organised

³⁶¹ DD 748/5 February 1929.

³⁶² *The Nottingham, Notts and Bulwell Local News*, 25/2/22, p. 5.

³⁶³ *Ibid.* 21/4/23, p. 6.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 31/3/28, p. 4, 27/4/29, p. 5.

women's activities was reflective of a conformist desire not to go beyond what was socially acceptable in the field of women's rights. It could be argued that this promotion of domesticity, though important in enhancing self-esteem, did little to challenge gender inequality, and thus acted as a brake upon more progressive impulses within the organisation concerned. Alternatively, it could be argued that the organised women presented a different view of domesticity than the press did, combining it with a wider view of women's lives. Rather than conforming to a template of an ideal married woman, they were able to celebrate women's autonomy and competence within this field – acknowledging the sources of pleasure and fulfilment women found in the domestic arena rather than presenting the arena as one of pure duty and drudgery.

The existence of anti-feminist views in local public life, therefore, did not necessarily mean that feminism did not exist in Nottingham's women's organisations at this time. Often the women in the organisations did not label themselves as feminist because of the connotations the word had, yet these same women were campaigning for equality and an improvement in the everyday lives of women as citizens.

In conclusion, through various categories of work we can see that the women's organisations of Nottingham were active and campaigning on many issues. These organisations show the "flourishing thought" that Helen Jones describes in her book *Women in British Public Life*.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 133.

True, they did not represent all Nottingham women. Most were dominated by the social elite, and often by the exact same people. Even if we add together all those women involved in organisations at this time it still forms only a tiny minority of the women who lived in Nottingham and the surrounding areas. Given that most women were involved in more than one group, the proportion falls even further. On the whole these were upper and middle-class women, living in the leafy suburbs and private estates who were continuing an almost Victorian paternalism in their attempts to improve the lives of the poor around them. Yet for the whole of the inter-war period they battled against shifting social expectations of womanhood and domestic responsibility to ensure that areas of concern to their members and the wider female community were being pursued and pushed into the local consciousness.

CHAPTER FOUR: WAR AND THE WELFARE STATE – WOMEN AND THEIR ORGANISATIONS 1939-1949

As highlighted in Chapter One, the study of women at war, and the debate about the impact of the war on women's lives is an established one, yet study of the impact of their organisations during the Second World War and its aftermath is still in its infancy. There is a gap in the literature which has, until now, been perceived as proof that the women's organisations were not willing or able to continue effective campaigning through the 1940s. Yet evidence presented in this study suggests that most of them tried to maintain their campaigning momentum, and that this impetus was enhanced by new organisations – both in wartime and in the years that succeeded the conflict. This chapter will discuss the national changes and issues of concern to these organisations, before turning once again to the local experience. Although this period is quieter for the big organisations than the two decades which preceded it, this could partly be ascribed to the lack of division within the movement. All talk of "old" and "new" feminism is abandoned, and the organisations worked even more closely together to try and achieve advances in both categories. A local study becomes even more important during the war, where we see local activity having a huge impact on people's day-to-day lives. Helen Jones argues that the war made the local community paramount; that during the war "community was firmly rooted in a specific location" and that the experiences of war "enhanced people's attachment to these

places”.³⁶⁶ Previous work by Sonya Rose makes the case that national generalisations about the war are inadequate because of gender and class distinctions; Jones encourages further local study to get a true understanding of the importance of this period in the regions. In addition to their local war work, however, Nottingham women were still focussed on the “bigger picture” of women’s rights. In Nottingham we will find an active group of organisations who continued their feminist and citizenship campaigns alongside their determination to meet the new challenges presented by the war, and new organisations that developed in the post-war period to meet the new opportunities and difficulties presented by continuing economic crises, rationing and the establishment of the Welfare State.

BRITISH WOMEN 1939-1949

An overview of women’s lives during this period would include dramatic changes in employment, social activity and political representation. War brought deprivation and loneliness for many, but also opportunities and radically altered life chances for some. The practicalities of war hit women early as rationing was introduced in January 1940 and female unemployment was still relatively high as unions were unwilling to let skilled men be replaced by female labour. The unions were appeased and the National Service (Number Two) Act of December 1941 directed unmarried woman and childless widows aged 18-23 into work or the armed services. Many other women joined the workforce. By 1943 7.75 million women were engaged in paid work meaning that 80% of married women and 90%

³⁶⁶Jones, *British Civilians in the front line*, p. 200; p. 202.

of single women contributed to the war effort, a huge acceleration of the inter-war trend of increasing percentages of women joining the labour force.³⁶⁷ Almost two million women worked in munitions and 80 000 worked for Civil Defence; half a million extra women undertook white collar work whilst 80 000 worked in agriculture in the Land Army.³⁶⁸ Although the trade unions did not permit women to undertake apprenticeships and women were only able to join general unions until 1943, female union membership rose from 970,000 to 1,870,000 by 1943 and by 1942 Anne Loghlin became the elected chair of the TUC General Council.³⁶⁹ Many skilled occupations remained “reserved” but many jobs were broken into semi-skilled tasks, and the Ministry of Labour established centres to train women in basic engineering.³⁷⁰ Women also worked as postwomen, clerks, typists, air-raid wardens, nurses and bus conductresses (where they were paid equal rates to men – and more than any other group of women workers).³⁷¹ The vast majority of women did not enjoy equal pay rates but many of the women workers had not earned their own money since they married, and many earned more in factories than they had ever been paid before.³⁷²

³⁶⁷ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, pp. 167-175. All women under 45 were registered by October 1942.

³⁶⁸ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 173.

³⁶⁹ Douie, *Daughters of Britain*, p. 5.

³⁷⁰ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 99.

³⁷¹ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, pp. 180-181.

³⁷² In 1942 the average earnings of adult women were £2 4s 2d, whilst for men it was £4 19s 3d. Source: Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 98; Female bus and tram conductors were awarded equal pay to their male counterparts in April 1940 but were never allowed to become drivers. In the ARP men were paid £3 18s 6d whilst women were paid £2 15s 0; in the forces women received 2/3 of the pay of men and less food, and in the civil service the bonuses for women were less than for men. Source: Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*.

Women also helped the war effort by joining one of the armed services and the acceptance of women serving alongside men in a number of areas did much to promote the idea of women being more than one to keep the “home fire burning”. Women could join the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the Navy, Army and Airforce Institute (NAAFI) or the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS). Within the services women were recruited to fill many positions including telephonists, mechanics, drivers, medics, balloon operators, parachute packers, draughtswomen, projectionists, cooks, book-keepers and maids.³⁷³ In 1941 the ATS appealed to women by telling them that “it has been proved that girls and women can do some of [the Army’s] most important activities as well as men,” and the services employed 467,000 women by the summer of 1944.³⁷⁴ The work that married women undertook meant that ¾ million women with children under fourteen were regularly working outside the home and childcare became an important concern; by 1944 1500 state nurseries had been established to meet the growing need.³⁷⁵ Married women had worked before but childcare had been provided by other family members. As the realities of a protracted conflict sometimes prevented this, the government was compelled to start providing for the children whose mothers were being encouraged into work. They also, from 1943, introduced many part-time positions in factories to encourage even more women to join the labour force – by 1944 900 000 women were working part-time.³⁷⁶ These economic changes resulted in issues such as

³⁷³ M-O A: TC32/1/G Recruitment Material for Women’s Services 1941.

³⁷⁴ M-O A: TC32/1/G Recruitment Material for Women’s Services 1941 – ATS 7/11/41.

³⁷⁵ Riley, *War in the Nursery*.

³⁷⁶ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 96.

equal pay, day nurseries, equal compensation and family allowances being placed firmly in the spotlight for the policy makers.

In the realm of politics, the female MPs responded to the outbreak of war by forming a cross party caucus – the Woman-Power Committee – in May 1940 to start “pressing for women to make gains from the increased demand for their labour.”³⁷⁷ In March 1941 they introduced the Woman Power debate into the House of Commons and were steadfast in campaigning for equal compensation for women who had suffered war injuries (which they achieved in April 1943), equal pay (in which they were partially successful when the 1944 Education Act established equal pay for women teachers), and in raising issues of salvage, day nurseries, rehabilitation and refugees into the House. The female MPs did not always act together but the respect that they, and other political women, attracted resulted in substantial parliamentary change in 1945. Women were encouraged to stand as candidates for the 1945 parliamentary elections by the Women for Westminster campaign group and in that year 24 women were elected as MPs, suggesting that “the wartime work of political women had impressed the electorate.”³⁷⁸ The shift towards the Labour Party was to herald a number of important changes in the lives of women, not least the establishment of the Welfare State. Ellen Wilkinson was Minister of Education from 1945 until her death in 1947, although the newer MPs were less visible and rarely spoke at

³⁷⁷ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 95.

³⁷⁸ Brittain, *Lady into Woman*. 87 women had stood. Of the women MPs 21 represented labour and there was one each for the Liberal and Conservative Parties and one Independent (Eleanor Rathbone).

Labour Conferences. Between 1945 and 1959 there were five women Chairs of the Labour Party and five female Chairs of the Conservative and Unionist Association.³⁷⁹ Women had crossed a threshold – women MPs were still unusual but women’s involvement in national politics was no longer abnormal.

Much of the information and advice women received both during and after the war came through the women’s magazines such as *Woman’s Own* and *Good Housekeeping*, who worked closely with the government to provide advice for a great many women.³⁸⁰ They regularly explained government directives for the lay woman and consistently pushed the message of women as essential to the winning of victory. They validated a multiplicity of roles and gathered an audience of loyal readers “united as never before under the flag of femininity and the Union Jack.”³⁸¹ Despite this wartime message of acceptable participation, however, the post-war period witnessed the magazines “encouraging the female labour force back to kitchen concerns and the homemaker role.”³⁸² They fully supported the pronatalist policies of the new Labour government, worried by the 1944 Royal Commission on Population and the 1946 Survey of Childbearing in Britain, but they also increased the public discussion about companionate marriage.³⁸³ Although each magazine made their own editorial decisions, recent work has

³⁷⁹ Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement*.

³⁸⁰ N. Walker (ed.), *Women’s magazines 1940-1960: gender roles and the popular press* (Boston, 1998).

³⁸¹ Ferguson, *Forever Feminine* p. 20.

³⁸² Ferguson, *Forever Feminine* p. 21.

³⁸³ Summerfield, ‘Approaches to women and social change’, p. 77.

indicated that they promoted, in the post-1945 period, an interestingly monolithic view of the role of women, especially the young wife and mother.³⁸⁴

This post war period saw many women gratefully returning home from their war work, others angry about their demoted status and some who continued to work and gain independence from that work. By 1947 nearly two million women had left work.³⁸⁵

When I was in the steel works I did a man's job but when my husband was demobbed I left my job to join him and anyway the men ... needed jobs.³⁸⁶

Once victory was assured, many women were encouraged to return to the home, due to a fear about the falling birth-rate and the impact this would have on the power of Britain when it was facing the loss of its empire.³⁸⁷ The *Royal Commission on Population* was appointed in 1944, a year in which the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, declared that a normal family ought to have three or four children.³⁸⁸ But, of course, such families needed to have a married couple at their helm. Social norms had undergone some change because of the war, with some people's attitude towards marriage and the family undergoing a shift. One indication of this was the increase in the divorce rate from six thousand divorces in 1938 to over fifteen thousand in 1945.³⁸⁹ This was a result of the liberalisation of the divorce laws in 1937, and a slight relaxation of sexual morality during the

³⁸⁴ Walker, *Women's Magazines*.

³⁸⁵ S. Carruthers, ' "Manning the Factories", ' p. 233

³⁸⁶ Joan Brierley interviewed for: North East Derbyshire College, *In Living Memory: Women's Lives this century, an oral history project* Vol. 1 (Derbyshire, 1990).

³⁸⁷ Summerfield, *Women Workers*.

³⁸⁸ Cited in Pugh *Women and the Women's Movement*, (1992) p. 294.

³⁸⁹ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, Chapter 12.

time of national crisis, as discussed by Martin Pugh. Pugh also quotes a married man's fears in 1944:

Sexual morality has decayed a great deal in recent years, and the war has spurred on a process already set in motion earlier. Promiscuity is no longer considered wicked ... No one seems to see any value in fidelity to one and the same partner.³⁹⁰

A rise in divorce placed the issue of equal guardianship of children firmly in the spotlight. There is little evidence, however, for the claim that the war led to a universal change in sexual morality, with some commentators acknowledging that the increase in illegitimate births was simply due to men not being at home to marry their pregnant girlfriends as they had done before the war.³⁹¹ Young, single women were more likely to go into pubs and mix with men at work but were not abandoning the sexual mores of a resolutely conservative society.

The legacy of the war and concerns over the falling birth-rate was women once again being exalted for their domestic role and their key place in a traditional family, as explored by Marilyn Lake.³⁹² As a result they were encouraged to leave work in favour of full-time domestic duties and child-rearing.³⁹³ When the war was over a number of child-rearing experts wrote that it was vital for a child's development for their mother to be at home. A new breed of child psychologists,

³⁹⁰ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, (1992) p. 270.

³⁹¹ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 114.

³⁹² M. Lake, 'Female Desires: The Meaning of World War Two', *Australian Historical Studies* 24 (1990) 267-84. Although the majority of this article is concerned with Australian policy, Lake also discusses the development of an idealised family elsewhere.

³⁹³ Carruthers, ' "Manning the Factories" '; this is also explored by Jane Lewis in *Women in England*.

including Dr Benjamin Spock in his *Baby and Child Care* (1947) told society that working mothers reared juvenile delinquents – that good “mother-care” was the only way to ensure well-adjusted citizens and thus a well-adjusted society. Society, including many of the women’s organisations, continued to accept that a woman’s prime role was domestic, and that if she has a family this was her most paramount concern and interest. Yet this did not negate the interests she may have held elsewhere (at work, in the community) and “women were not the passive receptacles of gender ideology.”³⁹⁴ Increasingly it was acceptable for older women in particular to engage with wider society. As we shall see later, participation in the local community through political, lobbying and philanthropic work continued to develop.

The notion that that post-war years universally brought a return to motherhood and housework for married women needs further qualification. Although this continued to be the prescribed ideal, the economic crisis which followed the war meant that the same government who had encouraged women to leave the factories to clean and warm their hearths now needed them back to work to help resolve the financial emergency. In 1946 organisations such as the NAAFI advertised for women workers under the headline, “you’re not redundant,” and banks offered business loans to women who had made plans during wartime to realise their dreams.³⁹⁵ Rations became even tighter (rationing continued until 1954) and many married women continued to work part-time once their husbands

³⁹⁴ D. Smith Wilson, ‘A New Look at the Affluent Worker: the Good Working Mother in post-war Britain’, *20th Century British History* 17:2 (2006) 206-229.

³⁹⁵ *Nottingham Guardian*, 6/3/46, p. 1, 17/5/46, p. 1.

had returned. The government used propaganda campaigns to lure women back to work and even considered national service for young women.³⁹⁶ The new working women were engaged in clerical work and light industry and there was some increase in women in the professions since the pre-war period.³⁹⁷ Despite the arguments of some historians that the war had no long-term impact on the lives of women, it is undeniable that it changed the nature and pattern of women's employment. The increased participation in the workplace focused the attention of the organisations on working conditions and the reduction in Treasury subsidy for day nurseries (halved in 1945, abolished in 1946) placed this issue firmly on the agenda in the postwar era. Equal pay and the end of the marriage bar for civil servants and teachers amplified these demands for all women workers but the new Labour government would make no formal commitment to equal pay as a government policy. By 1947 two million women had left the workforce, although there were still many more women workers than there had been in 1939, with 22% of married women with jobs compared to 10% in 1938.³⁹⁸

The war did bring a revival of interest in the woman question because many aspects of life which had been regarded as individual assumed a social

³⁹⁶ W. Crofts, 'The Attlee Government's Pursuit of Women', *History Today* 36 (1986) 29-35.

³⁹⁷ In 1928 there were 2580 women doctors and 82 female dentists. By 1945 this had increased to 7198 and 549 respectively. Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, p. 260.

³⁹⁸ Holdsworth, *Out of the Doll's House*.

Married women workers per 1000 by age group:

	18-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
1931	196	193	138	105	88	66	33	10
1951	n/a	377	252	267	246	221	33	12

Source: Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 150.

Note the huge increase in the numbers of married women workers between the ages of 35 and 64. Work for these women gave them financial security and a degree of social freedom.

significance and became the business of government officials and policy makers.³⁹⁹

The establishment of the welfare state gave family allowances directly to mothers in 1946, extended a man's National Insurance coverage to his wife, introduced maternity benefit and nationalised the health care system under the NHS, giving women doctors the same pay rates as men. Contraceptive advice was more available and obstetric care was improved. But benefits were 25% lower for married women and women who worked in their husbands' businesses were classed as unemployed.⁴⁰⁰ The Beveridge Report that had been the basis of the welfare state expressed a firm belief in the "equal but different" principle and treated a married couple as a single economic unit – thus denying the independent economic rights of married women. Many of his references to women had been couched in terms of the vital nature of their role as housewife and mother – to ensure "the adequate continuance of the British race and the British ideal in the world."⁴⁰¹ Despite this bedrock of domestic idealism, however, the welfare state did make significant advances in improving life for women in a wider sphere, such as employment and achieving a degree of economic independence, and this gave the women's organisations a platform to work from.

Thus, the Second World War and its immediate aftermath presented many women with an entirely new set of challenges and opportunities though the domestic realm of home and family continued to be the dominant arena for the vast

³⁹⁹ Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p. 224.

⁴⁰⁰ Lewis, *Women in England*; Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992).

⁴⁰¹ quoted in Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p. 248.

majority of women. The development of the women's organisations and their campaigns in this period is reflective of this change and continuity; again they focused on the struggle to reach gender equality in some areas, whilst also working to alleviate the struggle many women had to ensure their families were adequately fed and cared for.

NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND ISSUES

As argued in the introduction, the war by no means put a halt to the activities of the women's organisations. Indeed, new organisations emerged to both help the country face its "hour of need" and to supplement the work the other organisations had done in promoting women as full and equal citizens. In 1940 a Mass-Observation survey listed the most prominent women's organisations at the start of the war as: the WVS, ToCH, the Women's Freedom League, the Electrical Association for Women, the Women's International League, the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Women's Catholic League, the National Council of Women, the British Federation of University Women and the Soroptomists.⁴⁰² In January 1940 twenty-one women's organisations met at a WFL Conference entitled "the Status and Future of Women War Workers" where they passed resolutions on security, the cost of living, women in industry, personal injury compensation, evacuation, broadcasting and married women's nationality status.⁴⁰³ These issues were to be the basis of many of the campaigns fought by the women's groups both during

⁴⁰² M-O TC32/4/A/3 *Details of some women's organisations.*

⁴⁰³ M-O TC32/4/H *Report of the Conference of Representatives of Women's Organisations.*

and directly after the war and were fought for jointly by the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations established in 1942. This first formalised collaboration was to set a pattern for the work of the organisations in wartime and beyond.

A wartime source by biographer and essayist Margaret Goldsmith, who looked favourably on the impact the war was having on the importance of women to society, reported the following conversation:

A: Feminism was certainly dead between the wars.

B: No, only dormant. But the war has shaken the apple out of Snow White's throat and she is very much alive again. For the duration she is sitting up and taking notice, but wait till after the war is won!⁴⁰⁴

The most active and popular wartime organisation was the Women's Voluntary Service. They were engaged in a number of vital civil defence jobs and were affiliated to 59 other women's groups – feminist, religious, cultural and professional.⁴⁰⁵ They also had an arm called "Housewives Service" where women would encourage co-operation in their local community in times of crisis, and "bring a feeling of self-reliance and mutual help into almost every street".⁴⁰⁶ The WVS had been established in 1938 by the Home Office and led by Lady Reading as the Women's Voluntary Service for Air Raid Protection, and was intended as a reserve for the civil defence arrangements. In the first few months alone 32,000

⁴⁰⁴ reported in Goldsmith, *Women at War*, p. 178.

⁴⁰⁵ Affiliation to groups would ensure that any correspondence to general organisations from the WVS would be read out at meetings. It also enabled shared membership, preventing members from feeling that they had to choose between organisations.

⁴⁰⁶ M-O TC 32/4/I *Women's Voluntary Service*; J. Hartley (ed), *Hearts Undefeated: Women's writing in the Second World War* (London, 1994), pp. 140-143. Women members of the Housewives Service would undertake training courses in areas such as first aid and home nursing, and then display a card in their window offering their services to the community. Work undertaken would include emergency child care, making tea for emergency workers and helping the elderly.

women enrolled, taking a “chance to give national service without giving up their homes.” “So great was the wish to join the WVS that a one-way traffic system had to be put into operation along the HQs corridors.”⁴⁰⁷ One million women were involved in WVS activity during the war, largely in practical work such as collecting salvage, running canteens, organising the response to evacuees and knitting socks, but also in bringing together all the women’s organisations in an attempt to press for changes to welfare provision. They were mostly a practical rather than a campaigning organisation but they provided opportunities for women to develop in the three key areas of this study – as feminists, citizens and as consumers of culture and relaxation. In 1944, as the final months of the war approached Lady Reading urged the members at the WVS AGM to sacrifice their domestic role for the good of the nation – “forget your home, leave beds unmade, leave the house dirty, don’t look after your husband’s meals.”⁴⁰⁸ This is a remarkable quote. On one hand it could indicate how detached the aristocratic Lady Reading was from the reality of the domestic burden most women were required to carry. Yet viewed another way this is official recognition that the most important role of women in the war was not as housewives, but as workers for the

⁴⁰⁷ E. Burton, *What of the Women: A Study of Women in Wartime* (London, 1941), p. 85; *Women’s Newspaper*, 13/9/40, p. 1.

Membership figures for the WVS:

Date	Housewives Service	Total Membership
March 1943	199 526	776 552
September 1943	275 756	979 091
March 1944	273 127	986 134
September 1944	299 353	992 389
March 1945	296 231	968 242

Source: J. Hinton ‘Voluntarism and the Welfare State: Women’s Voluntary Services in the 1940s’, *Twentieth Century British History* 9/2 (1998), p. 278.

⁴⁰⁸ Lady Reading quotation in Summerfield, ‘Women, War and Social Change’ in Marwick (ed), *Total War and Social Change*.

national good – as full and important citizens. The WVS were universally praised for their work, especially in the press. The *Newark Advertiser*, a weekly local in the north of Nottinghamshire dedicated one of its six pages to WVS work each week, and editorials and adverts in all areas of the press made reference to the important work the WVS did during the war.⁴⁰⁹

Other organisations also balanced war work with campaigning zeal. When war broke out the W.I.s were advised by the National Federation to carry on their monthly meetings and balance their concerns between home and garden (food, handicrafts, health etc.), cultural activity (music, dancing, literature, history) and community work (evacuation, discussion of the international situation, and democracy), all with the aim of “improving and developing the conditions of rural life.”⁴¹⁰ Their work was seen as vital by contemporary feminists such as journalist, CWG member and future Labour MP Elaine Burton:

in this way it is hoped that countrywomen will become more articulate, because freedom of thought and speech, and the knowledge of how to use it, is the basis of democracy.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ An example was a half-page thank you letter from Hoover, published in the press in 1942: “The Hand that held the Hoover helps the bombed! When an incident has occurred, nobody is more welcomed to bombed out, wardens and demolition workers than the WVS with their mobile canteens. Now there is a bite to eat, and a cup of tea to hearten them. That’s only one of the many jobs WVS do, voluntarily, and without pay, and they nearly all have homes to run and families to look after as well. As a token of our very heart-felt admiration for this splendid service we say Salute! From Hoover.” Quoted in Merz, *After the Vote*, p. 72.

⁴¹⁰ M-O TC32/4/G/1 *National Federation of Women’s Institutes: Hints on War-time Programmes*.

⁴¹¹ Burton, *What of the Women?* pp. 91-92. Burton was an MP 1950-1959 and was awarded a life peerage as Baroness Burton of Coventry in 1962. She first stood for Parliament in the Hartlepool by-election in 1943.

The organisations in fact flourished – a Mass-Observation survey of January 1940 claimed that “inside their organisations women are more consciously critical, more questioningly aware,” and the issues that concerned them became issues of national policy.⁴¹² This is a key detail, but the survey sadly does not elaborate on what the women were questioning and what their concerns were. What we do know, however, is that by 1944 a deputation of women’s organisations were able to successfully challenge Beveridge’s plan to pay family allowances to men – again demonstrating a direct success which is less apparent in the inter-war period.⁴¹³

The National Union of Townswomen’s Guilds responded to a Mass Observation questionnaire about their wartime aim by stating that it was “to encourage the education of women to enable them as citizens to make their best contribution towards the common good.”⁴¹⁴ The TWG movement spread through the country during the war and maintained its initial focus on evacuation, food and war work, yet they also joined forces with other organisations to debate the merits of the Beveridge Report. An article written in response to the report in their periodical *The Townswoman in 1943* claimed that the TWG were able to represent a whole spectrum of opinions on women’s role and that the national membership was 50% feminist and 50% not.⁴¹⁵ They claimed that this was why they were able to

⁴¹² M-O A: TC32/1/A/3

⁴¹³ The deputation included members from the Women’s Freedom League, National Council of Women, British Federation of Business and Professional Women, the Open Door Council and the Married Women’s Association. Ref: Parker, “Women MPs, Feminism and Domestic Policy”, p. 149.

⁴¹⁴ M-O TC32/4/G/2 *National Union of Townswomen’s Guilds*.

⁴¹⁵ Merz, *After the Vote*.

represent the “average” woman, but the article does not say how the author was able to arrive at this conclusion. The very fact that the word “feminist” was in accepted usage speaks volumes. The YWCA enrolled 2000 young women into its own war service effort by the end of 1939.⁴¹⁶ The Co-operative Women’s Guild continued to fight for the needs of working men and women alike, although they did lose 33% of their numbers due to the demands of work, and possibly because they openly opposed the conflict. Yet they still engaged in welfare work and also continued their feminist campaigns. In 1942 they discussed the priorities for the year ahead and their list included: equal compensation, working conditions for women, girls’ education and war-time nurseries – the same concerns shared by every other campaigning organisation.⁴¹⁷ They continued into the post-war era when they declared their purpose to “make the ordinary housewife a democratic co-operator and an informed citizen.”⁴¹⁸ New feminist organisations were emerging - in 1940 the Married Women’s Association was formed out of the Six Point Group to

raise the status of the woman whose day’s work is done in her home and to secure for her as good conditions as are enjoyed by workers in the other spheres in regard to certainty of remuneration, reasonable hours, holidays and leisure, health service and protection in old age.⁴¹⁹

New organisations also emerged at the end of the war, including the British Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 1946 for women who owned businesses,

⁴¹⁶ Burton, *What of the Women?*

⁴¹⁷ Gaffin and Thomas, *Caring and Sharing*.

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 149.

⁴¹⁹ M-O A: TC32/4/E/2 *Women’s Organisations 1940*

and the British Housewives League in 1945 who were initially set up to campaign against the continuation of austerity methods. Once the war was over the WVS continued to work in local communities to help them face continued hardship.

Nella Last, a WVS worker, wrote:

Lady Reading had told all the organisers to see that the workers had ‘a good rest’ because their work might not be finished for a while. She said that, whichever government got in, these next two years would be the hardest and most difficult years our country had ever known.⁴²⁰

Membership of the WVS naturally fell as the national emergency lessened. Once the war was over there was less immediate demand for volunteers but members continued to work as Home Helps, to settle displaced persons and to assist in the fuel crises.

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Many of these groups “contributed to discussions about the possibility of a permanent transformation of the social order.”⁴²¹ The campaigns and issues of concern pursued by these organisations were often not about the war at all, although many were prompted by the changes the war and post-war period had brought. The two main areas of concern have been identified by Barbara Caine as 1) allowing women to contribute to the war effort and 2) ensuring women were granted adequate pay and status for their contributions.⁴²² Child care was a

⁴²⁰ Broad and Fleming (ed), *Nella Last's War*, diary entry for 25th June 1945.

⁴²¹ Rose, *Which people's war?* p. 126.

⁴²² Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* .

pressing issue as women were being encouraged to work. Nursery care was limited so campaigns were launched to encourage the government to subsidise nursery places, with the result that they helped to finance, along with local authorities, 71,806 places by 1944.⁴²³ This was undoubtedly a feminist issue, the achievement of which allowed women the freedom to work, although often it was not presented as such; rather it was seen as a necessary evil in a time of national crisis. Another immediate problem, which attracted old feminist organisations such as the WFL was the need for British women to be able to keep their nationality even if they married foreign nationals – a campaign they were successful in winning.

The response to the 1942 Beveridge Report was varied, with the Women's Co-operative Guild criticising the Report because it legalised the perceived secondary importance of a married woman's work and the WFL campaigning against it and in favour of equal benefits for each gender. The WVS however, welcomed it as finally giving some value to the housewife, even if it was less than given to her husband. Nella Last wrote,

I listened to Sir William Beveridge ... His scheme will appeal more even to women than to men, for it is they who bear the real burden of unemployment, sickness, child-bearing and rearing ... Trouble with the menfolk of my generation, they looked on women as 'to be cared for' and did not realise how hard we worked.⁴²⁴

⁴²³ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*.

⁴²⁴ Broad and Fleming (ed), *Nella Last's War*, diary entry for 2nd December 1942.

Women's organisations continued to press for family allowances, with some members, such as Eva Hubback, arguing that they were fairer than equal minimum wages.⁴²⁵ In June 1944 the Family Allowances Bill was introduced and it proposed to pay the allowances to fathers, but the women's organisations, alongside an outraged Eleanor Rathbone in Parliament, worked to force a change and when the Act became law in 1945 payments were made to mothers at the rate of 5/- per week per child. Susan Pedersen describes how Rathbone responded with anger to the initial proposals, largely because of the damage they would do to the position of women in the family and in society, and partly because the whole measure threatened to lead to "sex antagonism".⁴²⁶ She threatened the government with the "women's societies" – a threat she clearly felt was strong enough to merit making. Her determination paid off and the Bill was passed despite antagonism towards it from the Treasury, Ministry of Labour and a lack of whole-hearted support from the front-bench of any party.⁴²⁷ When the National Insurance Act was passed the following year it was discriminatory in awarding women lower levels of benefit, but many women welcomed it despite of, or maybe because of, its emphasis on the essentially domestic nature of women.

The women MPs, as we have seen in the introduction, came together during the war and the Woman Power Committee of MPs (WPC) undertook research into encouraging women to contribute and into their conditions of work, in addition to

⁴²⁵ Burton, *What of the Women?*

⁴²⁶ Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, p. 366. She was supported in her sentiments by Mavis Tate, Nancy Astor, Edith Summerskill and William Beveridge.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 366-7.

co-ordinating the women's organisations and lobbying their male colleagues. They raised votes on the women's services, women's employment, salvage, day nurseries, rehabilitation and refugees and they travelled around the country and to America to gather ideas and share their message of the importance of women.⁴²⁸ They drafted a Bill to end all forms of discrimination, including protective legislation, as the Equal Citizenship (Blanket) Bill. They were not, however, able to introduce it to the House, despite a mass public meeting held in September 1943 addressed by Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Edith Summerskill and Vera Brittain, because of trade union opposition. A significant WPC focus was securing equal compensation for war injuries for women. In this they were joined by the Open Door Council, the Six Point Group, the Women's Freedom League and the Fabian Women's Group, as well as the National Women's Citizens Association, the Soroptomists and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women, all of whom continued their campaigning work throughout the war years. They worked together as the Equal Compensation Campaign Committee and after presenting four petitions to Parliament they succeeded in forcing the government into a defeat in November 1942 by pushing through the legislation against Churchill's wishes, and in April 1943 equal compensation became law.⁴²⁹ Some women MPs also contributed to the ending of the marriage bar in teaching through their support of an amendment to the 1944 Education Bill. All the feminist organisations, and the TUC, joined the fight for equal pay which dominated the feminist agenda during the war. The campaign was given a sharp

⁴²⁸ Douie, *Daughters of Britain*.

⁴²⁹ Bruley, *Women in Britain*.

focus by the illegal strike of women workers at the Rolls Royce factory in Glasgow in 1943. In 1940, the Engineering Federation had agreed that women would receive equal pay after 32 weeks in post. 20,000 women were employed at the Rolls Royce Hillington site in Glasgow - their employers evaded the 1940 equal pay formula and were challenged by the AEU in 1943. They settled. But 16,000 women (and some men) refused to accept the deal and walked out for over a week. They won a new agreement which specified the pay rate for every machine in the factory and the work done on it, regardless of who was operating the equipment. In the same year the Equal Pay Campaign Committee (EPCC) was set up, headed by Edith Summerskill MP (Lab), Mavis Tate MP (Cons) and the suffragist Pippa Strachey. The EPCC had 72 affiliated societies including the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Open Door Council, the NFWI and the Women's Liberal Federation. Not all women MPs were behind the issue, however, and when the EPCC introduced an amendment to the 1944 Education Bill calling for equal pay for teachers some of the Labour women MPs voted in accordance with their Party Whip and against the amendment. The amendment was passed by one vote and Churchill made it an issue of confidence. As a result the EPCC was successful in getting a Royal Commission set up, but the Commission's eventual recommendations were weak (recommending equal pay for exactly equal work and accepting the notion that women were less efficient than men) and the EPCC continued to campaign until 1956. In 1947 they held a mass meeting in Westminster with 2000 women representing 77 societies and nine trade unions and that same year all three political parties accepted the idea in

principle at their annual conferences. The strength of a campaign is not necessarily measured in its success, but in the determination of its campaigners to achieve their goals, and British women's organisations were not about to give up on this essential aspect of feminism.

Outside Parliament Labour women were campaigning not only for equal pay (seen as primarily a middle-class concern, as it was only being proposed for professional work) but for clean milk supplies, rent control and the provision of council houses. The war therefore, did not lead to a cessation of campaigning by organised women, and neither was it responsible for an end to feminist and citizenship demands. Many women at the time felt that the war was proving an emancipatory experience. Dr Edith Summerskill MP argued in 1942 that the war would liberate the housewife through economic independence and Margaret Goldsmith confidently stated in 1943 that,

any post-war society that did not offer [women] absolute equality of opportunity and wages would certainly not be the democratic society for which we are fighting.⁴³⁰

National organisations continued to push for a range of changes, some directly linked to the war, some unconnected, and some that had been brought into sharper focus by the enhanced role played by women within the nation and their communities.

⁴³⁰ E. Summerskill, 'Conscription and Women', in *The Fortnightly Review* 151 (1942) 209-214; Goldsmith, *Women in War*, p. 214.

After the war the feminist organisations were left with an ageing membership, but several major issues still to be resolved, including equal pay, equal National Insurance and improved access to education and employment for women. But there was what Caine has described as a “flurry of activity” as the Labour landslide galvanised many organisations for further action.⁴³¹ Successful post-war campaigns included those to end the marriage bar for doctors and to secure equal pay for female civil servants (both achieved in 1945). New organisations such as the Married Women’s Association were also formed, campaigning for rights such as equal access to family income and equal rights as parents, but also joining campaigns to achieve equal pay and encourage women into politics. Post-Beveridge, some women were calling for a raft of reforms to benefit the exhausted working mother, including nurseries, play centres, rest homes for tired housewives, social service holidays for poorer families, communal laundries and improved obstetric and gynaecological care.⁴³² The Women’s Co-operative Guild launched campaigns in the post-war period for maternity and child welfare clinics, pensions for married women and additional and improved public housing. In 1946 their Annual Congress demanded an electric washing machine be installed in every new council house.⁴³³ Their campaigns were those of the welfare feminists - those that would improve the lives of the majority of Britain’s female citizens.

These campaigns were nationally devised but locally fought with local branches raising funds and awareness as well as adding their voices to the demands for a

⁴³¹ Caine, *English Feminism*, p. 234.

⁴³² Riley, ‘Some Peculiarities of Social Policy’, in Higgonet et al. p. 265.

⁴³³ Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p. 245.

better life for women. The variety of campaigns – and the cross-organisation support they got - is an indicator of a movement that continued to be ambitious and active. The level of co-operation between women’s groups that had allegedly been ideologically split during the inter-war period is marked. It perhaps emerged from a realisation that women’s concerns were likely to be buried under the fears firstly of invasion and defeat, and then of economic crisis, and that if they were to be heard their voices had to be collective and loud.

NOTTINGHAM AT WAR AND BEYOND

Nottingham during the war was a provincial town “doing its bit to keep the home fires burning”. As a city with some prime industrial sites it survived the Blitz relatively unscathed, with only one large attack in May 1941 when 424 bombs were dropped killing 156 people. The raid on the 9th May was probably a mistake by the Germans who were more than likely targeting the Rolls Royce factory in neighbouring Derby. 12,500 homes, factories, offices shops and warehouses were damaged during the war, including churches and University College.⁴³⁴ The war saw 228 air raid warnings in Nottingham and the caves under Nottingham were put to use as shelters, as were underground facilities at Boots and Players factories.⁴³⁵ Helen Jones has worked on the notion that local areas were strengthened by their experiences of suffering during the war arguing that “there was a sense of relief that people’s own city was sharing in the experience of bombing ... local pride was strongly involved in post-raid reactions in proving

⁴³⁴ *Nottingham Evening Post Supplement on Air Raids* DD1627/1.

⁴³⁵ Newark had nineteen raids, Southwell 27, East Retford 25, Beeston and Stapleford 12 and West Bridgford 2. Source: *Nottingham Evening Post Supplement on Air Raids*.

that one's city was as brave as London."⁴³⁶ This re-emphasises the importance of local studies during this era. Nottingham's industry was redirected towards war work with Raleigh specialising in making shell fuses and ignition units for ammunition. For the future, Reconstruction planners working during the war had a vision of an ideal city with a ring road, two new bridges over the River Trent and a brand new Civic Centre. The planners also expressed an aspiration to provide communities with crèches, hotels for domestic workers, laundries, child welfare clinics, playing fields, community associations and acres of space for clubs to develop.⁴³⁷

In the immediate post-war period Nottingham enjoyed an expansion of both industry and housing stock. The major Victorian and pre-war industries were dwindling in importance but the city witnessed the emergence of opportunities in the service and financial sectors, as well as new skilled industry such as furniture making and printing.⁴³⁸ Boots formally ended its marriage bar in 1945, although it had been redundant throughout the war. Yet some Nottingham women seemed keen not to work, with 6000 vacancies for women available at the Nottingham Employment Exchange in 1946.⁴³⁹ In 1945 the slum clearance programme resumed and competitions for housing designs were launched. The result was three new estates with 13 000 new houses, largely semis with gardens, at Clifton, Bestwood Park and Bilborough, financed by the local authority and the Treasury.

⁴³⁶ Jones, *British civilians in the front line*, p. 152; p. 6.

⁴³⁷ J. D. Chambers, *Modern Nottingham in the Making* (Nottingham, 1945).

⁴³⁸ Nottingham Corporation, *Nottingham Official Handbook* (Nottingham, 1950).

⁴³⁹ C. Weir, *Nottingham: A History* (Chichester, 2002).

This number, however, still fell below the amount of houses the 1945 Labour Government had promised. Reconstruction plans also included a public health centre, a technical college, and many new schools to meet the demands of the 1944 Education Act. The city celebrated its Quincentenary in 1949, a year after University College had received its Royal Charter to become Nottingham University. Adult Education was well-established in the city with 14000 students following adult education courses run by the University and WEA in 1946, rising to 19000 by 1950.⁴⁴⁰

The local experience of many women at war can be represented by Miss Majorie Mason who wrote a brief but interesting Mass-Observation Diary for August 1941. A 35 year old office Manageress, her month included talk of rations, local bombings, German refugees, fire-watching, the blackout, her work for the Ambulance depot, travel difficulties and ARP exercises.⁴⁴¹ Sadly her diary lists her activities but does not expand on her attitudes towards combining her work with volunteering. Nottingham women were active in many ways during the war. By 1942 4000 Nottingham women had registered for Civil Defence. 4000 ATS women worked at the Chilwell Ordnance Depot servicing tanks, driving vehicles, despatching parts and maintaining stores. Female Raleigh workers worked on assembling and inspecting fuses, producing cartridge cases and making shells.⁴⁴² Nottingham Warship Week in November 1941 featured a Women's Day when 1500 women war workers paraded past the Council House, a parade that included

⁴⁴⁰ J. D. Chambers, *A Century of Nottingham's History, 1851-1951* (Nottingham, 1952)

⁴⁴¹ M-O Diaries *Majorie Mason (Miss)*

⁴⁴² D. Noble, *Thus we Served* (Nottingham, 1946)

chemists, bus conductresses, members of the Auxiliary Fire Service, railway workers, nurses, Red Cross workers and representatives from all the armed services. The Mayor thanked them for their “fortitude and courage”. Warship weeks were a feature of local areas in 1941, 1942 and 1943. Townspeople were encouraged to raise money to support their own warship (it bore the name of the town) and thus it encouraged participation from the whole spectrum of society. We can argue their interest was two-fold – one to do something practical to help the war effort, and secondly to raise more money than the neighbouring area, most likely in this case to be Derby.⁴⁴³ In 1942 the town’s aim was to raise £210,000 to adopt HMS Fury and they were encouraged by a visit from Winston Churchill.⁴⁴⁴ Many younger women joined the Land Army to farm the land surrounding the city, getting paid 32/- a week, and led by Lady Sibell Argyles of Ollerton. The male writers of the official city handbooks were keen to stress, however, that they weren’t becoming too masculine:

When she has finished her work in the evenings, she ... is at liberty to shed her uniform, don her prettiest things and forget that such things as turnips and animals exist.⁴⁴⁵

From the records we can find examples of women’s organisations working together (as we see on the national stage) and in 1940 organisations were asked to

⁴⁴³ Helen Jones stresses the importance of this local competition in constructing local identity during the war. Jones, *British civilians in the front line*.

⁴⁴⁴ DD1091/1 *Nottingham Warship Week, November 1941*;
http://www.emsource.org.uk/archive/items/ww2/warship_week_1.html

⁴⁴⁵ Nottinghamshire County Council, *Nottingham at War: Official Handbook of Useful Information and Advice* (Nottingham, 1942).

send representatives to the Nottingham and Notts Women's Advisory Council. In

1942 a Group Action Council of women's organisations was formed,

to prevent overlapping among all women's organisations of acquiring information and, on that information, working for reforms for the whole community. It would not be sectarian, party-political or feminist... [but] part of a need to educate women to take their share of responsibility as citizens and in national affairs.⁴⁴⁶

50 organisations joined the council and sub-committees were formed within it to research specific areas, including venereal disease, housing and child care. In

1945 this became the Standing Conference of Nottingham Women's Organisations.

Politically, the results of the 1945 election in Nottingham illustrated why Labour was able to achieve a national landslide. The balanced picture of the 1936 election (four Conservative MPs and five Labour representing the city and county) was entirely swept away. Only Newark kept a Conservative member. Nottingham saw the election of one of the country's 24 women MPs – Florence Paton who was elected for Labour in the hitherto safe Conservative seat of Rushcliffe, a seat that had never been held by any other party before, and has only been held by Labour once since. It was her third time standing in the constituency and she lost her seat

⁴⁴⁶ Quoted in DD 748/6/2 *Minutes of the Nottingham Branch of the National Council of Women, 1940-1946* 16th December 1942.

in 1950.⁴⁴⁷ The period 1945-49 also saw the City Council consistently held by Labour though frequently only by a slim majority.

The 1940s saw a core of six or seven women repeatedly elected as Councillors and serving on a wide range of committees, not just those deemed to be female areas of interest.⁴⁴⁸ Like all local authorities the City of Nottingham cut its funding to local day nurseries in 1946 although the Committee responsible for them expressed some concerns:

The Social Welfare Committee is anxious for the nurseries to keep on so that women with children can go out to work and not fall on that Committee for support unnecessarily.⁴⁴⁹

and in 1948 the Council were still funding seven, despite the Treasury withdrawing its subsidy as Denise Riley has indicated.⁴⁵⁰ Though the Council's motive may have been financial, the local council recognised that some married women wanted to work. Seven women were elected to the County Council in 1946 (out of the 64 seats) and there were also 10 female JPs in 1948. On a smaller

⁴⁴⁷ Mrs Paton had stood in the constituency in 1929 and 1931. Her husband was also elected in 1945 to represent a Norwich constituency.

⁴⁴⁸ In 1945 the six elected female Councillors were Susannah James, Bertha Hazard, Margaret Glen-Bott, Kate Barsby, Laura Chambers and Mary Wood. In 1949 Winifreda Case was added to their number.

The committees they served on included traditional areas of interest such as Health, Mental Health, Welfare and Education, alongside other committees such as Pensions, Libraries, Baths and Washhouses, Housing and Rates. Source *City of Nottingham Municipal Diaries* 1945-46, 1946-47, 1947-48, 1949-50.

⁴⁴⁹ CATC 10/120/12 City of Nottingham: Town Clerks Office *Minutes of the Day Nurseries Committee 1946*.

⁴⁵⁰ Riley, *War in the Nursery*.

scale the *Beeston Gazette and Echo* declared that “history is made” when Sandiacre Parish Council appointed their first woman Chairman in 1940.⁴⁵¹

The period 1939-1949 was inevitably a period of change and upheaval for Nottingham, and the city faced new economic, social and political circumstances. Nationally the organisations responded to the changes and opportunities presented by the war partly by emphasising their role as keepers of the home front. Thus they were able to pursue feminist campaigns and those concerned with alleviating the hardships of war. Locally we see a similar picture with women building on their war work to make further demands for progress.

THE LOCAL PRESS

Never in the history of the world has so much been asked of women. No longer do they sit at home and wait.⁴⁵²

Jill, who drove a smart coupe, is today at the wheel of a heavy Army lorry; Jane, who had little need to do any work in peacetime, is busy packing crates; Mary, who was an industrious housewife until her husband was called up and her children evacuated has found her niche in the canteen.⁴⁵³

During the war the local press focused much more closely on the work and activity of local people, responding entirely positively to the work of women

⁴⁵¹ *Beeston Gazette and Echo*, 4/5/40, p. 2.

⁴⁵² *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 15th July 1941.

⁴⁵³ Report on women in the ATS in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 12/9/39, p. 3.

during the war, and the rhetoric rarely failed to refer to local women as “heroines”.⁴⁵⁴ They took local women more seriously and we can see evidence of them reporting feminist, citizenship and social activities with a new respect. As the war progressed and paper shortages began both of the large local papers became four pages only, apart from when *The Nottingham Evening Post* printed six pages on a Friday and a supplement on a Saturday. The four pages were usually one of war news, one of classified, one of adverts/cinema/London gossip/sport and one for everything else. As a result the appearance of regular columns for women was affected, and anything that was published can be assumed to have been seen as important for educating and appealing to the paper’s readership. As an aside, adverts again demonstrated an understanding of women’s lives and made use of their war work to appeal to them. An advert for Glymiel Jelly ran: “At the bench or on the farm/ Guard your busy hands from harm/ Keep their smooth efficient charm/ With Glymiel Jelly.”⁴⁵⁵

The local press were almost entirely neutral on matters of party politics during the wartime period, abandoning their pre-war Labour-bashing. In the early days of the war the papers maintained their women’s columns and their letters page became more regular and showed evidence of a larger post bag. The letters and columns, however, were rarely written in response to any national political change. When Chamberlain resigned in May 1940 the “Feminine Reflections” column in the *Guardian* was concerned with “five ways with potatoes”; when Dunkirk fell the

⁴⁵⁴ For a general discussion of the local press in wartime see Jones, *British civilians in the front line*, p. 153.

⁴⁵⁵ *Nottingham Guardian*, 7/10/42, p. 3.

main topic of debate on the letters page was about poultry keeping.⁴⁵⁶ The passing of the Education Act in 1944, ending the marriage bar and instituting equal pay for women, as well as restructuring the British education system passed without comment in either letters pages or editorially. The election of Florence Paton prompted a short paragraph about her “shock victory” in the general post-election analysis, but there was no further comment about it and no letters to the Editor.⁴⁵⁷ The smaller village papers still included columns for women – the *Beeston Gazette and Echo* published “for the Ladies” – but increasingly their pages were dominated by lists of local men serving, and those killed, injured or missing.⁴⁵⁸

After the war the pro-Conservative rhetoric began to creep back and the 1945 municipal elections lead to headlines such as, “Mapperley stands firm” and “Socialists checked in only three wards.”⁴⁵⁹ Social conservatism continued to dominate the pages and much of the summer of 1948 was occupied by a continued worry about the “shameless” girls who were to be found hanging around the Market Square, with correspondents regularly complaining that these girls would not do the decent thing and get married:

The young women of your city are some of the most impolite, ignorant and conceited members of their sex I have ever met.

⁴⁵⁶ *Nottingham Guardian*, 10/5/40, p. 3; *Guardian*, 26/5/40, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁷ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 27/7/45, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁸ “For the Ladies” was entirely domestic – a typical column in 1941 contained information on sweet lavender, beetroot jelly, savoury pancakes, removing grease marks, storing marrows and tomatoes and cleaning carpets. (27/9/41) By 1948 the diet had not changed much and Beeston women could read about flower arrangements, pastry making, hot baths, stair carpets and renovating veils (14/8/48).

⁴⁵⁹ *Nottingham Guardian* 2/11/45, p. 3, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 2/11/45, p. 3.

The average girl does not want to settle down now, but is all out for a good time at the man's expense.⁴⁶⁰

The young women of Nottingham did reply but the published responses all rejected the rudeness of the first man, and denied the assertion of the second by claiming that they were all too keen to settle and start a family with a man with good prospects.

After the war the women's columns returned in full vigour, though again they were seemingly nationally franchised. In 1949 the *Nottingham Guardian* started a new Saturday column called "Jeanette Hugh writes for women" which, on first publication covered religion, soup, hats and life for the British housewife in Kenya.⁴⁶¹ Women were published on the editor's letters page in much greater numbers than before 1939. At the end of this period, in June 1949, the *Evening Post* published letters from women on topics such as dogs and cats, sweets, animal suffering, shoes, the NHS (denying that it was causing economic problems), clothing for the WVS and help for the disabled. This wide range of topics demonstrates the wide range of interests that Nottingham women pursued, through organisations and individually, and the process of writing to the media was an example of pro-active citizenship that some of the organisations were trying formally to develop.

⁴⁶⁰ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 12/7/48; 21/7/48

⁴⁶¹ *Nottingham Guardian*, 21/5/49, p. 4.

It is still important to remember, however, that much of the work of the women's organisations was conducted in an atmosphere of continued anti-feminism, and despite the plaudits women received for their work, the war did not dispel the anti-feminist views of many. In 1939 the Lord Mayor of Nottingham misjudged his audience of the Business and Professional Women's Club when he boldly declared, "a business career is an excellent thing, but for many women there is a more important part in life for them to play. That of wife and mother."⁴⁶² Yet the fact that he felt it was appropriate speaks volumes about the attitude towards women. The work of the organisations was performed in an environment in which most people accepted the primacy of the domestic role. It was a message they were receiving from both the government and the media. Even when praising the war effort of women the "Woman's ways" column of the *Nottingham Evening Post* wrote that,

the bride, if she is of the plucky wartime type, will find in housework a thrilling new sport ... whereas sitting at a desk all day made her complexion sallow and her muscles lax.⁴⁶³

It was a message that some women embraced. In 1942 the *Nottingham Evening Post* published a letter from a woman stating,

Women are unfit, both mentally and constitutionally, to do night fire-watching. Married women, especially, are under a terrific strain nowadays

⁴⁶² reported in *Nottingham Guardian*, 16/12/39, p. 3.

⁴⁶³ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21/5/40, p. 4.

... let those whose only ambition is to become mothers of healthy children, stay at home, safe.⁴⁶⁴

This letter did produce a flurry of indignant responses from women who were happy to continue working for the war effort. Other female correspondents were forthright in their anti-feminism:

Equal pay for men and women would compel thousands of married women to abandon their homes ... in all that hot air ... the agitation only applies to a picked handful of women such as teachers or engineers. The most important women in the country – mothers – are not even mentioned.

Women are always demanding equality. So why this talk of pensions at 55? Let us hear them shout about working the same years as the men and then we shall know they really mean equality.

How can a mother who has regular decent money coming in every week content her mind away from her child ... All women are not compelled to go out to work ... many go out to work for excessive dress and posh homes.⁴⁶⁵

Locally some groups also preferred the domestic agenda to any other – in September 1944 Beeston TWG agreed that “nursery schools and clinics destroy a mother’s sense of responsibility.”⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. 3/9/42.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. 29/11/44, p. 3, 23/4/46, p. 6, 23/2/49, p. 5.

⁴⁶⁶ Merz, *After the Vote*.

The end of the Second World War, like the First, was marked by a return to the domestic ideal – an ideal expressed in the media and in government policy. In 1947 George Isaacs, Minister of Labour, was appealing to women to return to the factories to help Britain survive the post-war economic slump, but he maintained that,

I am not speaking to the mothers of very young children. It is more important that they should be looking after their babies than volunteering to do a job outside the home ... I know that many of you have homes to run and I know that a woman's first duty is to her home.⁴⁶⁷

Thus, as a different Lord Mayor said when addressing the same Business and Professional Women's Club in 1949, "women must educate themselves and overcome the prejudice I have found among women in local wards against being represented by women ... Your biggest opponents are women themselves."⁴⁶⁸

Domestic concerns were undoubtedly seen as superior to any other, with some women distrusting other women who attempted to fulfil themselves beyond the boundaries of home and family. However, we do not see a blanket demonisation of working mothers and unmarried women, even once the war is won. The domestic arena is presented as an ideal and idealised place for women but there was a tacit recognition that not all women were "lucky" enough to attain the ideal and that some women had to work outside the home. There was also a greater understanding that work in the home was indeed work. Away from the concerns

⁴⁶⁷ Quoted in Carruthers, ' "Manning the Factories" ', p. 249.

⁴⁶⁸ reported in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8/1/49, p. 5.

about the mothers of young children working, which are still regularly encountered today, on the whole the atmosphere in Nottingham was less stiflingly domestic in the post-war period than it had been in the 1930s.

In conclusion, the local press eulogised women for their war work and women featured more as letter writers and journalists than they had in the years before the war when much of the press' coverage of women's "issues" was confined to the regular columns. This was both because women were more visible in local society, and because women now formed the majority of the paper's readership with many men away. Their response to the post-war era, as we shall see, was less predictable, and although they reverted to the exaltation of wives and mothers, they did not demonise them if they went to work, and they were less dismissive about advances made by women after the war.

NOTTINGHAM'S ORGANISATIONS – WAR WORK AND COLLABORATION

Most of the organisations that had served Nottingham's women before the war continued into the wartime period and beyond. The National Council of Women continued to attract a steady number of members – 382 in 1941 – and Nottingham was also the home of the NCW East Midlands Regional Committee, thus demonstrating the strength of the branch. Mansfield also had its own branch, as did Newark. Increasing numbers of smaller organisations affiliated themselves to this dominant body, including the Catholic Women's League (1943) and the Ex-

Service Women's Association (1944) and the YWCA, Women's Police Court Association, Magistrates Association (all in 1945). Initially the NCW suspended Council meetings to fully engage in war work such as ARP, first aid and the WVS, but quite quickly members chose to meet again to push for further change and support for their activities from local and national politicians – “to work for the removal of all disabilities of women, whether legal, economic or social.”⁴⁶⁹ Membership did fall after the war (it was 271 in 1949) but they continued to attract affiliation, with even the Life Boat Association joining them in 1947.

The local branches of the NFWI flourished during the war as rural women pursued work to benefit their members, community and nation. As examples, Tollerton WI changed their monthly meetings to the afternoon because of the blackout, suggesting that their members were not working full-time. They set up jamming kitchens and canning centres as well as helping to run the WVS canteen and organising knitting circles.⁴⁷⁰ Keyworth WI was similar, establishing a National Savings Group and making quilts.⁴⁷¹ In 1949 Nottingham had 98 Women's Institutes with 6200 members, demonstrating a growth in popularity from their pre-war position and the 3432 members who were subscribed in 1942.

The British Federation of University Women was involved in war relief, providing help for refugees, maintaining the education of girls and lobbying MPs. Their liaison officer in Nottingham was Miss Bates who lived in the Park, where

⁴⁶⁹ M-O TC32/4/F *National Council of Women, Interview with Mrs Patrick Ness.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Tollerton at War: A Village Newsletter Supplement* (1995).

⁴⁷¹ DD 2382/1/5 *Keyworth Women's Institute: Records of Monthly Meetings, 1935-1942.*

many leading organisation women continued to reside.⁴⁷² The Soroptomists also persevered to represent the educated and professional Nottingham woman – in fact the frequency of their lunch meetings increased from monthly to fortnightly.⁴⁷³ Their records demonstrate a continued sharing of personnel between different groups and causes with members involved in the WVS, Citizens Advice and the Red Cross. Membership grew through the war years, with 12 new members joining in April 1942 alone. They were able to finance two homes where retired professional women could rent accommodation for their old age and in 1944 owned £1153 7s 9d in cash and property.⁴⁷⁴ References to a branch of the Spinsters' Pensions Association and the Business and Professional Women's Club also can be found in the minutes of other groups. The Electrical Association for Women also continued its work through this whole period, helping to arrange blood transfusions, match sales and wool collections, "becoming a platform for the woman's point of view."⁴⁷⁵ The Nottingham Council of Social Service (NCSS) acted as a co-ordinating body and its list of affiliated societies gives an indication of the vast numbers of organisations which existed but of which we have no record, whether in the press or deposited in local archives.⁴⁷⁶ Other

⁴⁷² M-O TC32/4/C/1 *British Federation of University Women*.

⁴⁷³ DD SO 2/2.

⁴⁷⁴ DD SO 2/3 *Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Soroptomist Club of Nottingham, 1942-1948*.

⁴⁷⁵ DD 1357/1/4/1 *AGM Minutes of the Nottingham branch of the Electrical Association for Women, 1940-1954*, 24/2/43.

⁴⁷⁶ In addition to the bodies discussed in this section, affiliated organisations to the NCSS in 1944 included the Women's Hospital Committee, the Nursing Association, the TocH League of Women Helpers, the Women's Free Church Council, the Women's Team Games Board, the Women's League of Health and Beauty, the Beeston Musical Society and the Women's International League. Source: DD CSS 6 *Nottingham Council for Social Service: Annual Reports 1944-1951*. Representatives were also sent, in 1945, from the Board of Family Welfare, the British Red Cross Society, the Day Nurseries and Children's Homes, the District Nursing Association, Girls' Life

organisations that do receive brief press coverage but have left nothing else include the British Women's Total Abstinence Union and the Nottingham Ladies War Finance Campaign Committee. Religious women could join branches of the Central Council for Women's Church work in Southwell or the National Free Church Women's Council in Nottingham. Other religious groups included the Catholic Women's League, ToCH and the Mothers' Union.

Bulwell had a branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild that has left minimal records, whereas the minutes for Woodthorpe Townswomen's Guild (TWG), formed in 1944, are more extensive. This group, and a branch at Arnold were established in 1944. They had been preceded by the first Nottinghamshire branch in Beeston in February 1942 and a second in West Bridgford in January 1943 and were very popular organisations. Within two months the Woodthorpe branch had 200 members and a waiting list of others. By the end of 1945 there were branches in Stapleford and Carlton as well.⁴⁷⁷ The TWGs published their own magazine – *Nottingham Women's Life*.

Girls could join any number of girls' clubs, the Guides and also the British Camp Fire Girls and by 1944 52% of young people were a member of a youth club of some sort.⁴⁷⁸ Many wartime girls were involved in the Service of Youth scheme,

Brigade and the Nottingham Inner Wheel. Source: *Voluntary Social Service Organisations in Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1945).

⁴⁷⁷ DD 2276/1/1 *Woodthorpe Townswomen's Guild Committee Meeting Minutes, 1944-1949*.

⁴⁷⁸ Organisations listed in M-O 32/4/J-K *Religious Organisations and Youth Organisations*. Statistics from P. Tinkler, 'Girlhood in Transition? Preparing girls for Adulthood in a Reconstructed Britain', in C. Duchon and I. Bandhauer-Schöffmann (eds), *When the War was Over: Women, War and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956* (Leicester, 2000).

designed by the government to prepare the youth of Britain to serve their country as well-informed citizens.⁴⁷⁹ Even more were part of the Guiding movement and in December 1939 all Guides over the age of fifteen were reported to be involved in some form of war work.⁴⁸⁰ The Nottingham Union of Girls' Clubs also had links with the Nottingham Association of Women's Clubs which provided opportunities for classes and undertook war work such as helping at Rest centres, organising evacuees and visiting hospitals as well as "driving away the depression and loneliness amongst wives of serving men."⁴⁸¹

The political parties continued to campaign and we have records for the South Division Conservation Association Women's Section, the Broxtowe Labour Party Women's Divisional Council, the Market Ward Labour Party Women's Section. Although we have no records from Nottingham branches of women's trade unions, reports in the national press do indicate that many Nottingham women were unionised and that Nottingham branches were able to deal with national meetings – the National Union of Women Teachers held its National Conference in Nottingham in April 1945 and the Conference of Women Engineers had their national assembly in the city in October 1948.⁴⁸² We also know that the Nottingham branch of the NUWT spent the early part of 1941 writing to all local

⁴⁷⁹ P. Tinkler, 'Sexuality and Citizenship: the State and Girls' Leisure provision in England, 1939-1945', *Women's History Review* 4/2 (1995).

⁴⁸⁰ DD 1663/7/2 *Nottinghamshire Guides Association: Divisional Commissioners Meeting Minutes 1936-1943*.

⁴⁸¹ The list of affiliated societies in the Association in 1941 included all local clubs, the Radford Women's Centre, the Girls' Friendly Society, the Social Service Society, local churches, Wilford Street Women's Centre and the YWCA. Source: DD CSS 5 *Nottingham Social Service Society Annual Reports 1939-1945*.

⁴⁸² Both were reported in *The Times* – 4th-6th April 1945 and 1st-2nd October 1948.

MPs and councillors to ask for their support for equal pay and that the prime concern of the Nottingham branch of the National Association of Women Pharmacists was dilution.⁴⁸³ Other professional bodies that appear briefly in the local press include the Nottingham Royal College of Midwives (February 1948), the Women's Engineering Society (October 1948) and the Tobacco Workers Union who tried to unionise the women who worked in the Players Factory in 1948, using the match girls as their inspiration.

Specific war-time organisations were set up such as the Nottingham and Notts Far East Prisoner of War Association set up by Mrs Majorie Harvey and Mrs Gladys Whitley, both of whom worked at Boots as well as the Women's Voluntary Service, set up in the city in 1939 by Miss Lavinia C. Talbot. The WVS ran three canteens – at Locksley House, the ARP Headquarters and at Victoria Railway Station – and during the war the WVS encouraged 80,000 Nottingham women into salvage, knitting or signing up for the Housewives Service.⁴⁸⁴ In 1942 the Nottingham branch had 59 Salvage Stewards, three National Savings Groups and 50 staff to run mobile canteens and by 1944 they appointed Daylight Reporting Wardens and Incident Inquiry Point Officers, whilst the Beeston branch set up a children's clothes and shoes exchange shop and made camouflage for Army vehicles.⁴⁸⁵ They collected donations, organised collections of knitting and

⁴⁸³ Brief reports in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 11/1/41, p. 3, 9/9/42, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁴ Source: Brewhouse Yard Museum display on Nottingham Women at War, June 2002. Women in the Housewives Service placed a card in their window to identify themselves and women would turn to them as qualified to help in an emergency.

⁴⁸⁵ DD WVS 1/1/1 *Minute and notebook for the Women's Voluntary Service 1942-1946*; DD WVS 1/2 *WVS Area Leaders Minute Book 1943-44*; *Beeston Gazette and Echo*, 29/1/44, p. 2.

undertook salvage and ARP responsibilities; they were also involved in auxiliary nursing, evacuation and running rest centres. In 1941 and 1942 the accounts of the Nottingham branch reveal spending on wool, tea urns, newspapers, material and car repairs and by July 1941 they had organised the knitting of 31500 garments by City women.⁴⁸⁶ Their work continued after the war – in November 1949 the West Bridgford WVS membership returns shows 196 members (23 regular, 23 occasional and 150 emergency) and this only increased in 1950.⁴⁸⁷ The Newark branch of the WVS was particularly strong and had 1000 members in 1940 and its own column in the *Newark Advertiser* – a strength that had an impact elsewhere as the Newark branch of the NCW had to be suspended because its 92 members were busy in other war work.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ DD WVS 1/11 *Second World War members of the West Bridgford WVS*. This return lists the following members involved in the following activities:

Hospital Supplies	148	Communal Feeding	134	Auxiliary Nursing	45
Housewives Service	210	Evacuation	77	AFS and transport	29
Clerical and CAB	57	Land Workers	5	Raid Welfare	1
Salvage	1	Rest Centres	13	ARP and First Aid	25
				Street Savings	114
				Clothing	5

DD WVS 1/4 *Finance Reports for WVS 1941-1945; Nottingham At War: Official Handbook of Useful Information and Advice 1942*

⁴⁸⁷ DD WVS 1/10 *West Bridgford WVS Membership Returns, 1949-1950*.

⁴⁸⁸ In 2001 I met with Roma Parlbay whose mother had been the President of the WVS in Newark and the Lady Mayoress. A list of tasks she was involved in included salvage collection, providing wardens for air-raid shelters, raising funds for Books for Burma, organising a knitting room and a sewing room where WVS members could knit, sew and darn in company, as well as sewing decorations onto soldiers' uniforms for them, collecting toys to be given out at Christmas parties, and running the Darby and Joan club after the war.

The *Newark Advertiser* published an "Alphabet of Newark WVS" in September 1941:

A – ARP	B – badges for members	C – co-operation	D – Duchess of Gloucester visited
E – evacuees	F – food	G – gifts	H – hospitals
I – Impulsive, Newark's sponsored warship	J – junk	K – knitting	
L – Lady Reading	M – mobile canteens	N – nursing	O – office staff
P – parcels	Q – quartermaster's stores	R – rest centres	S – station canteen
T – thrift shop	U – "underneath the arches" – need more women air raid wardens	V – valued help	
W – war savings street groups	X – unknown quantity of work coming along	Y – youth is an asset but most of workers are ageless	Z – zeal.

After the war, in 1947, Nottingham women also established a branch of the British Housewives League – a group that attracted controversy from the outset and whose Secretary had to write to the local press to deny accusations of political affiliation when a London member Dorothy Crisp wrote to the *Times* advocating suffragette-like militant action. The fact that the letter was published indicates the importance and impact of this new group on a sector of local society.⁴⁸⁹

Thus, throughout this period Nottingham continued to have a thriving and developing network of women's organisations. They increasingly worked collaboratively and worked on an extensive agenda. The role played by the organisations during the war was on one hand very different to that which they had played before the war. Inevitably we have evidence that the social events were dwindling and that executive committees met much less frequently to discuss national campaigns and issues. However, the war also brought new opportunities for women to develop and for their organisations to make advances in the three key areas identified by this study. The experience of war and the independence it brought for some women exposed them to the continued inequalities of a woman's lot and for some Nottingham women this gave feminist campaigns an added impetus. The wider role that women were asked to adopt in British society taught many of them about the responsibilities they held as citizens and as a result a number of them began to demand the rights that went with them. And, although the social and fundraising energies of many organisations were redirected towards knitting, salvage and comforts funds, they were still coming

⁴⁸⁹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 11/7/47

together to share their experiences, worries and joys – an avenue that must have been key for younger women lonely without their husbands.

After the war a large number of women, influenced by their wartime experiences, had no desire to return to a world where their sole contribution was domestic. For many women the war had provided an exciting and somewhat liberating experience, though many also seemed to understand it was an exceptional period to be followed by a return to pre-war normality. Others obviously used it as a platform for further developing the role and position of women in society. Yet the distinction between the two cannot be drawn simplistically. The experiences of many women during the war shaped their lives afterwards, even if they did return to the domestic role. Although many welcomed some return to “normality” they had still experienced a “new and fierce” independence that shaped their expectations thereafter.⁴⁹⁰ Women returned to the home but many were not the same women who had left it. The *Nottingham Evening Post* claimed that war enabled women to “enlarge their experience...[It was] possible for the women and girls of all types to break away from the somewhat restricted lives which most of them lead ... At the end they will return to a more normal, feminine life, having collected a large fund of exceptional experiences.”⁴⁹¹ Not all women chose to return to a exclusively domestic life, and those that did used their exceptional experiences to galvanise them into more participation.

⁴⁹⁰ Minns, *Bombers and Mash*, p. 199.

⁴⁹¹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21/1/47.

THE CONTINUING MOMENTUM OF FEMINISM

In 1945 a Mrs Edwards from the Nottingham Business and Professional Women's Club wrote to the *Guardian* to argue that "women's interests must be broadened and they must co-operate with men in making a better world."⁴⁹² Through both the press and the work of the women's organisations we can see that feminist campaigns continued throughout the war and beyond, and feminist views and concerns continued to be expressed. There were campaigns that wished to challenge the status quo and use the war to push for equal pay, equal compensation and increased access to opportunities for professional women. Nottingham feminists seemed to view the war as an antidote to any pre-war apathy and they were able to work together to pursue a number of interests without worry that the concept of feminism would create a sex war in addition to the international conflict, as was expressed by some inter-war anti-feminists. As a result they received some favourable coverage in the press, and feminist issues were able to successfully fight for restricted column space.

A Miss Saville, also of the Business and Professional Women's Club, was published with her cry that "women want to use their capabilities to the full ... conscientious and loyal ... they should not be excluded from any trade or profession." Nothing was published in response suggesting that there was nothing contentious about these feminist sentiments.⁴⁹³ In October 1940 the *Nottingham Evening Post* had published an article by Diane Dane on "Britain's Woman

⁴⁹² *Nottingham Guardian*, 24/1/45, p. 5.

⁴⁹³ *Nottingham Guardian*, 24/1/45, p. 5. Women's employment rights continued to be a controversial subject so it is unlikely that the lack of response meant that nobody cared.

Power” in its Woman’s Ways column. In it Dane protested against the unemployment of skilled women, praised the work of women MPs and called for equal pay and access to training and promotion. Again, nobody wrote to contradict her.⁴⁹⁴ Later an editorial in the *Nottingham Evening Post* confidently stated:

Women won the vote in the last war. They look like enfranchising themselves professionally in this one. Hitherto they have not been conspicuously prominent in law, accountancy or engineering but the experience of feminine capacity during this war is likely to change all that.⁴⁹⁵

In 1945 a letter from “Ken K” invoked the memory of Mrs Pankhurst to call for the continuation of the “struggle ... for female equality of pay, rights, opportunities and privileges.” This time there was a response with dozens of women writing to join the calls for greater opportunities outside the home, including Teresa Tinsley who wrote on 18th January that:

to raise the spiritual and moral standards of our people will need a mass attack by all the combined women’s organisations ... we need more women on Watch Committees, more women magistrates in juvenile courts and more women doctors.⁴⁹⁶

Thus the organisations were working within the context of a city whose major voice seemed more open to feminist ideas, especially during the war years.

⁴⁹⁴ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21/10/40, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 1/3/44, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 5/1/45, p. 3. Eg Teresa Tinsley wrote on 18th January:

to raise the spiritual and moral standards of our people will need a mass attack by all the combined women’s organisations ... we need more women on Watch Committees, more women magistrates in juvenile courts and more women doctors.

Edith Summerskill MP visited Nottingham a number of times during the war and in 1941 in an address at Nottingham University, attempted to stimulate the city's women by asking, "is this new world for which we are working to be a new world for men, and an old world for women?"⁴⁹⁷ Many of the women in the audience were determined that this was not to be so and were pursuing many of the feminist aims of the pre-war "old feminists" in addition to new feminist opportunities presented by the war itself. The National Council of Women, in 1940, had local committees on a range of issues which covered both the old and new feminist agendas. These included Education, Industry, Moral Welfare, Parliament and Legislation, Public Health and Housing, Public Service and Magistrates, and Women Police.⁴⁹⁸ Throughout the war they held lectures, wrote letters, signed petitions and hosted meetings on a range of topics of feminist interest including the post-war education of girls (28/10/41), family allowances (10/4/42) and women's pensions (16/12/42). They also campaigned for women police and the increase of women in local government (12/7/44). The issue of women police had always featured heavily in the campaigning agenda of the local NCW and continued to do so now. By 1944 Nottinghamshire had seven women police officers and its first woman sergeant who had been promoted after 25 years service.⁴⁹⁹ In 1943 they discussed the Beveridge Report at length and decided to challenge it due to its acceptance of the economic inequalities faced by women, and later that year they were engaged in fund-raising for the Women for

⁴⁹⁷ Reported in the *Nottingham Guardian*, 4/10/41.

⁴⁹⁸ M-O TC32/4/F *National Council of Women 1940 Handbook*.

⁴⁹⁹ *Nottingham Guardian*, 17/6/44, p. 3.

Westminster campaign (7/4/3). They were very active in the campaign for equal compensations for war injuries, a campaign in which they worked closely with the Soroptomists and the Business and Professional Women's Clubs (whose Nottingham branch had 153 members in 1943 - the largest branch in the United Kingdom). They wrote to all the local MPs and the Minister of Pensions Sir Walter Womersley about the issue in 1941, organised a petition in January 1942, and continued to release press statements about it until 1943. Edith Summerskill said that 1300 letters and postcards on the issue had been received in Westminster from Nottingham women.⁵⁰⁰ They conducted a survey of opinions on the equal pay issue in July 1944 to give the national organisation the evidence they needed to present to the Royal Commission and in 1945 they wrote to lobby local MPs on the Nationality of Married Women Bill.

The Chairman emphasised what a lot of important work was carried out by the NCW; some members may think that we come into this room, have lunch, hear an address, do a little business and there it ends, but this is not the case.⁵⁰¹

Although their minutes record discussion of many issues, they also engaged in action, sending representatives to sit in on the meetings of other organisations who were discussing the same issues. These then returned with proposals on how advances could be made both nationally and locally. They also sent representatives to the national committees to report their findings and both make

⁵⁰⁰ reported in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 17/10/41.

⁵⁰¹ DD 748/9 *National Council of Women Miscellaneous Minutes* Speech from the AGM 13th June 1943.

suggestions and receive direction about future operations. Their campaigning was legalistic – petitions, letters and press releases – but the continuation of it throughout the war demonstrates that wider issues of feminism were not completely submerged by the day-to-day practicalities of war.

The political parties also continued to pursue feminist aims. The President of Market Ward Labour Party from 1941 to 1948 was a woman – Mrs Martin – and the ward routinely returned her as a candidate for the local elections, despite her repeated defeats.⁵⁰² In 1949 the South Division Conservative Association Women's Section sent resolutions to the National Conference in favour of equal pay and greater equality in women's pensions.⁵⁰³ Both parties held Women's Conferences annually through the war and beyond and the arrangements for these were featured heavily in the deposited records, thus implying that the events were taken seriously by the members and the wider Party. Although much of the work of the political parties was taken up with helping the war effort and fund-raising for electoral work after the war, women played a much bigger role in the parties – increasing their representation on general party committees in addition to the specific women's sections. Although this could partly be down to fewer men, it was a trend that continued into the post-war period when each of the committees for which we have minutes had between 25% and 35% women on their executive committees. Women were still not equal, but they were working within a party that was recognising their growing importance.

⁵⁰² DD PP 14/1/1 *Minutes of the Market Ward Labour Party 1941-1949* 3rd June, 1941. When Mrs Martin retired as President in 1948 she was replaced by another woman, Mrs Skellington.

⁵⁰³ DD PP 2/3/1 23rd May 1949.

Feminist issues were engaged with by a number of the other organisations. The Nottingham Business and Professional Women's Club declared their aim to be feminist - "to encourage in business and professional women a realisation of their responsibilities in national and world affairs and to work for the removal of sex discrimination in employment."⁵⁰⁴ The Nottingham branch sent a deputation of Nottingham women to meet female MPs to push for the greater use of trained and qualified women in the war effort and later sent a resolution to the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce to ask local authorities to open nurseries for women who wanted to work. In 1949 they were campaigning for more female magistrates, better financial support for divorced women and the need for a female member on all local housing committees.⁵⁰⁵ The Group Action Council, later the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations, held large meetings on a range of feminist issues. In July 1945 their topic was women in local government and all 72 affiliated societies agreed to work to increase female representation on the local council executive. The Standing Conference also invited women to form a "brains trust" to advise the council on Reconstruction matters – an acceptance perhaps that women had a specific and different view on such matters, but also an acceptance that their voice must be heard.

Woodthorpe Townswomen's Guild debated, and supported, equal pay in February 1945. The Soroptomists publicised the work of the "Women for Westminster"

⁵⁰⁴ *Voluntary Social Service Organisations in Nottingham.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Nottingham Guardian*, 27/11/39, p. 3, 5/6/47, p. 3, 10/1/49, p. 4.

campaign in September 1943 and discussed equal pay in depth in November 1944. At this time they expressed fears that equality of pay rates may make it more difficult for women to get the top jobs but by July 1947 they were writing to the government to express their disappointment that the government had not yet awarded equal pay for equal work. Equality feminism therefore continued to be an important aspect of the work done by the campaigning groups, and an aspect that continued throughout the war. It could even be argued that equality feminist aims were more actively pursued in the 1940s than in 1930s and even 1920s. Unlike Smith's assertion that change during the war was limited and short-lived, these women were maintaining a pre-war tradition of campaigning for fundamental rights and the changes they secured, especially in the area of equal compensation and limited equal pay, were the foundations of the more dramatic changes seen later in the 1960s and beyond. Feminist campaigns continued through this period, at a time when many contemporaries were celebrating the work women were doing in maintaining Britain just as it was for the men to come home to. Nottingham's women's organisations all engaged in war-work, but many also took the opportunity to use their new prominence to push for the demands which would begin to realign the balance of gender expectations once the war was over. Issues such as equal pay were a direct challenge to a post-war government to recognise that such a realignment was necessary.

WAR HEROINES AND ACTIVE CITIZENS

Some historians are beginning to consider the role of women and their organisations during the war without a dominant focus on the practical effects of the war, but with a sense of the ideological shift that occurred during these years.

Participation in women-only organisations, or in distinct women's sections of mixed organisations, played a significant role in the lives of hundreds of thousands of middle-class women ... [They] all shared in a discourse about female citizenship which sought to foster the capacity of housewives to assert themselves in the public sphere ... to assert a distinctive feminine presence in local civic life; and to exercise leadership over women less privileged than themselves.⁵⁰⁶

Hinton's work is essentially about the inter-play of class within the WVS but he makes this interesting point that by consciously joining a single-sex voluntary organisation, women were making the decision to increase their presence within a local community and to join community work – they made the decision to become citizens. It is difficult to assert that this was the primary reason that most women joined local organisations during the war, but Hinton continues to argue that the consequence of joining a group was that women were “educated for citizenship” and encouraged to become “active participants in political life.” By fund-raising, canvassing and lobbying the local power brokers, women were indeed actively

⁵⁰⁶ Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War*, p. 2.

participating, and many then began to push against the restraints that stopped them developing further.⁵⁰⁷

When Mass-Observation sent a questionnaire to women's organisations in 1941 the Women's Guild of Empire responded, "we are not at all domestic ... We are to teach responsibility to women as citizens."⁵⁰⁸ This was the aim of many of the organisations and it was an aim fulfilled by much of the work undertaken by Nottingham's organised women. In November 1944 the Soroptomists and Nottingham Business and Professional Women's Club held an "equal citizenship" day in the city to allow anyone one who had views on how to develop female citizenship to contribute to an open forum; the education of women as citizens, and the importance of securing welfare reforms, was brought into sharp focus by the war and its immediate aftermath. Women were playing a full and equal role, including working for the armed services, in an era where the war affected every aspect of daily life. Some women involved in this role increasingly demanded recognition and greater opportunity to develop once the war was over. The essential difference between the citizenship campaigns and those that were more openly feminist, was the degree of challenge. Here the organisations were focussed on making gains for women, without explicitly challenging the status quo, and without diverting their support for the war effort.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid p. 40.

⁵⁰⁸ M-O TC32/4/H/2 *Interview with Secretary of Women's Guild of Empire.*

Some of its readers also seemed to view women's developing role as citizens as a positive step forward – a correspondent wrote in response to the National Service (Number Two) Act which conscripted unmarried women by writing:

We see girls with initiative, self-confidence and personality, as well as with mental and physical agility.⁵⁰⁹

Their increasing influence on society was also accepted – in 1939 an article entitled “Women and Politics” said,

It is more important that women today should take an interest in political questions for they have to play their part as citizens. They need to be well informed not only about what is happening today, but what has happened in the past and the background in which events have occurred,⁵¹⁰

and the paper did seem more keen to publish letters and articles on welfare and citizenship issues rather than stick to a diet of domestic tips. In January 1940 the *Nottingham Evening Post* published a letter from a woman calling for family allowances and in 1945 they published a number of letters from women calling on other women to support various parliamentary candidates. In December 1940 they published a response to a letter by a Mr Bond who had criticised women in local government:

I read the letter with interest and I thought for a moment I was back in the Middle Ages. Your correspondent says we ought to have women ... but they should be single women ... Those days are past. The British government has awakened in the minds of women a realisation of their

⁵⁰⁹ *Nottingham Guardian*, 19/12/41.

⁵¹⁰ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 1/12/39, p. 3.

own capacities ... They have tasted something of what it means to enjoy a richer and fuller life than one entirely occupied in washing, scrubbing and darning ... the days of man's monopoly of local government are over... Women do not want to usurp man's place in the universe, but they do want an equal share in the planning of a better world and better living conditions.⁵¹¹

Even if it was not the view of the majority of women, the strength of feeling of this correspondent indicates that the changing experiences of women were to leave a lasting legacy and could not always be a temporary matter as Harold Smith would have us believe.

The post-war era saw the *Nottingham Evening Post* printing letters from women which bemoaned the political apathy of the young, letters which support one of the contentions of historians that the movement lost its way because of an ageing membership unable to attract young supporters.⁵¹² This argument, however, appears to be based on some of the old feminist groups of the interwar period, and does not recognise the role played by new organisations in developing women's role as citizens. For example, the Nottingham branch of the British Housewives League, established in 1947, were quick to write to the press and campaign about a number of issues, including a call for housewives to go on strike from buying overpriced fruit and vegetables, and to refuse to buy food that wasn't wrapped in

⁵¹¹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 1/12/44, p. 4.

⁵¹² *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13/5/49; Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992)

plastic.⁵¹³ This willingness to take collective action reveals an organisation which recognised the power of women as consumers and allowed them to become more active as citizens.

The NCW continued its work in campaigning for Nottingham women to be able to act as full citizens as well as simultaneously providing them with opportunities to exert their citizenship rights. They sent members as representatives to a number of bodies who were working to improve the lives of local women, especially in the area of Reconstruction. Thus, in 1945 NCW women joined the Nottinghamshire Rural Housing Committee.⁵¹⁴ In 1944 the NCW worked hard on a campaign to have Household Management recognised as a career (including providing training for interested housewives in domestic law and house construction so they could inspect potential problems damage and know how to arrange for them to be fixed). After the war the NCW worked with the prevailing vision of domesticity but continued to use it to push for improvements to women's general lives. Thus, in 1946, they launched campaigns for improved maternal welfare and for the education of women for marriage and family life.⁵¹⁵ They also organised and circulated questionnaires on shop opening hours and utility furniture, and passed resolutions supporting the enabling of painless childbirth, as well as campaigning for the police to find husbands who deserted their wives and for the council to provide cars for midwives.⁵¹⁶ This citizenship

⁵¹³ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 16/8/47; *Nottingham Evening Post* 23/5/49.

⁵¹⁴ DD 748/6/2 24th May, 1945.

⁵¹⁵ DD 748/6/2 15th October, 1946.

⁵¹⁶ DD 748/9/96 *Report of the Nottingham branch of the National Council of Women, 1946-1947*.

work merged seamlessly with the more equality feminist issues, as the members worked to improve the opportunities of all Nottingham's women.

The influence upon our national life of the million women, who through WVS, have learned to take a wider view of their duties as citizens will be considerable.

The role of the WVS was key in developing women's ideas of their own citizenship – a continuation of the voluntary social service role which had been vital in allowing women to “actively assert” their citizenship.⁵¹⁷ For many, their membership of the WVS provided them with their first taste of public service, which then helped to develop their self-confidence and their desire to contribute further. Much of their work was an extension of a domestic role, especially the work of members of the Housewives Service, but they were still involved in the community and improving the lives of others whilst developing as citizens. They were becoming more informed about the political and administrative processes of the community, thus equipping themselves to be even more active in the future. After the war the local WVS branches were involved in providing accommodation for young married couples (December 1947), organising holiday camps for agricultural volunteers (May 1948) and recruiting WVS volunteers from the new housing estates (December 1949), thus continuing to contribute to their local community.

⁵¹⁷ in Hartley, *Hearts Undefeated*, pp. 140-143; Hinton, “Voluntarism and the Welfare State” p. 279.

Other welfare campaigns were launched – the Nottingham Housewives’ League wrote to local MPs asking for their support on the Bill to give women analgesia in childbirth and sent a deputation to Mrs Paton, MP for Rushcliffe, and James Harrison, MP for East Nottingham to demand answers of issues of housing and food supply. Local members were also involved in the storming of Westminster Hall by the League in June 1946 over issues of food control.⁵¹⁸ These women, described as “militant” by James Hinton were continuing a trend of welfare feminism that extended back before the war commenced, which had given women the confidence to express their domestic concerns in a wider arena.⁵¹⁹ One area that troubled many of the groups was that of post-war housing. Woodthorpe TWG organised a petition in September 1945 demanding that women had a greater voice on the local housing committee and the EAW called for more smaller houses and flats. Other concerns included the adoption laws, prison reform, tariffs and public toilets.⁵²⁰ Their campaign was dominated by the desire to harness the benefits of electricity to improve the lives of women – to take out the “drudgery which has killed the housewife physically and mentally.”

Women could not be truly considered emancipated ... until old fashioned tools and out-of-date methods in the home were replaced by scientific organisation.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8/3/1949; *Nottingham Guardian*, 17/4/47, 21/10/47; reported in *Nottingham Guardian*, 6/6/47, p. 3.

⁵¹⁹ J. Hinton, ‘Militant Housewives: the British Housewives League and the Attlee Government’, *History Workshop* 34 (1998) 129-156.

⁵²⁰ DD 1357/1/4/1 *Minutes of the Nottingham branch of the Electrical Association for Women, 1938-1946*. These topics were all on the meetings list for 1946.

⁵²¹ DD 1357/1/4/1 28th February 1945; DD 1357/1/48 *Nottingham branch of the EAW, Newspaper Cutting File, 1936-1986* Dame Haslett to the EAW 9th February 1948.

Specific war work encouraged women to develop as citizens and to serve their wider communities. In addition to the Group Action Council, the Nottingham Social Service Society also acted as an umbrella for many voluntary groups. In 1939 it set up an Emergency Committee to help its affiliated societies to engage in war work, and it helped to set up the city's first Citizens' Advice Bureau. In 1940 the educated women in the Soroptomists set up a canteen in Nottingham Midland train station to supply food and drink, and were successful in raising £290 to enable it to become self-financing by 1942.⁵²² They also set up a home for "ladies in straitened circumstances" brought on by the war, in July 1940. The Girl Guides ran the George Street Baptist Air Raid Rest Centre in 1941 and helped to run the YWCA wartime Youth Café. The WVS dominated the co-ordination of women's war work in the city, but other organisations were also meeting the needs identified by their own members.

The stated aim of the South Division Conservative Association Women's Section was to "further political education amongst women electors in the division."⁵²³ This was done through regular lectures from local and national politicians on issues including the threat of socialism and the fuel crisis.⁵²⁴ This political education played a fundamental role in ensuring women were playing a full role as informed citizens. Because of the high level of shared membership between the women's organisations, many political women were members of other organisations, and they took with them the understanding of how to make an

⁵²² DD SO 25/3/1 *Details of Soroptomist War Work*.

⁵²³ DD PP 2/3/1 *1945 Branch Rules*.

⁵²⁴ DD PP 2/3/1 *Minutes 1946 AGM, 1947 AGM*.

impact on the world of local politics. Women were developing their civic functions and calling for the opportunities to develop them even further. The Standing Conference of Women's Organisations united these demands and gave Nottingham women a collective voice. In 1948 they launched campaigns for women to be part of rent tribunals, improved housing, playgrounds for children, and the care of orphans. Their interest ranged over both feminist and citizenship issues and through strength of numbers they were a formidable force in local politics.⁵²⁵

In 1945 the NCSS held a Conference on Women's Education and recommended that:

there should be provided sound courses of instruction on a whole range of subjects [from] home-making to house-management ... to civics, local government, social reconstruction and international affairs.⁵²⁶

The education of girls and women was seen as key to their future role as citizens and many of the organisations were keen to push for co-educational facilities – a campaign taken up by the Arnold Townswomen's Guild in July 1944.⁵²⁷ The Woodthorpe TWG set up a Civics Group in April 1945 to educate interested members about the political process and current affairs. This group also held regular debates on current affairs such as “the development of a youth movement is detrimental to home life” (4/2/46) and “unless ethical standards are raised civilisation must fall” (7/10/46) and, in 1948, set up a monthly “social studies”

⁵²⁵ *Report of Standing Conference of Women's Organisation 1947* in DD SO 2/3 .

⁵²⁶ DD CSS 6 *NCSS Annual Report 1945-6*.

⁵²⁷ *Nottingham Guardian*, 6/7/44, p. 3.

group to allow women to meet and discuss issues of social policy. This work was essential in educating women as citizens, and the fact the TWGs were able to add new groups in the post-war period is an indication of the appetite that existed for these types of opportunities.

The WI also offered occasions for its members to become more informed about politics and current affairs. In January 1941 Keyworth WI were “inspired” by a talk on “Women’s Work in Wartime” and they were later addressed on “Beveridge: For and Against” (April 1943), “Social Order and Prison Reform” (October 1945) and “the Women’s International League for Peace” (September 1948). The Soroptomists had lectures on the demands of different types of jobs, “Women in India” (July 1940) and were addressed by Margaret Bondfield MP in November 1943 on the “position of women in the home and the state.” The EAW heard speakers on “The Psychology of Nazism” in March 1941, Educational Reform in January 1944 and an “inspiring” address on “Women’s Place in the Post-War World” in November 1944. Unfortunately the minute books do not record what this place would be.

Opportunities for the citizenship education of girls often came through the Nottingham Union of Girls’ Clubs who ran lectures on debating and public speaking in January 1941, and encouraged girls to join the Nottingham Youth Council to discuss education (February 1942), Beveridge (March 1942) and

National Service for girls (January 1945).⁵²⁸ The latter led to a debate about whether it was better for girls to get experience of the world of work, or start trying to rectify the falling birthrate straight away. The title of their 1942 Regional Conference was “The World Crisis – what can we do?” suggesting that the girls had been encouraged to believe that they had the power and influence to change things. In 1946 representatives from all Nottingham’s girls’ clubs were invited to an address by Ellen Wilkinson, by then Minister for Education, at Nottingham’s Albert Hall and they were also visited by Princess Elizabeth following a discussion about the strength of the Empire. Other societies encouraging young women to develop their own opinions and training them to articulate them included the 1st Warsop Branch of the Girls’ Friendly Society who regularly provided its members with a choice of debate topics and training on how to research and conduct their debates.⁵²⁹ Girls were being taught that they needed to form opinions on current affairs and ideological matters, thus being encouraged to believe that their opinions should be expressed and well-informed. This was the basis of a fledgling belief that women needed to be as informed as men as they could possibly be the policy makers of the future.

Finally, some of the citizenship education of Nottingham’s women and girls was provided by the Workers’ Educational Association. Their classes continued

⁵²⁸ DD 1566/1/1 *Nottingham Union of Girls’ Clubs: Minutes of the Members’ Councils 1935-1947*.

⁵²⁹ DD 142/13/1 *Minutes of the 1st Warsop Branch of the Girls’ Friendly Society, 1938-1943*. In November 1941 the list of topics included: road travel is better than air, young people shouldn’t join societies, the countryside is better than the town, “science is a curse to civilisation”, long hair is better than short, home baking is better than bought, and should you save the lives of brought-down enemies. The girls chose the last one.

throughout the war with eight classes delivered by women in 1943, covering subjects from Music to Reconstruction and Social Psychology.⁵³⁰ In 1941 the WEA set up an elite group called the 22 Club which held weekly meetings and monthly discussion evenings, run by women and mostly attended by women only. A list of their lectures and discussions demonstrates that there were women with a taste for current affairs who believed that it was important to be educated to enable them to play a part in a new and perhaps more evenly balanced society, where their voice would be heard and valued.⁵³¹ Developing women as citizens did not take place in isolation from the other work of the women's organisations – indeed for many there was still no ideological difference between pushing for equal pay and pushing for an improved electricity supply. The same women worked on the same campaigns with no conflict to indicate a weakening of the women's "movement" in 1940s Nottingham, representing a continuation of the approach taken before the war. As we approach 1950 many of Nottingham's organisations had spent thirty years campaigning on a range of issues without the need to classify them as feminist or not.

⁵³⁰ DD WEA 2/1/3/1 *Minutes of the WEA – Nottingham Branch 1942-1949*.

⁵³¹ DD 1146/2 *Log book of the 22 Club 1941-1945*.

Lectures included:

Science v. Materialism 11/6/41
 The use of leisure in wartime 19/5/43
 Sex and the Individual in the Modern World
 29/10/41
 The current of intellectual thought in Europe
 7/4/43
 Conditions of responsible citizenship 9/6/43
 Towards democracy in China 24/11/43

Discussions included:

Psychology 16/7/41
 Insurance 13/8/41
 Post War Economy 6/5/42
 The Parliamentary Machine 3/6/42
 Are Family Allowances a good thing? 26/8/42
 Social Service in the Post-war era 20/1/43

A SPACE FOR FEMALE CULTURE

Many will feel that they are going back to prison, unless they have some life away from sinks and brooms and washtubs.⁵³²

Most of the groups studied provided a range of opportunities and activities, many of which cannot be simply categorised as feminist or citizenship endeavours.

Many of the campaigns and concerns were not openly feminist but all accepted that women should be involved in wider society and that their involvement benefited both them and their community. In 1944, as the Townswomen's Guilds movement was spreading into Nottinghamshire a member wrote to the *Evening Post* that they wished to "serve as a common meeting ground for women irrespective of creed and party for their wider education including social intercourse."⁵³³ As previously argued, this space for social intercourse was a vital part of Nottingham's network of women's organisations. The organisations provided a much needed avenue for relaxation and a female-focused space for women, many of who were working alongside men for the first time in many years and facing some hostility because of it. The tensions, difficulties and loneliness of the war could be slightly alleviated by having the opportunity to meet women who were suffering the same hardships, and working together to try and alleviate some of the worst excesses of wartime life. Groups such as the Allestree Conservative Ladies Coffee Club met fortnightly in the post-war period on a Thursday (the 56 members relaxed with musical afternoons, whist drives,

⁵³² P. Bendit and L. Bendit, *Living Together Again* (London, 1946).

⁵³³ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 4/2/44, p. 5.

outings and bring and buy sales) and the existence of this and similar groups demonstrate the importance they held as a counterweight to the troubles of wartime and the immediate aftermath of war.⁵³⁴

As before the war, various aspects of the organisations' work allowed for vital social intercourse. Informative talks were a feature of many of the group meetings. Woodthorpe TWG had talks on China (October 1944), "Dress through the last seven centuries" (June 1945), the Borstal system (August 1945), "Nottingham as a Fashion Centre (October 1946), "Old People's Welfare" (January 1948) and Charles Dickens (May 1950).⁵³⁵ The Mothers Union continued to provide an avenue for social comradeship for godly women, and they were able to engage in discussion about the Biblical roots of warfare and conflict, whilst the Soroptomists discussed the colour bar in South Africa and the United Nations.⁵³⁶ The Forest Ward Women's Conservative Association, meanwhile were edified by a lecture on "pioneer women" such as Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry, Madame Curie and Mrs Pankhurst.⁵³⁷ These talks were designed to interest and educate and were an important alternative form of collective culture to the picture house.

Fund-raising and charity work were still key features of the organisations' work.

Keyworth WI spent October 1946 raising funds for the nursery association, thus

⁵³⁴ *Allestree Ladies Coffee Club: 1948-1988. The first forty years.* (Nottingham, 1988).

⁵³⁵ DD 2276/2/1 *Woodthorpe Townswomen's Guild*

⁵³⁶ M-O TC32/4/E/4 *The Mothers' Union*; DD SO 2/3 January 1947, June 1947.

⁵³⁷ *Nottingham Guardian*, 17/4/40, p. 3.

demonstrating an acceptance that women with children needed or wanted to work. The Soroptomists organised a collection for the Ambulance Fund in Spring 1940 and for the Guide Dogs for the Blind in the Autumn of 1941. Many groups also sent representatives and funds to the Nottinghamshire Comforts (and Cigarettes for Local Prisoners of War) Fund who used most of the money to buy wool to be knitted into garments by the WVS and WI. Beeston Women's Conservative Association continued their whist and bridge drives every month throughout the war, maintaining a sense of normality for women who were often facing uncertainty and potential personal loss.

Demonstrations of practical skills also played a part. In May 1943 the NCW, who spent most of the war campaigning on feminist and citizenship issues, held a demonstration of fruit preservation. Keyworth WI offered demonstrations and instruction on wartime gardening (June 1940), eggless baking (February 1942) and First Aid in the home (March 1943). Coddington WI gave a demonstration on salads and salad dressings in June 1941 and East Stoke WI gave one on haybox cookery in February 1948. Keep fit classes were often offered and fun events such as fashion shows also featured on the programmes of the groups, including a show organised by Woodthorpe TWG in July 1945. Woodthorpe TWG also introduced a "Woman's Hour" where women were invited to speak for five minutes on a subject of their choosing, whether it be educational, amusing or reciting. This opportunity to practice public speaking in front of a small group of friends must have dramatically increased the self-esteem of many of the members, and thus

cannot be simply dismissed as unimportant in the wider development of women's roles at this time.

*

The Second World War and its aftermath was a time when Nottingham women were continuing to work through their organisations to empower themselves – as equal citizens and as individual members of a household, community and nation. In 1941 Miss Dorothy Fisk a member of the elite 22 Club was invited to address her club on “The Woman's Point of View”. She told the group that they must continue to fight for: equality of opportunity in education, the abolition of the marriage bar, improved access for women to promotion, legal union status for housework and equal pay and compensation.⁵³⁸ There is evidence that Nottingham women were hearing about these feminist issues and were involved in campaigns to secure them. Added to the voices of the Soroptomists and the NCW Nottingham's welfare and equality feminists enjoyed new support with the voice of the Business and Professional Women's Club and the militancy of the Housewives' League. This belies the argument that feminism was stagnant and that many campaigning women returned meekly and gratefully to their homes once the war was won, never to emerge again until the 1960s.

The strength of Nottingham's organisations in this period was their ability to work collectively, a strength that was further developed over the next two decades. They had shared personnel before the war, but the time of crisis gave them the

⁵³⁸ DD 1146/2 *Log book* 12/11/41.

impetus to formalise their co-operation through the Group Action Council (established by the Soroptomists) and the use of the NCSS as an co-ordinating organisation.⁵³⁹ From the records we can see that the NCW, for example, regularly discussed the requests for help they had had from other organisations, and also recorded the representatives they sent to the meetings of other organisations in the city. In 1942 the Soroptomists started to regularly hold joint meetings with the Nottingham branches of the Business and Professional Women's Club, The Nottingham Federation of University Women, the NCW and the WVS. The knitting work of the WVS was done in conjunction with the Women's Section of the British Legion, the Co-operative Women's Guild, the NFWI and the Church of Scotland's Women's Guild. This mirrored the national pattern of the organisations working together in an attempt to tackle some of the greatest inequalities and meet the greatest needs of women of whatever background. It also tells us that the "movement" if any such thing existed, was unified and was strengthened by a co-operation that lasted beyond 1945. The number and variety of organisations that continued shows how secure the tradition of local organising was. The lists we can find in the NCSS and the visibility of women's organisations in the press, support the contention that through the war and beyond women continued to value the opportunities and experiences they found in joining single-sex groups. If they continued to be attractive to members the organisations must have been meeting their needs, whether those needs were a determination to change women's position in society,

⁵³⁹ Hinton also briefly discusses the role of Group Action Councils nationally, and within the context of the WVS. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership...*

to try and secure an improvement in their local community, or to simply allow them some independent space away from the home.

During the war years many Nottingham women felt valued and respected as an important part of the wider community, even if their contribution remained largely domestic:

Very few of us can be heroines on the battlefield, but we can all have the tiny thrill of thinking, as we hear the news of an epic battle in the air, “perhaps it was my saucepan that made part of that Hurricane!”⁵⁴⁰

The local organisations helped to foster and channel this sense of community and as a result many of their members were unwilling to let it go once war was over. We can see in Nottingham, therefore, a direct challenge to those who deny the importance or the legacy of the war in changing the lives of women. Organised women did not see 1945 as an opportunity to retire from the hard work of the war years – indeed they used the experienced gained by local women in campaigning and serving during the war to further pursue campaigns they felt were important. Within Nottingham women became increasingly visible within local politics indicating that the Second World War had been a catalyst for allowing women to further develop as citizens.

⁵⁴⁰ Lady Reading, leader of the WVS in July 1940. Quoted in Minns, *Bombers and Mash*, pp. 143-144.

CHAPTER FIVE: WOMEN, FEMINISM AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

As outlined in the introduction, the period that has attracted the least attention in relation to the role of women's organisations has been the post-World War Two period – that before the emergence of the Women's Liberation movement at the end of the 1960s. The study of the effect of the war on women has eclipsed any focus on the decades that followed, and many seem happy to accept the cultural stereotype of 1950s woman in her spotless home, waiting for her husband to come home from work and dreaming of nothing more than a new washing machine. Even historians such as Maggie Andrews who have made bold claims for the inter-war period, seem to accept that this time was one of declining campaigning zeal. The accepted view seems to have mirrored what some contemporaries described: in 1956 an article in *The Economist* entitled "The Feminists Mop Up" stated:

More than a century after Florence Nightingale staged her passionate revolt against the trivial domestic round here are the mass of women still preoccupied with their love life, clothes, children and homes – all the stuff of the women's magazines ... The ordinary woman persists in the belief that in marriage, one ounce of perfume is still worth a peck of legal rights and her dreams of power still feature the femme fatale rather than the administrative

grade of the Civil Service. The working class woman, especially, is almost untouched by the women's movement.⁵⁴¹

But others are beginning to see the period differently. Joyce Freeguard's work on the 1950s in particular demonstrates that national organisations continued to push for change and continued to maintain a feminist consciousness about improving the lives of women as citizens.⁵⁴² This chapter argues that this was a period of substantial change for many British women, and a time when many new rights were being established. The campaigns for these, largely legislative, rights were still being led by women in organisations, and the Nottingham organisations were as active and influential as ever.⁵⁴³ They continued to raise consciousness of a life outside the home, even at a time when the media were keen to make the home and family women's only concern. In this period, as in the previous ones, women's organisations were important in shaping and reflecting the lives and concerns of women. They pushed for feminist gains, allowed women to operate as full citizens in a democratic society, and allowed women a cultural space to pursue their own interest and specialities.

⁵⁴¹ Quoted in Gavron, *The Captive Wife*. It was testing this claim that was to be the basis of Gavron's study.

⁵⁴² Freeguard, 'It's Time for the women of the 1950s...'

⁵⁴³ There is little work done on the direct links between campaigns and legislative success after the equal pay agitation, but Hera Cook's work on the provision of contraception states, "the social legislation of the 1960s was passed as a result of agitation by groups that had, in the main, been established in the inter-war period." Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 316. Yet Cook also says that the campaign for free contraception was part of a wider social concern over the level of illegitimacy, and that although free contraception had been one of the recommendations of the 1949 Royal Commission on Population, it was not introduced until 1967. Thus, the direct link between campaigning activity and social/Parliamentary change in this era requires much greater study.

WOMEN IN 1950S AND 1960S BRITAIN

What is particularly significant about this period are the number of women who were active in the workforce, many of whom were married women with children. The economic boom of the 1950s witnessed women moving in greater numbers into the tertiary sector and new industries, most commonly secretarial or light factory work. “In twenty years the typical woman worker shifted from a young, single girl to a married woman over thirty, usually with children.” Part-time work for women quadrupled in the 1960s and 1970s and the official figures for part-time women workers who paid tax and national insurance were 779 000 in 1951, 1.85 million in 1961 and 2.75 million by 1971.⁵⁴⁴ By 1961 8.4 million women were working (32.4% of the total workforce) and, increasingly, married women had a “bimodal” pattern of working, having a break for childbearing and then returning to work, most often part-time.⁵⁴⁵ Their work, however continued to be sex-segregated and low skill; the proportion of women in professional work rose only slowly. As Viola Klein wrote at the time “there is no trace of feminist egalitarianism ... nor even is it implicitly assumed that [married] women have the right to work.”⁵⁴⁶ In 1952 women were paid 53% of men’s pay and equal pay,

⁵⁴⁴ Smith Wilson, ‘A new look at the affluent worker’, p. 207.

⁵⁴⁵ Thane, ‘Towards Equal Opportunities’, p. 193; Bruley, *Women in Britain*.

Statistics for women in the labour force:

	1951	1961	1971
Percentage of women in total labour force	31	33	37
Percentage of women aged 20-64 working	36	42	52
Percentage of married women aged 15-59 working	26	35	49

Ref: Thane ‘Women since 1945’, p. 393.

⁵⁴⁶ V. Klein, *Britain’s Married Women Workers* (London, 1957). Thane gives the figures for 1961 and women made up 16% of the medical profession, 3.5% of the whole legal profession and 2.3% of surveyors and architects. “Towards Equal Opportunities”.

though promised by both major parties, was slow to be achieved.⁵⁴⁷ Trade union membership grew and there were incidents of women working collectively to improve their working conditions; in 1955 women workers went on strike at the Hillingdon engineering works near Glasgow for equal pay, in 1968 183 car-seat machinists at the Ford factory in Dagenham went on strike demanding the recognition and pay owed to them as skilled workers and in 1969 200 women went on strike at the Lucas factory in Acton calling for equal pay and grading. Thus, women were increasingly prominent in the workplace and not just young women waiting to start their families.

Working mothers did not, however, go unchallenged. The family was still considered the most important component of society, and though there were 25,000 divorces a year in the mid 1950s and over 50,000 in 1969, 75% of those who divorced remarried, often in increasingly elaborate ceremonies. The birth rate rose in the early 1960s and 95% of children were born to married parents, though an anonymous survey of newly married couples in 1969 revealed 26% of men and 63% of women were virgins on their wedding day, demonstrating an apparent relaxation of sexual behaviour.⁵⁴⁸ Sex was increasingly acknowledged as important to both partners within marriage and the work of Alfred Kinsey

⁵⁴⁷ Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour*.

⁵⁴⁸ Marwick, *British Society since 1945*.

Marital status of men and women (000s)

	Men			Women		
	1951	1961	1971	1951	1961	1971
Single	10811	11340	12014	10846	10829	11055
Married	12358	13279	13976	12488	13355	14050
Divorced		102	200		185	318

Births per 1000

1951 16.0 1961 17.9 1964 18.8 1968 17.6 1970 16.7

Ref: Marwick, *British Society since 1945*, pp. 168-9.

demystified sex and contributed to a slow liberalisation of attitudes towards it.⁵⁴⁹ The contraceptive pill was introduced in 1961 (though not officially endorsed by the government until 1967) and by 1964, when Helen Brook opened her first birth control clinic for unmarried mothers, half a million women were on the pill and the birth rate started to fall.⁵⁵⁰ The number of children offered for adoption also fell as legal abortion was introduced in 1967 and the stigma attached to unmarried mothers gradually faded. Mothers were seen as the key to the home and to the stability of the nation, and new fields of psychology and sociology debated furiously as to whether the increasing trend of mothers to work part-time when their children were still of school age would lead to a breakdown of social norms, even though most women fitted their work around school hours.⁵⁵¹ On one side a number of studies in the early 1950s described the theory of “maternal deprivation” of children whose mothers worked. The primary proponent of this theory, John Bowlby, claimed that separating a young child from its mother, even for a short period, could result in juvenile delinquency. Mothers were the only ones who could be responsible for the mental welfare of their children and therefore working mothers would raise mentally ill children and were responsible for juvenile delinquency – “mother-love in infancy is as important for mental

⁵⁴⁹ A. Kinsey et al, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, 1953).

⁵⁵⁰ In 1963 there were 400 Family Planning clinics in Britain. In 1964 the Brook Clinic in London started to give contraceptive advice to unmarried women which led to a much wider use of the pill. Sue Bruley makes the claim the feminism and the contraceptive pill went hand in hand: “contributed to the growing feminist consciousness in the late 1960s and helped to create a feeling amongst young women that they may seek control over other aspects of their lives. Ref: Bruley, *Women in Britain*, pp. 138-9.

⁵⁵¹ The debate that raged on this issue is discussed in detail in Smith Wilson, ‘A New look at the Affluent Worker’, pp. 210-222.

health as are vitamins and proteins for physical health.”⁵⁵² In a brief leaflet entitled “Can I Leave My Baby” Bowlby recommended it only in the direst of emergencies and forecast peril if it was done too often.⁵⁵³

Promoting the alternative view was Ferdynand Zweig who, after studying 445 women workers, concluded, “there can be little doubt that ... children are nowadays much better cared for by mothers who go out to work than in former times,” a standard of care he ascribed to better nursery provision and higher wages for women.⁵⁵⁴ Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, though accepting of the idea that many women wanted to stay at home, argued that bi-modal working should be made easier with the wider introduction of nursery care.⁵⁵⁵ They wanted women to be able to combine their “two roles” and also argued for 2 years paid maternity leave and a shorter working day for both mothers and fathers. Whilst accepting women’s primary role as mother and housekeeper, and couching their conclusions in terms of working women being needed to serve the nation, they denounced Bowlby as a “new and subtle form of anti-feminism”.⁵⁵⁶ Part-time work should be encouraged for mothers of school-aged children as it allowed women to have experiences outside of the home, but had a limited impact on their primary roles as wife and especially as mother.

⁵⁵² J. Bowlby, *Maternal Care & Mental Health* (WHO, 1952).

⁵⁵³ J. Bowlby, *Can I Leave My Baby?* (London: 1958).

⁵⁵⁴ Zweig, *Women’s Life and Labour*, p. 15.

⁵⁵⁵ Myrdal and Klein, *Women’s Two Roles*.

⁵⁵⁶ Quote in Thane, ‘Towards Equal Opportunities’.

In politics the number of female MPs in this period remained steady and those elected were determined to be “MPs, not women MPs” - we do not witness the collaborative work between women MPs that was such a feature of the war-time era.⁵⁵⁷ The 1950 election saw 126 women candidates stand and 21 were elected. Nottingham’s female MP, Florence Paton, lost her seat by only 395 votes. In this brief government Edith Summerskill was appointed Minister of National Insurance. In 1951 77 female candidates stood for election and 17 were elected. Florence Horsburgh became Minister of Education, though she did not sit in the cabinet until 1953. Four private Bills sponsored by women were successful in this Parliament concerning disposal of uncollected goods, anaesthetics in veterinary operations, the protection of birds and the rights of householders in the face of meter readers. In 1955 some women MPs held their own debate on nuclear weapons, which resulted in a motion calling for greater research into the long-term effects of the bomb.

In 1955 there were 91 women candidates and 24 were elected (14 Labour and 10 Conservative). In the 1955 budget RAB Butler put a 30% purchase tax on washboards and pegs which drew sharp criticism from the women on both sides of the House. The women MPS were split, however, over the Suez Crisis, with the government women supporting military action and their Labour opponents condemning it. The 1959 election saw 81 women standing, and 25 elected, including Margaret Thatcher – 12 Conservatives and 13 Labour members. In 1964

⁵⁵⁷ Rowbotham, *A Century of Women* (London, 1977) The following summary has been informed by Brookes, *Women at Westminster*.

90 candidates produced 29 women MPs and in 1966 26 of the 81 candidates were elected. The firm majority gained by Labour in 1966 allowed them to establish, in 1967, a committee to investigate sexual discrimination – a committee that reported in 1969 and 1972 and led to the provisions of the 1970 Equal Pay Act and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act.

Both parties continued to “represent women primarily in terms of their domestic roles; and images of women as housewives were prominent” in their propaganda. In the 1950s, when the nation continued to struggle under austerity measures, the housewife “could be a positive and powerful political figure.”⁵⁵⁸ The Conservatives in particular addressed women as consumers and in 1964 one Labour election pamphlet called on women to “vote for the future, vote for the children of Britain.” “Between 1950 and 1966 not a single [Labour] pamphlet made reference to the single or married working woman;”⁵⁵⁹ mainstream politics focussed only on one aspect of women’s lives, thus ignoring the concerns of many women, both within and outside party membership.

Legislation affecting women was prominent in this period. 1958 saw the passage of the Life Peerages Act, an important feminist demand, which would allow women to be life peers (although not hereditary until 1963). The first life peer was Lady Reading, President of the WVS, who became Baroness Swanborough. By 1964 there were nine women life peers in the Lords. 1967 saw the Abortion Act

⁵⁵⁸ McCarty, ‘Attitudes to Women and Domesticity’, p. 175.

⁵⁵⁹ Black and Brooke, ‘The Labour Party, Women and the Problem of Gender’, p. 420; p. 441.

(allowing women to seek legal abortion with the consent of two doctors), the NHS (Family Planning) Act which allowed local authorities to provide contraceptives, and the Sexual Offences Act which decriminalised homosexuality for adults. 1969 saw the Divorce Reform Act which introduced the concept of “irreconcilable differences” and allowed couples who had been separated for two years a divorce if both parties agreed (if only one partner agreed they could now obtain a divorce after 5 years). In 1970 the Matrimonial Property Act deemed that a wife’s work, whether it be in the home or outside, was an equal contribution to the house, and thus all assets should be divided equally in a divorce. In the same year the Equal Pay Act was passed, and despite its many loopholes and delays, it firmly established the principle of equal pay for equal work. Thus the period of “stasis” in the women’s movement was one which witnessed significant legislative change, changes which were consistently lobbied for by the women’s organisations at both a national and local level and which had been lobbied for for many years.

Educational opportunities were expanding for both boys and girls. By 1955 7.9% of children were in education until they were 17, twice as many as had been before the war. In 1956-7 89,833 students were at university. Yet, often the only technical training on offer for girls of secondary school age was that in shorthand or typing. Grammar schools persisted in presenting motherhood as the primary career for girls. Campaigning women, however, did succeed in prompting a clause in the 1959 *Crowther Report* which proposed allowing able girls to be exempt

from “education for motherhood” and indeed some women did take advantage of these new opportunities to enable them to access professional careers:

New opportunities of well-paid work for educated women were developing in the state sector ... Teachers and social workers [were] professional workers, often active trade unionists and earning enough to make them independent. It was this confident and growing stratum, radicalised during the 1960s, that was to become active in the new Women’s Liberation movement.⁵⁶⁰

By 1957 2.5 million new flats and houses had been built nationwide, largely by local authorities, and many local studies show that young married women were very happy to have a house of their own on one of the new estates.⁵⁶¹ The number of women who were able to benefit from labour-saving devices in the home grew dramatically in this period. In 1956 8% of homes had a fridge; this had risen to 33% by 1962 and 69% by 1971. Also in 1971, 64% homes had a washing machine. Women’s magazines boomed from a total weekly circulation of 3.1 million a week in 1946 to 12 million in the mid-1950s – 58% of women read a weekly women’s magazine, a trend enhanced by the lifting of paper restrictions in 1952.⁵⁶² By 1958 five out of every six women read a woman’s magazine regularly.⁵⁶³ They largely “combined enthusiasm for consumer goods with

⁵⁶⁰ Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p. 352.

⁵⁶¹ Langhamer, ‘The Meaning of Home’, pp. 349-52.

⁵⁶² Thane, ‘Women since 1945’,

⁵⁶³ S. Spencer, ‘“Be yourself”: *Girl* and the business of growing up in late 1950s England’, in K. Cowman and L. A. Jackson (eds), *Women and Work Culture: Britain c.1850-1950* (Aldershot, 2005).

enthusiasm for the family and the monarchy,⁵⁶⁴ presenting an ideal home of Formica, cleaning products, frozen peas and electrical equipment, when the reality for many working-class women was scarcity in the new tower blocks. Yet mainstream women's culture did begin to go beyond the home and family. Women's columns of a new type sprang up in the local and national press, written by women for women and increasingly discussing women's work as well as hemlines and recipes. Magazines for girls presented idealised views of possible careers for women alongside their tips on preparation for the domestic role.⁵⁶⁵ The BBC introduced Woman's Hour and *The Guardian* newspaper set up a Housewives' Register for educated women isolated in their homes with young children, dissatisfied with the sole role of "mummy". Hannah Gavron's work of 1966 also revealed the isolation and discontent felt by many housewives.⁵⁶⁶ However, though some women were aware of international texts such as those by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, the influence of the American role models of femininity such as Doris Day and Marilyn Monroe had arguably a greater impact on the construction of a female "identity".⁵⁶⁷

Like the periods previously discussed in this study, the 1950s and 1960s were a period of transformation for women. Though often dismissed as the era of the housewife, rising affluence, improved education, improved opportunities in the workplace and a variety of important legislation altered the lived experience of

⁵⁶⁴ Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p. 297.

⁵⁶⁵ Spencer, 'Be Yourself'.

⁵⁶⁶ H. Gavron *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (London, 1966).

⁵⁶⁷ S de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Paris, 1949) first published in English by Jonathan Cape in 1953; B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963).

many women, even if this was accompanied by a continued emphasis on the importance of motherhood. Despite being described as a “dormant” period in the history of feminism, some very important legislation was passed in the pursuit of greater equality and improved opportunities for women. Therefore, the question needs to be posed – is it possible to ascertain how much of this was passed due to pressure from women’s organisations? In addition, the concept of femininity was growing in complexity, as it increasingly became the norm for both middle-class and working-class women to mix marriage and work, and for some to mix motherhood and a career. Improved education and a dramatically changing social context meant younger women had many more opportunities to learn about the world and its inequalities, and many new organisations to join to attempt to redress these problems.

NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND CAMPAIGNING ISSUES

In 1964 there were three million women active in around 120 national organisations in Britain.⁵⁶⁸ The changing cultural context did lead to an emergence of new, single-issue organisations in this period, such as the Minorities Research Group for Lesbians, set up in 1963.⁵⁶⁹ Yet the traditional organisations

⁵⁶⁸ Meehan, ‘British Feminism’ in Smith (ed) *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, p. 192.

Membership figures for the 1950s:

Labour Party Women’s Section	364,000	National Fed. of Women’s Institutes	500,000
Mother’s Union	500,000	Six Point Group	200
National Council for Equal Citizenship	3,000	Women’s Co-operative Guild	48,000
National Union Townswomen’s Guilds	250,000	Women’s Unionist Association	2,200,000

Ref: Beaumont, ‘The Women’s Movement,’ p. 266.

⁵⁶⁹ J. Gardiner, *From The Closet to the Screen: Women of the Gateways 1945-85* (London, 2003).

also continued to campaign with equal pay and equal opportunities as their focus. In the early 1950s there were national campaigns on these issues by the Six Point Group, Married Women's Association, Women's Freedom League and the Women's Peace Movement.⁵⁷⁰ In 1952 the Six Point Group hosted a conference which asked, "Is there a Feminine Point of View?" The conference ended with an acceptance that family life was of prime importance to women and a declaration that women were more compassionate, intuitive and selfless than men, but that all efforts should be made to tackle women's sense of inferiority, especially in the field of education.⁵⁷¹ The Conference ended by declaring,

The emancipation of women has still a long way to go ... the ultimate aim, which we should never lose sight of, is nothing less than a society shaped and run equally by men and women and pursuing the best ideals and hopes of both.⁵⁷²

Into the 1960s, social change led to a new emphasis for many of the older organisations yet many of the "new" issues of reproductive rights and rights within marriage which were now beginning to bear fruit, had been on their agendas since 1918. Tireless campaigns, begun in the 1920s, for information about birth control or rights on divorce resulted in legislative change in this period. Marwick has argued that the legislation that was passed to enable women to achieve equality and maximise their role as citizens was the result not so much

⁵⁷⁰ Caine, *English Feminism*.

⁵⁷¹ The conference called for schools to teach about marriage, not just domesticity, and to prepare young women for combining marriage and motherhood.

⁵⁷² O. Campbell *The Report of the Conference on the Feminine Point of View* (London, 1952), p. 60.

of the “exertions of active feminists” as of “deeper social and economic forces favourable to a general liberalisation.”⁵⁷³ Yet women regularly organised to pursue feminist and citizenship objectives and Freeguard believes that they did make a difference:

The image that emerges of women’s organisations in the 1950s is of interconnection, co-operation, mutuality and success in their pursuit of a wide range of gender equality issues.⁵⁷⁴

[Legislation] fed the growing expectations of women without satisfying them.⁵⁷⁵

Certainly, collaborative working was increasingly evident in this period. In 1952 the Communists established the National Assembly of Women which involved many prominent women in the campaign for peace. Nuclear weapons were an issue of immense concern for feminist groups at this time, including the Women’s Co-operative Guild, the 1958 Women’s Peace Caravan, the Women’s Committee of CND and an organisation called Voice of Women. Two-thirds of the support for the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests, established in 1957 and the fore-runner to CND, came from women. In 1966 the Six Point Group and the Fawcett Society, worried by “too many small societies ... struggling for the same objects, with inadequate resources,”⁵⁷⁶ started making alliances between themselves and other groups, including the National Council of

⁵⁷³ Marwick, *British Society since 1945*, p. 149.

⁵⁷⁴ Freeguard, ‘It’s time for the women of the 1950s to stand up’, p. 1.

⁵⁷⁵ Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement* 2nd ed., p. 313.

⁵⁷⁶ *ibid.* p. 301.

Married Women and professional and employment associations. They specifically “aimed to co-ordinate consistent pressure for equal opportunities, equal pay, equal taxation and better treatment for unmarried mothers.”⁵⁷⁷ Standing Conferences of Women’s Organisations were set up in many towns, including Nottingham, and were composed of representatives of local organisations, providing a “platform or mechanism for bringing organisations together on matters of common interest.”⁵⁷⁸

Collaborative activity is straightforward to find; what is less easy to comment on, or even to unearth, is the specific impact of this activity. There are a number of ways the impact of feminist and citizenship campaigns could be seen, especially through examining the general climate of views on gender, and by examining the views of the important opinion-formers (politicians, the media) on the changes and demands being proposed. During the period immediately following the franchise in 1918 we witness a significant range of legislation that affected the lives of women, but little was related to the specific feminist demands the organisations were making. In this second post-war period we see a great deal of notable legislation when feminist demands were less overt (although still important). There are three possible explanations for this. Firstly it could be ascribed to the work of the early agitators finally bearing fruit in a period when social attitudes, especially those on reproductive rights and rights within marriage, were changing. But this negates the influence of work that continued after 1939. The impact of the Second World War must be important, as although the domestic

⁵⁷⁷ Thane, ‘Towards Equal Opportunities’, p. 204.

⁵⁷⁸ Freeguard, ‘It’s time for the women of the 1950s to stand up’, p. 23.

ideal continued to dominate, attitudes towards and amongst women did change. And, importantly for this chapter, the significance of efforts of the existing organisations in maintaining a focus on particular gender issues is a contributory factor. The relative importance of each of these features is difficult to assess, but it is more problematic to dismiss any one of them as being immaterial.

The National Women's Advisory Committee of the TUC pursued a feminist agenda through the 1960s and by 1963 had secured TUC approval for a charter demanding equal pay, improved employment opportunities, better training, retraining for older women returning to work and improved health facilities in the workplace. The National Labour Women's Conference also passed a number of feminist resolutions in this decade. This has led Olive Banks to conclude that "the British equal rights legislation of the early 1970s ... does not owe its origins to the new [American] feminism," but to a continuous British movement kept alive by socialist women and women MPs.⁵⁷⁹ This is a key point in the context of this study but the historiographical problem is that little work has been done which directly links specific campaigns with specific advances. The contention here is that women's organisations made an important contribution in helping to make both the politicians and wider society aware of many issues of concern to women, thus raising their profile.

One important place to look for "impact" is the actions of women politicians.

Discussion of "women's issues" over forty years meant that politicians in general,

⁵⁷⁹ Banks, *Faces of Feminism*, p. 220.

and women politicians in particular, could not dismiss them. Included amongst these MPs were Edith Summerskill who, in 1952 introduced a Bill to help women whose husbands failed to pay them maintenance, and who finally achieved success with the 1963 Married Women's Savings Act, and Barbara Castle who, as Minister for Labour, introduced the Equal Pay Bill in 1970. Castle had also successfully introduced the Criminal Law Amendment Bill twenty years earlier to increase protection for prostitutes, demonstrating the commitment of some women MPs to feminist and citizenship causes. Margaret Thatcher also spoke in Parliament defending the rights of mothers to work.⁵⁸⁰

What is harder to assess is precisely the impact of the organisations which campaigned on a range of issues. Yet the scale of the campaigns and their lobbying activities indicates the possibility that their impact was important at least in terms of consciousness raising, in maintaining a focus on issues of importance to women. The Conservative Women's Conference in 1958 reflected the traditional concerns of that party, calling for an increase in corporal punishment, harsher punishments for crime, flogging for adult criminals and birching for young offenders. Yet the party also recognised the need to improve the rights of wives and in 1955 had declared itself committed to reforming tax allowances for married women. The Labour Women held regular discussion forums in the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations, and set up the National Labour Women's Advisory Committee. In 1964-5 there were 1665 active Women's Sections nationwide and women made up 42% of the Labour

⁵⁸⁰ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 143.

Party membership. Much of the time of the Women's Sections was spent campaigning on social welfare rather than gender issues.⁵⁸¹

The National Council of Women continued to express their views on a range of social issues and launched campaigns on widows' pensions, divorce and protecting women's rights within marriage. The topic of their 1958 national conference was working mothers. They can also take credit for some memorable legislative initiatives that achieved some success such as the Public Lavatories (Abolition of Turnstiles) Act, championed by the NCW, which became law in 1963. The British Federation of Business and Professional Women outlined their objectives in 1950:

to promote and safeguard the economic and social interests of business and professional women and secure increased opportunities for women in industry, the professions and public life.

By 1954 the Federation had 94,000 members and affiliated societies ranged from laundresses to farmers.⁵⁸² The Cooperative Women's Guild campaigned on a wide range of issues throughout the period, passing resolutions on matters including racial discrimination (1952), pensions (1952), family allowances for first children (1955), improved provision for the homeless (1962) and a call for increased unemployment benefit (1963).⁵⁸³ They also arranged cost of living rallies, collected toys for children in need, organised petitions against nuclear

⁵⁸¹ Black and Brooke, "The Labour Party, Women and the Problem of Gender," pp. 430-2.

⁵⁸² Freeguard, "It's time for the women of the 1950s to stand up," p. 26.

⁵⁸³ Gaffin and Thomas, *Caring and Sharing*.

weapons and attempted to push Parliament to accept a “Charter for Children” in 1968.

The Townswomen’s Guilds continued to be resolutely apolitical but declared their aim

to encourage the education of women to enable them as citizens to make their best contribution towards the common good ... to serve as a common meeting ground for women, irrespective of creed and party, for their wider education including social intercourse.⁵⁸⁴

The Guild offered its members social and educational activities and focused on the domestic skills that women could use “for the service of the state.”⁵⁸⁵ The Married Women’s Association, formed out of the Six Point Group and joined by many well known feminists such as Edith Summerskill and Vera Brittain, continued the campaign to make marriage an equal partnership and thus pursued the goal of equal shares in the family finances.

Equal pay was granted, in principle, by the end of this period, and this was largely due to an intense campaign by women trade-unionists, MPs and members of organisations. In 1951 the Equal Pay Campaign Committee (supported by a range of feminist organisations) made a propaganda film entitled “To be a Woman”.

This was shown all around the country, having a six day run in Nottingham in July 1951 (a longer run than in many cities) and then showing again in the suburb

⁵⁸⁴ Quoted in McCarty, “Attitudes to Women and Domesticity,” p. 301.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 304.

of Lenton Abbey in October for three days.⁵⁸⁶ In 1954 they dressed a horse-drawn wagon in suffragette colours to present an equal pay petition to Parliament. In 1961 equal pay was awarded to public servants and in 1964 the Labour government expressed its commitment to universal equal pay. When it did not deliver on its promises, many women joined together to form the national Joint Action Committee for Women's Equal Rights in 1968. The Treaty of Rome had made equal pay a condition of Britain joining the EEC and the Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970, to come into effect five years later. It was a major success and cannot simply be explained in terms of a desire for European integration – the continuity of the campaign from its early years between the wars culminated in success before the birth of Women's Lib.

Other issues were of concern to organised women – in 1954 the Women's Co-operative Guild voted for reform of the abortion laws. On an entirely different spectrum Mary Whitehouse and the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association published a "Woman's Manifesto" declaring that women wanted to "re-establish morality". The NVLA represented a very different tradition of women's activism, the feminism of moral purity – women defending society from men's natural but supposedly corrupt sexual impulses - and many of the women's organisations did indeed join the push for greater controls over film and television output.

⁵⁸⁶ Freeguard, "It's time for the women of the 1950s to stand up," Appendix 1.

A range of other issues captured the attention of women's groups - in 1961 pram-pushing mothers led 400 marchers to the Soviet Embassy with a letter for President Khrushchev which included the sentiment:

Up to now women have not had much to say in politics; but...we can't go on cooking food for our families when we know it is being contaminated with radioactive poisons.⁵⁸⁷

The WI launched a high-profile campaign to improve screening services for cervical cancer. Women For Westminster, the Status of Women Group and the Open Door Council all worked to improve women's access to the political process and the professions. Other groups, such as the National Council for One-Parent Families "maintained a distance from contemporary feminism yet were motivated by some of the same grievances."⁵⁸⁸ In the 1960s many organisations supported the calls made by Hannah Gavron for a "reanalysis of women's roles and capacities ... [and] a re-integration of mothers of young children into society" pushing for nurseries for those at work and community playgroups and classes for those at home.⁵⁸⁹ The call for nurseries was particularly prominent in the campaigns of the National Women's Advisory Committee. Campaigning activities for these organisations included encouraging women to join trade unions, supporting women on strike, rallies and marches, and the traditional methods of letter writing and lobbying politicians. Specific organisations for single issues acted as umbrella organisations – the Abortion Law Reform

⁵⁸⁷ Quoted in Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p. 344.

⁵⁸⁸ Wilson, *Only Half-way to Paradise*, p. 184.

⁵⁸⁹ Gavron, *The Captive Wife*, pp. 146-8.

Association was set up to legalise abortion and was supported by a range of women's groups.

Nationally some division along old lines returned, as demonstrated by the huge row within the British Federation of University Women when protective legislation was discussed in July 1954.⁵⁹⁰ Alongside the push for equal pay and rights there was a growing "recognition that equality on men's terms would not secure fundamental change in the position of women."⁵⁹¹ This thread of feminist thought, accepting women's differences, was no change from that of welfare feminism, but it was given intellectual support by the feminist writers of the period, such as Myrdal and Klein. Some women continued to balk at the label feminism – Shirley Williams commented in 1960, "I'm not a feminist either, but that's a matter of generations I think."⁵⁹² Interestingly she positions herself in a younger generation where feminism is less relevant, in contrast to the equal rights feminism of her mother Vera Brittain. It may be that feminism was less fashionable in a period where single-issue organisations such as CND diverted the attentions of many passionate female campaigners, or when many women were faced with balancing work and home, but measures which were campaigned for to help women to achieve that balance or improve their home life are not disregarded in this study.

⁵⁹⁰ Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*.

⁵⁹¹ Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945*, p. 115.

⁵⁹² Quoted in Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992)

Falling and aging membership of the organisations was, however, widely acknowledged. In 1961 the Women's Freedom League disbanded. The Women's Co-operative Guild lost members, falling from 61037 in 1951 to 38380 in 1963. This all combines to give a picture of organisations struggling to survive at a time when television could be a greater lure than sitting in a village hall or meeting room, and when greater educational opportunities for women reduced the need for them to receive their education through the medium of an organisation lecture. Some organisations continued to hold their meetings in the afternoon when working women were unable to attend. In addition, the growing trend towards part-time work meant that many middle-class women were no longer available for a commitment to voluntary work. Other organisations, however, attracted even more members, for example the WI and the Townswomen's Guilds, the Electrical Association for Women and political bodies such as the Labour Party Women's Section and Women's Unionist Association, representing Conservative women.⁵⁹³

And, in spite of some declining membership rolls, at the end of the 1960s women in the older organisations were still campaigning:

⁵⁹³ **Membership figures in the 1930s and 1950s:**

	1930s	1950s
National Federation of Women's Institutes	238,000	500,000
National Union of Townswomen's Guilds	54,000	250,000
Labour Party Women's Section	250,000	364,000
Women's Unionist Association	940,000	2,200,000

Ref: Beaumont, 'The Women's Movement', p. 266. In 1949 the EAW had 100 branches with over 10,000 members. By 1960 the number of branches had increased to 202, further increasing to 246 by 1965. Pursell, 'Domesticating modernity',

The fiftieth anniversary of the granting of the vote to women in 1968 appears to have produced a last flowering of the old suffrage movement spirit and a determination to pass on to younger feminists the message that there was still a long way to go.⁵⁹⁴

It was at the very end of this period when a new form of feminist consciousness began to emerge, initially amongst students, intellectuals and female trade unionists. The student movement and the New Left organisations of this period had politicised many women, as had examples of militant action in the fight for equal pay. This, kindled by the American movement, led to the establishment of the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights in May 1969. The same year saw the first anti-Miss World protest with placards announcing:

Miss-Fit Refuses to Conform, Miss-Conception Demands Free Abortion for All Women, Miss-Placed Demands a Chance to get Out of the House.⁵⁹⁵

In 1970 a women's history conference and Women's Liberation workshop was held at Ruskin College, Oxford resulting in four key demands: equal pay, equal education and opportunities, 24 hour nurseries and free contraception and abortion on demand. These were not new demands, but into the 1970s feminism became a stronger, more vocal, if even more fractured ideological movement.

NOTTINGHAM IN THE DECADES AFTER THE WAR

⁵⁹⁴ Bruley, *Women in Britain*, p. 149. See also M. Cole 'The Women's Vote: What has it Achieved?' in *Political Quarterly* 38 (1962).

⁵⁹⁵ Quoted in Sebestyen (ed), '68, '78, '88, p. 53 .

Nottingham in the mid century was a very different city to what it had been in 1918. By 1950 only 10% of Nottingham's working population worked in the textile industry, as opposed to the 25% in 1911.⁵⁹⁶ The city continued to grow and by 1961 577,500 people lived within ten miles of the city centre, making the city the eighth largest in Britain.⁵⁹⁷ Within the workforce, by 1960, women outnumbered men, but throughout the period, male unemployment was below the national average.⁵⁹⁸ Engineering, pharmaceuticals, tobacco and transport continued to be the big employers. In 1952 the Duke of Edinburgh opened a new Raleigh plant, and by then the company were producing over a million bicycles a year for the domestic and export markets. The big three employers in Nottingham regularly laid on excursion trains to the seaside and other destinations.

In this period the city began to look very different. In the late 1950s Nottingham was beset with road building schemes as an inner ring road was built to ease traffic congestion and many of the city's older buildings were demolished to make way for two new shopping centres. Nottingham attracted many migrant workers and organisations were set up to welcome new communities including Poles,

⁵⁹⁶ F. A. Wells 'Nottingham Industries: One hundred years of progress', in *A Century of Nottingham history* (University of Nottingham, 1951).

⁵⁹⁷ R. H. Osborne, 'Population and Settlement', in K. C. Edwards (ed), *Nottingham and its Region* (Nottingham, 1966). The population of Greater Nottingham had grown from 286 000 in 1901, to 436 800 in 1951, to 460 500 in 1961. Of the latter number, 311 900 lived within the city, though suburbanisation over the next decade was to reduce that number to 300 630. Ref pp. 347-354.

⁵⁹⁸ F. A. Wells 'Present Day Economic Structure', in Edwards *Nottingham and its Region*; D. Lawrence, *Black migrants: White natives. A study of race relations in Nottingham* (London, 1974) states unemployment figures:

	%age unemployed Nottingham	%age unemployed Britain
1952	1.3	1.6
1956	0.8	1.2
1960	2.2	2.4
1963	4.4	4.6

Ukrainians, Italians, West Indians and Pakistanis. In 1954 a Commonwealth Citizens Consultative Committee was set up to try to meet the needs of the new migrants, though this did not prevent serious race riots in the St Ann's area of the city in 1958. St Ann's was also the subject of a survey by the Adult Education Department at the University of Nottingham who found, in 1961, that 91% of houses in the area only had outside toilets, and 54% had no hot running water. In a city with the average population density of 17 people per acre, St Ann's had 62.2.⁵⁹⁹

In 1960 Nottingham was thrust into the national spotlight with the release of the film *Saturday Night, Sunday morning*, "a gritty portrayal of modern life in one of the country's largest provincial cities."⁶⁰⁰ Other cultural highlights included performances by Gerry and the Pacemakers and the Beatles, the opening of a new ten pin bowling alley, the launch of Radio Nottingham, the emergence of ice-hockey to accompany football and cricket as the city's sporting obsessions, and the opening of the Nottingham Playhouse. This latter building, despite many financial problems, became a leading provincial theatre and hosted an annual Arts Festival from 1965. In politics Nottingham saw its first woman Lord Mayor, Mrs Joan Case, in 1968, along with the first female Chair of the County Council, Mrs Anne Yates, in the same year. Women continued to be elected in steady numbers

⁵⁹⁹ K. Coates and R. Silburn, *Beyond the Bulldozer* (Nottingham, 1980).

⁶⁰⁰ Weir *Nottingham: A History*, p. 91.

to the local Council, and many served on Committees that went beyond their “domestic” concerns.⁶⁰¹

The 1960s saw a boom in the field of sociological studies and one of the most important of these was carried out in Nottingham. Husband and wife John and Elizabeth Newson published *Patterns of Infant Care in an Urban Community* in 1963 after interviewing 709 Nottingham mothers. The study tells us that Nottingham’s rate of illegitimate births – 9% - was twice the national average. 60% of women had their babies at home and 13% had their husband in attendance. Class had some effect on age of first “confinement” and average number of children.⁶⁰² The new council houses built by the city were often allotted to families with small children, so some communities were entirely made up of young families, allowing some chance for women to gain peer support, but little to get support and advice from the older community.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ 1958-1959 9 Councillors 1960-1961 10 Councillors 1969-70 11 Councillors

In 1960-1961 26/82 JPs were women, in 1966-67 this proportion had increased to 41/127. In 1960-1961 the women Councillors served on the following committees: Education, Public Baths, Children, Health, Welfare, Art Galleries and Museums, Watch, General Works/Highways, Public Parks, Sewage, Water, Catering, Fire Brigade, Estates and Housing, Planning and Public Libraries. By 1969 5 of the 11 women Councillors were Chairs of the following committees: Children, Museums and Libraries, Child Care and Remand Homes, Further Education, Youth. Ref: City of Nottingham *Municipal Diaries* 1958-59, 1960-61, 1962-63, 1963-64, 1965-66, 1966-67, 1967-68, 1968-69, 1969-70.

⁶⁰²

	Class I and II	White Collar	Skilled Manual	Semi-skilled	Unskilled
Age of first confinement	24.37	24.09	23.04	23.00	22.63
Average number of children	2.13	2.09	2.59	2.7	3.43

Ref: Newson, *Patterns of Infant Care*.

⁶⁰³ Newson, *Patterns of Infant Care*.

Nottingham was a therefore a city that continued to face economic and social change and the new issues that were a consequence of these changes were embraced by the organised women of the city alongside their more traditional and long-standing campaigns. We shall see that they continued to campaign both for their feminist and citizenship concerns, but that they were also able to adapt their demands to face a new, arguably more progressive era. They were also able to adapt their methods of working by increasingly coming together to lobby and campaign, thus strengthening their voice.

THE LOCAL PRESS – FINDING A LOCAL VOICE

Much of the stereotyping of the 1950s as a period of stultifying domesticity is a result of a superficial reading of national newspapers and magazines, but the continued study of the local press shows the picture to be a much more complex one. The local press in this period increasingly became an interesting mix of both traditional attitudes towards women and domesticity and a progressive recognition of women as a group with an eclectic and expanding range of interests and concerns. Therefore the local press in this period continued to be a rich resource for examining the range of views of women and the forces that shaped their lives.

In 1950 the Saturday edition of *The Nottingham Evening Post* was a publication of six pages. Page one held national and local headlines, pages two and three classified adverts, page four had the letters page, TV and radio listings and two local columns, page five was wedding, cinema and local announcements and page

six contained sport and local news. In this abbreviated publication, constrained by continued austerity measures, there was little space for reporting specific issues of concern to women, still less minority concerns such as feminism. Reporting of the activities of local women's organisations, once a regular feature of the evening newspaper, was increasingly rare. Yet a column emerged entitled "A Word with Women". Although not regular at first, this became increasingly prominent, reflecting the increased popularity of women's magazines at the same time. By 1954 the *Post* was ten pages long and in 1955 began to include a full-page entitled "Talking with Women" in each Friday's edition. By 1965 a new column entitled "Woman at Home" was also added.

In 1950 the *Nottingham Guardian*, the sister paper of the *Post* was also six pages of densely packed text.⁶⁰⁴ It also, however, published a Saturday supplement called the *Nottingham Weekend Guardian* which catered more specifically for its female readership. This supplement included a fashion page, short fiction and two pages of reports from the local Women's Institutes each week.⁶⁰⁵ As the period progressed it increasingly also featured celebrity news and fashion, beauty tips and child psychology. In 1953 it also started to give regular reports of the local branches of the TWG. The main paper also introduced columns for women, starting with "A woman about town" in January 1953 and then introducing a twice-weekly column edited by Mrs Ailsa Stanley in 1954 - a column that ran

⁶⁰⁴ In 1954 the paper was renamed the *Guardian Journal*

⁶⁰⁵ For example, in February 1952, Underwood WI had a film on railways, West Leake had a cake icing demonstration, Greasley had a lecture on good grooming, Gedling staged a drama production and Southwell were told about electricity in the home. *Nottingham Weekend Guardian*, 23/2/52, pp. 4-6.

until the 1970s. These columns are important in the development of a local voice for women. Whereas previously columns had been written in London and franchised out to the local press, the 1950s and 1960s witness the emergence of local columns, written by local women, about local issues of concern and interest. In a period of intense interest in women's magazines (which will be explored later) there was a demand for something of direct relevance to a local readership. That the column emerges as a mouthpiece for various organisations is even more important.

Both papers toned down their open allegiance to the Conservative party in this period and reporting of elections was less partisan, though in May 1958 the *Post* did publish a full page advert crying, "Vote Conservative – Stop the Playhouse" reflecting Conservative determination to make the cost of the building a local election issue. In the course of the 1960s the local press bore almost no resemblance to that of the pre-war era as it reported on the Lady Chatterley trial, CND and the mini skirt. In June 1960 one editorial conceded that divorce was better for children than watching their parents rowing.⁶⁰⁶ The traditional women's organisations may have suffered because of this development as they could have been seen as too traditional or irrelevant in a paper increasingly concerned with pop music and television. Fear of Communism, however, was always apparent, and on occasion the editor would illustrate the evils of Communism by describing how women were forced to be equal in Russia, meaning that both men or women had to do unpleasant jobs, and that China was forcing its mothers to leave their

⁶⁰⁶ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7/6/60, p. 3.

children at nurseries.⁶⁰⁷ Within the main body of the press women's organisations were hardly visible, though it will become clear that this did not mean they were becoming less active. On the contrary, many were increasing their role and influence through collaboration with others.

The local press' position on women becomes increasingly difficult to characterise during this period. Whereas in the 1920s we see an initial flurry of feminist writing to appeal to the newly enfranchised woman and then a backlash, similarly straightforward patterns are not to be detected in the 1950s and 1960s. In this later period the press reflects a mingling of conservative views on the domestic role of women with a brand new acceptance of women's growing range of interests. We witness a continuing undertone of moral panic, especially in the letters pages, alongside an increased number of photographs of women in bikinis being used to publicise consumer goods. Though women writers were still the minority of contributors to the letters pages, and "women's issues" were rarely discussed in this forum, when they were they often elicited extreme responses from both sides. In 1957 the letters page of the *Post* was animated by the topic of working mothers with responses ranging from those saying that housewives had it too hard to those who wrote that nurseries were the same as "Nazi baby farms."⁶⁰⁸

Yet, even more interestingly, sometimes the most overtly anti-feminist letters were published and no replies were printed. It is not, of course, clear that replies

⁶⁰⁷ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7/9/59, p. 5, 22/1/60, p. 5.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 1/8/57, p. 5, 3/8/57, p. 6.

were not sent, but the editor chose not to reproduce them. In July 1951 the following letter was seemingly accepted without dissent:

Housewives who go out to work, even part-time, soon get behind with their housework, and the husband arrives home to find his wife busy every evening doing what she should have done in the day. The result is domestic strife. To suggest that husbands should help their wives in cases like this is stupid. A husband's place is not in the kitchen.⁶⁰⁹

And a similar sentiment went unchallenged in 1966:

What this country needs is a plan to discourage working mothers ... [They] have contributed much to the rising cost of living ... Juvenile delinquency begins by parental neglect ... scrap the subsidised nurseries ... confine female labour to where only they can do the job and working mothers may have time to teach ... manners to their children.⁶¹⁰

Some women contributors were regulars, and “contributed towards and confirmed the previous discourse of femininity” for example “Arnica Plinth” who wrote in August 1950 condemning young women who had crooked stockings, or worse wore no stockings at all.⁶¹¹ In May 1959, another regular female writer “Harum Scarum” condemned a recent report that wives and mothers were more content if allowed to go out to work, by describing the plight of their discontented children left to “fend for themselves”.⁶¹² In another vein, in 1967 a female letter writer described what would happen if women ruled:

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. 17/7/51, p. 4.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. 7/9/66, p. 6.

⁶¹¹ Spencer, ‘Be Yourself,’ p. 155; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 25/8/50, p. 4.

⁶¹² *Nottingham Evening Post*, 4/5/59, p. 4.

1. Money would not be squandered
2. Rapists would be sterilised
3. Kid-glove measures would be done away with
4. Vandals would be sent to prison
5. Hanging restored to all murderers.⁶¹³

- a reflection that traditional female conservatism was still a pertinent force. Yet women letter writers were rare – in four weeks in mid-1960 only five letters by women were printed.⁶¹⁴

The older generation continued to deplore the behaviour of some young women, especially those who visited the city at the weekend, “dressed to kill, overloaded with lipstick, nail varnish, cheap jewellery and scent.”⁶¹⁵ And when local women were deemed to have behaved in a less than lady-like fashion the letter writers were quick to comment. Representatives from the Nottingham and Notts Housewives’ Association heckled the Minister of Food, Maurice Webb at a meeting in Blackburn in 1954. Mr Webb told one Nottingham woman to “shut up” and accused her of being mentally disordered. This elicited lots of letters but one woman wrote,

how many husbands managed without a cooked dinner that day because their wives were telling a Food Minister how to do his job?⁶¹⁶

⁶¹³ Ibid. 23/6/67, p. 7.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. 27th April – 25th May 1960. The letters were written about the need for a concert hall in Nottingham, the inadequacies of the old age pension, protecting magnolia trees, Southwell Minster and road crossings.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. 23/10/50, p. 4.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. 16/3/51, p. 4.

During the election campaigns of this period the *Post* would have specially dedicated letters columns, but these rarely featured letters on policies towards women, although food was a major topic of interest in the early period. One letter in response to the 1951 election result stated,

May I express my profound pleasure on hearing that four women MPs had not been returned to Parliament? If I could have my way women would not be allowed to sit as MPs or on the city council. Their place is in the kitchen.⁶¹⁷

Some advances had been made and many battles already won, but anti-feminism continued to be a pervasive force in the city. In 1966 a woman wrote to the *Post*,

I predict that if we found ourselves in the unfortunate position of having a woman Prime Minister there would be nuclear war within six months.⁶¹⁸

Here, however, we find letter writers at odds with other areas of the paper, where columns pushing for greater opportunities for women, and increased political participation by them, were now well-established.

The columns in both local newspapers contained a mix of domestic tips, fashion, local interest and issues which could be described as feminist or citizenship issues. In January 1953 the *Evening Post* began a weekly column entitled “Round the Women’s Clubs” and each week a different organisation and its work was described. The column lasted for four months and reflected a wide range of organisations in the city, from the National Council of Women to the Ladies Section of the Notts County Bowling Association. Despite the fall in the number

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. 7/11/51, p. 4.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. 22/3/66, p. 7.

of articles written about the organisations within the main body of the papers, the Townswomen's Guilds were prominent in the supplements, reflecting either their suitable outlook for a modernising but still conservative local press, or the fact that they had a strong publicist. The monthly meetings of other organisations were no longer routinely reported, but the activities and concerns of many of them featured in the women's columns.

The first appearance of "Talking with Women" in the *Post* in 1955 included an interview with young actresses, a fashion plate, information on the new housewife training centre, the importance of fashion to children, and a report of a meeting of the East Midlands Business and Professional Women's Group. Thus it seemed designed to appeal to a wide range of Nottingham's women.⁶¹⁹ Yet, as time progressed, articles related to women as anything other than wife, mother or consumer were outnumbered.⁶²⁰ On one occasion the column seemed almost anti-feminist. When responding to the fact that a woman had to pay half of the costs of her £50,000 divorce trial a contributing editor wrote,

That privilege is the logical outcome of all the nagging Granny went in for fifty years ago, and while I'm grateful to her for the right to raise my emancipated voice for Mr MacMillan or Mr Wilson, it makes me wonder if we haven't rather bungled this equality business.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁹ Ibid. 21/1/55, p. 7.

⁶²⁰ 28/1/55 – articles on coats, curtains, lipstick, wallpaper and recipes; 4/3/55 articles on relaxation, lingerie, fashion, soup and repairing dolls; 4/5/60 articles on dressmaking, beads, eggs and French chain stores; 7/6/61 articles on autumn fashions, ladies' choirs and writing thank you letters.

⁶²¹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22/5/63, p. 6 .

However, with this in mind, the column was less focussed on the domestic ideal than perhaps some of the women's magazines at the time were.⁶²² It did regularly include articles about careers, local women of interest, and citizenship, political and organisational information.⁶²³ The column did not assume that women would give up work on marriage and reported interviews with successful career women (such as the 20 year-old who earned £1000 p.a. sexing new born chicks) to those who combined motherhood and a career, including Mrs Betty Davies – housewife, actress and Secretary to the Director of the Nottingham Forensic Science Laboratory.⁶²⁴ These women were inspirational to a new generation of women who, despite being told that their domestic role was crucial in holding together the fabric of society, in reality often had to, or wanted to work. In June 1957 the main article of the column had the title – “Women Bank Managers? The Day will come!” and later that summer the page reported extensively on the publication of *Careers for Mothers* by Brenda Lewis. They reported the following extract without comment:

I believe that children are far happier with a happy mother they see often, but not necessarily always, than a disgruntled, nagging mother who nevertheless is permanently at their beck and call.⁶²⁵

In the 1960s, when women had two columns in the *Post*, “Talking With Women” continued to provide more than domestic guidance – in July 1969 the column included a sensitive article on unmarried mothers, in September it reported on a

⁶²² Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* (1992), Spencer, ‘Be Yourself’.

⁶²³ 30/9/55 reports WEA afternoon classes for women; 7/10/55 “Top tips for female university students”; 20/1/56 a report on the first ever women to be elected Vice-President of the Notts Master Bakers’ and Confectioners’ Association.

⁶²⁴ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 29/3/57, p. 6; 10/5/57, p. 6.

⁶²⁵ Quoted in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 23/8/57, p. 5.

group of Kegworth women who had created a register of part-time jobs “to bring mental stimulation” into their lives and in November it included an article on the history of women police in Nottingham – “the battle for equality in a man’s world.”⁶²⁶

The *Guardian* also catered for the working woman. In 1952 and 1953 they profiled a different job for women each Friday in their “A Woman at Work” feature.⁶²⁷ In 1954 they introduced a bi-weekly column edited by Mrs Ailsa Stanley. Mrs Stanley was a prominent member of many local women’s organisations and frequently took the opportunity to discuss their work in her columns. She was an active Soroptimist and County Organiser for the WI as well as being a professional journalist, wife and mother. She is visible in the pre-war archives as a speaker at luncheon meetings, largely discussing her journalist and travel experiences. Into the post-war period she was more keen to pursue the campaigns of the many organisations to which she was connected, and a regular prominent voice in the local press was of huge significance. The *Guardian* gave the organisations a voice that was often completely missing from the *Post*. Stanley’s column, like “Talking With Women” featured articles about inspirational women and opportunities for citizenship alongside fashion and cookery advice. Columns from the mid 1950s include topics as diverse as feminine fashions, the West Indies, the Red Cross, eating kippers for breakfast,

⁶²⁶ *Nottingham Evening Post* 1/7/69, 9/9/69, 11/11/69.

⁶²⁷ 1952: Department store worker (4/1), teacher of the blind (11/1), dressmaker (18/1), Red Cross worker (1/2), City Councillor (8/2), artist’s model (29/2), tennis player (14/3), pharmaceutical chemist (28/3), policewoman (11/4), archivist (25/4), postmistress (16/5), licensee (23/5). 1953: chief pharmacist (2/1), framer (16/1), voluntary worker (6/2).

and the work and resolutions of the Soroptomists, TWGs, and Nottingham Association of Women's Clubs. In June 1964 the list of topics ran as follows: embroidery, toddler groups, equal pay, Nottingham Business and Professional Women's Club, keep fit, blonde wood, herring recipes, cooking with spices, the TWG, shrimps, sailing and Nottingham women on the honours list.⁶²⁸ And she was still finding new things to write about in 1969 – the 1st December saw a column including interior design, charity, clothes labels and the Soroptomist campaign against biological weapons. Ailsa Stanley thus brought together feminist and citizenship issues with the local press in a manner not witnessed before. The organisations were given a much higher profile than they had enjoyed before and their concerns were consistently placed at the heart of women's lives alongside recipes and pictures of new coats.

Anti-feminist sentiments were still evident in the local press in the 1950s and 1960s but even equal pay rarely stirred up huge dissent. At a time when conservative social commentators were attacking the working mother, local people seemed less concerned – the debate periodically emerged but did not last long. Women were increasingly catered for through women's columns which now provided more than a diet of fashion and home-making tips. The very existence of these columns could suggest that women were still regarded as a group with different concerns to men, but Ailsa Stanley's column is highly significant in this context. For twenty years she continued to blend fashion, childcare, food and

⁶²⁸ *Guardian Journal*, 8/6/64, 15/6/64, 19/6/64. The two women honoured were Mrs Seely for her work with women's organisations, especially the YWCA (OBE) and Mrs Foster, Chair of the East Midlands Women's Advisory Committee of the Conservative Party (CBE).

citizenship together, combining information with entertainment without ever diluting her coverage of Nottingham women's organisations.

NOTTINGHAM'S ORGANISATIONS – PROLIFERATION AND CO-OPERATION

Nottingham is rich in the vitality and life of its women's organisations which cover all sections of the community ... The motive for such work is based on the desire of women to escape from the humdrum domestic routine for a few hours.⁶²⁹

Using both the local press and local archives we can find evidence of a growing number of organisations that represented and co-ordinated the interests of women in the city and county. We thus see both the continuation of the more-established groups, and the emergence of new groups to meet the changing needs of women in the 1950s and 1960s. A pattern also emerges of greater co-operation between the groups when campaigning. This could be read as a reaction of a movement under siege, but it is more convincingly seen as a new source of strength.

The Women's Institute continued to prosper in this period. In 1950 there were 92 Institutes in Nottinghamshire, with 5291 members.⁶³⁰ New branches continued to be established, such as the one for the army wives at Bestwood Lodge barracks. In 1956 the County Federation had sub-committees to discuss agriculture, education and public questions, handicrafts, international matters, music and drama, office and finance and organisation, demonstrating that their interests went beyond fruit

⁶²⁹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13/1/1951, p. 3..

⁶³⁰ *Nottingham Guardian*, 18/3/50, p. 5.

preserving and cake-making. They were keen to grow and modernise and in 1965 the Federation appointed a full-time publicity officer to “unveil the face-lift for its fuddy-duddy image.”⁶³¹ It seemed to work – in the east Nottinghamshire village of Bramcote the WI had over 200 members in September 1965 and a second branch became necessary; in the same year Keyworth WI found it necessary to set up a waiting list for prospective members.⁶³² A typical WI meeting in the 1960s would be held twice a month, in the evening. Business would be discussed for the first 45 minutes, then a speaker or demonstration, then thirty minutes for refreshments and games and chat in social time.⁶³³ The decline in the tradition of afternoon meetings amongst the WI and other women’s groups reflected a period in which many more women were engaged in paid work during the day.

The urban equivalent of the WI, the Townswomen’s Guilds also thrived. The first Nottingham Guild had been established in 1944 and by 1954 there were fifteen guilds in Nottingham with 1700 members.⁶³⁴ By 1965 there were seven more guilds and 300 additional members. Of the 22 Guilds, twenty met in the evenings, again reflecting a shift from the traditional afternoon/lunch meetings where only women who did not need to work could attend. Unlike its rural counterpart, the TWGs were more concerned with developing their members as citizens:

⁶³¹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7/5/65, p. 7.

⁶³² DD2045/1 *Bramcote Women’s Institute 1965 Scrapbook*; DD2382/1/19 *Record of Committee Minutes for Keyworth WI, 1964-1972*. Three other areas in Nottinghamshire had two branches – Newstead Abbey, Burton Joyce and Keyworth.

⁶³³ DD2368/4/2 *Details of the Programmes of Plumtree Women’s Institute 1966*.

⁶³⁴ *Guardian Journal*, 18/4/54, p. 4.

This is a club for the housewife, for the woman whose main interest is her home and family, but who wants to learn both how to run her home better and to have wider interests outside of it.⁶³⁵

As part of these wider interests the first Nottingham TWG, in Woodthorpe, sent representatives to the Arnold and Woodthorpe Council of Social Services to organise a local “good neighbour” scheme in 1966.⁶³⁶ Membership of the Woodthorpe group fluctuated, with 110 members in 1950, 77 in 1963 and 97 in 1968, but overall in the county the membership figures continued to grow.

The National Council of Women remained active. 1953 saw the first ever National Conference held in Nottingham and prompted the branch to restate its aims:

To campaign for equal rights for women, legally, economically and socially, and it is at present engaged in the struggle for equal pay. Its concern is also for the welfare of all UK citizens ... tries to educate women for public life, for membership of local councils, and to become local magistrates.⁶³⁷

Here feminism and citizenship come together within this one organisation; indeed the distinction between the two was never recognised within the NCW. Their Sectional Committees included Migration, Cinema, Education, Home Economics, Housing, Humane Treatment of Animals, Parliament and Legislation, Public Health and Child Welfare and Temperance.⁶³⁸ The membership of the NCW did fall from its inter-war peak (220 members in 1953 and 197 in 1957 as opposed to

⁶³⁵ “Round the Women’s Clubs” in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21/1/53, p. 5.

⁶³⁶ DD2276/1/4 *Committee Minutes of the Woodthorpe Townswomen’s Guild, 1964-1970*.

⁶³⁷ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7/4/53, p. 5.

⁶³⁸ DD 748/9/1-248 *Branch Return of the Nottingham NCW 1949*.

400 before the war) but they continued to be an active force within the city, lobbying politicians, working with other women's organisations and pursuing local grievances.

Women's groups affiliated to political parties continued to grow. Conservative women could meet at the City of Nottingham Conservative Women's Luncheon Club (50 members in 1950), the Nottingham Conservative Women's Advisory Group, the South Nottingham Conservative Association for Women, Allestree Conservative Ladies' Coffee Club and the Nottingham Conservative Ladies' Coffee Club (started in 1968 with 146 members), in addition to ward and constituency branches. Conservative women moved beyond fund-raising and tea making - the Conservative party in the North Nottinghamshire constituency of Bassetlaw chose a female candidate for the 1955 election, though she was unlikely to be elected in the largely mining community.

Labour women were more likely to work within their branches where they were often dominated by a principally male membership, but regular reports also survive from Women's Advisory Councils of the Labour Party who organised Regional Conferences for Labour Women.⁶³⁹ The party fielded female candidates for municipal elections – an example being Mrs Baxter, JP who was nominated as the Labour candidate for the St Mary's Ward in both 1950 and 1951. Market Ward chose women candidates in 1956 and 1958. In 1960 the East Midland Regional Women's Section was planning for a "Woman's Week" and in

⁶³⁹ Within DDPP 14/7/1 *Labour Party, Broxtowe Ward, Correspondence and Minutes*, DDPP 14/1/2 *Labour Party Minutes Book Lenton Ward, 1949-1955*.

Nottingham they held a “Speaker’s Forum” competition as well as day schools and an education conference. By 1953 there were 167 women’s sections in the East Midlands. In 1958 the Market Ward branch established a Women’s Section though their first role was to organise a bazaar and jumble sale.⁶⁴⁰ During the 1960s Labour women could also meet at the Margaret Bondfield club where calls to continue the “battle for equality” were regular features.⁶⁴¹

The Women’s Co-operative Guild also continued to operate and sent delegates to national and regional conferences as well as educational conventions.⁶⁴² The Guild met weekly, and minutes reveal at least one new member at each meeting. Within the union movement, Nottingham had an active branch of the National Union of Women Teachers but it disbanded in 1961 once equal pay was achieved.⁶⁴³ A new organisation, very active in the early 1950s, was the Nottingham and Notts Housewives’ Association who mainly campaigned on food issues – writing letters and lobbying MPs about the cost of meat in 1951.⁶⁴⁴ The WWS also remained active, its war work redirected into the provision of meals on wheels, clothing depots and Darby and Joan Clubs.⁶⁴⁵ They also organised “One-in-Five” talks around the county, to educate 20% of all Nottinghamshire women

⁶⁴⁰ DDPP 14/1/3 *Minutes of the Market Ward branch of the Labour Party, 1955-1959.*

⁶⁴¹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 23/5/63, p. 7.

⁶⁴² DDGN 3/5/1/1 *Minutes of Bulwell Co-operative Women’s Guild Committee 1947-1959.*

⁶⁴³ DDTU 14/1 *Minute Book of the Nottingham and Notts. Branch of the National Union of Women Teachers, 1940-1960.*

⁶⁴⁴ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 29/1/51, p. 4, 22/2/51, p. 3

⁶⁴⁵ The Darby and Joan Clubs were started in 1946 so that “old dears can drop in for a cup of tea, play whist or listen to an old entertainment, invest their savings – perhaps sixpence a week for a anew hat or towards an outing – change their library books, and even have their feet attended to by visiting chiropodists. As the clubs are mixed, quite a number of the members meet other members who are so delightful they marry them.” In V. Graham, *The Story of the WWS* (London, 1959), p. 33.

about how to survive a nuclear explosion.⁶⁴⁶ On the other end of the spectrum to these largely housewife groups, were the Business and Professional Women's Club and the Soroptomists. The Nottingham branch of the former had 250 members in 1953, including the National President and Vice-President, to "cater for serious-minded women with an interest in their jobs or professions and in citizenship."⁶⁴⁷ By 1954 the Soroptomists had expanded from one branch in the city and had set up a sub-branch at Long Eaton on the Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire border, with another being set up in Mansfield three years later, and another in West Bridgford in 1964. Membership within the city branch remained steady, with 95 members in 1950 and 93 in 1968. They continued to be a very active group, running two sets of flats for members and gathering information from other groups to support their campaigns for refugees, "coloured" people, further education for girls and the United Nations.⁶⁴⁸ You were entitled to join the Soroptomists if you were over 21, of good character and had reached a high standing in your profession "as proprietor, partner, manager or responsible officer."⁶⁴⁹ This was thus a group for career women who also wanted to engage in community work. This role was enhanced in 1963 when a brand new organisation was established with the name of Altrusa. The Nottingham branch was the fifth in

⁶⁴⁶ "The WVS has guaranteed to ... entice one out of every five women into listening to three short talks ... to explain how to protect one's home and family, how the effects of nuclear explosions can be lessened and ... to what extent Civil Defence can give help." Graham, *The Story of the WVS* p. 49 The role of the WVS, therefore, was not to campaign against nuclear weapons, but to educate the nation's women on how to survive them!

⁶⁴⁷ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13/1/53, p. 5. Membership had fallen to 142 by 1959.

⁶⁴⁸ DDSO 3 *Letter Book of the Soroptomist Club of Nottingham* 1956.

⁶⁴⁹ DDSO 4/1 *Minutes of the Annual National meetings of the Board of Governors of the Soroptomists, 1953-1955*.

the country and its aim was to provide vocational information for women, improve international relations and offer local community service.⁶⁵⁰

The work of these many women's organisations was increasingly co-ordinated by the Nottingham Standing Conference of Women's Organisations (NSCWO), chaired in the late 1950s by Ailsa Stanley. In 1959 NSCWO included representatives from the Business and Professional Women's Club, the Soroptomists, the National Council of Women, the Townswomen's Guilds, Medical Women, the Nottingham Association of Women's Clubs, Women's Gas Federation, Girls' Friendly Society, International Women's League, the Electrical Association for Women, the Women's Institutes and the Ex-Service Women's Club.⁶⁵¹ By 1969 it had 44 affiliated organisations. Another co-ordinating group was the East Midland's Women's Advisory Committee, which in 1963 called for a drop in local rates, the abolition of the earnings rule on widowed mothers' pensions and new measures to allow people to buy their own homes.⁶⁵² But the biggest umbrella society in the 1950s was the Nottingham Council for Social Service (NCSS), which was a mixed-sex organisation, but had representatives and funding from many of the city's most important women's groups.⁶⁵³ With the

⁶⁵⁰ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7/2/63, p. 5. Unfortunately, no other reference to this organisation has been found.

⁶⁵¹ DDSO 4/2 *Minutes of the Annual National meetings of the Board of Governors of the Soroptomists, 1956-1961*.

⁶⁵² *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22/3/63, p. 5.

⁶⁵³ In 1959 the affiliated organisations included:

The Business and Professional Women's Club	The Catholic Women's League
Electrical Association for Women	Ex-Service Women's Club
Jewish Women's Benevolent Society	Nottingham Association of Girls' Clubs
National British Women's Total Abstinence Union	National Council of Women
Soroptomist Club	ToCH Women's Section

funds raised the NCSS ran six homes for the elderly and managed Visiting and Benevolent Funds in addition to a Commonwealth Citizens' Consultative Committee and a Family Welfare Committee. The existence of these bodies reflects the increase in collaborative working that characterises this period and which could possibly be a factor in explaining legislative advances at a time when some individual groups were weakening.

Other groups, which have not left written records, can be found through brief reports in the local press or through correspondence with the larger organisations. Within this category are included the Inner Wheel (women's branch of the Rotary Club), the YWCA and the Nottingham Association of Women's Clubs. The national committee of the latter held their annual conference in Nottingham in 1959, the theme of which was celebrating the young, and the campaigning message was improved refuse collection.⁶⁵⁴ In 1967 25 clubs affiliated to the Nottingham umbrella organisation. The YWCA was featured in the *Post's* "Round the Women's Clubs" feature. In 1953 the city branch had 400 members aged 11-60 and two extension clubs in Sneinton and Radford added another 400 members. Its aim was to give girls and women "a branch between the outside world and the Churches," and it provided activities and classes for its members.⁶⁵⁵

Townswomen's Guilds
Nottingham Association of Women's Clubs
Women's International League
WVS

Nottingham Association of University Women
Women's Fellowship of the Methodist Church
NSCWO
YWCA

Source: DD CSS 7 *Annual Report and Directory of the Nottingham Council of Social Service 1959*.

⁶⁵⁴ Reported in Ailsa Stanley's column *Guardian Journal*, 11/9/59, p. 5.

⁶⁵⁵ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 31/3/53, p. 5.

Young women were also represented by the Girl Guide movement. In 1950 there were almost 3000 Guides and 205 Rangers (aged 16-21) in Nottinghamshire; by 1967 this had risen to 3769 Guides and 128 Rangers. The Official handbooks of the Guiding Movement state that the Rangers were trained in “citizenship, home-craft and camping”, with citizenship taking precedence.⁶⁵⁶ And the Nottingham Association of Girls’ Clubs continued to co-ordinate the provision of leisure and educational opportunities for many young women in the city. In 1956 there were fifty clubs affiliated and they offered senior members the opportunity to attend residential weekends and engage in community service.⁶⁵⁷

Churches often had their own women’s groups, such as the Young Wives of St Mark’s in Woodthorpe who staged a charity fashion show in May 1963 and the Women’s Fellowship of the Methodist Mission who “discussed moral and social problems, helping to support the Fellowship’s Mother and Baby home in Streatham and a residential club for business and professional women.”⁶⁵⁸ Others included the Clifton Baptist Women’s Bright Hour, the Sherwood Methodist Women’s Fellowship and the Southwell House Committee for Moral Welfare, the latter of which ran homes and flats for unmarried mothers and young women in dangerous circumstances. ToCH Women’s Section expanded from its Nottingham and Beeston branches to form one in Mansfield Woodhouse in 1955. There was a Beeston and District Mothers’ Club whose Chair declared in 1952 that “the

⁶⁵⁶ DD1663/16/1-4 *Nottinghamshire Girl Guide’s Handbook 1950*.

⁶⁵⁷ DD1566/1/9 *Minutes of the Members’ Council Meetings of the Nottingham and Notts. Association of Girls’ Clubs, 1953-1958*.

⁶⁵⁸ *Guardian Journal*, 10/5/63, p. 7, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 24/3/53, p. 5.

greatest function of this club is learning that other people have the same problems as ourselves,” and a West Bridgford Young Wives Group which had 200 members and held bi-monthly meetings with talks and lectures.⁶⁵⁹ The village of Bramcote, as well as having two WIs and a branch of the WVS, supported a Housebound Housewives Association, a Mothers’ Union (50 members in 1965), a Young Wives Group (90 members in 1965) and a Ladies Committee of the NSPCC.

The Electrical Association for Women continued. It had 112 members in 1960, 96 members in 1969 and continued to push for improved education for housewives, as well as working collaboratively with other groups on a range of citizenship and social welfare issues. Mention is also made of the Women’s Gas Federation – for “women who use gas in their homes to voice their opinion” - who, in 1967, formed circles called the Young Homemakers.⁶⁶⁰ In 1956 the Nottingham branch of the Natural Childbirth Association was established and in 1957 the Nottingham Bedsitters’ Association was formed to protect the rights of hundreds of female tenants. In 1958 the Nottingham branch of the “English Wives’ Association” for English wives of Polish men had 40 members and from 1957 to 1994 the “Merry Wives of Gunthorpe” raised funds and organised outings. At the end of our period, in 1970, Nottingham saw the establishment on the Nottingham Working Association of Mothers, or Outlook, with the aim of “offering an interest outside

⁶⁵⁹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22/1/52, p. 5, 29/1/53, p. 6. The former group had 100 members in 1960.

⁶⁶⁰ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7/3/53, p. 5, *Guardian Journal*, 20/2/67, p. 7.

the home to any housebound woman and to enable her to pursue it regularly.’⁶⁶¹

There was obviously a growing number of women who felt constrained by domesticity and anxious to find other outlets.

What is striking about this period is the amount of collaboration between the groups. There are hundreds of examples of such work within the archive material, from donations made by one organisation to another, representatives sent to different organisations, and joint campaigns. For example, in 1959 the Soroptomists sent a representative to the United Nations Association who were discussing nuclear warfare, and raised funds for the Committee for the Welfare of Coloured People who were campaigning for a West Indian to be appointed as Organiser of Adult Education for the city.⁶⁶² In the period 1953 – 1956 the NCW gave assistance and information to the Women’s Advisory Council on Solid Fuel, the Distressed Gentlewomen Association, the Portland Training College for Disabled Women, the Nottinghamshire Rural Housing Committee, the Linen Guild and the Nottingham Committee of the British Council of Aid to Refugees. Representatives of various organisations were also sent to local government bodies to lobby, give evidence and be involved in consultation.⁶⁶³ On a practical level, the Soroptomists and the EAW shared a meeting room and members of different groups were frequently invited to luncheon meetings by other

⁶⁶¹ DD2382/1/6/2 *Newsletter of the Nottingham Working Association of Mothers, 1970.*

⁶⁶² DDSO 8/1 *Minutes of the Nottingham branch of the Soroptomists AGMs, 1958-1976.*

⁶⁶³ For example, reps from the NCW visited the County Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and the Old People’s Welfare Committee in 1950. Source: DD748/7 *Minutes of the Committee Meetings of the Nottingham and Notts National Council of Women, 1947-1956.*

organisations.⁶⁶⁴ Many of the speakers at lunchtime and evening meetings were members of other women's organisations. In 1957 the city staged a "Festival of Women" in which many of the women's organisations were involved (though no records of this have survived) and organisations worked together on many issues, such as the need for Burton Joyce to have a post office which was campaigned for jointly by Burton Joyce WI and the NCW. The Business and Professional Women joined forces with the Soroptomists in 1965 to push for better National Insurance rates for part-time workers, and improved road safety.⁶⁶⁵ This collaborative working had existed in the earlier periods but was an increasingly important feature of organisational life in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1958 the NSCWO published a *Women's Guide to Nottingham's Associations* as they felt there were so many for women to choose from.⁶⁶⁶ Yet it was acknowledged that many of the organisations had an ageing membership and needed to work much harder to attract younger members. Membership of many of the older organisations was falling but other groups such as the WI and TWGs, and new organisations, however, were flourishing and collaborative work gave Nottingham's women an even stronger, collective voice.

EQUALITY FEMINISM – CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

⁶⁶⁴ In June 1951 the president of the Soroptomists, the President of the Business and Professional Women's Club and the Head of the WVS were all invited to the NCW luncheon. Source: DD748/7 *Minutes of the NCW Committee Meetings*

⁶⁶⁵ Reported by Ailsa Stanley in the *Guardian Journal*, 18/10/65, p. 6

⁶⁶⁶ Mentioned in DD1357/1/4/3 *Electrical Association for Women Executive Committee Minute Book, 1957-1967*. Unfortunately, no copies of this guide have been traced.

Women who insist on equality of status with men are in danger of losing the precious position, privilege and prerogative of being women.⁶⁶⁷

Overtly feminist issues seem less prominent within the organisations in this period, yet, despite the comment above, the acceptance of feminist issues such as equal pay and the right for women to work appeared to become more widespread. This may reflect Hera Cook's idea that feminist demands were now part of mainstream society; that the organisations were no longer on the fringes of a male-dominated society – they were “as much a part of upper-middle class society as were MPs.”⁶⁶⁸ Letters about equal pay and equal pensions were featured in the press and often elicited supportive replies (though the latter was less popular for fear of damaging men's wages). In 1950 a woman wrote to the *Post* demanding an increase in the war widows' pensions, a demand that met with a supportive reply – “it is time something was done to ease the burden for us and let us live again.”⁶⁶⁹ In 1951 a woman wrote to the letters page outraged at the suggestion that women should not be allowed to stand for election and declaring:

Women are capable members of society, of government and of council. We women have had enough of man-made wars and we are fighting not only for equality, but for peace, security and a full, rich life for our children.⁶⁷⁰

In May 1951 the equal pay issue was fought out in the letters page of the *Post*, largely sparked by the shortage of female teachers. Miss D. Shaw wrote that equal

⁶⁶⁷ The vicar of St Ann's, Rev. R.T. Little quoted in the *Nottingham Guardian* 18/9/50, p. 4.

⁶⁶⁸ Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 316.

⁶⁶⁹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18/9/50, p. 4, 22/9/50, p. 4.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 10/11/51, p. 4.

pay was the only way to ensure women teachers remained in the profession and thus ensure the education of thousands of children (again, feminism through appealing to society's view of the correct priority of women). The responses ranged from fear for the homes of these women to a concern that it would lead to the end of chivalry, but Miss Shaw persisted by arguing that women outnumbered men in society and unmarried women needed to be given a chance to earn a decent wage.⁶⁷¹ Again, the debate was couched in the gender expectations of the era, but women were still pushing for equal rights and the following year a woman correspondent went further:

Thank heavens there are some men in this country who *have* realised that women are being used for cheap labour, and are prepared to stand side-by-side with us women in the fight for the rate for the job.⁶⁷²

The women's organisations and political discussions kept the equal pay issue alive and, on each occasion it featured on the letters page, there were women prepared to state their case for equality:

We are ready to face fair competition with men ... when a man performs the two jobs of looking after the home and family and earning a living it is outstanding, but hundreds of women do just that, and on unequal pay.⁶⁷³

Feminist voices were still evident, still angry and yet still having to defer to their maternal role. In addition to the letters page, feminism also found a voice through

⁶⁷¹ Ibid. 30/5/51, p. 4, 4/6/51, p. 5, 7/6/51, p. 4 .

⁶⁷² Ibid. 21/5/52, p. 4.

⁶⁷³ Ibid. 7/3/54, p. 4.

the women's columns, including an interview with a Mrs Dangerfield who was campaigning for universal nursery provision to enable all women to work, claiming "it is bad for a child to see only one face year after year until it goes to school."⁶⁷⁴ The columns also reported the push for more nurseries by the Nottingham and District Employment Committee in 1964 after the Director of Education in Nottingham wrote to every married woman teacher who had left the profession asking them to return. Working Nottinghamshire women also express their frustration through strike action. In 1961 the mill girls of Mansfield went on strike for six days in a bid to improve the treatment of union members in their factories.⁶⁷⁵ Three years later, the women workers at Raleigh in Nottingham went on strike over pay rates.

The organisations continued to be an important feminist force. The NCW was openly feminist, their aim being to:

to campaign for equal rights for women, legally, economically and socially, and it is at present engaged in the struggle for equal pay.⁶⁷⁶

They engaged in a number of feminist campaigns during this period. In 1950 they campaigned to get more women involved in public affairs and lobbied local MPs to support Barbara Castle's Criminal Law Amendment Act which increased protection for prostitutes. The following year they lobbied local MPs to support equal pay. In 1955 their campaign was for more women jurors and in 1958 they

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid. 23/1/63, p. 5.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid. 7/3/61, p. 7.

⁶⁷⁶ See previous reference to this quote.

wanted to improve Widowed Mothers' Allowances.⁶⁷⁷ Much of their feminist campaigning was achieved through lobbying local MPs, but they also contributed evidence to local committees and engaged speakers to educate their membership on the relevant issues. Sadly, we have no available records for the NCW after 1960.

The Soroptomists too were openly feminist. In 1957 they held a Weekend Conference on Matlock, where their keynote speaker, Dr E. Griffiths, delighted his audience by calling for equal opportunities for education, equal economic rights and equal pay. He ended his speech by declaring, "surely the woman who is capable of having a family *and* a job should be helped."⁶⁷⁸ These issues continued to form the basis of much of the campaigning work of the Soroptomists and were combined with specific matters such as stopping the ban on women at the Birmingham Stock Exchange (1956) and allowing women to sit in the House of Lords(1957). In 1955 the Business and Professional Women's Club campaigned to improve the 8:1 male:female ratio on the City Council by publishing a pamphlet to inform women about local politics and to try to persuade them to stand as candidates. When Mrs Ellen McCunn became the first female Chair of Arnold Urban Council she gave "credit for her own public career to the TWG".⁶⁷⁹ The Women's Institutes did not abandon feminist causes altogether either – in

⁶⁷⁷ DD 748/7 *NCW Minutes* 29/11/50, 28/6/5, 13/6/55; DD 748/8 *Minutes of the committee meetings of Nottingham and Notts National Council of Women, 1956-60* 7/7/58.

⁶⁷⁸ DD SO 3 *Soroptomist Letter book* 1957.

⁶⁷⁹ DD2276/6/1/1 *Woodthorpe TWG Press Cuttings 1954-1970*, April 1956.

1961 Plumtree WI supported the national WI campaign to improve widows' pensions.

A national picture has often been painted of this period, and especially the 1950s, as being too oppressively domestic and overly concerned with consumerism – thus unpropitious for feminism. In Nottingham, overt feminism does seem less evident than in the inter-war period, but it still has some prominence and some organisations continued to push for feminist issues and concerns. Hera Cook's work is relevant here. Her point about feminism entering the mainstream is made quite speculatively and without specific reference, but it is interesting when examining the reduced force of feminist demands. Her argument can be expanded to suggest there was less need for open campaigning because some of the feminist ideals of the importance of equality (even if still based on difference) had gained general acceptance among the political elite of British society, and by default the majority of the electorate. Although British society venerated the domestic role of women, it also elected governments who promised equal pay. Therefore if feminist demands were no longer unusual it is likely they were to be less of a novelty and thus perhaps less visible, making it much more difficult to quantify the impact women's organisations had in particular.

THE DOMINANCE OF CITIZENSHIP

We are interested politically. We are eager to learn and to meet other women for discussion. The woman who only wants to escape is more likely to go to the pictures.⁶⁸⁰

Rather than the nadir of feminism, the 1950s and 1960s can be viewed as the height of the push for citizenship rights, and interest in allowing women to develop as fully participating members of local society was prominent in all of the organisations studied. Equality feminist campaigns were fought, but the vast majority of the campaigning work carried out by Nottingham's organised women was on issues that concerned women as citizens. As we saw in the survey of Nottingham's organisations, the concept of citizenship featured highly in many of their statements of aims and Nottingham women joined a whole range of organisations which both campaigned for their citizenship rights, and allowed them to develop as citizens – giving them a “taste for public work ... an ideal training ground.”⁶⁸¹

A range of issues caught the imagination of local women, and many campaigns were pursued through the NSCWO. In 1958 they “declared war on adverts which bring sex into their campaigns”.⁶⁸² In 1959 their concerns were playing fields, housing homeless families, rent control, the price of electricity and the restriction of offensive weapons.⁶⁸³ In 1964 they discussed libraries, the shortage of midwives, emergency dentists, homeless children, the Council for Single Parents,

⁶⁸⁰ Letter in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18/1/51, p. 4.

⁶⁸¹ From the TWG Press Officer, 1956 in DD 2276/6/1/1 *Woodthorpe TWG Press Cuttings*.

⁶⁸² Reported in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14/2/58, p. 5.

⁶⁸³ Reported in DDSO 4/2 *Minutes of Nottingham Soroptomist Club AGMs 1956-1961*.

housing for the elderly and day nurseries; the following year it was facilities for mothers and children in courts, mortgages for women, the health implications of hairspray, plastic milk bottles, TV programmes and firearms; and at the end of the decade it was the Victoria Centre shopping mall, divorce law reform, training women for the professions, Radio Nottingham, pensions and women's rights through the ages.⁶⁸⁴ Their range was eclectic, but the size of the organisation meant it could represent the interests and concerns of all Nottingham's organised women, thus making it a highly effective tool in pushing citizenship forward. They also organised courses for women, including one on public speaking, introduced in 1967. By giving a voice (sometimes literally) to Nottingham's women they were teaching them that their concerns were valid and important in working to effect change.

Alongside their equality campaigns the NCW continued to campaign for greater rights for women – including more day nursery provision (June 1957), the need for more women police surgeons (March 1960) and better National Insurance advice for widows (June 1964). They also continued their own development as citizens by campaigning on a range of other issues including the standardisation of dress sizes (October 1951), the provision of accommodation for homeless women with young children (March 1953), safe vaccinations (April 1954), prison overcrowding (April 1956) and nuclear testing (September 1957). They also regularly completed the questionnaires sent by head Office to gauge members' opinions and experience of a wide range of topics including the effect on the

⁶⁸⁴ DDSO 18 *Minutes of the Nottingham Soroptomist Club AGMs 1958-1976*.

home of women working (November 1956), broadcasting and television (May 1957). Members were consulted and their opinions valued, thus treating them as proper citizens within a democratic system.

The Soroptomists also pursued citizenship issues alongside equal feminism. In the 1960s each year had a designated theme and the club worked on issues and heard Speakers around the topic. In 1966 it was “Understanding” and in 1968 “Where are we Going?” The latter title led to resolutions on drug addiction, human rights, housing, and the care of the handicapped. The Soroptomists also encouraged their members to engage in personal service to the community rather than endless fundraising.⁶⁸⁵ The Nottingham EAW lobbied the Chancellor in 1952 requesting a cut to the tax on electrical household appliances and in 1961 were addressed by the Lady Mayoress on “woman’s place in civic affairs”.⁶⁸⁶ Many of the social interests of the WI concerned child welfare and child psychology was a popular area of study – in 1959 the WEA ran an afternoon course on the subject for which the WVS ran the crèche. Local WIs also passed resolutions about grammar schools (Misterton 1954), the price of children’s clothing (NFWI, 1954), National Service (Plumtree, 1955)

Local Conservative women passed resolutions on students nurses’ pay (March 1961) and pollution (March 1962) as well as being addressed on issues such as married women in the professions (September 1962), university life for women

⁶⁸⁵ DDSO 31/2 *Committee Minute Book of the Soroptomist Club (Trent Valley) 1964-1985.*

⁶⁸⁶ DD 1357/1/4/3 *EAW Minute Book, 1957-1967.*

today (March 1966) and “Women at the Top” (January 1969). Local Labour women expressed a desire to “stimulate educational interests ... so as to provide a well informed membership” and introduced Speakers’ Forums to train women speakers in 1953.⁶⁸⁷ Labour women were also able to attend residential Weekend Schools covering topics such as “Crime and Punishment” (1953), “how Parliament works” (1956) and “British Socialism” (1959). Local issues of concern included a campaign to abolish Nottingham High School (1958) and resolutions about national issues included the need for more homes for OAPs (1956) and the need to end world poverty (1957).

As an organisation campaigning on consumer issues, the Nottingham Housewives Association (NHA) were very active and vocal in the early 1950s in their campaigns over food supply. In August 1950 they tried to lead a city-wide boycott of Russian food as part of a campaign against Communism; in 1951 they wrote a call to the women of Nottingham: “wake up housewives! Let’s get together to protect home life!”⁶⁸⁸ Although we have no membership lists for the NHA it can be assumed that many had not been part of other organisations (else they would have probably have pursued their aims through those channels) and the campaigning zeal of this group, though relatively short-lived did allow its members to plan and execute their role as disgruntled consumers and citizens.

⁶⁸⁷ DDPP 14/7/1 *Labour Party Broxtowe Ward Correspondence and Minutes, 1952-1955.*

⁶⁸⁸ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22/8/50, p. 4, 16/1/51, p. 4. Later in 1951 the NHA listed their aims as 1) to unite all housewives 2) to safeguard home life 3) to offer constructional advice where necessary on all problems of food, fuel, housing etc 4) to get more food into the home 5) to be non-party. Source *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13/11/51, p. 4

From heckling Ministers and lobbying MPs, to writing regular letters to the local press, these women were deeply involved in participatory action.

In contrast to the consumer focus of the previous group, Bramcote's "Housebound Housewives Association" had a programme which stated:

The modern, educated woman, particularly if she has had an interesting career, is often frustrated by the enforced rustication thrust upon her by the ties of motherhood ... she sometimes longs for non-domestic interests.⁶⁸⁹

In what can be seen as a precursor to 1970s feminism women used personal experiences and interests to start tackling "private" issues. They set up their own groups to discuss literature, music and social issues such as the correct use of leisure and the population explosion. This was empowerment for women who did not accept the dominant view that domesticity could fulfil all women's needs. In 1970 the two biggest discussions of one of these newer groups were "Do you feel like battering your baby?" and "What has been the impact of your child on your marriage?"⁶⁹⁰ They kept a register of part-time jobs and ran courses with a crèche including O levels for mature students and secretarial courses. They also provided mother and toddler groups, careers guidance, a babysitting circle, afterschool clubs and discussion groups, all organised and financed by the women themselves. Women were working together to partially reject the domestic ideal and improve their own lived experience.

⁶⁸⁹ Found in DD 2045/1 *Bramcote Women's Institute 1965 Scrapbook*. The organisation was one of 200 nationwide and had 18 members by 1965.

⁶⁹⁰ DD2382/1/6/2 *Neswletter of Nottingham Working Association of Mothers 1970*.

Woodthorpe Townswomen's Guild set up a Social Study group for women who wanted to investigate social and political issues further and in 1954 members presented papers on Education, Equal Pay for Equal Work and "Woman as Citizen".⁶⁹¹ Other TWGs followed suit – Middleton offered a course on the United Nations and Beeston had fifty members in their Social Study group by 1955. The Social Study groups of all the TWGs that year met a one day school at Nottingham University in September and annual Conferences followed, including the 1959 Conference with the theme "the Path to Peace", 1961 "Women as Readers and Viewers" and 1965 "the Standard of Living – Women as Earners and Spenders".⁶⁹² The groups remained active in each branch, demonstrating a craving for knowledge within this organisation traditionally dismissed as the urban WI.⁶⁹³ There was a great appetite for education amongst the women of Nottingham with 1500 more women than men signing up for evening classes offered by the Nottingham Education Committee in 1955.⁶⁹⁴ Brains trusts, where a panel of people were invited to meetings to debate a particular issue were also popular, and an important tool in education women as citizens, for example the NSCWO held ones on Hire Purchase and Consumer Rights in 1962.

Young women were educated in citizenship by the Girl Guides – "we realise that in camp it is possible to train our guides in citizenship ... to live as members of a

⁶⁹¹ DD2276/1/4 *Woodthorpe TWG*.

⁶⁹² *Nottingham Evening Post*, 16/6/55, p. 5, DD 2276/1/1 *Woodthorpe TWG Minutes*.

⁶⁹³ Woodthorpe TWG Social Studies Group undertook lectures on famous women through history (July 1958), local government (October 1959), the local press (October 1961), local history (October 1962), the work of women police (July 1963), "you and the law" (June 1964).

⁶⁹⁴ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 23/2/55, p. 5.

community.”⁶⁹⁵ The older Guides were also given the opportunity to attend courses on topics such as voluntary service and careers as well as marriage guidance and cookery. The Nottingham and Notts Association of Girls’ Clubs offered their members the opportunity to complete a National Certificate in Voluntary Club Leadership.⁶⁹⁶

The Women’s Institutes continued to campaign in this period, though, as even Andrews acknowledges, it was by no means their dominant activity.⁶⁹⁷ Individual institutes pursued local campaigns at different points in this period. In 1969 Gamston and District WI launched a campaign against the smell of the local pig farm and weeds in the local canal, writing to both the press and local councillors in their determination to resolve a local issue.⁶⁹⁸ These WI campaigns had a long history – in 1951 Plumtree WI had won the fight for a chemist in Plumtree and the erection of barriers in front of the local school and in 1956 successfully campaigned to their Rural District Council for more telephone kiosks; in 1965 Sutton-on-Trent WI had campaigned to stop the removal of hedges in their local area and in 1968 Keyworth WI campaigned for a new bus service (after a successful campaign in 1966 against bus lanes).⁶⁹⁹ These campaigns were not embarked upon to enhance the role of women as citizens, but by participating in them, and by achieving their aims, that was exactly what the members were able

⁶⁹⁵ DD 1663/16/2 *Nottinghamshire Girl Guide Handbook 1958*.

⁶⁹⁶ DD 1566/1/7 *Minutes of the Nottingham and Notts Association of Girls’ Clubs, 1948-1954*.

⁶⁹⁷ Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*.

⁶⁹⁸ DD 828/1/2 *Gamston and District WI Scrapbook, 1967-1970*.

⁶⁹⁹ DD 2368/1/3/1 *Minute book of Plumtree WI*; DD 2368/3/1-2 *Correspondence book of Plumtree WI, 1954-1988*; DD 2298/1/1 *Sutton-on-Trent WI 1965 Scrapbook*; DD 2382/1/8 *Keyworth WI Record of Monthly Meetings, 1964-1974*.

to achieve. The local WIs also sent resolutions to the national conferences with Keyworth supporting resolutions against cruelty in intensive farming (April 1965) and in favour of improved social security benefits for women (June 1969). By discussing these resolutions members were participating in more than tea and gossip.

Women also launched campaigns with no organisational support. Single issue demonstrations emerged in Nottingham, such as that by local women protesting against an infant school closure in Strelley in May 1960.⁷⁰⁰ In 1966 a group of Bulwell mothers joined forces to march against dangerous traffic and in October 1969 a group of mothers in Aspley launched a campaign against school rezoning by keeping their children at home for over a month.⁷⁰¹ These activities were spontaneous, but indicative of a community where women felt they were able to effect change through direct action as citizens. Of course, this confidence cannot simply be ascribed to the effect of Nottingham's organisations, but it does undermine the view that direct action amongst women was dormant until the "awakening" of 1970s.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

At a time when television has been said to keep more women at home,⁷⁰² the organisations continued to provide an important social outlet for many women –

⁷⁰⁰ Reported in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 23/5/60, p. 6.

⁷⁰¹ Reported in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 23/5/66, p. 6, 9/10/69, p. 7.

⁷⁰² D. Strinati and S. Wagg (eds) *Come on Down?: Popular Media Culture in Post-war Britain* (Oxford, 1992)

something for women who “want occasionally to get away from their families and discuss mutual interests with their contemporaries.”⁷⁰³ Recitals, outings, social time, whist drives, garden parties and amateur dramatics all gave women an opportunity to direct their own leisure time and engage with things of interest to them.

The Women’s Institutes increasingly became social rather than campaigning organisations, but they were no less important because of this. In 1954 a survey of WIs within the *Notts. Weekly Guardian* saw Ruddington having basketry classes, Kirklington making spring hats, Bingham making sweets, Cropwell Bishop knitting, Newstead learning about Guide Dogs, Costock holding a sponge cake competition and Fiskerton making Easter bonnets.⁷⁰⁴ Members were not discussing equal pay or nuclear weapons, but they were given an environment where their own skills could be celebrated away from home and family.

Education was still an important arm of the organisations, whether it was through formal classes or through the weekly speaker. Speakers provided a vast range of material for the women of Nottingham, from a talk about Buckingham Palace (Arnold TWG 7/1/54) to Turkish housewives (Nottingham Association of Women’s Clubs 7/3/58), perfumery (Woodthorpe TWG 18/1/55) to the town rock garden (EAW 7/2/69).⁷⁰⁵ The list gives an impression of local women being

⁷⁰³ Ailsa Stanley in the *Guardian Journal*, 6/2/67, p. 6.

⁷⁰⁴ *Notts Weekly Guardian*, 3/4/54, pp. 4-6.

⁷⁰⁵ From the archives we can get a detailed overview of the Speakers who addressed the different organisations.

Clifton Baptist Church Woman’s Bright Hour

1954 – beauty hints, poetry reading, “a pair of spectacles”, “the royal mile”.

1956 – religious readings and talks, solid fuel, life in Germany, work of Church women.

educated as “citizens of the world” on a range of issues that were largely apolitical. For some organisations specific classes were planned to allow their members chance to develop further – for example the Nottingham Federation of WIs planned countywide art classes in 1964 “to attract housewives away from the usual tea drinking chats.”⁷⁰⁶ In 1951 Woodthorpe TWG ran classes in upholstery, embroidery, dressmaking, crafts, drama and dance.⁷⁰⁷ The benefits of social activity in a wider context were not lost on those running the organisations.

The Electrical Association for Women

1966 - demonstration of cleaners, holiday films, cooking and serving international dishes, hats through the ages.

1969 – the town rock garden, care of leather and suede, decimalisation, our sayings and their origins.

Gamston WI

1957 – beauty, sweets and chocolates, interior décor, the West Indies, buffets, loose covers, flower arranging, biscuit making.

1959 – what’s new in fashion?, yeast cookery, painting portraits, millinery, lampshades, film show.

1966 – bell ringing, the *Newark Advertiser*, work of a County Councillor, dressmaking, hairstyles through the ages.

1969 – the decimal system, stage costume, weaving, the work of a policewoman, the changing face of Nottingham, the VSO.

National Council of Women

1956-7 – USA 1956, employment and insurance, the harvest of the West Indies, impressions of Modern Turkey, TV and radio, marriage and divorce, the United Nations.

Nottingham Conservative Women’s Luncheon Club

1957 – the West Indies, “life begins at 40”, behind the Iron Curtain, the Commonwealth, life as a journalist, the story of Ulster.

1959 – “50 years ago today”, East v. West., Montgomery in the desert, the budget, theatre, free enterprise, personal responsibility.

1962 – problems at home and abroad, public relations, Buckingham Palace, Russia, married woman and the professions.

1968 – bridal customs through the ages, dressing to please a man, the Samaritans, German women, crime and punishment today .

Woodthorpe TWG

1955 included Nottinghamshire birds, the life of an auctioneer, a Spirella demonstration and Eurythmics for the older woman.

1956 – exercises for beauty, the Amazon, Copydex adhesive, Voice and Speech training.

1957 – plastics in the home, a wool demonstration, cake decoration.

1959 – the West Indies, modern millinery, housework with ease, a talk by the Children’s Officer.

1960 – Crown wallpaper, travel films, fashion parade, a talk on refugees, ways with salads, Elizabeth Fry and a beauty demonstration.

1962 – the PDSA, demonstration by the Gas Board, drama, frozen food, embroidery through the ages, flowers and the Freedom from Hunger campaign.

⁷⁰⁶ Reported in *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7/12/64, p. 6.

⁷⁰⁷ DD 2276/1/2 *Minutes of the Committee Meetings of Woodthorpe Townswomen’s Guild, 1949-1956.*

Competitions continued to be popular, with Plumtree WI having a monthly competition through the 1960s.⁷⁰⁸ As previously argued, these competitions were important for rewarding domestic and craft achievement. For the majority of women their lives were domestic – competitions such as these allowed external validation of that work.

Fundraising and planning social activities for others also gave women members an outlet for their organisational abilities. The Soroptomists held coffee mornings, cheese and wine parties, bring and buy sales and whist drives throughout this period. Sherwood Women's Missionary Society arranged a film evening, a rummage sale, coffee mornings, a morning market, a hot supper and published a recipe book – all in 1957.⁷⁰⁹ Parties for the elderly were popular (Carlton TWG 7/2/55). Outings too were common – Woodthorpe TWG visited Burton-on-Trent and Stratford in 1957, the EAW visited power stations and Crown Derby in 1950.. Keyworth WI even “adopted” the island of Grenada in 1968, sending fabric and dressmaking supplies.⁷¹⁰

The evidence in this chapter points to the conclusion that the 1950s and 1960s was a time when the domestic rhetoric used to describe women's lives was strong, but was not the only theme influencing Nottingham's organisations. The

⁷⁰⁸ DD 2398/4/2 *Programme Details, Plumtree WI.*

The competitions ran as follows:

Eg 1966: Jan – my prettiest cup and saucer Feb – sewing postcards Mar – house plants
Apr – Victoria sponges May – birthday cards Jun – flower arranging Oct – open
Danish sandwiches Nov – buttons on a postcard

⁷⁰⁹ MR 4/203 *Minute Book of Sherwood Methodist Church Women's Missionary Society, 1957-1975.*

⁷¹⁰ DD 2382/1/8 *Record of Keyworth WI.*

Soroptomists, during a Conference in Long Eaton, repeated their conviction that “a woman’s first duty is to her children and her home.”⁷¹¹ But the weight of evidence suggests that increasingly it wasn’t her only duty. Anti-feminism did continue, amongst women as well as men, but an acceptance that women were more than just domestic creatures is much more visible in the local press in this period. There were some who said that women should focus solely on the home, but the press and the organisations reflect the fact that many of Nottingham’s women were doing more. In one way they were less prominent in the local press as fewer of their meetings were reported, yet the existence of the columns written by local women, especially that by Ailsa Stanley, meant that actually a wider group of women were exposed to their messages. These women may not have joined, but were part of a society which increasingly accepted that women could show an interest in a wide range of issues and causes.

Women are women’s greatest enemy. There are a number of women who do not want to do things themselves and resent seeing others do them ...

Women’s organisations have brought home to women the fact that outside affairs affect them personally.⁷¹²

The 1950s and 1960s therefore, far from being a time when feminist and citizenship action was crushed under the weight of domestic ideology, was a time when battles were being won, boundaries were being redrawn and new methods of working were developed. Although it is difficult to ascertain the direct

⁷¹¹ Reported in the *Guardian Journal*, 31/5/63, p. 6.

⁷¹² Address to the Nottingham NCW by the national Vice-president Mrs Anderson, reported in the *Nottingham Guardian*, 2/5/52, p. 3.

influence of the organisations on legislative change, and although membership of the traditional feminist organisations in Nottingham was falling, we do see that they were able to counteract this by increasing their collaborative working. The establishment of groups such as NSCWO to co-ordinate campaigns gave the women of Nottingham an even more powerful collective voice.

This is also a period where feminism, both equality and welfare feminism, seems less prominent in the concerns of the organisations, but when a whole range of issues that affected and developed women as citizens came to the fore. It is a period in which we can also see the roots of later single-issue campaign and pressure groups, whereby women concentrated on a particular issue of concern, whether it be nuclear weapons or the plight of new immigrants, or simply education or traffic in the local area.

The voice that stands out in this period is that of Mrs Ailsa Stanley. Prominent in Nottingham women's organisations before the war, the changes in society and changes in the local press gave her and the women she represented a regular voice in the local community. For twenty years she pursued a feminist and citizenship agenda and the longevity of her column is testament to the fact she was saying things local women wanted to hear as well as educating a generation for the feminist battles to come.

Much progress was still to be made, and in 1969 Ailsa Stanley called for women to join together to improve progress:

Nottingham, which is truly a woman's city with outstanding opportunities for women who want to get to the top, is still not throwing up enough leaders and one wonders why.

Her wishlist for the 1970s, however, was somewhat eclectic:

End to the Vietnam war

End to world poverty

Put the magic back into the theatre

Banish clichés

Ban dry-clean only clothes⁷¹³

Mrs Stanley, like Nottingham's women, had a range of issues that remained to be resolved.

⁷¹³ *Guardian Journal*, 29/12/69 p. 7

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The rationale for this thesis has been two-fold. One aim has been to test the hypotheses that have been presented about the twentieth century national women's organisations by examining what happened to them following the "heroic" era of suffrage campaigning. It is an attempt to examine the extent to which political parties and other organisations provided women with an opportunity to challenge social expectations and push for economic, political and social advances, specifically at a local level. There has been much disagreement about the ability of these groups to challenge the predominant ideas on gender and push for feminist and citizenship advances. This study was conducted to take the debate beyond the conflicts of "old" and "new" feminism, and beyond the sometimes over-simplified debates about the strength or weakness of a feminist movement. It has attempted to show that the debate needs to be widened to allow a recognition that the area is much more complex. Some work had been done which has introduced the concept of citizenship into the study of women's organisations in an attempt to broaden the field of study and create a more nuanced picture, but the concept had not been fully explored and thus was not an integrated part of a wider understanding of the complex development of women's rights. A local study has allowed us to examine these debates and assess the relative strength of women's organisations and feminism over a substantial period of time. Nottingham is an ideal city to choose for such a study as its twentieth century history is largely unremarkable – the suffrage campaigns had been

relatively low-key and the changes that occurred to the lives of the city's women were changes that affected women in many provincial cities. The dichotomies of old v. new feminism, or feminist action v. handicrafts lack a recognition of the complexities of the relationship between women and their organisations and we have seen that, at a local level, feminist and citizenship campaigns co-existed within the same organisations.

The second motive for the study was to make a small attempt to redress the balance of emphasis on women's organisations in the twentieth century. It is clear from this thesis that the bulk of work has thus far been carried out on the inter-war period, with the later period receiving often superficial treatment. The Second World War has also often been studied in isolation. This thesis allows us to see both change and continuity between the periods, and also enables us to partially reclaim the 1950s and 1960s as a period of importance – perhaps not as overtly feminist as the 1920s, but a stage of significant activity all the same. The history of feminist activity is not a balanced one and further work is needed on the later period if we are to continue to build a nuanced picture of women's campaigning activity and its impact throughout the century. It is for this reason that a long chronological span was chosen. Through the study we have been able to find examples of where specific campaigns led to specific changes, and an important focus of the story told here is the cumulative impact of a group of organisations who sought in different ways to press for feminist demands and open up chances for women to exert their influence as citizens. A longer chronological span has

enabled us to watch many of the concerns of the early feminists enter the mainstream of political thinking, and go on to achieve success. It has also allowed us to tentatively attempt to assess why.

Citizenship, feminism and the social dimension

A body of work has now been established examining twentieth century feminism and, for the inter-war period in particular, emphasises the distinction between “old”, equality feminism and “new”, welfare feminism. At one level this remains an important conceptual difference, which is why the issues have been separated throughout this study. But in practice, at a local level, the distinction did not neatly divide organisations. Indeed, organisations rarely described themselves as “feminist” at all. Instead, a number of the local organisations examined adopted a range of demands and causes that can be described as feminist (both “old” and “new”) whilst combining them with other issues and concerns. This could suggest two things: firstly that feminism was a term rejected by the organisations, or secondly that feminism was, for them, part of a more generally-used term – “citizenship”. As discussed in the introduction, the exploration of this term in the context of women’s organisations had been started by Caitriona Beaumont but the exact nature of it and its importance throughout the entire century has not yet been fully explored.⁷¹⁴ Feminist campaigns are those that sought equal rights and economic treatment; citizenship campaigns are those where women were seeking to improve their own lives and thus pushed for a range of advances which would

⁷¹⁴ Beaumont, ‘Citizens not feminists’; Beaumont, ‘The Women’s Movement, Politics and Citizenship’.

enable women to play a fuller role in society. This study shows a great deal of overlap between issues I have defined as openly feminist, and those described as more generally concerned with citizenship; between winning equality and using such new rights to push for the other things women wanted. Yet the distinction remains a necessary one – it acknowledges that the term “feminism” was not always a comfortable one for contemporaries; indeed in the 1950s even Shirley Williams, daughter of leading feminist campaigner Vera Brittain rejected the label. It was therefore important to take a more nuanced approach than that taken by Maggie Andrews, and examine the work of women’s organisations using the vocabulary acceptable to contemporaries. This necessitated a distinction between feminism and citizenship that some could argue is unnecessary, but which acknowledges the different foci of a number of campaigning organisations.

An area, introduced here but demanding much closer study is the significance of these groups as social institutions for women and the role they played in validating and enhancing women’s own life experiences. Work on women’s leisure has begun but is more descriptive than analytical in nature. That which does aim to analyse women’s culture focuses on commercial provision of leisure and not on the role of organisations as providers of leisure activities.⁷¹⁵ Historians such as Martha Vicinus have examined the friendship and social networks which helped bind early feminist organisations together, but more work is needed on the social

⁷¹⁵ Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England*.

functions of the organisations as the twentieth century progressed.⁷¹⁶ Not enough attention has been paid to the empowering nature of female-only social spaces.

The inter-war period

The fact that this thesis dedicates two chapters to the inter-war period is indicative of the interest in and debate initiated by study of feminism and women's organisations in this period. Nationally the focus has been on the strength or otherwise of the organisations, and the splits between old and new feminism in the 1920s. The debate between historians such as Susan Kingsley Kent and Martin Pugh characterised work in this area in the 1990s and there continues to be a debate between those who believe that the re-emergence of the domestic ideal and campaigns to improve domestic circumstances were incompatible with feminism, and those such as Maggie Andrews who believes that all female campaigning can be "reclaimed" as feminist. But the debate is not always relevant when drawing local conclusions and an overly-stated distinction between the "old" and "new" traditions of feminism was not reflected at a local level. What we find instead is an assortment of organisations working on a range of issues and campaigns which transcend these distinctions. The large variety of women's groups in Nottingham indicates they were meeting a need and that women were keen to join single-sex organisations where their interests and concerns were

⁷¹⁶ M. Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago, 1992)

addressed. Joining a women's organisation, especially one which was openly a campaigning group, represented a conscious decision to reject the confines of a purely domestic life and take an interest in the world beyond their own immediate family. It may be that members went to meetings to work on campaigns to improve their domestic life, and equally attendance at evening meetings could be a temporary escape from the domestic – a small rejection of a gender ideology that stated that women should and would be fulfilled by their own domestic life. Thus the debate can be replaced by a more nuanced analysis of the range of activity that women were involved in; an analysis that can expand Beaumont's work on the specific area of "citizenship".

Within a city generally administered by a Conservative council and dominated by an essentially conservative press women were working on a range of campaigns that challenged the rigid status quo. Some of these were explicitly feminist campaigns, for instance those conducted by the local branches of the NCW and the Soroptomists. Through the interwar period they pushed for greater political representation for women (including the equal franchise), equal pay, the end to the marriage bar and for women police - issues that transcended women's domestic role. Simultaneously, they also actively campaigned in their guise as "citizenship" organisations for educational reform, improvements to housing and to encourage women's roles in local politics. A great many organisations went beyond the purely domestic role of women, from the Girl Guides who trained their members to be self sufficient, capable women to the Soroptomist club which

gave career women the recognition which many had lacked in the past. And the distinction between the two, which is evident but by no means crucial within the primary material, did not result in a “movement” riddled with ideological differences, but instead in a collection of many different organisations, each with a different cultural, social or political emphasis, but each contributing to small changes in the lives of their members, and often to the lives of women in their community.

The Second World War

The war changed women’s lives - the pattern of women’s work during the war changed to one that was to continue for the next decades. Before the war the vast majority of married women who worked did so only in times of economic difficulty and the accepted place of middle-class, married women was firmly in the home; after the war married women increasingly worked part-time, defying social commentators who claimed this would lead to an epidemic of delinquency amongst children. Even during the war it was frowned on for women to go out to work – yet they did. For many women the war gave a temporary opportunity for women to work outside the home and play a fuller role in society. But by stressing the temporary nature of this, historians such as Harold Smith have ignored the inevitable psychological changes experienced by women – they had been given a taste of independence which must have affected their post-war lives.⁷¹⁷ The existing literature studies women at a national level and has a tendency to make sweeping generalisations about the impact of the war on women’s expectations

⁷¹⁷ Smith, “The effect of the war on the status of women.”

and attitudes, from Smith arguing that the impact was short-lived to Arthur Marwick claiming the war “emancipated” women.⁷¹⁸ A local study is essential in building a more detailed analysis which allows for the difference between women. At a local level for example, work in the WVS made women active and important in their local community and it is simplistic to assume that they no longer wanted to contribute to the local community once the war was over. This is not to argue that all women wanted to continue the roles they adopted during the war, but that for some the perception of themselves and their abilities changed irrevocably.⁷¹⁹

The importance of the war to twentieth-century feminism is also supported by the fact that it is during the war that we are truly able to point to specific campaigns having a substantial impact on changing policy, with women working collaboratively on equal compensation and family allowances. Such collaborative work was a feature of this period at both a national and a local level with women joining together to push for important, non-war related issues such as equal pay. Locally a range of organisations continued to work for feminist goals, though inevitably much local voluntary action was directed towards the WVS. The NCW remained very active and continued to push for equal pay and other organisations such as the Soroptomists maintained a campaigning function. Citizenship as a concept was brought into sharper focus by the war and its immediate aftermath, with a great deal of emphasis on community service and the duty of citizens to be

⁷¹⁸ See note 57

⁷¹⁹ Broad and Fleming (eds), *Nella Last's War*.

educated.⁷²⁰ The reward for this responsibility was increasingly seen in local political representation as outlined in chapter four, and pushing for greater local representation was a key focus of citizenship campaigning during this period. A post-war example of women refusing to accept that their voice was no longer to be heard immediately was the work of the Nottingham Housewives' League whose work in consumer politics pushed for improved food supplies and a "better deal" for women who no longer believed they had to accept what was given. Local evidence undermines the claims made that the war suppressed the impact women's organisations could have.

1950-1969

Contrary to some traditional received views of the 1950s and 1960s, this was a period of vital feminist advances, including women peers, equal pay and significant divorce and contraception legislation – a period in which, as Andrews describes the 1950s, women were accepted as "equal citizens of the English nation."⁷²¹ Important work on "reclaiming" this period has been undertaken by both Stephen Brooke and Joyce Freeguard. The domestic role assigned to women in this period is no longer dismissed as one which limited women; instead it gave women an acknowledged social and cultural importance. In addition this was a period in which campaigning activity did result in successes including equal pay. It was also a period where we can use the local evidence, and especially the local press, to make a claim for a continued vibrancy and new and effective ways of

⁷²⁰ Jones, *British Civilians in the front line*.

⁷²¹ Andrews, "For Home and Country," p. 133.

working. In the local press Ailsa Stanley and her twice-weekly column gave campaigning women a voice. Within a traditional diet of fashion and homecare Mrs Stanley emphasised the importance of the work of local women's organisations, and educated her readers about contemporary debates including whether mothers should also engage in paid work. This was then key to the educational aspect which I contend is the most significant role of the organisations throughout this period. Feminist campaigns continued in Nottingham – the NCW continued to push for advances including equal pay. This issue had been on their agendas for forty years and tireless campaigning was about to bear fruit. Nottingham women also pursued an eclectic range of campaigns, including those for nurseries, local political representation and better control of television programmes. The discussion of, planning for and enacting of these campaigns was key to developing the members as citizens. Also fundamental in developing women's citizenship was the ever-increasing educational opportunities provided by the organisations, especially those that educated their members on citizenship issues and current affairs.

This was also a period of increased collaborative working – when the organisations found an increased strength and effectiveness through operating within umbrella organisations such as the NSCWO. This method of working had emerged during the Second World War, and although the women MPs no longer worked together on a national level, organisations did so in greater numbers, possibly explaining the paradox of a high level of feminist legislation at a time

when many individual feminist organisations were suffering from a dwindling membership. A final striking aspect of this period was the emergence of local single-issue campaigns. In the 1950s “the participation of women in public life had advanced a generation ... popular culture had moved beyond voluntarism.”⁷²² It was a time when women felt able to come together informally to challenge decisions they were not happy with allowing a case to be made that some of that empowerment had been inspired and enabled by a tradition of campaigning that was firmly established in Nottingham for fifty years. It could be argued that the organisations had succeeded in their aim of enabling women to be active citizens and that they proved an indirect inspiration to women angry about issues such as school closures.

Change and continuity – the cumulative impact

There are aspects of both change and continuity to be tracked across the three periods studied. In terms of change it is important to acknowledge that although the 1950s do not deserve to be dismissed entirely, local evidence does suggest that this was a decade of less overt equality feminism than that seen in the 1920s. The interest in feminist advances ebbed and flowed through the decades, and the WI lost interest in specific equality feminist ideas very early. Though there is no ideological split between old and new feminism, it is undoubtedly the case that citizenship was increasingly the focus of most of the work carried out by the organisations of Nottingham. Yet other organisations continued to fight feminist battles for decades, and in Nottingham the NCW and the Soroptomists tirelessly

⁷²² Pursell, “Domesticating modernity”, p.65.

campaigns for advances such as equal pay. What did change about these organisations is that they increasingly came together to push for the changes that mattered to them.

It would be a great satisfaction if we were able to definitively assess the impact of the work undertaken by local women's organisations but such an assessment remains problematic, as discussed in Chapter Five. What we see at both the national and local level are individual campaigns which resulted in changes. At the national level this included the campaign for equal compensation during the war and the successes achieved through making Family Allowances payable to mothers in 1944. Locally, women's organisations can be credited with a range of influence. Through formulation of resolutions, collecting signatures on petitions and writing to MPs they made possible minor contributions to some of the larger national campaigns. Their work also led to concrete local reforms such as those affecting milk supply and bus lanes. Finally, they maintained a female presence in the local public sphere which ensured that women's concerns were on the agenda of local politics and the local press. It is thus my contention that the organisations throughout this period had a key impact on raising awareness of issues concerning feminism and female citizenship – both within women as a gender, and within the political establishment. Social change undoubtedly contributed to a shift in attitudes – society in the 1920s could not have countenanced free contraception for unmarried women, yet only forty years later it was offered – but women's organisations also played their part in contributing to this social transformation.

People were exposed to the campaigns and concerns of women's organisations through the media, and although their message was not as pervasive as those pushing for domesticity and the exaltation of motherhood, women continued to join local branches of the organisations to push for change. Tireless lobbying on key issues may have contributed to what Hera Cook sees as the acceptance of these ideas into the political mainstream.⁷²³

Studying the local

Throughout the study it has been stressed that a local study is of vital importance in building up a nuanced picture of organised women and their public activism in this period. Nottingham is largely unremarkable as a city in the mid-twentieth century. Many of the changes it experienced in housing and industrial complexion were similar to the changes of other cities in Britain. It is therefore an ideal city in which to study "ordinary" women, their activities and their concerns. As acknowledged, work has been started on examining the local picture. Recent work on Labour women in Manchester, Liverpool and Scotland is important, but looks only at a specific group of politicised women, and largely from the perspective of the battles they had to fight to be heard within their own organisations.⁷²⁴ Helen Jones' work on the Second World War raises significant points about the importance of locality in the Second World War, and it could be argued that her work is of relevance throughout this study. Her contention is that local areas responded to the strains of the "national emergency" by developing an enhanced

⁷²³ Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 316.

⁷²⁴ Hughes, "Fragmented Feminists?"; Hunt, "Making Politics in Local Communities"; M. Worley (ed), *Labour's Grass Roots*.

sense of the importance of their own town/city, the experiences of its own citizens and the work that was taking place within it. An argument could be made that some women in Nottingham were experiencing a similarly heightened sense of the importance of the local throughout this century. Through this period we see great social change and period of uncertainty and upheaval. Jones' theories could be expanded to suggest that local women came together within difficult cultural circumstances to provide a local response to an uncertain and ever-changing cultural environment. Although the local groups were almost universally affiliated to national organisations, the vast majority of their work is undertaken at a local level. Improving the lives of local women was their primary objective. We have witnessed women who campaigned on local issues and have discovered that, for women in the provinces, their engagement with the concerns of the national organisations was through the work of local branches.

A key feature of this study, and one that needs to be developed in much more detail, is the examination of the role of the local press in both mirroring national opinion about women and in creating a specifically local cultural context. There is much to be gleaned from this rich source – from a study of advertising to a detailed analysis of the provision made for women readers. The analysis undertaken here has used letters to the editor to assess the prevalence of conservative gender ideology. Most of the letters about women, and many by women, conformed to the views that women's place was in the home. Yet there is also evidence of those who did not agree and who used the letters pages to push

for change within the local arena and challenge the assumptions of the majority. Articles in the press have also provided an indication of how much local interest existed in women's organisations and their workings. In the inter-war period there was frequent reporting of meetings, resolutions and campaigning by the organisations of Nottingham. This almost entirely disappeared during the war though, of course, it is difficult to argue this was due to a lack of interest or activity – it was possibly more straightforwardly a lack of paper. After the Second World War reporting of the range of organisations within the main body of the paper gradually diminished, though groups such as the WI and TWGs were still prominent, featuring notably in women's columns.

Perhaps most interesting within the study of the local press was the emergence of voices purporting to speak directly to women and, as the period progresses, speaking directly for women. The women's columns have been analysed throughout the study, and the balance of the traditional feminine concerns of housework, fashion and childcare with more wide-ranging interests has been assessed. A key point, however, is that before the Second World War these columns were usually franchised and thus did not represent the local voice; in the 1950s and 1960s they become of vital importance to an understanding of Nottingham women because of the local voice of Ailsa Stanley. One should be wary of saying that the women's pages contained the only things that women were expected to know. They existed within newspapers full of local, national and international news and politics which many women surely read. No evidence has

been found about the readership patterns of women, or of their reaction to what was presented to them, but the number of columns grew throughout the inter-war period and therefore one can assume they must have been popular with the readership and with advertisers. In the 1950s, a time when nationally women's organisations were said to be dwindling, Mrs Stanley's columns revealed the range and vigour of their activity locally, and suggested that there was an audience among Nottingham women readers for messages about feminism and citizenship as well as for recipes.

There is a great deal that this study has not been able to answer, with the specific impact of individual organisations being one. Another important aspect which has not been assessed here was the emotional impact of being a member of one of these organisations. To assess this oral history and study of diaries would have needed to be undertaken and no evidence of that sort was available to me. Other aspects that need further work include a greater focus on the social dimension on women's organisations, and a wider study of women's leisure activities in general, in order to fully understand the role of women's organisations in enhancing their lives. However, what the study has allowed is a greater focus on the individual and smaller collective in working to achieve social change, which is a necessary move away from the many studies that have just examined a national picture.

It is thus the conclusion of this study that a focus solely directed at the national picture does not allow the true nature of women's organisations to be assessed. When examining the "strength" of the movement it is true that the century saw periods of greater and lesser activity, but it is important to acknowledge that changes in emphasis and patterns of working are not commensurate with decline and ineffectiveness. What the organisations gave to their members was an education in how to engage with civic society as full and valued members; what they gave to wider society was a key part of the jigsaw that saw women's accepted role in society challenged.

The fact that the organisations were largely middle-class does not mean that they were exclusive, and the fact that, on occasion, they attracted little public interest does not mean that they did not exist. That they continued amidst the prevailing push towards domesticity indicates their strength; campaigning continued without the support or recognition of the local press. Some more than others did discuss feminist and citizenship issues – birth control, equal pay, family allowances, the franchise – and by doing so were politicising their members. They provided a cultural space where women could develop new interests or concentrate on the ones they had to suspend for the benefit of family and children. What we witness through this period is a muted but determined collective voice which provided an alternative culture where issues affecting women could be discussed and new ideas spread. The domestic sphere was the only option for most women, but this did not preclude them from joining organisations or discussing politics. For such

women it was the practical help they could give each other day to day, as well as more formalised feminist campaigns that constituted social action, and thus was essential. Nottingham women were empowered by their new rights as citizens and strove to improve these in any way that interested them. The local evidence confirms that a substantial number of women throughout this period had a desire to be socially and politically active and were joining organisations in order to do this.

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