

## “‘Constable Dances with Instructress”: The Police and the Queen of Nightclubs in Interwar London’ :

The campaign against the nightclubs in the 1920s metropolis, headed by the crusading Home Secretary Sir William Joynson-Hicks, is well known in popular histories of the interwar period.<sup>1</sup> This would culminate from the autumn of 1928 in the imprisonment of the woman known as the Queen of Nightclubs, Kate Meyrick, and the uncovering of corruption in the Metropolitan Police in the form of Sergeant George Goddard, who was charged with corruptly accepting and obtaining money from Meyrick and another nightclub owner and sentenced to eighteen-months imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> The story of Meyrick’s nightclubs, and particularly the “43”, has become central to many accounts of metropolitan social life in this decade. Thus ‘the bright young things’ danced the twenties away at Mrs Meyrick’s establishments before the killjoy Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks, popularly ridiculed as Jix, spoilt their fun. Joynson-Hicks’s campaigns against immorality in the 1920s have tended to be portrayed as the acts of a puritanical Home Secretary holding on to the last bastion of Victorian reaction.<sup>3</sup> Yet recent surveys of the cultural history of the interwar metropolis rarely offer more than a perfunctory account of the key protagonists and the main events: Joynson-Hicks’s public

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Louise Jackson, Alison Oram, Stefan Slater and John Carter Wood for commenting on earlier versions of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Recent examples include M. Pugh, *We Danced all Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2008), 219; D. J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Fall and Rise of a Generation, 1918-1940* (London, 2008), 43, 44; J. R. Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven and London, 2012), esp. chapter 7, 209-29.

<sup>3</sup> Kate Meyrick and her children are also frequently referred to as Merrick. This is the original spelling of the name, Meyrick is a variation of Merrick.

<sup>4</sup> On Joynson-Hicks’s political career see H. Clayton, “‘A frisky, tiresome colt?’ Sir William Joynson-Hicks, the Home Office and the roaring twenties, 1924-1929’ (D. Phil., Aberystwyth, 2009). Also, H. Clayton, ‘The life and career of William Joynson Hicks: A reassessment’, *Journal of Historical Biography*, 8 (Autumn, 2010), 1-38. I would like to thank Dr. Clayton for giving me the opportunity to read his unpublished research.

campaign to clean up London, Meyrick in her role as the ‘Queen of Nightclubs’, and the Old Bailey trial which exposed the corrupt association between Meyrick and Sergeant Goddard.<sup>4</sup> A notable exception is Judith Walkowitz’s account of Meyrick in her recent study of the cultural geography of the Soho area.<sup>5</sup> Walkowitz reads the nightclub scene, and Meyrick’s role within it, as an ‘action environment’ in which elements of sociability, multiple forms of gender and sexuality, risk, consumption and corruption fostered a sense of speed. In other words, Meyrick’s clubs are studied as an ‘accelerated’ milieu in the ‘roaring twenties’.<sup>6</sup> This article will locate the nightclub campaign within the longer history of nightclub regulation and specifically consider the policing of the clubs associated with Meyrick from her initial foray into club-land in 1919 until her death in January 1933 (she was active until May 1932).<sup>7</sup> By exploring the changing dynamic between Meyrick and the police (including Goddard) over the course of her ‘career’ the article will move the focus away from Joynson-Hicks’s campaign and aim to provide a more nuanced account of the policing of the nightclubs in this period. Thus, the campaign against Meyrick’s establishments and other nightclubs in the metropolis both pre-dated and post-dated Joynson-Hick’s tenure as Home Secretary. Both at the time and retrospectively, these events have been constructed as a story of mismanagement by a weak and distanced Police Commissioner and of a nightclub scene that was allowed to flourish unchecked until the arrival of William Joynson-Hicks, who would crack-down on the nightclubs, leading to the exposure of Goddard and the cleansing of the Augean

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<sup>4</sup> Pugh, *We Danced all Night*, 218-19; Taylor, *Bright Young People*, 43-4, 110-11; J. Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London, 2010), 628-29.

<sup>5</sup> Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, particularly, 209-29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 213, 214, 229.

<sup>7</sup> R. Davenport-Hines, ‘Kate Evelyn Meyrick’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2010 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66827>, accessed 2 September 2012].

stables of the Met. This essay, in contrast, will argue that the Metropolitan Police were conducting a campaign against the nightclubs, and particularly Mrs Meyrick, as early as 1919. Moreover, that by the mid-1920s, Commissioner Horwood sought the co-operation of Joynson-Hicks in order to give the campaign more public exposure, and to achieve the passage of much needed legislation. However, despite the campaign, a Royal Commission and the breaking of the Goddard case, little had changed by the early 1930s and Kate Meyrick would continue to contribute to the night-time economy of the metropolis.<sup>8</sup>

Undoubtedly Kate Meyrick is central to an understanding of metropolitan night-life in this period. Thus, Judith Walkowitz has argued that, ‘Mrs Meyrick serves as the fixed point in the shifting terrain of London’s hedonistic action environment’.<sup>9</sup> In this article, Meyrick can be considered as the fixed point by which police regulation of the clubs was organized. The article will draw on the extensive records of the Metropolitan Police and Home Office that deal with Meyrick and her businesses from c. 1919 to c. 1933, supplemented by the extensive contemporary press reporting from *The Times* and other national and Sunday papers.<sup>10</sup> In the article that follows, the first section will provide some broader context both to the wider landscape of police powers in this period and to the development of the licensing acts. The second section will consider the first stage of the police campaign against Meyrick from her arrival in London in 1919 until

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<sup>8</sup> For definition of the ‘night-time economy’ see P. Chatterton and R. Holland, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power* (Abingdon, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, 213.

<sup>10</sup> National press used here include: *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*; Sundays include: *The Empire News*, *News of the World*, *Reynolds’s Newspaper*; London evening papers: *Evening News*. Most of these papers had a bias towards conservatism and/or popular imperialism in this period, particularly given the ubiquity of Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere. Sunday papers such as the *News of the World* and *Reynolds’s Newspaper* were aimed at working-class audiences and tended towards sensational reporting with a moral tone. M. Conboy, *Journalism: A Critical History* (London, 2004), 157-8. K. Williams, *Read All About It: A History of the British Newspaper* (Abingdon, 2010), 119.

1925. The third section looks at the involvement of Joynson-Hicks and his relationship with the Metropolitan Police. The final section will focus on the ‘relationship’ between Sergeant Goddard and Mrs Meyrick, leading to the trial of 1928 and the imprisonment of the principals in early 1929. It will also briefly outline the continuing efforts to control Meyrick and her nightclubs in the aftermath of the Goddard case and the Royal Commission of 1929.<sup>11</sup>

### **Wider Contexts**

Critical discussions of the nightclub campaign have tended not to closely consider Meyrick’s activities. Clive Emsley has focused on the place of the Goddard case, and particularly the activities of Sergeant George Goddard rather than his co-defendant, as a means of exploring police corruption in the Met in this period. Emsley’s prime interest here is naturally the exposure of Goddard rather than the details of the campaign itself. The seriousness of the charges against Goddard and the amounts of money allegedly involved were significant, as were the implications for the Metropolitan Police.<sup>12</sup> Hence, Emsley concludes that despite Goddard’s undoubted corruption, his activities were indicative of far more entrenched practices across the Met.<sup>13</sup> James Nott has explored the nightclub campaign as a way of considering Joynson-Hicks’s ‘moral policing’ in relation to the role of ‘morality’ as a Conservative party issue in the twenties, concluding that despite Joynson-Hicks’s eccentricities his campaign largely reflected popular

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<sup>11</sup> Meyrick was charged alongside another club owner, Luigi Ribuffi (or Ribuffini), who had also ‘conspired’ with Goddard. Ribuffi and Meyrick were apparently unknown to each other. See *The Times*, 30 January 1929, 9; also *Justice of the Peace and Local Government Review*, 93 (1929), 83.

<sup>12</sup> Goddard was found guilty of corruptly accepting and obtaining money from his co-defendants Meyrick and Ribuffi. According to Emsley it was estimated that his assets amounted to almost £18,000. C. Emsley, ‘Sergeant Goddard: The story of a rotten apple, or a diseased orchard’, in A. Gilman Srebnik and R. Levy (eds), *Crime and Culture: An Historical Perspective* (Aldershot, 2005), 85, 88.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 85–104, 94.

Conservatism of the time.<sup>14</sup> Whilst Nott explores the evolution of the nightclub campaign as it pre-dated Joynson-Hicks, his emphasis is on moral politics and moral campaigning rather than the policing of nightclubs and/or Meyrick, whom is only briefly mentioned here.<sup>15</sup> Other historians have related elements of the nightclub campaign and Goddard/Meyrick scandal to the crisis in police powers that came to a head in the later 1920s. Through the mid-to-late 1920s the Metropolitan Police would be involved in a number of high-profile cases that would lead to the questioning of police procedures and the limits (or not) to their powers. John Carter Wood has identified several issues that he understands as shaping the police crisis by the later 1920s: the truthfulness of police evidence, the use of plainclothes police and the methods used in the questioning of witnesses and suspects, were central concerns. As Wood points out in his study of the Helene Adele case, a number of these cases involved women, or men who had been (apparently) importuning women.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, the cases led to accusations that policemen were abusing their procedural powers. Thus Helene Adele was a 21-year-old woman wrongly charged with a breach of the peace. Subsequently two constables were found guilty of bringing false charges against the young woman after one of them had tried to sexually assault her. Police procedure relating to the cross examination of suspects was also questioned by commentators.<sup>17</sup> In the autumn of 1927 concerns about

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<sup>14</sup> J. J. Nott, 'The plague spots of London': William Joynson-Hicks, the Conservative Party, and the campaign against London's nightclubs, 1924-29', in C. J. Griffiths, J. J. Nott and W. Whyte (eds), *Classes, Cultures and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibben* (Oxford, 2011), 227-46.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>16</sup> J. C. Wood, 'The Constables and the garage girl: The police, the press, and the case of Helene Adele' (unpublished paper given at ESSHC, 2012, Glasgow University, cited with permission of the author), 9-10; Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard', 95-6. For press coverage of these cases see, *The Times*, 14 July 1925, 16; *The Times*, 21 July 1925, 10; *The Times*, 21 September 1927, 7; *The Times*, 1 June 1928, 11. See also National Archive [hereafter NA]: HO 144:/6596/22400-22401; MEPO 3/1865.

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Wood, 'The third degree': Press reporting, crime fiction and police powers in 1920s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 21, 4 (2010), 464-85.

police evidence would underpin the appointment of the ‘Street Offences Committee’, which reported in December 1928.<sup>18</sup> Between 1927 and 1928 a number of cases stacked up against the Metropolitan Police, the most notorious of which were that of Beatrice Pace, a widow who had been interrogated to the point of collapse in March 1928; Irene Savidge, had been arrested in April 1928 along with the economist Sir Leo Chiozza Money and charged with an offence against public decency, she had accused the police of improper questioning in the subsequent interview; and the Helene Adele case in July 1928.<sup>19</sup> Cases such as these, as historians such as John Carter Wood, Stefan Slater and Huw Clayton have shown, indicate significant tensions between the police and the public in the inter-war period.<sup>20</sup> These cases would, at least in part, lead to the appointment of the *Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure* from August 1928, which would report in March 1929. In the published report, it would only be the Savidge case that would be referred to directly, as result of a recent Tribunal of Inquiry into that case.<sup>21</sup> In September of 1928 the nightclubs case would break, leading to a state of affairs where the evidence for the Royal Commission was being compiled alongside the Goddard scandal. Undoubtedly the concurrency of the case fed into the proceedings of the Royal Commission, which as Emsley has noted, ‘Did not shirk the problem of police

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<sup>18</sup> S. Slater, ‘Lady Astor and the ladies of the night: The Home Office, the Metropolitan Police and the Street Offences Committee, 1927-28’, *Law and History Review*, 30, 2 (2012), 533-73.

<sup>19</sup> On Beatrice Pace see J. C. Wood, ‘Mrs Pace’ and the ambiguous language of victimisation’, in L. Dresdner and L. Peterson (eds), *(Re) Interpretations: The Shapes of Justice in Women’s Experience* (Newcastle, 2008), 79-94; H. Clayton, ‘A bad case of police Savidgery: The interrogation of Irene Savidge at Scotland Yard’, *Women’s History Magazine*, 61 (Autumn, 2009), 30-38. On Helene Adele see Wood, ‘The Constables and the garage girl’.

<sup>20</sup> See Wood, ‘The third degree’; idem., ‘Press, politics and the “Police and Public”: debates in late 1920s Britain’, *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés*, 16, 1 (2012), 75-98. On the relationship between police powers and policing on the ground, see S. Slater, ‘Containment: Managing street prostitution in London, 1918-59’, *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2010), 332-57.

<sup>21</sup> BPP, *R. C. on Police Powers and Procedure*, 1929, Cmd. 3297, IX, 127, 83 (hereafter *RCPPP*). For the Savidge Tribunal see *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1928, 6; *The Times*, 7 June 1928, 10. Also, Clayton, ‘A bad case’; Wood, ‘The third degree’.

corruption'.<sup>22</sup> However, the point of connection which links cases like that of Adele, Pace and Savidge with that of Meyrick, rests on the interpretation of police powers and how these translate into the practical tools to be used in the policing of social space.<sup>23</sup>

### **Licensing and the Entry to Nightclubs**

There had been various attempts to control the sale of alcohol from the late nineteenth century, with the passage of various Licensing Acts that aimed at both reducing the numbers of licensed premises and so raising standards, and placing restrictions on pub opening hours.<sup>24</sup> The 1902 Licensing Act made a distinction between proprietary clubs and members clubs. In the former the premises and stock belonged to a proprietor and so a license was required. In the latter, the property, including drinks stock, belonged to the 'members'. As no drinks were 'sold', no license was required.<sup>25</sup> Under the licensing Act of 1910, clubs had to be registered at the Petty Sessional Court of the district. Once registered the police had no right of entry except under the specific provision of a search warrant. To get this warrant the police had to gather enough information to satisfy a court that a club was conducted in such a way as to constitute a grounds for striking it off the register. It was the inherent tension in this situation that would fuel much of the debate about police powers.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, during the war social anxieties about the availability

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<sup>22</sup> Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard', 97.

<sup>23</sup> On police investigative methods see R. M. Morris, 'History of criminal investigation', in T. Newburn (ed.), *A Handbook of Criminal Investigation* (Cullompton, 2007), 15-40. For the policing of night-time economies in the interwar period see Slater, 'Containment'; and in relation to 'queer' space, M. Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> For recent research on liquor licensing see, L. Gosling, 'Trouble brewing: The background to the much-contested Licensing Act, 1908', *History Today*, 58, 3 (2008), 21-23; P. Jennings, 'Liquor licensing and the local historian: The 1904 Licensing Act and its administration', *Local Historian*, 39, 1 (2009), 48-63; J. Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> J. Parry Lewis, *Freedom to Drink: A Critical Review of the Development of the Licensing Laws and Proposals for Reform* (London, 1985), 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see debates in October and November 1915, in relation to the Clubs Temporary Provisions Bill, HC Deb 21 October 1915 vol 74 cc2044-56; HL Deb 04 November 1915 vol 20 cc163-166.

and impact of alcohol had intensified. The Defence of the Realm Act (better known as DORA) was introduced shortly after the outbreak of hostilities in 1914. Regulation 40b of the Act, introduced in 1916, imposed severe restrictions upon the availability of alcohol. This was partly in response to moral panic about the intercourse of soldiers and prostitutes. The pubs and nightclubs of the West End were arguably seen as the key spaces for such transgressions and after the war concerns about the illicit character of the nightclub and other late night spaces persisted.<sup>27</sup> However, the Acts and DORA provisions had little real clout, since they allowed for a number of loopholes that nightclub owners exploited. Thus *Reynolds's Newspaper* drew attention to '...the practice of allowing any and every person turning up at these clubs to become members for the occasion on payment of a charge for admission'.<sup>28</sup> A Licensing Act of 1921 would enable the law to be enforced a little more vigorously.<sup>29</sup> This act had brought in the important new concept of 'permitted hours', thus the licensee was only allowed to sell intoxicating liquor between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. and 5.30 p.m. and 11 p.m.<sup>30</sup> Unlicensed selling of alcohol and drugs as well as prostitution were all criteria for revocation of a license.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless police powers as regards the nightclubs were limited, and nowhere was this more apparent than in the Met's extensive recourse to the use of plain-clothed tactics. The practice of using plain clothes officers was discussed a number of times in the Royal Commission of 1928-9; not only were plain clothes officers used to obtain evidence of offences in the nightclubs, but also the practice of employing plain clothes

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<sup>27</sup> On concerns about prostitutes and soldiers see Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885 – 1960* (Basingstoke, 2012), 135-136; M. Kohn, *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drugs Underground* (London, 1992), 40; Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, 216-16.

<sup>28</sup> *Reynolds's Newspaper*, January 28<sup>th</sup> 1923.

<sup>29</sup> Clayton states that it was this act under which Joynson-Hicks would pursue his nightclub campaign later in the twenties. Clayton, chapter 6 in 'A frisky, tiresome colt?', 162.

<sup>30</sup> Parry-Lewis, *Freedom to Drink*, 26-27.

<sup>31</sup> Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard'. See also A. Tietjen, *Soho: London's Vicious Circle* (London, 1956), 130-138



officers to detect public decency and street offences was also considered. This related directly to the high profiles cases already mentioned, particularly the Savidge case.<sup>32</sup> More broadly, during the twenties, Metropolitan Police divisions would increasingly resort to the use of surveillance and plains-clothed officers in order to regulate disorder. The adoption of undercover methods to police the nightclub campaign would be ridiculed in the press and prove politically controversial. Part of the problem of gaining entry into the clubs, as clarified by the Commission, was that in order to gather enough evidence to justify a raid, the police had to participate in offences themselves, hence, order drinks. By 1929, the practice of using plainclothes officers, described by the Commission as ‘agents provocateurs’ was greatly criticized, yet the obstacles to gaining entrance to the nightclubs and gathering evidence in a transparent way, were clearly recognized.<sup>33</sup> Thus throughout the twenties, it was the practice of plainclothes surveillance that was adopted as part of the attempts to control the nightclubs.

### **The Police Campaign Against Kate Meyrick, c. 1919 – c. 1925**

Kate Meyrick’s arrival on the nightclub scene coincided with the stepping up of the regulation of both alcohol and drugs in the aftermath of the war.<sup>34</sup> According to the narrative provided in her autobiography, Kate Evelyn Nason was born in Dun Laoghaire, near Dublin in 1875, into a middle-class family.<sup>35</sup> She married a ‘Dr. Meyrick’ and like

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<sup>32</sup> *RCPPP*, 40-45, 78-9 and 97-9 on plain clothed women police. See evidence of Sir William Joynson Hicks in HC Deb 07 May 1928 cc16-9. See also L. Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2006), 107-21.

<sup>33</sup> *RCPPP*, 41, 43-45, 116.

<sup>34</sup> For the attempts to regulate drugs in the interwar period see Kohn, *Dope Girls*. See also V. Berridge, *Opium and the People: Opiate Use and Drug Control Policy in Nineteen and Early Twentieth Century Britain* (Orig. edn. 1981, this edn. London, 1999); T. Seddon, ‘The regulation of heroin: Drug policy and social change in early twentieth-century Britain’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 34, 3 (2007), 143-56.

<sup>35</sup> For birth see Ireland, Civil Registration Index, Kate Evelyn Nason, 1875, registration district: Rathdown, volume no. 12, 889.

many young Irish in the late nineteenth century, sailed to England.<sup>36</sup> They eventually settled in Brighton and raised a family.<sup>37</sup> Meyrick embarked on her nightclub career whilst staying in London to nurse her daughter May during the influenza epidemic that reached its peak in the winter of 1918-19. Whilst in town, Meyrick responded to an advert, 'Fifty pounds wanted for partnership to run tea dances'. Within a few days she and her partner had set up Dalton's Club in Leicester Square. She had started, as she puts it, 'on my first adventure in London nightlife'.<sup>38</sup> Dalton's was registered in April 1919 as a 'rendezvous for members of the theatrical and variety professions and their friends'.<sup>39</sup> Meyrick remained in London and her daughter stayed to help her run the club. She became a pivotal figure in a period during which concerns were focused strongly on London's nightclubs; Meyrick represented the conflict between legality and illegality that characterised popular conceptions of nightlife. Her identity as a deviant figure was conflicted and the nightclub was a conflicting deviant space. Her frequent court appearances and run-ins with the police provided her with a veneer of danger and excitement that proved attractive to the 'bright young things' of the era. By visiting Meyrick's clubs, they ran the risk of falling foul of the law. However, as the journalist Hannen Swaffer noted in an article on 'The Night Club Panic' in 1925, people of all kind attended nightclubs, 'Theatre managers were there, composers, a stockbroker or two, my

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<sup>36</sup> This was the extravagantly named Ferdinand Richard Holmes Merrick whom she married in 1899. For marriage see Ireland, Civil Registration Index, Kate Evelyn Nason, Oct – Dec 1899, registration district: Rathdown, volume no 2, 817. Meyrick first petitioned her husband for divorce in first in 1910 and then in 1920. These were both withdrawn. In 1921, Ferdinand Richard Holmes Meyrick petitioned his wife for divorce, citing the co-respondent as Harry Sampson otherwise Harry Dalton. NA: J77/1003/469; J77/1606/9844; J77/1776/5389.

<sup>37</sup> There is some confusion over the number of children born to Kate Meyrick. According to a number of sources she had six children. In her autobiography she writes of her time in Southsea, 'It was here that the first of my eight children, May, was born'. K. E. Meyrick, *Secrets of the 43 Club* (orig. published, 1933, this edn. Dublin, 1994), 8.

<sup>38</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

own lawyer, girls from the latest revues, yes, all the regular night-life people'.<sup>40</sup> Meyrick was well aware of the draw of the nightclub and her own role in this. Even before her conviction for bribery in 1929, she artfully manipulated her celebrity, selling her story to the *Sunday News*. Her fame would be consolidated with the publication of her autobiography after her death in 1933, a document in which Meyrick assuredly placed herself at the centre of the popular culture of the decade.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the course of the twenties the newspapers took ownership of Meyrick, dubbing her, 'The Queen of Nightclubs', a title that she endeavoured to live up to. Partly, this was a product of her sheer tenacity, and relentless determination to succeed in the nightclub business, despite four committals to prison. Partly it was a product of Meyrick's self-presentation and her manipulation of the press, as the hard-working mother of eight children. Family and business were closely aligned in Meyrick's world – her older children were also involved in the running of her various clubs. Partly it was a product of the shifting social landscape of the post-war period, shaped by anxieties about gender, ethnicity and criminality.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the attack on nightclubs may have been underpinned by class and, to some extent, regional sensibilities. Huw Clayton has suggested that the press may have been divided in their opinion on class and regional lines. He points particularly to the coverage of the nightclub campaign in the late twenties by the *Manchester Guardian*, which was

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<sup>40</sup> *The People*, 8 February 1925.

<sup>41</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*. Her place in interwar popular culture was sealed by the inclusion of references to Meyrick and her club, the "43", in a number of literary texts. For example, Anthony Powell referenced the "43" in his novel *Afternoon Men*, published in 1931, and Evelyn Waugh's bright young things visited the 'Old Hundredth' run by a lightly disguised 'Ma Mayfield' in *A Handful of Dust* (London, 1934) and *Brideshead Revisited* (London, 1945). For interwar bohemianism see Taylor, *Bright Young People*; Walkowitz, *Nights Out*.

<sup>42</sup> For recent work on post-war gender see J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009); L. Noakes, 'Demobilising the military woman: Constructions of class and gender in Britain after the First World War', *Gender and History*, 19, 1 (2007), 143-162. For discussion of broader tensions in the post-war see S. Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918 – 1931* (Basingstoke, 2009).

very supportive despite previously being critical of Joynson-Hicks. This coverage essentially saw the nightclub ‘problem’ as a London issue, drawing on regional sensibilities in its critique of metropolitan bohemianism.<sup>43</sup>

According to Marek Kohn it was the notorious drugs death of Freda Kempton in March 1922, a dancing girl who had started off her career in one of Meyrick's early clubs, Brett's Dance Hall, which would first bring Meyrick to the attention of the police.<sup>44</sup> Certainly this case, and particularly the involvement of the Chinese ‘Dope Fiend’, Billy ‘Brilliant’ Chang, seems to have precipitated the drugs panics of that year.<sup>45</sup> Early the following year in an article entitled, ‘Vice of London’s Underworld’, *Reynolds’s Newspaper* had reported on the setting up of a ‘New Police Crusade’, a ‘War on Night Clubs’. Thus the Flying Squad was literally to, ‘...Swoop Down on Offenders’. The press, and implicitly the police, drew close links between nightclubs, the ‘dope evil’ and aliens.<sup>46</sup> However the police interest in Meyrick predated both Kempton’s death, and the much later crusade spearheaded by Joynson-Hicks. Thus the first phase of police activity involving the nightclubs managed by Meyrick dated from 1919 to the middle of 1925, when Meyrick left to open a nightclub in Paris. The second phase dated from her return in 1927, and is dominated by the investigations by Goddard and then into Goddard from September 1928, which culminated in an Old Bailey trial in January 1929. During the early 1920s, the Metropolitan Police (mainly in the shape of “C” Division which controlled much of the West End) were intent on controlling and supervising the

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<sup>43</sup> Clayton, ‘A frisky, tiresome colt?’, 191-93. For the inter-war press see, Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850 – 1950* (Illinois, 2004), 130-72. For gender and the press see, Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> As well as Kohn, *Dope Girls*, 122-23, see M. Kohn, ‘Dope Girls, 1918 – 1995, and other stories’, *History Workshop Journal*, 42 (1996), 173-79; J. Seed, ‘Limehouse blues: Looking for Chinatown in the London docks, 1900 – 40’, *History Workshop Journal*, 62, 1 (2006), 58-85.

<sup>45</sup> For the death of Kempton and Chang see NA: MEPO 3/469.

<sup>46</sup> *Reynolds Newspaper*, 28 January 1923.

nightclubs. The extent to which their aim was to close down the nightclubs is, however, unclear. Certainly, in response to external moral campaigns, police activity seemed to increase.<sup>47</sup> However, given Meyrick's continuing success in the business over the course of the early twenties, it may be that containment rather than closure was the aim of officers on the ground.<sup>48</sup> Evidence of contact between Meyrick and the principal police officers who would be involved in raiding her most notorious club, the "43" in the mid-twenties can be found from 1919. The supervision of clubs and brothels had been George Goddard's responsibility as early as 1918 and Kate Meyrick came into his sights from the autumn of 1919.<sup>49</sup> Press reports described police investigations into Dalton's club and the resulting summons against Harry Dalton and Kate Evelyn Meyrick for permitting Dalton's Club to be used as 'an habitual resort of women of ill repute'.<sup>50</sup> Despite being a registered club, the police prosecutor Herbert Muskett, described it as 'a dancing hell – an absolute sink of iniquity', indicating the moral focus of the police investigations.<sup>51</sup> The club had been under observation between 22 September and 5 October and 'casual observation showed that no fewer than 292 women of the class indicated, many of whom had been convicted, left the club'.<sup>52</sup> Observations continued in November, undertaken by Sergeant Goddard and P.C. Wilkin.<sup>53</sup> In January 1920, officers had donned disguise to investigate Dalton's club and *The Times* reported how police-sergeant Goddard had

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<sup>47</sup> For example, the Public Morality Council had put pressure on the police to act in 1921 and 1922, Nott, 'Plague Spots', 236-37.

<sup>48</sup> Slater, 'Containment'.

<sup>49</sup> Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard', 87.

<sup>50</sup> *The News of the World*, 28 December 1919, 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Empire News*, 28 December 1919, 5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> The partnership of Goddard and Wilkins can be traced from December 1919 through to the prosecution of Goddard in 1928-9. Wilkins resigned from the Metropolitan Police as a result of his association with Goddard, but also gave evidence against Goddard at his trial. *News of the World*, 28 December 1919; NA: MEPO2/4481, Report from H. Martin, Superintendent, dated 27 July 1924; NA: HO144/17667, Report from J. Goddard, dated 27 February 1928, 4; *The Times*, 8 December 1928, 14.

visited the club in plainclothes on several occasions.<sup>54</sup> Goddard was a very visible witness at the police court proceedings, as a writer for the *Empire News* noted, ‘The star turn was furnished by Sergeant Goddard. He was the most perfect witness, from a legal point of view, that I have heard for many years’. When asked by the defense how he was attired, Goddard refused to furnish information, ‘If I told the court how I was attired the ends of justice would be defeated...I was, if I might say so, so cleverly disguised that even my own people did not know me’.<sup>55</sup> The coverage of the Dalton’s raids would run until February 1920, when it was reported that the club had been struck off.<sup>56</sup> The investigations into Dalton’s are of interest in that they establish the tenor of the relationship between Meyrick and the police. Whilst Goddard may have been effectively disguised it seems unlikely that Meyrick would not recognise him after his ‘star turn’ at the January hearings. Nevertheless, in her memoirs Meyrick dates her association with Goddard from the raid on the “43” in February 1922.<sup>57</sup> As Meyrick noted in regard to this raid, ‘the sequel to the visit of Sergeant Goddard and his merry men’ was an appearance at Bow Street and a fine of £300, which the presiding magistrate, Sir Charles Biron, allowed her to pay in instalments. Subsequently, Meyrick changed the name of the club to Procter’s and eventually started selling drinks again.<sup>58</sup> In 1923, she opened a club in Newman Street under the title of the Folies Bergeres.<sup>59</sup> Within a couple of months, the club was raided twice in succession and Meyrick and the manager Richard Carlish were

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<sup>54</sup> *The Times*, 15 January 1920, 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Empire News*, 18 January 1920.

<sup>56</sup> *Empire News*, 1 February 1920, 2; *News of the World*, 1 February 1920, 8.

<sup>57</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*, 51. *The Times*, 21 February 1922, 7. NA: MEPO 2/4481: for details of this raid see the report from G. Goddard, dated 10 May 1922; see also evidence of an early complaint about 43 Gerrard Street, dating from 21 December 1921 in this file. This was from the next-door neighbour, a woman named Laura Veal. See NA: HO 144/17667, for a “history” of the raids on 43 Gerrard Street, compiled by Superintendent Morton in June 1928.

<sup>58</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*, 52-53.

<sup>59</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*, 54.

fined. In July 1923, Meyrick and Carlish reopened the club as the New Folies, remaining relatively unscathed until September when another raid forced Meyrick to once again re-open as a new club, this time the 'Broadway'.<sup>60</sup> The specific chronology of raids becomes confused at this point, with some discrepancies in the records. However, a report from August 1923, detailing a raid on the New Folies, suggests that the Met's policy of combining raids with plainclothed police had continued to be used to target Meyrick's clubs. According to the *Daily Mirror*, 'One policeman stated that he was asked if he desired to dance with a pretty girl, and another said he went to the club as a foreigner, giving the name of Maxton Hegel and being disguised as a Russian Grand Duke'.<sup>61</sup> After the September 1923 raid, and the opening of the Broadway, Meyrick was left alone for a while. As well as running the Broadway, the "43" was re-established under the guardianship of one of her daughters. By June 1924, however, both the "43" and the "Broadway" would be raided again, with Goddard leading the raid on the former.<sup>62</sup> Meyrick was fined £390 as a result of these raids and would not be allowed to rest for long. By October of that year, a final raid on Proctors (or the "43") would lead to her first prison sentence.<sup>63</sup> On 18 November 1924 she was sentenced to six months imprisonment. The case was accompanied by substantial press coverage through October and November. Meyrick was charged, alongside Richard Carlish, her son Henry Lester Merrick, and another man named Charles Gardner. Another 37 defendants included a Lieutenant and a Captain of the Indian Army, a lawyer and an Oxford undergraduate. *The*

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

<sup>61</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 23 August 1923.

<sup>62</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*, 74-75; NA: MEPO 2/4481, Report from Goddard describing surveillance of the 43 club, Gerrard street, dated 28 June 1924'; Letter dated 9 July 1924 that the Forty-Three Club, Gerrard Street, 'is about due for a raid'; Report from Vine Street station on recent raid on Proctors club, 43 Gerrard Street, dated 27 July 1924. The club was actually registered at this time, but was struck off as a consequence of the raid.

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Mail*, 29 October 1924.

*Evening News* commented on the extraordinary scenes of those arrested as frequenters of the nightclub upon being led out by the officers, ‘They roared out with laughter and song, and called to one another as they were pushed into the vans. “The never-stop railway to Vine – street!” someone shouted, and another retorted, “All aboard for the Bow-street express”’.<sup>64</sup> A PC Frazer described how he had gone alone to the club, and danced with an instructress, drank champagne and shared a box of chocolates, a service for which he paid 35 shillings and 2 shilling tip. By the 22 November, a few days after Meyrick had been sentenced to prison, she had already sought to capitalize on her situation by selling her story to the *Sunday News*. Advance advertisements proclaimed, ‘In this daring human document Mrs Merrick throws an astonishing searchlight on night life in the West End’.<sup>65</sup> Meyrick would be released from prison in April 1925. According to her biography, she immediately opened a new venture in Golden Square, named “The Little Club”.<sup>66</sup> However, her tenure seems to have been short-lived and by the early summer of 1925, she had decided to decamp to Paris. In her auto-biography she blamed the police and their continued harrising:

Drastic police interference threatened me. The kill-joys were hard at work, and, although the kill-joys are in the minority, from the beginning of time their squawk has always been the loudest.<sup>67</sup>

By early 1925 the relationship between Meyrick, her family, and the Metropolitan Police was firmly established. Moreover, officers from the “C” division, Goddard and Wilkins from 1919, and Chief Inspector (later Superintendent) Morton and Superintendent Henry

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *The Daily Mirror*, 22 November 1924.

<sup>66</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*, 88.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 90.



Martin since at least 1924, had been closely involved in the observation and raids on Meyrick's clubs.<sup>68</sup> Even before the surfacing of the allegations of bribery and corruption, it seems clear that the family and the Met were engaged in something of a battle of attrition. Division "C", whether in the form of Goddard alone, or a broader conspiracy, may well have found the relationship with Meyrick lucrative, but it seems clear given the level of 'interference', that any relationship was far from comfortable. The financial impact on Meyrick is unclear. In a Superintendents report from July 1924, it was noted that fines were substantial, and in 1922 Meyrick had apparently been 'more or less penniless'.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, in her autobiography, she would claim that between 1919 and 1932, 'something like £500,000 passed through my hands'.<sup>70</sup> The money, according to Meyrick, had gone on running costs, unsuccessful ventures and the costs of living and the education of her children, at least two of whom eventually married into the peerage.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, by 1925 her life would become noticeably more uncomfortable with the involvement of the Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks.

### **Joynson-Hicks's 'War on the Nightclubs'**

1925 would be the year that Joynson-Hicks went to war. However, in late 1924 he had already signaled his attention to focus on the nightclubs with a request for information to Horwood about the numbers of nightclubs, and frequent offenders.<sup>72</sup> Thus from this point, Joynson-Hicks's ambitions for public morality and the Met's campaign against the

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<sup>68</sup> NA: MEPO2/4481, Report from Vine Street, 27 July 1924; also Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard', 89-90.

<sup>69</sup> NA: MEPO2/4481, Report from Vine Street, 27 July 1924; Meyrick, *Secrets*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-5.

<sup>71</sup> Dorothy Evelyn Meyrick married Edward Southwell Russell, 26<sup>th</sup> Lord De Clifford in March 1926; Mary Ethel Isobel Meyrick married George Harley Hay-Drummond, 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Kinnoull in June 1928. Davenport-Hines, 'Kate Evelyn Meyrick', *ODNB*. Another daughter, Gwendoline Irene Meyrick apparently married William George Bradley Craven, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl Craven in May 1939. Geoffrey Dorling Roberts, *Law and Life* (London, 1964), 76.

<sup>72</sup> NA: HO 45/16205, Letter to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, dated 26 November 1924.

nightclubs promised to be fruitful bedfellows. However, the Met was calling for legislation even before the October election. The *Daily Express* reported on the problems with the current legislation on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1924, with the headline, ‘Police Powerless to take Action’. According to the report the London police were ‘anxious and willing’ to take action against the clubs, but are ‘at present handicapped by inadequate powers’: “What the police need for the suppression of the undesirable clubs is the free right of entry and inspection for any authorised officer in plainclothes. At present the police cannot enter any nightclub unless under the authority of a special warrant”.<sup>73</sup> Thus the objective of Horwood and the Met was for an extension to their powers. A rearguard action in the fight against immorality was also being fought by the London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality, led by the Bishop of London, the Right Reverend Arthur Winnington Ingram, who would head a deputation to the Home Secretary in January 1925.<sup>74</sup> Finally, the metropolitan nightclub scene would be exposed to the full glare of the press. As *The Times* reported, ‘Not for the first time in the history of London the minds of some of its inhabitants are at the present moment much exercised on the subject of night clubs’.<sup>75</sup>

This was the coming together of various interests to promote the campaign against nightclubs. In fact, James Nott has pointed out that the face of the Public Morality campaign, Winnington Ingram, had long been an active figure in the fight against the nightclubs, having been involved in early campaigning during the First World War.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Daily Express*, 18 September 1924.

<sup>74</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 26, 27 January 1925. See also the report from *The Times* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> AGM of the Magistrates Association, which calls for the Home Secretary to bring about an amendment of the law as regards nightclubs. *The Times*, 18 October 1924, 18.

<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, 31 January 1925, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Nott, ‘Plague spots’, 236.

However, with the Conservative return to power in 1924, it seems clear that the Met sought the opportunity to push the campaign into a more public arena. It may be that Joynson-Hicks's reputation as a die-hard, to the right of the party, made him the ideal public face of the nightclub campaign.<sup>77</sup> Certainly, from the autumn of 1924, Horwood and Joynson-Hicks corresponded in regard to the problem of the nightclubs.<sup>78</sup> The public campaign was launched the day after the deputation, with Joynson-Hicks's intentions reported across the press on the 27 January 1925.<sup>79</sup> Joynson-Hicks was not keen to resurrect DORA, which was the preference of the London Public Morality Council, but rather was concerned with finding a precise definition of nightclub which would then help to shape the bill.<sup>80</sup> Clearly he was aware of the unpopularity of the wartime restrictions, and so sought a specific act that could not be broadened out beyond the nightclubs.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, for Joynson-Hicks, police powers were at the centre of this: "The police are working with one hand tied behind their backs...We cannot go into these clubs...We have no right to go in...Some of these places are very difficult to enter...As head of the police, I am quite as anxious as you are to get rid of this horrible excrescence in the life of London. The police have authority from me to take any step which they consider fitting in regard to this question'.<sup>82</sup> According to *The Times*, Joynson-Hicks had identified that the real difficulty was proving that the law had been broken. Moreover, Joynson-Hicks revealed some clear irritation with the public morality brigade, "He had no evidence that there was any widespread feeling that there was any immorality or

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<sup>77</sup> Certainly, James Nott has remarked on the clear connection between the interests of the Bishop of London and Joynson-Hicks, 'Plague spots', 237.

<sup>78</sup> NA: HO 45/16205, Letter from William Horwood to Home Secretary, dated December 1924.

<sup>79</sup> *Daily Express*, 27 January 1925.

<sup>80</sup> *The Times*, 27 January 1925, 11.

<sup>81</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 27 January 1925.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

drunkenness within the 11,000 clubs to which he had referred. They must realise that men were entitled to form themselves into clubs, so long as the clubs were not a source of evil to the body politic'.<sup>83</sup> These reports suggest that Joynson-Hicks was prepared to bring some sort of limited bill that would help the Met in their policing of the nightclubs, but was keen not to be too associated with the moral purity of the London Public Morality Council. Presumably as a newly incumbent Home Secretary he sought not to alienate his public.<sup>84</sup> Despite this prevarication, the press continued to popularise Jix's war against the nightclubs. The continuing police raids did little to undermine this 'Stern War Backed by the Home Secretary', as the *Express* reported it in February.<sup>85</sup> The *Mirror* commented on the problems with definition, and particularly the difficulty of differentiating between the illicit nightclub of the type ran by Meyrick, and the traditional gentleman's clubs of Pall Mall. Perhaps unwittingly, the *Mirror* had put its finger on the problem at the heart of the debate when it commented, 'Imagine a raid, by an army of policemen, upon a many-membered club in the West End – the names and addresses taken of a few thousand Liberals, or automobilists, or Old Oxonians!', describing the clientele of both the "43" and the Pall Mall gentleman's clubs.<sup>86</sup> The problem was a tricky one for Joynson-Hicks. He seems to have wanted to extend the Met's powers, but he was keen not to turn too far to the right. If he did not get his definition of nightclubs absolutely right, he risked incurring the wrath not only of a cynical public, but also his fellow members of the

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<sup>83</sup> *The Times*, 27 January 1925, 11.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Daily Express*, 4 February 1925.

<sup>86</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 16 March 1925. For discussion in the Commons see HC Deb 12 March 1925 vol 181 cc1495-6; HC Deb 26 March 1925 vol 182 cc602-3

House.<sup>87</sup> Eventually, in late March he decided to define the nightclub as ‘any club which is regularly open for dancing after midnight’, with rights of entry by police inspectors to be conferred at all times.<sup>88</sup> The act would demand a satisfactory report from the police before the annual renewal of a license. It would also introduce new precautions ‘regarding the bona fides of the proprietors, manager, and secretary’ of a club, presumably allowing more control over repeat offenders such as Meyrick. The draft of the bill was to be considered by the cabinet on the 25 March 1925.<sup>89</sup> After this the bill seems to disappear. By the time parliament returned from the Easter break, the bill had been dropped. The following day, the *Daily Express* reported on the ‘Dead Night Clubs Bill’.<sup>90</sup> In parliament and in the press, Joynson-Hicks’s ‘War on Nightclubs’ would very quickly lose speed during the course of 1925.<sup>91</sup> Why Joynson-Hicks backed down over the legislation in 1925 is not entirely clear, although it is likely that the difficulty of finding a definition that would enable the prosecution of some clubs but not of others had become insurmountable. Thus, in an exchange in the Commons in July 1925 Joynson-Hicks was particularly cagey in response to questions as to why the bill had been dropped, stating that he felt there had been improvements in the condition of nightclubs and generally sidetracking the issue of why he had seemed to lose interest in an issue which he had previously been pursuing so vigorously.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Joynson-Hicks corresponded with Horwood in relation to the issue of definition, NA: HO 45/16205, Letter from William Horwood to Home Secretary, dated 18 February 1925.

<sup>88</sup> *Daily Express*, 25 March 1925. See also Nott, ‘Plague spots’, 238-9.

<sup>89</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1925.

<sup>90</sup> HC Deb 07 May 1925 vol 183 cc1118-9; *Daily Express*, 8 May 1925.

<sup>91</sup> Although the Home Secretary was still under pressure to affect change. In November 1925, he received another deputation from the London Public Morality Council. NA: HO 45/16205, Note of a Deputation received at the Home Office on the 17 November 1925.

<sup>92</sup> HC Deb 30 July 1925 vol 187 cc598-9.

However, the police campaign against the nightclubs had not abated. Thus throughout this period the police continued raiding the nightclubs, and arguably carried on a system of bribery and corruption in parallel. Despite her committal to Holloway in 1925, the relationship between Meyrick and her family had clearly remained a concern to the police. Whilst Meyrick was imprisoned, her children had again stepped into the breach. The “43” remained open and was the subject of correspondence between the Commissioner and the Home Secretary. In police reports from March and April 1925, it is clear that continuing observation had taken place of the “43” club, which was being run by Miss Merrick and Henry L. Merrick as a ‘dance club’. Another daughter, Miss May Meyrick and a relative of the family, Miss Croft were also mentioned, though the former had managed to evade capture during the police raids as she was apparently in Paris.<sup>93</sup> Raids of the club would lead to the prosecution of Henry Lester Merrick and Evelyn Merrick for selling intoxicating liquors.<sup>94</sup> Thus even from her prison cell, Meyrick seemed able to keep her hand in the nightclub business, and whilst her son and daughter managed to escape with fines, a petition to the Home Secretary to allow a visit from another daughter, May, was turned down.<sup>95</sup> According to her autobiography, after her release in April 1925, Meyrick left for Paris and did not return until 1927, when she opened the “Silver Slipper Club” in Regent Street. However, it is likely that not only did she maintain her interests in London through her family connections, but also that she

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<sup>93</sup> NA: MEPO2/4481, Vine Street, “C” Division, Clubs – Irregularities, 20 March 1925.

<sup>94</sup> NA: HO144/17667, Evidence in prosecution of Henry Lester Merrick, Evelyn Merrick, Maud Croft and five others, for ‘irregular sales of intoxicating liquor at The 43 Club. Police report into case of son and daughter ‘of the notorious Mrs. Merrick’’, dated 28 April 1925.

<sup>95</sup> In the 1925 case, Merrick vs. Bertie her solicitor petitioned the secretary of state to allow May Merrick to accompany him to prison to interview Mrs Meyrick in relation to their case. Request refused (NA: HO 144/17667, Letter from J. E. Holloway Pike & Co., and reply, dated 25 February 1925).

spent some of this intervening period in the city.<sup>96</sup> By March 1926, she was announcing the marriage of her daughter, Miss Dolly Merrick, to the 19-year-old Lord De Clifford at a London Register Office.<sup>97</sup> Of course she might have done this from Paris, but she was certainly in London by February 1927, when the *Daily Express* reported some “‘Gossip’ About a Night Club”. The report focused on a window-smashing scene at the “43” club in Gerrard street. The window-smasher was a man named Wilfred Liddell Steel. According to the *Express*, ‘Steel, who is known in London sporting circles, made allegations of bribery against the police, and said that he would appeal’.<sup>98</sup> The paper followed an alleged exchange between Steel and an Inspector Blackwell, with Steel claiming, ‘Did I not tell you to go and raid the place? There is no license there. What does Mrs. Merrick pay you a week? Everyone knows in London’. Things would change with Meyrick’s return to London, and the opening of the “Silver Slipper” in late 1927. As Meyrick herself describes it, ‘On Christmas Eve, 1927, the “Silver Slipper” club suffered its first raid, and although the immediate results were not in themselves particularly serious – I was not charged – that raid marked the beginning of a chain of events which were to lead to the darkest hour of my whole career’.<sup>99</sup>

### **Goddard’s Downfall and Beyond, 1928 – 1933**

During his tenure as Commissioner, William Horwood seems to have supported the policy in harring the nightclubs, and particularly the targeting of Meyrick. How far he was aware of the methods that were being used, and which undoubtedly contributed to

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<sup>96</sup> Whilst her manager Richard Carlish, in his biography *King of Clubs*, described how he had managed Meyrick’s club in Montmartre in the mid-twenties, he does not refer to Meyrick being present. See chapter eight of R. Carlish, *King of Clubs. Richard Carlish as Told to Alan Bestic* (London, 1962), 111-124.

<sup>97</sup> *Daily Express*, 15 November 1926.

<sup>98</sup> *Daily Express*, 28 February 1927.

<sup>99</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*, 156.

the conditions leading to the corruption scandal of 1928, is a moot point. As Clive Emsley has pointed out, later his reputation would be as a man who had refused to respond to allegations of corruption or to investigate his force's activities.<sup>100</sup> He was clearly au-fait with the targeted raiding of Meyrick during the early twenties, and in early 1924 described her as 'The principal behind the scenes'.<sup>101</sup> Certainly he was aware of accusations against Goddard from very early on. In 1921 a Sergeant Horace Josling had accused Goddard of taking bribes from illegal bookmakers.<sup>102</sup> Given Goddard's key responsibility for the control of nightclubs and brothels, the charges could not be overlooked. Horwood referred the case to the Home Office, the result of which was an in-camera inquiry, which did not make its findings public. The case was then returned to the Met, and in July 1922 Josling was essentially scapegoated, with a disciplinary charge of bringing false allegations.<sup>103</sup> During this same period Goddard was directly involved in the targeting of Meyrick, and was named both by Meyrick and the press as being concerned in the raids on her premises. Indeed, the evidence strongly suggests that she was caught up in something of a cat and mouse game with the police, as we have seen, having to move and reinvent herself and her clubs within a matter of months and some times weeks. At Goddard's trial in 1928, the prosecution provided evidence that he had opened an account for his takings as early as 1919, although it was not proved whether the money he deposited in these early years came from nightclub bribery, or from other sources.<sup>104</sup> The point at which Goddard started receiving bribes from Meyrick is unclear. Meyrick's own record of the early twenties is politely scathing of Goddard; the implicit

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<sup>100</sup> Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard', 88-90.

<sup>101</sup> NA: HO 144/17667, Handwritten letter from Horwood dated 19 February 1924.

<sup>102</sup> M. Fido and K. Skinner, *The Official Encyclopaedia of Scotland Yard* (London, 1999), 225-26.

<sup>103</sup> Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard', 91.

<sup>104</sup> *The Times*, 21 December 1928, 4.



suggestion being that she was his victim rather than his co-conspirator. According to the indictment on which she was charged, Mrs Meyrick had conspired with Goddard between October 1924 and November 1928.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, a list of Meyrick's convictions shows that ten out of 11 of these took place in the period January 1920 to November 1924 when she was imprisoned for the first time.<sup>106</sup> If her arrangement with Goddard started in the autumn of 1924, it was not enough to keep her out of prison. However, it did keep her relatively unscathed from her release in 1925 until 1928.

So whilst the campaign against Meyrick continued from her return to the scene in 1927, the ability to prove anything against her would now be somewhat stymied. Between December 1927 and February 1928 various undercover policemen visited the Silver Slipper Club and also the renamed "43", now being run as "The Cecil", in attempts to find compromising evidence. They frustratingly reported on snatched conversations implying the presence of alcohol, of entering rooms filled with recently emptied glasses, quickly removed by waiters.<sup>107</sup> P.C. Thomas Grant who visited the club with a female acquaintance, commented on the presence of 'women of questionable character', though he was unable to find any evidence of intoxicants.<sup>108</sup> They apparently did their best to purchase a bottle of wine, but were unsuccessful. A final report to the Chief Inspector on 27 February 1928 compiled by Goddard conceded that "The Cecil" was an 'undesirable and unwanted resort', he also asserted that clear evidence was unobtainable. Rather huffily he complained:

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<sup>105</sup> *The Times*, 19 March 1929, 5.

<sup>106</sup> NA: HO 144/17667, handwritten extract from letter dated December 1924; NA: MEPO 2/4481, Report from Superintendent Martin with list of convictions and results reported against Kate Evelyn Merrick, dated 22 July 1924; NA: HO 45/16205, Letter from W. Horwood to Home Secretary; summary list of convictions, dated December 1924.

<sup>107</sup> NA: HO 144/17667, Series of reports from December 1927 – February 1928.

<sup>108</sup> NA: HO 144/17667, Report from Thomas Grant, Vine Street Station, dated 23 February 1928.

It is interesting to note that practically all the letters and communications respecting gross irregularities taking place in this Club are anonymous, writers are not satisfied in confining themselves to complaining of this place, but they make insidious lying and unfounded allegations against Police who are powerless to defend themselves owing to the cunning of writers of complaints hiding under anonymity.<sup>109</sup>

A week or so later, things began to unravel for Goddard. Correspondence between Horwood and Joynson-Hicks', reveal that the Commissioner had his suspicions about the officers of "C" Division, or at least chose to disclose them at this point, leading to his suggestion that officers from outside the division should take over the observation of the club. Joynson-Hicks gave him carte-blanche to do whatever he needed to close down the "43". In a letter to the Commissioner dated the 3 March 1928, Joynson-Hicks had urged, 'I want you to please put this matter in the hands of your most experienced men and whatever the cost will be, find out the truth about this Club'.<sup>110</sup> What this meant in practice was using illegal means. Notes from early June show that officers from the B Division used the services of a certain 'gentleman' to introduce them into the "The Cecil", and enough evidence was finally gathered to convict Mrs Meyrick of selling intoxicating liquors without a license, for which she was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Various reports from June, July and August 1928, survive requesting the authority to pay the 'out-of-pocket' expenses of the 'gentlemen' who had introduced the police into the club. It is also clear from these reports that by early June suspicions about

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<sup>109</sup> NA: HO 144/17667, Report from J. Goddard, dated 27 February 1928.

<sup>110</sup> NA: HO144/17667, Letter to Police Commissioner Sir. William Horwood, dated 3 March 1928. Kohn suggests that Joynson-Hicks was on a personal crusade against Meyrick. Kohn, *Dope Girls*, 122.

“C” division were starting to solidify into accusations.<sup>111</sup> Clearly tensions were rising and transparency was everything by early July when Horwood wrote to the Secretary of State in order to request authorization for the payment, ‘In the course of his visits this gentleman found it necessary to spend money freely both on himself and in entertaining friends whom he took with him’. Horwood had added a rather defensive note, ‘The SofS directed me to spare no expense in obtaining a conviction against this club’.<sup>112</sup> By the autumn of 1928, charges of bribery and corruption were being laid at Scotland Yard’s door, and in the final months of that year, the case against both Meyrick and Sergeant Goddard was built. In early 1929, Goddard was jailed on corruption charges, and Kate Meyrick was sentenced to fifteen months hard labour for bribing him.<sup>113</sup>

By the time of her 1929 imprisonment Mrs. Meyrick’s health had deteriorated badly. Reports from the prison medical authorities, as a response to petitions from Meyrick’s daughters, acknowledged her failing health, but the Home Secretary refused to concede to requests that she be released to a nursing home for the completion of her sentence. Meyrick was eventually released in January 1930, having earned remission for good conduct.<sup>114</sup> The *Evening News* reported, ‘When she walked out of the prison at 8 o’clock there was a wild rush, girls and men swarming round her and cheering loudly’.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, the Goddard case did not curb Meyrick’s appetite for the nightclub business. She continued to be a thorn in the side of the police, and they continued to wage

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<sup>111</sup> NA: HO 144/17667, Letters dated 4 July, 27 August; Minutes dated 4 June 1928, 10 June 1928.

<sup>112</sup> NA: HO 144/17667, Letter from W. Horwood to the Home Secretary, dated 10 July 1928.

<sup>113</sup> NA: MEPO 2/4481, Letter from Wontners, solicitor to New Scotland Yard, regarding prosecution of Kate Evelyn Merrick, dated 31 January 1929.

<sup>114</sup> *Evening News*, January 27 1930.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

war against her.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, even whilst Mrs Meyrick was still in prison, in July 1929, reports were again suggesting that the “43” was being run as an unlicensed dance club. Conversations between the Commissioner, the Home Office solicitors, Wontner’s, and the solicitors for London County Council indicate their frustration in the aftermath of the *Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure*, and the inadvisability of sending in police officers to obtain evidence.<sup>117</sup> After Meyrick’s release the following January, the cat and mouse game would continue. Police raids on the “43” took place in February and April 1930, this time undertaken by the “S” and “Y” divisions. It seems that the Commissioners reluctance to send in plain-clothed officers had not lasted. The reports suggest that Mrs. Meyrick was watching her back. As Sidney Marshall, an officer, from “S” division noted from information provided by a lady friend, “No information could be obtained as to gaming but she informed me that Mrs. Meyrick was very careful about the drink on the premises at this present moment but there is not much doubt that the premises will blossom out as before in the near future and that Mrs. Meyrick is advertising a big gala night at these premises on the 14 February 1930”.<sup>118</sup> By April, the lack of evidence forthcoming led the Superintendent in charge to surmise that his officers had been recognized, possibly by women of ‘doubtful character’. He recommended that observation should be attempted again, but with ‘strange officers’.<sup>119</sup> Observations were resumed and eventually evidence was found, as the *Evening News*

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<sup>116</sup> NA: MEPO 2/4481, Report detailing observations on the premises of 43 Gerrard Street, dated 28 April 1930; The “Cecil” alias “The 43” and the “Bunch of Keys” clubs – irregularities and allegations of bribery dated 11 May 1932.

<sup>117</sup> NA: MEPO 2/4481, Letter from T. Wontner, Solicitors, dated 12 July 1929. Wontners were the Home Office solicitors.

<sup>118</sup> NA: MEPO 2/4481, Report from Sidney Marshall of “S” Division, dated 3 February 1930.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, Vine Street Report, dated 28 April 1930.

headline announced, ‘Detective Sees Dancers Have Champagne in Jugs’.<sup>120</sup> In July 1930, Meyrick was sentenced to six months for selling intoxicants without a license at “The 43 club”; and in 1931 she received a final six months sentence after another raid on “43”. By 1932, in the face of another conviction for selling liquor, the courts and the police were driven to compromise. The presiding magistrate, Mr. Drummett, clearly frustrated and realising the unpopular move a prison sentence would be, asked Meyrick’s counsel, Mr. St. John Hutchinson, that she pledge never to run nightclubs again under an order to be in force for three years.<sup>121</sup> The *Mail* commented, ‘Mrs Kate Meyrick, the woman with the tragic eyes, has voluntarily left her throne where she reigned as Queen of London’s night clubs’.<sup>122</sup> As Meyrick noted in the final chapter of her biography, ‘I was obliged...to give in a court of law an honourable undertaking that I would not transgress for three years those laws which dictate to grown men and women the hours within which they may purchase alcoholic refreshment’.<sup>123</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The traditional accounts of these years have been caught up with the press presentation of the war between the Queen of Nightclubs and the redoubtable killjoy Jix, providing little scrutiny of the actual objectives of the Metropolitan Police and the tactics they were prepared to use to achieve them. This article, in contrast, has explored the interactions between Mrs Meyrick, the Metropolitan Police and other actors in the ‘nightclub campaign’ over a period of thirteen years. So what does the long relationship between Mrs Meyrick and the police tell us? Firstly, that Kate Meyrick and her family were highly

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<sup>120</sup> *Evening News*, 3 July 1930.

<sup>121</sup> NA: MEPO 2/4481, Report from F. Smith, Inspector’, dated 11 May 1932. This report relates to the three-year ban on Mrs. Meyrick running clubs. See also *Evening Standard*, 10 May 1932.

<sup>122</sup> *Daily Mail*, 12 May 1932.

<sup>123</sup> Meyrick, *Secrets*, 188.

adaptable. Despite police surveillance, raids, prosecutions and prison sentences, the family continued to re-invent, not only the “43” but also other West End Clubs, and maintain a business which presumably made enough money to justify their continuing existence. Secondly, in contrast to a reading of the ‘nightclub campaign’ that puts Joynson-Hicks at the centre, here we see his role as rather more incidental. Certainly, as in the case of his other contemporary campaigns, for a time it engendered something of a ‘moral panic’.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, as *The People* journalist Hannan Swaffer suggested in February 1925, the Home Secretary may have provided the spur to a sometimes reluctant police.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, Meyrick and the police would continue in their dance, which would continue beyond even the appointment of a Royal Commission and the scandal of Goddard. The longevity of the ‘relationship’ between Meyrick and some of the principal police officers (most notably, but not only, Goddard) make it highly unlikely that surveillance would be consistently effective. Despite this, the view that Meyrick was able to run her clubs with little interference before Joynson-Hicks became involved is clearly unsustainable. It is important to re-iterate that between 1920 and 1924, Meyrick was prosecuted ten times. Given the difficulty in gaining entrance to the clubs, and given the problems with legally obtaining evidence, this is hardly indicative of somebody who was being given an easy ride by the police. Moreover, evidence of Goddard’s assiduousness in prosecuting the war against the nightclubs was provided in 1928, when Chief Inspector Cooper presented a list of the 234 establishments that Goddard had raided between 1919 and 1928, along with a note of Goddard’s 89 commendations.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, whilst at

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<sup>124</sup> For example, see H. Shore, ‘Criminality and Englishness in the aftermath: The racecourse wars of the 1920s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 22, 4 (2011), 474-97.

<sup>125</sup> *The People*, 8 February 1925.

<sup>126</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 22 December 1928.

times it was effective and resulted in the prosecution of Meyrick and her associates; at other times the involvement of ‘known’ faces like Goddard and Wilkins in the raids, suggest not only corruption, but also hubris. Thus an interpretation of police powers and procedures characterized by ambiguity, discretion and perhaps a little complacency seems to have been inherent in the Mets policing culture.<sup>127</sup> In view of the ongoing critique that the Metropolitan Police were facing by the later twenties, it seems pertinent to consider the campaign against the nightclubs as part of a pattern in which we see the police (or at least parts of the Met) attempting to extend their powers. However, the extent to which these events can be viewed as part of a systematic campaign to influence and strengthen police powers is debatable. Whilst Joynson-Hicks and Horwood were keen to bolster police powers in order to deal with the ‘problem’ of the nightclubs (and particularly to stymie Meyrick’s activities) they were alert to the importance of being seen to be acting with the law.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, the extent to which the blame for poor management and malpractice lay at the divisional or at the level of the Commissioner was something that clearly exercised contemporaries. There was significant controversy over Horwood’s decision to announce his retirement in the summer of 1928, when the Savidge affair broke, as his imminent departure seemed to provide some sort of confirmation that he was in part responsible for the problems that were facing the Met.<sup>129</sup> In the Commons a number of MPs would vigorously questions Joynson-Hicks about the retirement of

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<sup>127</sup> On police culture see, C. Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History* (London, 1996), 217-23.

<sup>128</sup> NA: HO 45/16205, Letter from William Horwood to Home Secretary, dated 18 February 1925.

<sup>129</sup> HC Deb 11 July 1928 vol 219 cc2263-330; *The Times*, 3 July 1928, 10. Anne Pimlott Baker, ‘Horwood, Sir William Thomas Francis (1868–1943)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51587>, accessed 2 Sept 2012]

Horwood at various points in July.<sup>130</sup> Whether he jumped or was pushed, Horwood's reputation was tarnished by the association with Goddard and the Savidge inquiry. Moreover, Goddard was not simply a 'rotten apple', but indicative of a much broader problem. Indeed in an undated letter, probably from September 1929, Meyrick herself wrote to the new Labour Home Secretary, J. R. Clynes to draw attention to a petition for the reduction of her sentence. In this she describes how she was blackmailed by Goddard, and refers to payments made to other police officers who were not prosecuted.<sup>131</sup> If Goddard was clearly on the take, it is also evident that he was chosen to be the scapegoat for a division that was seen to have stepped over the line. Indeed, by 1931 the cleaning out of "C" Division was greatly extended, with the dismissal of an inspector and twenty-three P.Cs accused of accepting bribes.<sup>132</sup> In the matter of law, little changed, despite the recommendations of the *Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure*. Plain-clothed observations into Meyrick's and other clubs continued, although as Louise Jackson has noted, 'different forms of crime, criminality, and their association with social and geographical space, were investigated at different moments in time'.<sup>133</sup> Anxieties relating to race, sexuality and miscegenation would shape undercover club activity in the thirties and beyond, as work by Jackson, Walkowitz and Houlbrook has shown.<sup>134</sup> In the end, it would be two events that most effectively finished Kate Meyrick's reign as the 'Queen of Nightclubs'. Thus only the undertaking to desist from the business of

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<sup>130</sup> HC Deb 02 July 1928 vol 219 cc982-6, cc2263-330. Even at this point there were intimations that Horwood had been 'retired' so as to avoid him giving evidence at a forthcoming *Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure*. *RCPPP*, 3, 17, 18, 41, 91.

<sup>131</sup> NA: HO 144/17667, Letter from Kate Evelyn Meyrick to Secretary of State, undated.

<sup>132</sup> Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard', 98

<sup>133</sup> Jackson, *Women Police*, 115.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 107-17; Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, 229-49; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 26-7, 31-32, 83. In October and November 1939 observations were undertaken on the Melodies Club in Shepherd Street, W. C. 1. The presence of 'homosexual perverts' was noted. The Manageress of the club was Mrs. Irene Ransom, a daughter of Mrs. Meyrick. NA: MEPO 3/629.



nightclubs that she agreed to in May 1932, and her declining health, leading to her death in January of the following year, would finally bring this unique relationship to an end. Moreover, the police would continue to raid nightclubs, and the vexed question of bogus nightclubs and the supply of liquor would rumble on in parliament for the following two decades, until the passage of the 1949 Licensing Act made the provision for ‘special hours certificates’, and thus finally allowed drinking up to 2 a.m. in the London nightclubs.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> HC Deb 10 May 1949 vol 464 cc1689-731; A. Barr, *Drink: An Informal Social History* (London, 1995), 158-59; Morris, ‘Criminal Investigation’, 27.