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### The Social Geography of Prostitution in Edinburgh, 1900-1939

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## THE SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF PROSTITUTION IN EDINBURGH, 1900–1939

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LOUISE SETTLE

The prostitutes [. . .] live as members of the proletariat, in the poorer districts, but their main beat is Princes Street, and it has in their eyes the prestige and familiarity of a business address.<sup>1</sup>

Edwin Muir's 1935 description of 'prostitutes' in Edinburgh, moving freely between the working-class areas of the city and those reserved for the middle and upper classes, demonstrates the extraordinary ability of these women to transgress class and gender boundaries.<sup>2</sup> By focusing on the geography of prostitution, this article will show that prostitutes in Edinburgh were not forced to the margins of the city, nor indeed society, but that they remained in the very heart of the city centre throughout the early twentieth century. Ashworth, White and Winchester's study of red light districts in western Europe has established that the main factors which determined the location of prostitution were 'accessibility, opportunity and constraint'.<sup>3</sup> This article will argue that as the twentieth century progressed, the location of prostitution in Edinburgh moved towards the centre of the city's business and entertainment districts because these busy areas provided the best 'accessibility and opportunity' for the women who relied on visibility for their solicitation to be successful. Whereas some historians have focused on the regulation of prostitution and the role that 'restriction' played in determining where prostitution took place, this article will suggest that the ability of the

<sup>1</sup> E. Muir, *Scottish Journey* (London, 1935), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'prostitute' is used in this article with the understanding that this was a label applied by the police, magistrates and moral reformers to describe women who engaged in acts of prostitution and reflects the language used during this period. For more on the use of the word 'prostitute' as a distinct legal category see H. Self, *Prostitution, Women and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (London, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> G. Ashworth, P. White and H. Winchester, 'The Red-Light District in the West European City: A Neglected Aspect of the Urban Landscape', *Geoforum*, 19 (1988), pp. 201–12.

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women involved in prostitution to utilise key commercial factors was equally, if not more, important in determining the location of prostitution in Edinburgh.<sup>4</sup>

The historiography of prostitution in Britain focuses predominantly on the nineteenth century, and in particular on the English experience.<sup>5</sup> Considering that Scotland has distinctive traditions of law, medical practice, legislation and practical policing, it is surprising that there has not been any research undertaken to discover how the unique Scottish context affected the nature of prostitution and its regulation in Scotland during the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Whilst there is research on prostitution in Scotland during the nineteenth century, and a small selection which focuses on England during the first half of the twentieth century, this research primarily focuses on policing and policy debates or initiatives to reform ‘fallen women’.<sup>7</sup>

However, a small amount of recent research has begun to adopt an approach that has been influenced by social and historical geography. Philip Howell’s research on nineteenth-century Liverpool and Cambridge has shown that prostitution in these cities was regulated by separating it into specific locations away from respectable society.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Stefan Slater suggests that in London during the early twentieth century police attempted to contain prostitution by focusing their limited recourses on policing the central ‘recognised vice areas’.<sup>9</sup> However, Julia Laite’s research has found that although the criminalisation of prostitution in London increased during the early twentieth century this did not result in the containment of commercial sex to ‘one red light zone’ and instead prostitution spread out across many different areas of the city.<sup>10</sup> Roger Davidson and Gayle Davis’s research on prostitution in Edinburgh has shown that during the late 1950s the police restricted the location of prostitution by creating an informal tolerance zone around the Leith docks.<sup>11</sup> However, although research has been undertaken on the geography of prostitution in nineteenth- and

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, P. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge, 2009) and S. Slater, ‘Containment: Managing Street Prostitution in London, 1918–1959’, *Journal of British Studies*, 49, 2 (2010), pp. 323–57.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, J. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, 1980); F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (Cambridge, 1980); P. Bartley, *Prostitution, Prevention and Reform in England, 1860–1914* (London, 2000); T. Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730–1830* (London, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> See, L. Farmer, ‘“The Genius of our Law”: Criminal Law and the Scottish Legal Tradition’, in D. Sugarman (ed.), *Law in History: Histories of Law and Society*, ii (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 97–115.

<sup>7</sup> On Scotland in the nineteenth century see, L. Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990); on twentieth-century prostitution in England see, J. Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885–1960* (Basingstoke, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*.

<sup>9</sup> Slater, ‘Containment: Managing Street Prostitution in London’.

<sup>10</sup> J. Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*.

<sup>11</sup> R. Davidson and G. Davis, ‘“A Festering Sore on the Body of Society”: The Wolfenden Committee and Female Prostitution in Mid-Twentieth-Century Scotland’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 24 (2005), pp. 80–98.

twentieth-century England, and in particular London, there have been few regional studies outside of London, and no research on Scotland in the first half of the twentieth century. Therefore, by focusing on Edinburgh during the early twentieth century, this study will address this lacuna and shed further light on what Howell describes as the 'complexity of the locality'.<sup>12</sup>

Edinburgh's burgh court records provide the main source for determining the location of prostitution offences in the city. Each record contains information about the individuals and the offences, including the name of the street where the women were found soliciting. By taking a sample of these records (January, April, July and October from the years 1903, 1911, 1921 and 1931) and collecting all the offence addresses for each case of importuning, it is then possible to assign the location of offences to particular districts.<sup>13</sup> The city has been divided into eight main districts: West New Town, Central New Town, East New Town, Abbey Hill, Old Town, Southside, Tollcross and Haymarket. Parishes or electoral constituencies could not be used to divide the city because the latter are too small and the former too large. Instead, the city has been divided in a way that makes the process of change most visible. Ascribing streets to districts is only intended as a device to help the reader visualise how the location of prostitution changed and is therefore only meant to be indicative of general patterns.

## I

The development of the New Town at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries meant that Edinburgh's wealthy elite moved from the overcrowded tenements of the Old Town to the wide streets and attractive town houses of the New Town.<sup>14</sup> This meant that poorer inhabitants remained initially in the Old Town, and so too did prostitution. However, by the 1840s particular areas of the New Town had already begun to become less elite, as lower-middle-class and then working-class families started to move into areas in the East End, such as St. James Square and Greenside Place. In 1841, Dr William Tait described how most prostitution occurred in the Old Town on streets such as Black Friar's Wynd, the Grassmarket and the High Street.<sup>15</sup> However, he also mentioned areas in the East End, such as St. James Square, albeit prostitution occurred here to a lesser extent. The census of 1841 confirmed Tait's observations and indicated that there were brothels on Greenside Place, suggesting that prostitution was indeed moving into the 'less respectable' East End areas of the New Town.<sup>16</sup>

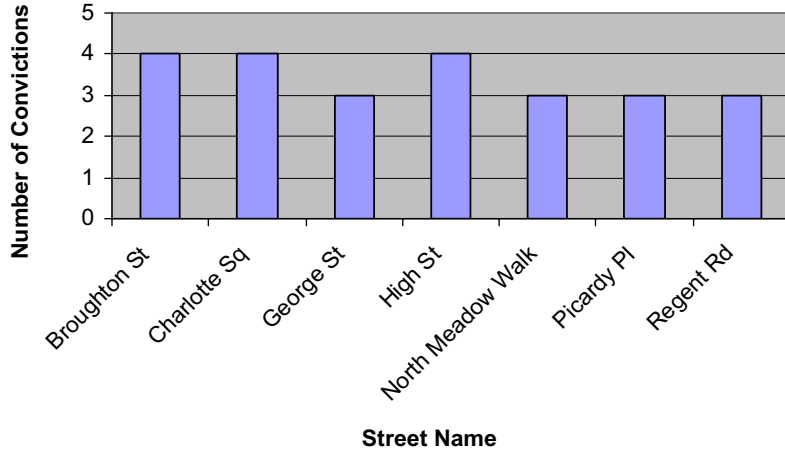
<sup>12</sup> Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> The Edinburgh Burgh Court Records for 1901 are missing. 1903 has been used instead because it is the closest surviving year.

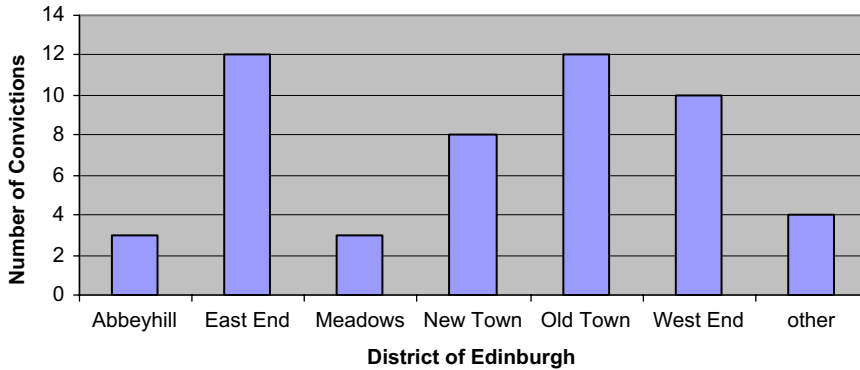
<sup>14</sup> S. Varga, *Edinburgh New Town* (Stroud, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> W. Tait, *Magdalenism: An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1840).

<sup>16</sup> Leith Walk Research Group, *Leith Walk and Greenside: A Social History* (University of Edinburgh, 1978-9), p. 16.



**Figure 1.** Streets on which importuning convictions occurred in 1903. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1903.

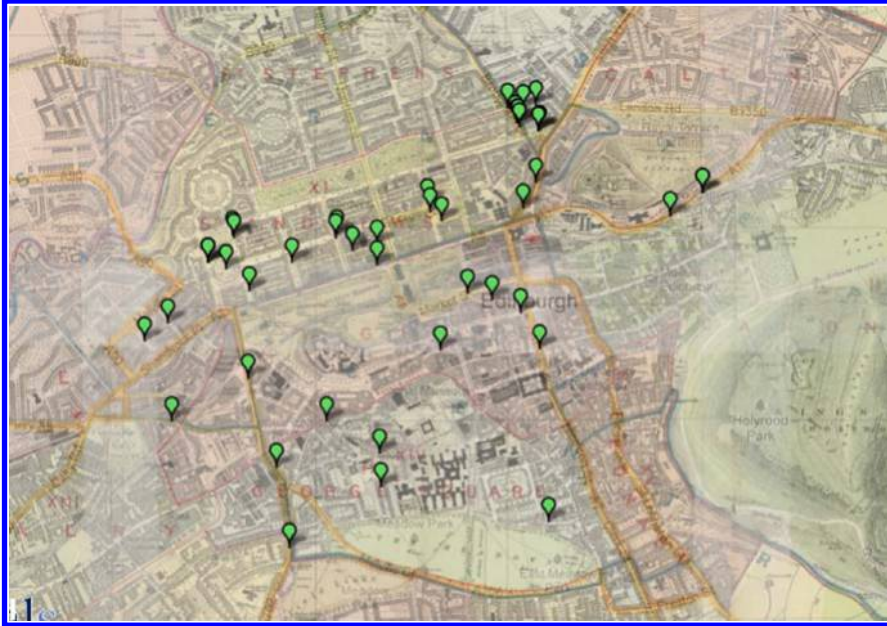


**Figure 2.** Districts in which importuning convictions occurred in 1903. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1903. The figures only include districts that had three or more convictions for importuning. Those with fewer than three are included in the 'other' section.

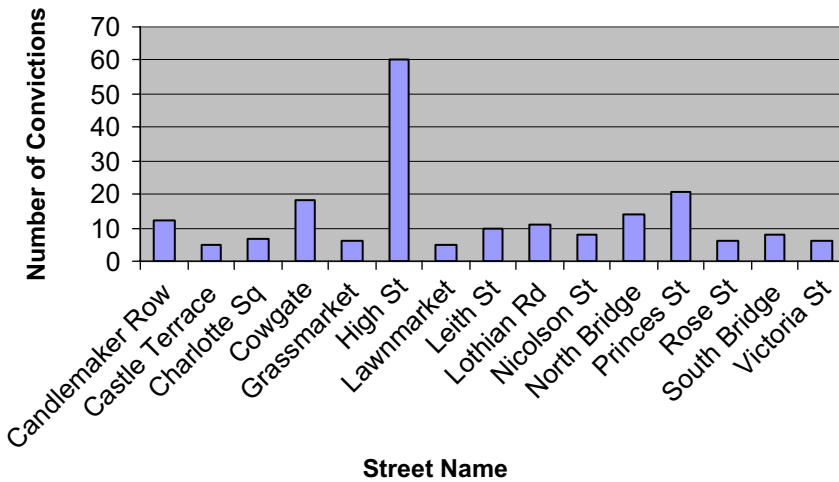
By the early twentieth century this move towards the northern centre of the city was more firmly established. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show that several streets in the central, east and west ends of the New Town, such as George Street, Broughton Street and Charlotte Square, had a notable number of prostitution offences in 1903. However, the High Street in the centre of the Old Town still had one of the highest numbers of importuning offences, and it is clear that the Old Town remained a popular location for street prostitution.<sup>17</sup>

This gradual movement towards the New Town can also be seen in the burgh court records for 1911. However, despite the movement of some prostitutes to

<sup>17</sup> Edinburgh City Archives (hereafter ECA), Edinburgh Burgh Court Records (hereafter EBCR).

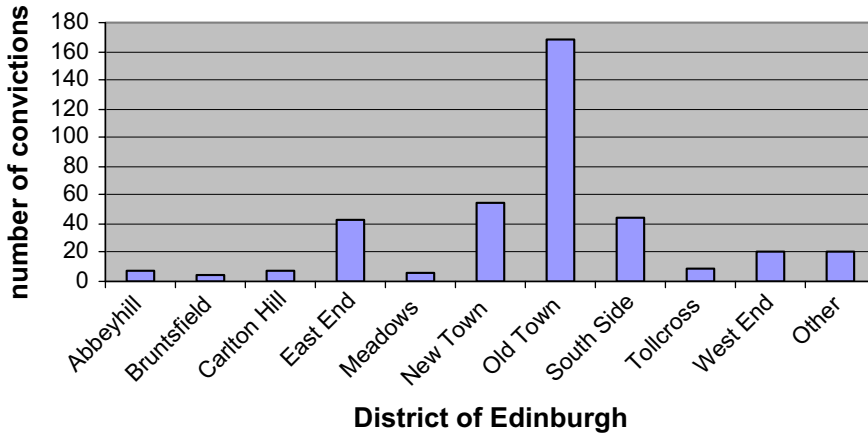


**Figure 3.** Location of importuning convictions in 1903. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1903. Map compiled using <http://geo.nls.uk/urbhist/>

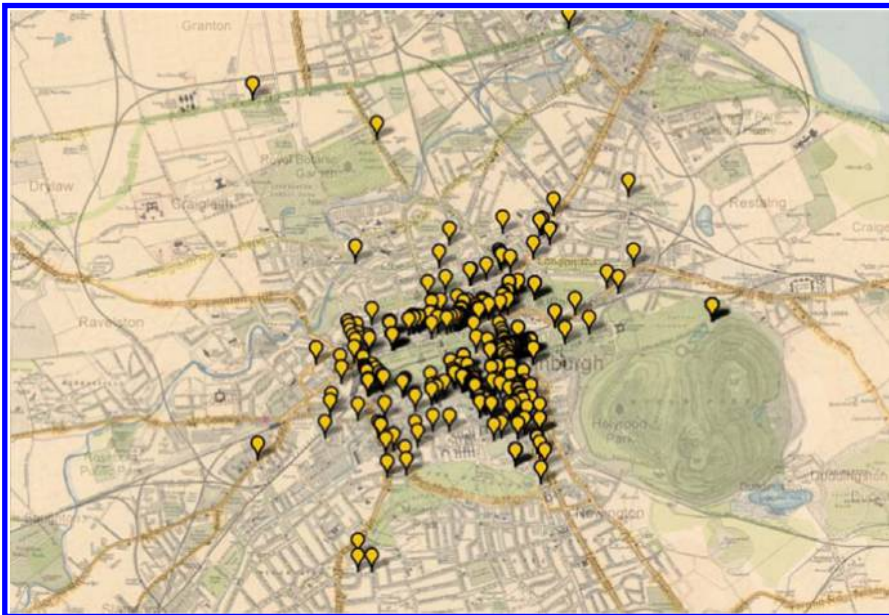


**Figure 4.** Streets on which importuning convictions occurred in 1911. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1911.

these New Town areas, figures 4, 5 and 6 show that the Old Town remained the area where the most prostitution offences were reported. For example, figure 4 shows that in 1911 thirty per cent of all prostitution offences occurred on the High Street in the centre of the Old Town. There were sixty occasions where the

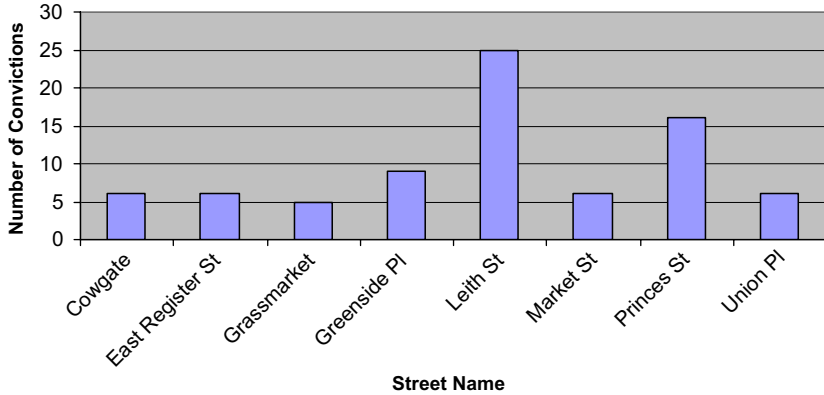


**Figure 5.** Districts in which importuning convictions occurred in 1911. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1911.



**Figure 6.** Location of importuning convictions in 1911. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1911.

High Street was named as a location for street prostitution, whereas the majority of the other streets named appeared in the records less than ten times. When all the offences are divided up according to the districts of Edinburgh in which they took place, the prominence of the Old Town as the main location for street prostitution becomes even clearer, with forty-four per cent of all recorded convictions for



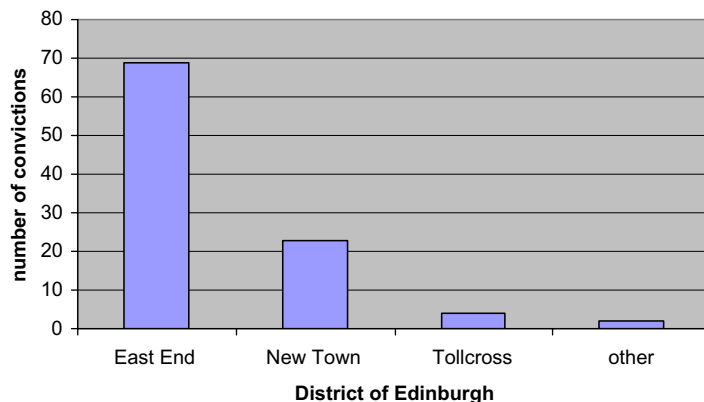
**Figure 7.** Streets on which importuning convictions occurred in 1921. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1921.

importuning reported to have occurred there. Additionally, twelve per cent of the total offences occurred in the Southside area. This district borders the Old Town ‘proper’ and also includes streets that had been known as locations for prostitution prior to the twentieth century. Therefore, when the number of offences which occurred in the Old Town and the Southside are combined, they collectively account for fifty-six per cent of all the offences. The court records, therefore, show that those women convicted for importuning in 1911 were three times more likely to have been soliciting in the Old Town and the Southside, rather than in the New Town.

Nevertheless, the district with the second highest number of offences was the central New Town, with fourteen per cent of the total. This was mainly on streets such as Princes Street, which had the second largest number of convictions, with twenty-one recorded offences, followed by the North Bridge, with eighteen. In addition, the east and west ends of the New Town had, respectively, eleven per cent and five per cent of the importuning offences. Therefore, overall, thirty per cent of the offences took place in the New Town—an area which previously had not been commonly associated with prostitution. The remaining fourteen per cent was distributed among a wide variety of different districts, such as Abbeyhill, Bruntsfield and Tollcross. Therefore, the evidence clearly demonstrates that in 1911 prostitution was spread across the whole city; although the majority of offences still occurred in the Old Town, a considerable minority occurred in the New Town.

By 1921, there had been a significant change in the location of prostitution offences. The movement towards the New Town, which was emerging in 1911, had now fully materialised. Leith Street had replaced the High Street as the main location for importuning offences, followed by Princes Street and Greenside Place. These streets were in the central and, in particular, the east end, of the





**Figure 8.** Districts in which importuning convictions occurred in 1921. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1921.

New Town. The significance of this can be seen more sharply by focusing again on the districts. Figure 8 shows that seventy per cent of all offences in the 1921 sample were in the east end of the New Town and twenty-three per cent in the central New Town area, whereas all the other remaining districts combined represented only seven per cent of the total. This evidence clearly demonstrates that by 1921 the majority of prostitution offences occurred in the east end and central New Town areas.

The 1931 court data reveals a similar pattern. As in 1921, a large majority (eighty-eight per cent) of the offences occurred in the east end and central areas of the New Town. However, figures 10, 11 and 12 show that by 1931 fifty-two per cent of the offences that occurred in the New Town were in the central areas, such as Princes Street and Thistle Street, whereas thirty-six per cent occurred in the east end areas of the New Town. Therefore, although the New Town as a whole remained the area with the most offences, by 1931 the central New Town areas had more offences than the east end. Interestingly, another ten per cent of the offences occurred in the west end district of the New Town—a relatively more wealthy area and one which previously had shown little evidence of street prostitution. In comparison, only two per cent of the offences were recorded in the Old Town. This shift in the location of offences towards the more ‘respectable’, wealthier areas of the central and west end of the New Town suggests that street prostitution during this period was moving further towards the centre of city life, both geographically and socially.

## II

Historians such as Howard Taylor have questioned whether data collected from criminal conviction statistics actually reveals more about the policing policies than

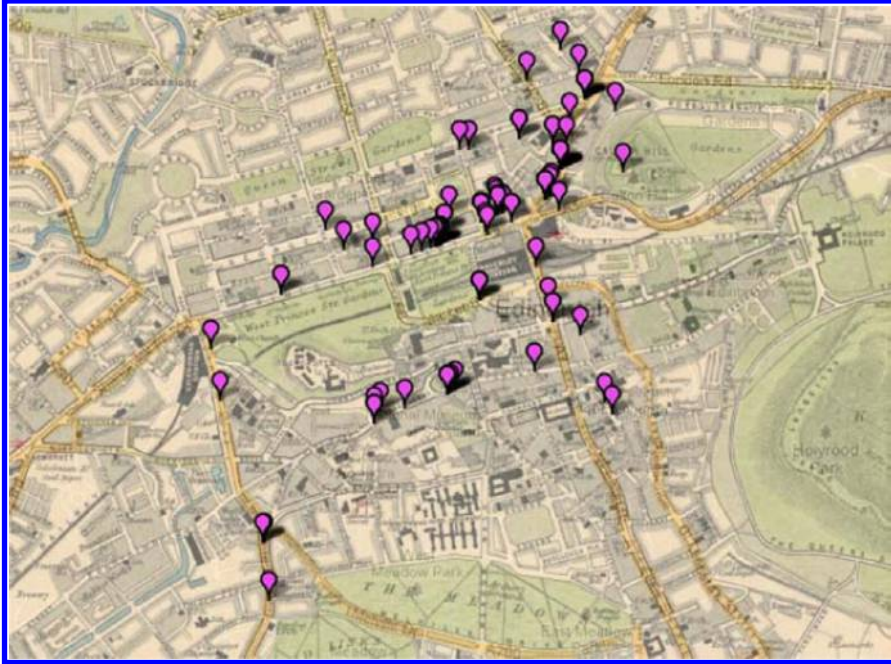


Figure 9. Location of importuning convictions in 1921. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1921.

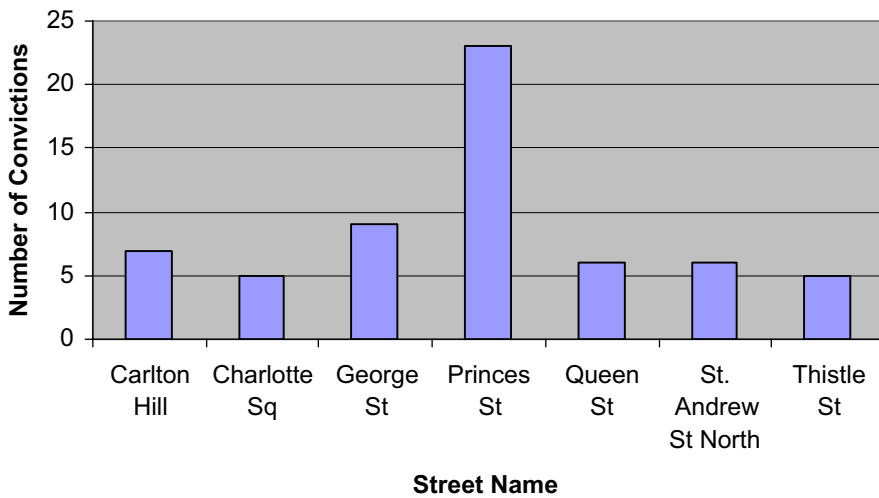
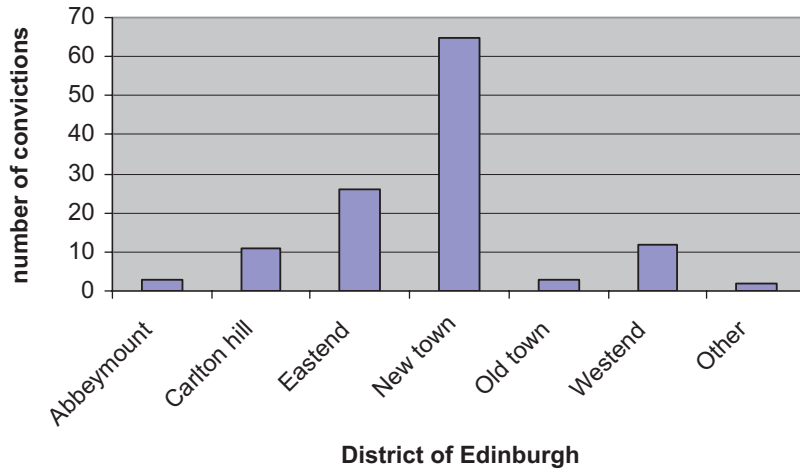
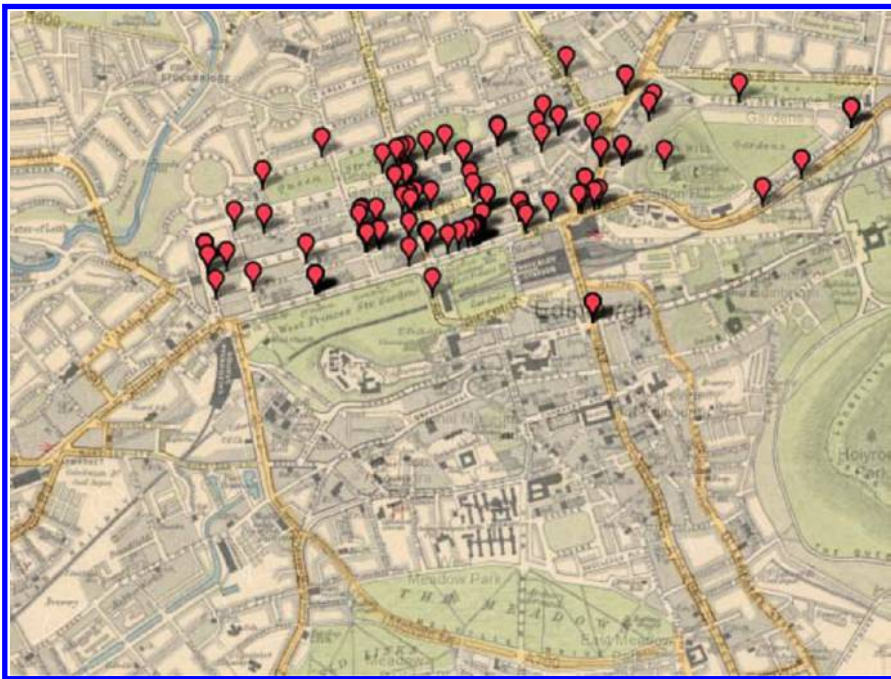


Figure 10. Streets on which importuning convictions occurred in 1931. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1931.



**Figure 11.** Districts in which importuning convictions occurred in 1931. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1931.



**Figure 12.** Location of importuning convictions in 1931. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1911.

the criminal activity itself.<sup>18</sup> It could be argued that statistics compiled from court records do not detail the areas in which prostitution was most common, but instead indicate the areas where the police chose to enforce the solicitation laws. Considering that arrests for prostitution were usually initiated by the police rather than by a witness or a victim (as would often be the case for other crimes), the criminal statistics relating to prostitution are particularly sensitive to changes in police policy.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the location of working-class prostitute women in the central middle-class districts transgressed both notions of respectable femininity and class boundaries, making it more likely that the police would arrest those women whose presence was more visible.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, regardless of whether the arrest statistics are high in these areas because of the increased visibility and surveillance of women engaged in prostitution in central areas, the sheer number of women witnessed importuning in these central New Town areas confirms that a considerable amount of solicitation occurred there. For example, the police reports from the late 1910s, the 1920s and the 1930s routinely describe how the women walked along routes which included some of the most prominent streets of Edinburgh, such as Princes Street, George Street and Frederick Street. One police witness testimony is representative of the large number of statements that describe the very public routes the women took through the cities centre:

At 11.10pm on the date charged she came under their notice loitering in St. Andrew Square [... she] proceeded westwards to George Street opposite number 52, there she spoke to a man who was seated in a stationary motor car for a few seconds, then continued west to Frederick Street. On reaching there she loitered about for about 5 minutes or so, then proceeded southwards in Frederick Street and turned east in Princes Street.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, social workers also commented on the 'depravity' of women who 'parade Princes Street night after night, making open advances to soldiers'. Further, coffee stalls in central locations, such as the Mound, were well-known as popular solicitation sites during the interwar period.<sup>22</sup> It would appear, therefore, that attempts to stop the majority of these women from soliciting in the respectable central areas of the city were unsuccessful. Perhaps the

<sup>18</sup> H. Taylor, 'Rationing Crime: The Political Economy of Criminal Statistics since the 1850s', *Economic History Review*, 3 (1998), pp. 569–90.

<sup>19</sup> C. Smart, 'Law and the Control of Women's Sexuality: The Case of the 1950s', in P. Hutter and G. Williams (eds), *Controlling Women: The Normal and the Deviant* (London, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> P. Howell, 'A Private Contagious Diseases Act: Prostitution and Public Space in Victorian Cambridge', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26, 3 (2000), pp. 376–402.

<sup>21</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of May Henderson or Courtney, 13 Apr. 1937.

<sup>22</sup> National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Acc.11191 Family Care Papers, Newspaper Cuttings, *The Evening Dispatch*, 23 Mar. 1919 and *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 7 December 1933; Davidson and Davis, 'A Festering Sore on the Body of Society', p. 95.

opportunities available in these areas were sufficiently attractive to risk potential arrest. Consequently, although the middle classes may have wanted to ostracise 'deviant' women from the centre of the city as part of a wider project to enforce middle-class notions of respectability, in practice, the implementation of such policies was unfeasible.<sup>23</sup>

Soliciting on the busy thoroughfares of New Town's central and east end areas meant that the women had a much higher chance of successfully importuning. In addition, they were also close to the main railway station. Railway stations have long been recognised as places where prostitution occurs due to the large amount of people who pass through; especially tourists and businessmen, the type of people most likely to be accosted by prostitutes.<sup>24</sup> The railway station as a site for solicitation was particularly important during the First World War because soldiers were moved across the country by train. The court records show that it was not just popular imagination or the military authorities' fear of venereal disease that linked soldiers and prostitution. In the witness testimonies, a large majority of the men whom the women solicited were described as 'soldiers', 'naval seamen', or other members of the armed forces. For example, in 1919 the police described how Mary Thomson and Mary Gibbons 'accosted an Australian soldier who spoke to them for a minute or two then left. On leaving the soldier, they accosted two naval seamen with a similar result. They then continued westwards and at the Palace Picture House they stopped two Canadian soldiers.'<sup>25</sup> It may have been easier for the police to recognise activity considered to be 'importuning' when a woman was standing with a group of soldiers rather than talking to civilians, especially considering the emphasis which had been placed on the dangers of prostitutes spreading venereal disease to members of the armed forces.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the exceptionally large numbers of witness statements that describe solicitation between prostitutes and soldiers suggest that the location of soldiers around the main rail station influenced where prostitution occurred. Therefore, the First World War clearly played a role in the movement of street prostitution from the Old to the New Town.

However, this must not be overstated. The First World War ended in 1918, yet in 1921 most prostitution offences continued to occur in the central and east end districts of the New Town. Clearly, there were more long-term factors influencing the location of prostitution, one of the most important of which was the location

<sup>23</sup> J. Walkowitz, 'Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London', *Representation*, 62 (1998), pp. 1–30; Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860–1914* (London, 200).

<sup>24</sup> Ashworth, White and Winchester, 'The Red-Light District in the West European City', pp. 201–12.

<sup>25</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Thomson and Mary Gibbons, 19 Apr. 1919.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, R. Davidson, *Dangerous Liaisons: A Social History of Venereal Disease in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Amsterdam, 2000); A. Wollacott, 'Khaki Fever' and its Control', pp. 325–47; E. H. Beardsley, 'Allied Against Sin: American and British Responses to Venereal Disease in World War One', *Medical History*, 20 (1976), pp. 189–202.

of entertainment and other commercial businesses. Elaine McKewon suggests that ‘prostitution finds locational stability in night-life districts [...] despite its relatively high visibility, because these are areas where “dissident” activities are widely known to thrive [...] and traditional social norms are relatively broken down’.<sup>27</sup> Edinburgh’s east end had been associated with the theatre since the early nineteenth century and by the 1920s there was a wide variety of new types of entertainment venues located in the area.<sup>28</sup> Many of the new dance halls and cinemas that opened during this period, such as the Playhouse on Greenside Row and Fairley’s dance hall on Leith Street, were situated in this area. The district was also well known for its pubs, fish-and-chip restaurants and ice-cream parlours, so much so that the locals described it as the place to get ‘alcohol and ice’, a description justified by the fact that in 1911 there were twenty-two pubs in the small triangle between Leith Street and York Place.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, this would have been a good catchment area for women to solicit the men who headed there for entertainment, especially the soldiers who left Waverley train station and headed to the New Town to enjoy their leave. Additionally, if sailors who were stationed in Leith wanted to go to the city centre, then the east end, and in particular Gayfield Square at the top of Leith Walk, provided a perfect location for importuning the sailors who passed this area on their way to and from the surrounding entertainment venues. However, this was not only the case during wartime. Throughout the whole period, the witness statements routinely describe how the women often solicited in front of cinemas, theatres, dance halls, restaurants and pubs. For example, one witness found in a brothel described how he had met the accused at the ‘Empire Theatre and accompanied them home to spend the night.’<sup>30</sup> Another report described how the police had found the accused ‘with another prostitute in the shebeen at 3a Greenside Place known as the “dug out” [...] Opposite the K.B Hotel she accosted a navy petty officer, [and] entered the fish and potatoes restaurant.’<sup>31</sup>

It was not only outside these venues that the women worked, but they might also be found soliciting inside. ‘Chuckers-out’ were often employed in cinemas to make sure that prostitution did not occur within the building, and the rooms were never fully dark for the same reason.<sup>32</sup> There was also particular concern about the dangers of coffee houses, fish-and-chip shops and ice-cream parlours in Scotland during the interwar period. It was believed that the rooms above or behind these shops were used for prostitution and that these venues particularly attracted young people who were vulnerable to the advances of the ‘immoral types’ who

<sup>27</sup> E. McKewon, ‘The Historical Geography of Prostitution in Perth, Western Australia’, *Australian Geographer*, 34, 3 (2003), p. 298.

<sup>28</sup> Leith Walk Research Group, *Leith Walk and Greenside: A Social History*, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Elizabeth Houghton, 15 Oct. 1919.

<sup>31</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Marjory Milner, 4 Feb. 1921.

<sup>32</sup> B. Thomas, *The Last Picture Show, Edinburgh: Ninety Years of Cinema Entertainment in Scotland’s Capital* (Edinburgh, 1984).

owned and frequented these places. Once 'seduced' by these men, the women would then engage in prostitution there. These 'immoral types' were frequently described as 'foreigners', and the xenophobic nature of the criticism of these venues was never far from the surface.<sup>33</sup>

Not only did this area offer a high concentration of potential clients, but it was also close to low-rent indoor premises where intercourse could take place. By the late nineteenth century several buildings located in the east end of the New Town on streets such as Leith Street and Greenside Place had been 'made down'. This effectively meant that the large, attractive buildings originally designed for middle-class inhabitants had been converted into small tenement flats that housed working-class tenants, often in overcrowded conditions. This was especially true of the east end areas surrounding St. James Square and Gayfield Square, which had become notorious for their slum-like residences.<sup>34</sup> One of the main methods used by prostitute women was to solicit men on the street and then to take them to either their own rented accommodation, a 'short time flat' rented only for the necessary period, or a brothel. For example, in a 1928 case a witness described how 'they had been accosted by the prostitutes Miller and Ryan, on the street, and after having a few drinks in a public house they had been taken back by them to the house for immoral purposes'.<sup>35</sup> Several other witness testimonies described how the men were solicited on the street and then taken back to a flat; for example, one man stated that 'he had been accosted on the street by one or other of the two women and taken to the house for an immoral purpose'.<sup>36</sup> Another man found in a brothel at 5 Prospect Terrace explained that he had 'met the accused and her sister in one of the main thoroughfares'.<sup>37</sup> This method of procuration meant that it was necessary for women to live in, or have access to, accommodation around the city centre areas in which they solicited – something which the east end could provide.

The home addresses recorded in the burgh court records show that the women increasingly lived in these central areas close to where most soliciting offences occurred. Figures 13 and 14 show that in 1903 and 1911 most of the women lived in the Old Town and Southside districts. These areas were inexpensive and close to the streets on which the women solicited. However, Figures 15 and 16 demonstrate that by 1921 and 1931 more women lived in the east end of the New Town, as it became increasingly possible and desirable to work from flats closer to the more profitable areas in the New Town.

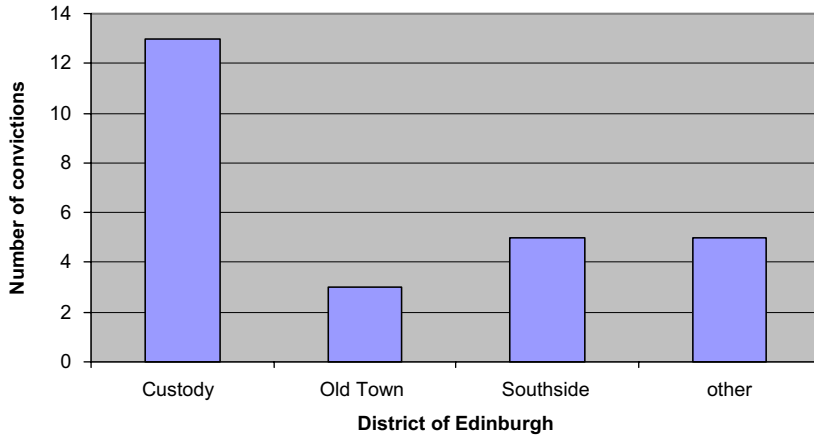
<sup>33</sup> Davidson, *Dangerous Liaisons*, p. 31; Glasgow Mitchell Library (hereafter GML), T. PAR 1.16, *Memorandum on a Social Evil in Glasgow, and the State of the Law for Dealing with Certain forms of Immorality* (Glasgow, 1911).

<sup>34</sup> Leith Walk Research Group, *Leith Walk and Greenside, a Social History*, p. 23.

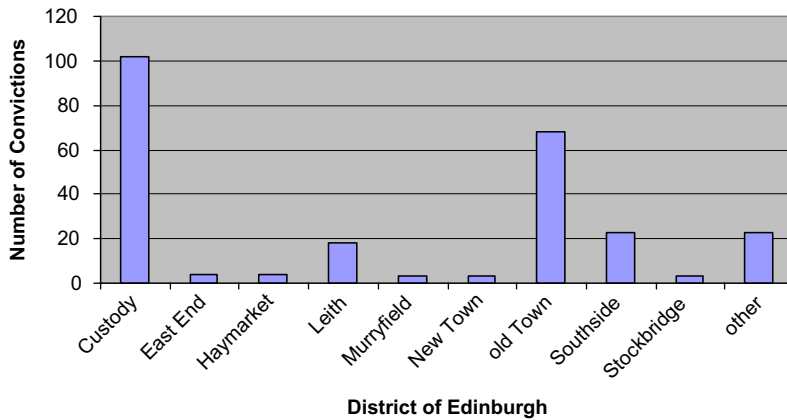
<sup>35</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of George Ritchie, 15 Feb. 1928.

<sup>36</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Jane Swanson, 1 Dec. 1919.

<sup>37</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Mary Watt, 8 Mar. 1917.



**Figure 13.** Home addresses of women convicted for importuning. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1903. Before 1921 the police used the category ‘in custody’ for those women who were currently in custody and had not given another address. However, by 1921 this practise had changed so that the police recorded the woman’s last known address, and the category of ‘in custody’ was removed.

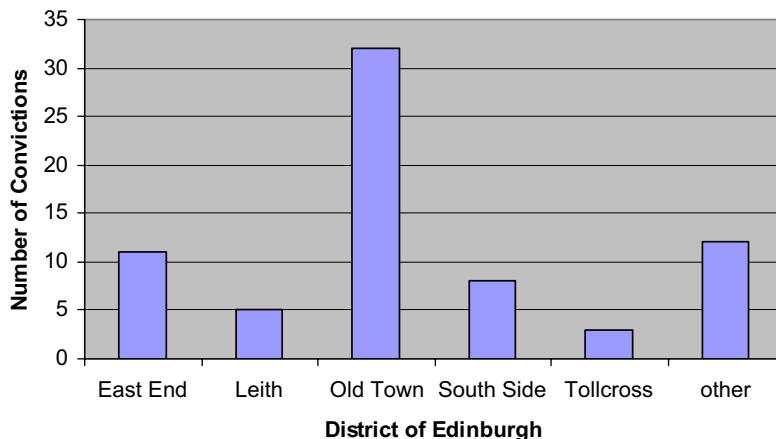


**Figure 14.** Home addresses of women convicted for importuning. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1911.

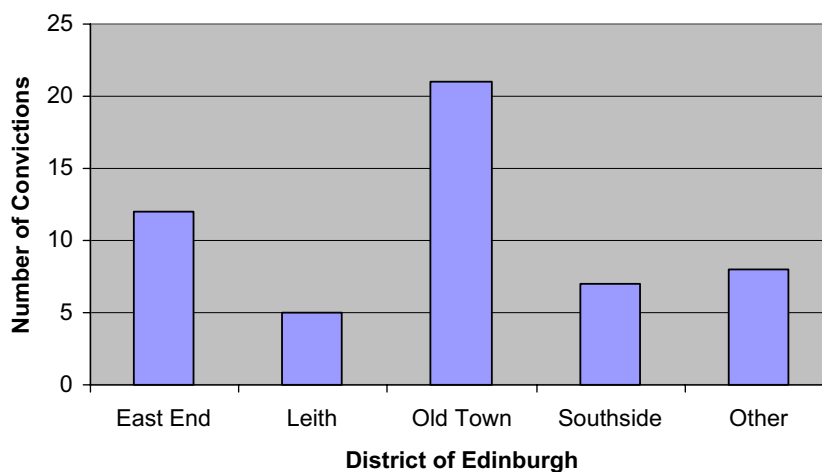
Nevertheless, the higher rents in the central and west end New Town districts probably meant that the women could only move as far as the east end of the New Town, and many still remained in the cheaper areas in the Old Town and the Southside. Therefore, it appears that Muir was accurate in his depiction of the prostitutes in Edinburgh being able to cross the invisible barrier between working-class and middle-class areas of the city.<sup>38</sup> These women’s ability to cross back and forth between class boundaries allowed them to live in the Old Town and the

<sup>38</sup> Muir, *Scottish Journey*, p. 12.





**Figure 15.** Home addresses of women convicted for importuning. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records January–October 1921.



**Figure 16.** Home addresses of women convicted for importuning. Source: Edinburgh Burgh Court Records, January–October 1931.

less expensive areas of the east end, but to solicit on some of the most prominent streets in Edinburgh.

These findings are relevant to wider theories regarding the relationship between social geography and identity. Building on Henri Lefebvre's and Rob Shields' concept of 'social spatialization', Angie Hart has examined how the El Barrio district in Spain during the early 1990s acted as a location where vice could be tolerated and was located both physically and metaphorically on the peripheries

of society.<sup>39</sup> Hart argues that, whereas the male customers moved relatively freely between this vice district and 'mainstream' culture, the prostitute women were less able to do so because of their 'marginal' status. Howell and Slater argue that a similar type of containment was attempted in English cities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>40</sup> However, as demonstrated above, in Edinburgh during the early twentieth century there was no single vice district located on the periphery of society. Instead, prostitute women moved between districts, and prostitution co-existed amongst a variety of businesses and entertainment venues in the heart of the city centre. If 'people's identities are in part constructed through the spatial locations they inhabit and frequent', then the location of prostitution in the city centre had an important influence on the women who worked there.<sup>41</sup>

The witness testimonies show that not all acts of prostitution happened indoors. The parks, doorways and alleyways around the central and east end of the New Town also offered opportunities for *al fresco* commercial sex. A case in 1919 described how officers had found 'the prostitute Cecelia Wood or Sneddon' and a sailor 'having carnal connection' in the public stair at 38b New Street.<sup>42</sup> Another case, this time in 1925, described how Mary Bradshaw (a suspected prostitute) 'entered the common stair [. . .] About three minutes later both came out of the stair and proceeded to the top of Leith Street where the sailor left.'<sup>43</sup> There were also many references made to Calton Hill and Holyrood Park as common locations for importuning and sexual intercourse. The location of these two large, open park spaces only a few minutes' walk from the east end of Princes Street provided a convenient location for those women without access to indoor venues. In 1921 Elizabeth Young was found 'importuning male passers-by for the purposes of prostitution on the Calton Hill', and in 1918 the police described how they saw Daisy Moor 'leave the Calton Hill with two sailors who left her in Leith Street after paying her some money.'<sup>44</sup>

Records that describe women having sex outside are quite rare, possibly because most of the reports focus on solicitation rather than on where the sex acts took place. However, by the 1920s an increasing number of separate cases were being heard in the burgh court of couples having 'carnal connection' in a public place. These cases were not necessarily related to prostitution, as anyone having sexual intercourse outdoors in public was liable for prosecution under the charge 'Breach of the Peace'. However, in certain cases it is possible to match

<sup>39</sup> A. Hart, 'Constructing a Spanish Red-Light District: Prostitution, Space and Power', in David Bell and Gill Valentine (eds), *Mapping Desire* (Routledge, 1995); H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991); R. Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*; Slater, 'Containment: Managing Street Prostitution in London', p. 337.

<sup>41</sup> Hart, 'Constructing a Spanish Red-Light District', p. 215.

<sup>42</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Cecelia Wood or Sneddon, 14 Nov. 1919.

<sup>43</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Mary Bradshaw, 28 Nov. 1925.

<sup>44</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Elizabeth Young, 31 Jan. 1921; ECA, EBCR, Case of Daisy Moor, 27 Mar. 1918.

the names of women prosecuted for prostitution with the names of women also prosecuted for having sex in public. Elizabeth Winter was caught having sex in a doorway on the 'bye lane next to George Street' in June 1935 and in June 1937 she was convicted of importuning for the purposes of prostitution, also on George Street.<sup>45</sup> On both occasions she had previous convictions for each offence.

### III

Clearly, the east and central New Town had many operational advantages and provided profitable locations from which women could solicit. Nevertheless, the high number of arrests in this area shows that being apprehended was a real risk for these women. The 1892 Burgh Police (Scotland) Act Section 381, subsection 22, made it an offence for a 'common prostitute or street walker' to importune for the purposes of prostitution.<sup>46</sup> Prior to this, Edinburgh had introduced the 1879 Municipal and Police Act which penalised the 'common prostitute' or 'night walker' who loitered or importuned passengers for the purposes of prostitution in or near any street or court.<sup>47</sup> However, the women had many tactics to avoid arrest. The cautioning system implemented in Edinburgh meant that women had to be cautioned for soliciting three times before they could be arrested and charged.<sup>48</sup> This gave women plenty of warning, something that many used to their advantage. If women feared they were receiving too much police attention, they might move to different areas in the city, or move to another nearby city, such as Glasgow.<sup>49</sup> For example, in 1919 twenty-two-year-old Sarah Montgomery was seen 'frequently on the streets accosting men' and was cautioned three times. However, shortly after this 'she disappeared for a month or so'.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Mary Bradshaw also 'disappeared for a time' between her initial cautions in 1923 and her eventual arrest in 1925, after a further three cautions.<sup>51</sup>

The large number of double trials that were held for women who had been arrested at the same time reflects the frequency of women working in pairs. Working with other women had many advantages, as it meant that the women could provide each other some protection both from the police and from the men they importuned. A case from 1917 is particularly interesting because it highlights how uncommon it was for women to work alone: a policeman explicitly emphasised that Nora Donaldson had 'not been seen in the company of other women of loose character. She works alone'.<sup>52</sup> Phil Hubbard's and Teela Sanders' study of the red-light district in 1990s Birmingham has used key ideas

<sup>45</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Elizabeth Winter, 29 Jun. 1935 and 5 Jan. 1937.

<sup>46</sup> The Burgh Police (Scotland) Act 1892 (55&56 Vict.c.55).

<sup>47</sup> The Edinburgh Municipal and Police Act 1879 (42&43 Vict. c. cxxxii).

<sup>48</sup> Davidson and Davis, 'A Festering Sore on the Body of Society', p. 83

<sup>49</sup> See J. James, 'Mobility as an Adaptive Strategy', *Urban Anthropology*, 4 (1975), pp. 349–64.

<sup>50</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Sarah Montgomery, 24 Jun. 1919.

<sup>51</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Mary Bradshaw, 28 Nov. 1925.

<sup>52</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Alexandria Stewart or Campbell, 27 Jan. 1917.

from Michel de Certeau's analysis of everyday life in the city and Henri Lefebvre's notions of space as a 'socially-produced phenomenon' to highlight the ways in which prostitute women attempted to 'use space to their own ends' in order to escape the 'ordering and disciplining processes that make distinctions between the normal and the deviant'.<sup>53</sup> The evidence above thus suggests that Hubbard and Sanders' argument that prostitute women were sometimes capable of tactically 'exceeding their socio-spatial confinement' and 'undermin[ing] the strategies of the strong by misusing spaces' is also applicable to Edinburgh in the early twentieth century.<sup>54</sup>

If all else failed, and women were arrested, it could be argued that the sentences they received were not harsh enough to deter them from working in the most profitable areas. The maximum fine the Edinburgh burgh court could award for soliciting offences was £10, and in default of payment the maximum prison sentence was sixty days. However, the burgh court records show that the most common sentence was actually forty shillings or twenty days imprisonment. For those women working in the more profitable central areas, it is likely that they could have afforded the fine and therefore avoided a prison sentence. Additionally, the 1914 Criminal Justice Administration Act gave offenders more time to pay their fines before they were sent to jail. This meant that only the poorest women who could not pay the fines were sent to prison. Therefore, for those women with enough money, the law's potential to deter was relatively low. Police officers in Glasgow and Edinburgh were well aware of this problem and on several occasions complained that 'the imposition of a fine is not a deterrent'.<sup>55</sup> Davidson and Davis have also found that Scottish members of the Wolfenden Committee on Prostitution and Homosexual Offences (1954–7) considered the existing tariff of penalties for soliciting in Scotland 'totally inadequate as a deterrent' and 'nothing short of a laughing stock'.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to question the assumption that the police were willing or capable of successfully constricting the movement of prostitute women. There are no police records to indicate the existence of an informal tolerance policy prior to the 1950s. To be sure, by its very nature an informal-tolerance zone was a *de facto* policy; a lack of formal recognition would therefore not be surprising. However, it appears that statements made about London by Laite and Slater, who claim that there was 'little evidence to suggest that police were in control – official or unofficial – of street prostitution' and that a lack of resources often limited the effectiveness of the police, were equally true in Edinburgh.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> P. Hubbard and T. Sanders, 'Making Space for Sex Work: Female Street Prostitution and the Production of Space', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27, 1 (2003), pp. 75–89; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life* (California, 1984).

<sup>54</sup> Hubbard and Sanders, 'Making Space for Sex Work', p. 83.

<sup>55</sup> GML, DTC 7/19/1, Glasgow Police Annual Report 1920.

<sup>56</sup> Davidson and Davis, "'A Festering Sore on the Body of Society'", p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> J. Laite, 'Prostitution in London, 1885–1930', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2008), p. 181; Slater, 'Containment: Managing Street Prostitution in London', p. 336.

For example, at the 1927 Street Offences Committee Police Chief Constable Roderick Ross explained that 'there were about 30 officers out each night, 6 pairs in each division' who were involved in policing street offences.<sup>58</sup> However, street offences did not only refer to prostitution, but also to a whole host of other minor misdemeanours, including drunk and disorderly behaviour, betting and littering. The officers therefore had to split their time between these different duties, meaning less time would be spent on the surveillance of prostitute women. The continued decline in the number of arrests also supports this assertion, although it may also reflect a more general reduction in prostitution. For example, whereas in 1908 there had been 3,192 proceedings against women for soliciting offences in Scotland, by 1918 there were only 460, and by 1939 the number had dropped to just 141.<sup>59</sup>

It has been noted that the police were often apathetic towards policing prostitution and were reluctant in undertaking this duty. Michael Brogden's research on the Liverpool police force during the interwar period suggests that this laissez-faire approach was common and that many saw prostitution as 'something to be tolerated'.<sup>60</sup> In the eyes of many officers, prostitution did not constitute a 'real crime' because there was no obvious victim. Even if the officers agreed that prostitution was immoral, many believed that it was not their job to police morality. This, along with the tedious work involved in surveillance operations, meant that many officers were less than enthusiastic about policing prostitution.

However, not all of the officers were ambivalent towards policing prostitution. There is considerable evidence to suggest that many felt sympathetic towards the women involved and wanted to see them reformed rather than arrested. For example, in 1915 Edinburgh Police Constable Alexander Robb described how he had 'repeatedly cautioned' Helen Carvie for 'conducting herself as a prostitute', and on each occasion she had 'promised to abandon that mode of living'.<sup>61</sup> Robb's continued attempts to deter Carvie from prostitution (without arresting her) suggest that he sympathised with her situation and was willing to give her several chances. In his autobiography, former vice squad leader William Merrilees also describes how he believed that 'his duties lay not merely in bringing offenders to justice, but in helping, or seeking to help, at least some proportion of the girls towards a different and better life'.<sup>62</sup> In 1919, PC Robert Reid and PC William Webster tried to help nineteen-year-old Mary Kelly who had been abused by her husband, who also acted as her pimp. Reid described how he had 'directed her to go to the central police station where she would get shelter as she said she was afraid to go home'.<sup>63</sup> Joanne Klein's research on police officers in Birmingham,

<sup>58</sup> *Scotsman*, 28 Jan. 1928, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Wolfenden Committee Report 1957, Prosecutions and Convictions for Importuning Offences in Scotland 1906–55.

<sup>60</sup> M. Brogden, *On the Mersey Beat* (Oxford, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Helen Carvie, 9 Jan. 1915.

<sup>62</sup> W. Merrilees, *The Short Arm of the Law: The Memoirs of William Merrilees* (Edinburgh, 1966).

<sup>63</sup> ECA, EBCR, Witness statement Robert Reid, 23 Jul. 1919.

Liverpool and Manchester during the interwar period shows that this sympathetic and understanding approach could be seen in police forces across Britain. Klein explains how 'most constables protected women from being victimised, regardless of their respectability, and even prostitutes sent for the police if they had problems with customers.'<sup>64</sup>

The general orders given to the police by the chief constables suggest that it was complaints from the public about the annoyance caused by a particular prostitute woman that provided the main motivation for police action, rather than any strongly held belief in the criminality of prostitution or a desire to contain it to particular areas. In Scotland it was not necessary to prove that importuning had caused annoyance (unlike in England and Wales during this period).<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident that the police primarily became concerned about importuning only once they had received complaints from the public. In 1903 the Chief Constable's General Order 707 stated that 'special attention should be paid to those characters likely to cause such annoyance' and that 'officers and men are directed to take such steps as will render these complaints impossible.'<sup>66</sup>

The widespread fear that officers could be accused of falsely arresting innocent women made some officers reluctant to arrest suspected prostitutes. Laite and Slater have shown how highly popularised cases of women being falsely arrested for soliciting, such as that of Elizabeth Cass in 1887 and Irene Savidge in 1928, made police more reluctant to arrest women they suspected of being prostitutes.<sup>67</sup> During the 1927 Street Offences Committee set up to investigate the effectiveness of solicitation laws several questions were raised about the possibility of false arrest in Scotland and about how the forces ensured that this did not occur. Mr Macpherson, public prosecutor for Edinburgh, insisted that false arrest was extremely unlikely and uncommon because of the thorough cautioning system. However, when questioned further, he recalled a case from 1926 when a woman was falsely accused of importuning for the purposes of prostitution and awarded £500 damages by the court.<sup>68</sup> Lord Advocate Mr Craig also recalled a complaint of false arrest made by a woman in 1907 against the Glasgow Police, which 'caused a good deal of trouble, and was raised in parliament.'<sup>69</sup> Clearly this was an issue that was still on the minds of the police during this period.

In addition to place, it is important to remember that developments in the regulation of prostitution occurred at different times in different cities. Neil Larry Shumsky and Larry M. Springer have demonstrated that in San Francisco during the period from 1880 to 1934 the location of prostitution altered depending on

<sup>64</sup> J. Klein, *Invisible Men: The Secret Lives of Police Constables in Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham, 1900–39* (Liverpool, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Laite, 'Prostitution in London, 1885–1930', p. 168.

<sup>66</sup> ECA, Ed6/2/5, Edinburgh Police Chief Constable's General Order 707, 22 Sept. 1903.

<sup>67</sup> Laite, 'Prostitution in London, 1885–1930', p. 170; Slater, 'Containment: Managing Street Prostitution in London', p. 343.

<sup>68</sup> *The Scotsman*, 28 Jan. 1928, p.11.

<sup>69</sup> *The Scotsman*, 2 Dec. 1927, p. 13.

particular economic developments within the city, changing attitudes towards prostitution, and different police responses to such pressures.<sup>70</sup> Although many of the factors involved, such as disputes over land use, can be seen as more general issues associated with prostitution, the way in which these factors interacted at different times uniquely shaped the nature of prostitution in each city. Therefore, whilst Howell's argument that prostitution was regulated by forcing women into the outskirts of the city did not apply to Edinburgh in the early twentieth century, it is possible that this type of regulation occurred later in the century. For example, Davidson and Davis' examination of prostitution in Edinburgh in the mid-twentieth century has shown that this type of 'informal regulation' did occur in Leith after the Second World War.<sup>71</sup> The informal tolerance of prostitution in Leith meant that women were free to work there without the fear of prosecution from the police they faced in the city centre. However, there is no evidence to indicate that such a policy existed in Edinburgh before the Second World War.

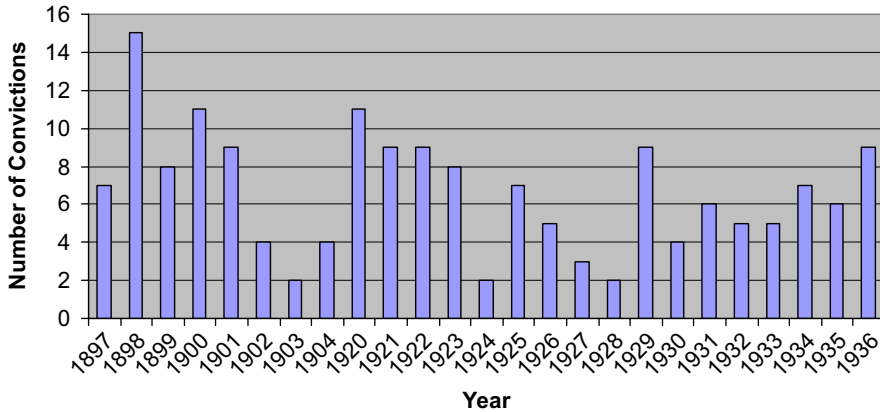
Leith was officially a separate town until 1920, when it was incorporated into the city of Edinburgh. This meant that before 1920 Leith had its own separate police force and court where the women were heard. Without the co-operation of the Leith force, the Edinburgh police could not have actively pursued a policy that forced prostitution into Leith. Unfortunately, the Leith burgh court records from this period have not survived, and it is difficult to determine the policies in Leith or the number of women convicted for prostitution there before 1920. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the Leith police would have co-operated with a policy that redirected all prostitution from Edinburgh to Leith. After 1920 prostitution offences in Leith were prosecuted in the Edinburgh burgh court, but very few cases relating to Leith appear in the records. From the court records alone it cannot be determined whether this meant that there was relatively little prostitution in Leith, or whether the police had developed an informal tolerance policy in this area. The police records give no indication of the existence of any such policy; however, it is possible that the authorities would have avoided paperwork in support of such a policy.

Leith was a port town that developed principally around the harbour of Leith and the shipping business it generated. Considering that there is a long-established connection between prostitution and seafaring, it is likely that the high concentration of sailors in the port meant that prostitution did occur there.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that so many witness statements described sailors in the city centre indicates that they were not confined to the harbour area, suggesting that the street prostitution that occurred in Edinburgh co-existed with that in Leith. This would suggest that it was not until after the Second World War that an

<sup>70</sup> N. Shumsky and L. Springer, 'San Francisco's Zone of Prostitution, 1880–1934', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1 (1981), pp. 71–89.

<sup>71</sup> Davidson and Davis, 'A Festering Sore on the Body of Society', p. 88.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Ashworth, White and Winchester, 'The Red-Light District in the West European City', pp. 201–12.



**Figure 17.** Convictions for brothel keeping, Edinburgh 1897–1936. Source Chief Constables’ Annual Reports 1897–1936. Data taken from Edinburgh Police Annual Reports, which did not include data for the years 1905–19.

informal tolerance zone was in operation around the Leith docks. The upheaval of war and new developments in technology and mobility meant that confining prostitution to the outskirts of Edinburgh became more feasible and desirable.

#### IV

There were considerably fewer convictions for brothel-keeping than importuning in Edinburgh. This proves problematic in mapping the location of premises categorised as brothels, classified by contemporary police and magistrates as any premises where more than one woman resided for the purposes of prostitution. Figure 17, for instance, demonstrates that the number of convictions rarely exceeded ten per year and was often much lower.

The burgh court records show that the brothels were distributed throughout the city and not restricted to one particular ‘red light’ area. Although the east end often had a higher number of brothels than other districts, the distribution was far less concentrated than was the case for street solicitation. The brothels were spread across more districts than the importuning offences and included areas that were much further away from the city centre, including Stockbridge, Murrayfield, Newington and the outskirts of Leith. For example, although in 1915 twenty-two per cent of the brothel convictions were in the east end, seventeen per cent were located in Stockbridge and seventeen per cent in the outskirts of Leith. Similarly, in 1921 whilst thirty-eight per cent of convictions for brothel-keeping were in the east end, twenty-five per cent were located in Leith and twenty-five per cent in the Southside. One of the most likely causes for this was the increase in the number of car owners and users. Whereas women importuning on the street needed to be visible on the busy thoroughfares in the city centre, brothels could



be located further away because men could travel there by car. One 1917 report described how a 'motor car drew up at Prospect Place and [they] observed the accused, her sister Jessie Watt [...] and a soldier leave the car and go into the stair.'<sup>73</sup> In 1937 a police officer explained how a suspected prostitute called Helen Stirling attempted to 'attract the attention of passing motorists by stepping to the edge of the pavement as they passed her' and, on another occasion, 'went up to a motor car which had drawn up on the south side of Princes Street, opened the door and spoke to the man who was driving it, and was in the act of entering the car when the witness approached.'<sup>74</sup> This type of importuning sounds very similar to what is today described as 'kerb crawling', and it is quite possible that these cases were some of the earliest recorded examples of this practice in Edinburgh. Technology was clearly having an important effect on the location of prostitution, arguably more so than policing, as increased mobility allowed for the 'separation of the place of contact and the place of transition'.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the most common place of contact still appears to have been on central streets such as Princes Street.

The witness statements also show that once the men knew about a particular 'brothel' they would often return, suggesting that brothels did not necessarily rely on being visible. For example, in the testimony given by a man found in a top floor brothel flat at 205 Pleasance, the witness explained how 'they had been in the house on previous occasions and knew where to come for "a good girl"'.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, return custom and reputation could avoid the need to solicit. The witness statement described how the men would not necessarily come to the flat accompanied by the women. This can also be seen in a statement given by a policeman who recorded how he had 'watched a colonial soldier leave and a few minutes later two soldiers went up to the house and were admitted.'<sup>77</sup> Considering that brothel-keeping was illegal and could warrant a much higher fine or prison sentence than importuning, it was in the interest of the brothel-keeper to draw as little attention to the brothel as possible. The high rents in the most central New Town areas may also have deterred brothel-keepers from locating their businesses there. Whilst it was free for women to solicit in the busy central New Town areas, it was more economical for women to head towards the less expensive districts to find an indoor location for the actual act of prostitution itself. Finally, this assessment has excluded the higher-end brothels catering to Edinburgh's elite, as these establishments seldom appear in court records. However, it is fair to assume that these brothels were located in or close to the upper class districts to which they catered.

Due to the shame often associated with buying sex, the male clients may have preferred brothels that were less visible and further away from the busy

<sup>73</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Mary Watt or M'Gillivray, 8 Feb. 1917.

<sup>74</sup> ECA, EBCR Case of Helen Stirling, 13 Oct. 1937.

<sup>75</sup> Ashworth, White and Winchester, 'The Red-Light District in the West European City', p. 206.

<sup>76</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Elizabeth Houghton or Pretsell, 15 October 1919.

<sup>77</sup> ECA, EBCR, Case of Mary Watt or McGillivray, 8 February 1917.

central areas. However, more clandestine forms of prostitution were also developing as a popular way of avoiding this type of stigma. Taking advantage of the dance halls and clubs that had become particularly popular during the interwar period was one of the principal methods employed. These venues were primarily designed for men and women to dance together to a variety of different popular styles of music, ranging from ballroom to swing and jazz, played by a live band. Such establishments were not intended for prostitution; however, some venues were adapted by those operating in the liminal circles of the world of prostitution who realised that dance halls offered opportunities for new and clandestine methods of prostitution. Some clubs operated a system of 'booking-out', an arrangement that involved a man paying a set amount so that he could hire a 'dance partner' for the whole evening.<sup>78</sup> Once the man had booked a woman for the whole evening, he was allowed to take her wherever he chose, including outside of the club. Officially, this was so that he could go to bars or restaurants in between dances and generally enjoy the woman's company for the whole evening. However, the police realised that this system was merely a front for organised prostitution and that the patrons of the clubs that 'booked-out' women expected that intercourse was included. If this could be proved, then the men who owned and ran the clubs were 'aiding and abetting prostitution' and 'living off the earnings of prostitution'.<sup>79</sup>

Witness statements provided in Immoral Traffic Act cases relating to dance clubs provide considerable evidence to suggest that these venues were part of a larger network that incorporated taxis, lodging houses, hotels, brothels and private flats. Once a woman had been 'booked-out', taxis were used to transport the couple to various places around the city where intercourse could take place. As the sex act did not occur on the premises, clubs could avoid being classed as brothels and prosecuted as such, meaning they existed legitimately in the busy central entertainment districts. Clubs known to operate this system, such as The Havana Dance Club at 120 Princes Street, The Savoy on Cockburn Street, and The Kosmo Club at 20 Swinton Row, were all located in the city centre.<sup>80</sup>

If men wanted to avoid the stigma that might be associated with visiting these types of clubs, advances in communication technology meant that they could use the telephone to arrange for a woman from the club to meet them outside. However, during the interwar period telephones were not yet widely available for use in private settings, and places such as dance clubs therefore still played a necessary intermediary role. Although the interwar period saw the beginnings of what we today described as the 'call girl' industry, the less-advanced technology available in this period limited its potential impact on the

<sup>78</sup> Louise Settle 'Policing the "Social Evil": Prostitution in Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1892–1939' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2013), pp. 245–57.

<sup>79</sup> The Immoral Traffic (Scotland) Act 1902 (1&2 Geo 5, c.20); The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 (48&4 Vict.c.69).

<sup>80</sup> *Scotsman*, 8 December 1933, p. 8.

geography of prostitution. Therefore, it was not until the late twentieth century and the influence of mass telephone ownership, mobile phone technology and the internet, that the 'suburbanisation' of prostitution, as described by Phil Hubbard and Mary Howell, had a drastic impact on the geography of prostitution.<sup>81</sup>

## V

The location of street prostitution in Edinburgh moved further towards the centre of the business and entertainment districts between 1900 and 1939, largely because these busy areas provided the best accessibility and opportunity for the women who relied on visibility for their solicitation to be successful. This process began in the mid-nineteenth century, but gained considerable momentum during and after the First World War. The location of brothels, however, deviated from this pattern. Whereas women who solicited on the street relied on their visibility to maximise their accessibility and opportunity, those working in brothels could rely on other methods. Brothels could depend on the fact that once men knew their location they could return again without needing to be solicited. Advances in mobility and communication technology meant that brothels in Edinburgh could be more widely dispersed throughout the city and not necessarily restricted to the city centre. However, it would not be until later in the twentieth century that these technologies were adequately advanced to allow for the suburbanisation of prostitution and the development of tolerance zones on the outskirts of the city. This article has shown that in early twentieth-century Edinburgh there was no 'informal tolerance zone' that was used to segregate prostitution away from 'respectable' society. Instead, prostitution occurred in the very centre of the city, suggesting that commercial factors were more influential in determining the location of prostitution than any police attempts to restrain prostitution. By taking advantage of the opportunities in the busy central and middle-class districts of the city, these women not only transgressed boundaries of class and gender, but they also challenged the attempts made by the authorities to restrict their movement and to control their behaviour.

<sup>81</sup> P. Hubbard and M. Howell, 'Revisiting the Red Light District: Still Neglected, Immoral and Marginal?', *Geoforum*, 39 (2008), pp. 1743–55.