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‘Hours of Distraction and Cheerful Companionship’: Leeds Association of Girls’ Clubs and the Girls’ Clubs Era (1904–1944)

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Introduction

Between the 1860s and the outbreak of the First World War, philanthropic women across Britain established clubs for working girls. The women of Leeds were no exception. Some clubs were connected to churches, chapels and synagogues whilst a minority had no links with any religious body. Clubs provided leisure activities and, in some cases, played an overtly political role in challenging contraventions of the Factory Acts and supporting members in asserting their rights. In many towns and cities, clubs formed unions and associations to facilitate the organisation of lectures, competitions and holidays, and to engage in campaigning. Again, Leeds was no exception: its Association of Girls’ Clubs (LAGC) was founded in 1904 and organised various activities although its stance was ostensibly apolitical. LAGC’s archives are held by its successor body The Youth Association and comprise minutes books, annual reports and a range of other documents. These newly available primary data have been drawn on to present a case study of organisations of girls’ clubs during the period before most youth clubs were mixed. Before the First World War, clubs from nearby towns sought affiliation and the organisation’s first name change saw it become Leeds and District Association of Girls’ Clubs (LDAGC).

Girls’ clubs met throughout the first decades of the twentieth century but from the 1930s they gradually evolved into mixed groups, admitting boys. Boys’ clubs remained staunchly masculine environments and did not admit girls.¹ Within twenty years, key roles in mixed clubs had been taken on by men. This marked a major change as hitherto men had been conspicuous by

¹ For a full account of the transition, see M. Butterfield and J. Spence, ‘The Transition from Girls’ Clubs to Girls’ Clubs and Mixed Clubs,’ in *Essays in the History of Community and Youth Work*, ed. by R. Gilchrist, T. Jeffs, J. Spence and J. Walker (Lyme Regis, 2009), p. 69–92.

their almost universal absence, other than as benefactors, judges, chairmen and ushers at LAGC events. At the same time boys began to eclipse girls in mixed club membership: a development which was in parallel with the increased role played by the state in youth work. The era of girls' clubs culminated during the 1940s, in the wake of changes wrought by the two world wars, the growth of mixed clubs and the increased involvement of the state in youth work.

Background

In 1896 the *Bristol Mercury* laid claim to the original girls' club which had opened 'about forty years ago ... to brighten, cheer and elevate the lives of the working girls of the city'.² By the 1890s Leeds, like other British towns and cities, was provided with a number of clubs. These included Woodhouse Carr Girls' Club (founded in 1896), Burley Church Girls' Club (1898) and the Girls' Letter Guild (1889). This last club matched each member with 'a lady correspondent, to whom she is expected to write once a month' and met at St. John's Church, New Briggate.³

Some club members were in domestic service but most worked in mills and factories. Britain's Industrial Revolution had seen the rise of paid employment for women outside the home or other domestic setting and by the late nineteenth century there was increased awareness of working conditions which could best be addressed collectively. Concerns also multiplied about the impact of mill and factory work on girls' femininity and morality. Gerry Holloway suggests it was widely believed that 'working in factories exposed women to influences that ran counter to dominant notions of correct feminine behaviour'.⁴ Girls were working away from their parents' direct supervision and gained independence along with their wages. Some moved out of their family homes, opting to rent lodgings with other young women. A contemporaneous writer observed that, away from parental control, girls became 'their own mistresses and [could] do what they like', adding, 'their only sitting room is the gin palace, the music hall, the penny gaff and the dancing room'.⁵ Concerned middle-class women, impelled by a range of philanthropic, religious, moral, social and cultural motivations, responded by opening clubs. Alicia Percival quotes an early club organiser's account of setting up a club for Leeds mill girls in a 'rather a low part of town':

² *Bristol Mercury*, 3 Oct. 1896.

³ Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs, *Tenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1914.

⁴ G. Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (2005), p. 30.

⁵ E. Hopkins, 'Review: Preventive Work by', *The Englishwoman's Review*, 14 May 1881. A 'penny gaff' was a variety show.

We have taken a large room and made it look as tempting as we can, with bright curtains and some pictures, and above all a very fair piano, which to our musical Yorkshire girls is a source of endless pleasure.⁶

The girls were living in lodgings and had 'little or nothing to keep them at home in the evenings' and, in consequence, needed something to keep them 'out of harm's way'.⁷ Some clubs, including Pontefract's (founded in 1890), were styled as 'evening homes', suggesting warm, welcoming domestic settings sufficiently appealing to lure girls away from insalubrious alternative attractions.⁸

The drudgery and tedium of the working day could result in the girls displaying boundless exuberance and confrontational behaviour outside working hours. Contemporaneous literature from around the country featured accounts of working girls who were had become 'independent and uncontrollable'.⁹ In 1894 the *Birmingham Daily Post* quoted a worker who stated that 'girls of fifteen were most difficult to manage owing to the rapidity with which the coarsening and demoralising influence of factory life took effect'.¹⁰ Alicia Percival quotes a description of an orphan who 'is a very bad girl, but one one cannot help feeling a liking for at once' despite the fact that, 'unless sharply looked after she uses most dreadful language'.¹¹ Moreover factories and mills faced downturns when reduced hours resulted in reduced income. Seasonal trades faced the same problem. The combination of extra spare time and less money was seen as potentially dangerous as girls might be tempted into immoral activities and even prostitution through economic necessity. Clubs could encourage constructive activities and promote middle-class standards of morality: leaders had scope to foster a heightened awareness of the dangers of entering a life of vice.

Theoretically domestic service provided a reliable alternative to mill and factory work and Sally Mitchell suggests it was favoured by mothers for providing accommodation and a controlled environment.¹² Selina Todd identifies the significance of 'cleanliness' in choice of employment which influenced some girls in favour of service.¹³ However it was not universally popular amongst young women who found it to be isolated in comparison

6. A. Percival, *Youth will be Led: the Story of the Voluntary Youth Organisations* (1951), p. 59.

7. Ibid.

8. LAGC, *Twelfth Annual Report*, Nov. 1916.

9. Hopkins.

10. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 Sept. 1894. Miss Cheetham, the worker, worked at Mansfield House Women's Settlement Girls' Club.

11. Percival, p. 60.

12. S. Mitchell, *The New Girl* (New York, 1995), p. 38.

13. S. Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918–50* (Oxford, 2005), p. 134.

with factories and mills which offered a more communal experience,¹⁴ as they could work alongside their friends. At a public meeting reported by the *Birmingham Daily Post* in 1894, one speaker blamed mistresses' attitudes for girls' dislike of domestic service and attributed girls' preference for factory work to the, 'Freedom to do as they pleased in many matters, not the least in the way in which they should dress, and the style in which they should do their hair'.¹⁵ Such was some girls' antipathy to service that in 1890 a young Mancunian found guilty of violent assault chose a month in prison with hard labour rather than becoming a servant 'in a respectable home'.¹⁶ Some young servants lived a considerable distance from home: in 1913 mistresses set up Roundhay Undenominational Girls' Club for their own servants who lived-in. They explained that they found that 'it makes new maids settle better to have somewhere to go to, and to make friends'. Although 'entirely nondenominational', members joined a temperance organisation.¹⁷

Girls' Club Leaders and Helpers

Women who established and worked at the early girls' clubs were motivated by both social and psychological impulses. Deprived of the opportunity to enter professional structured employment, middle and upper class women found an outlet in philanthropy, motivated by impulses varying from faith to fashion.¹⁸ By 1900, working at girls' clubs had become 'a craze', supplanting district visiting or 'slumming' in its appeal and even becoming a suitable topic for lampooning.¹⁹ Girls' club leaders identified the difficulties they encountered with some of the potential helpers whose motivation was suspect. Maude Stanley emphasised that helpers should model 'order, discipline, and good manners as well as good conduct', and display, 'a dignity in themselves which will command respect ... no favouritism [and] tact'.²⁰ Such paragons were not always forthcoming and leaders had to cope with

14. Mitchell, p. 38.

15. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 Sept. 1894.

16. A. Davies, *The Gangs of Manchester* (Preston, 2008), p. 290. In March 1890 Sarah Ann Hickson preferred a month in Strangeways with hard labour to service in a 'respectable home'. Later the same year, Alice Cullen made the same choice when faced with service or a fine for being drunk and disorderly.

17. LAGC, *Tenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1914.

18. K. Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 63. She observes, 'Many women developed their philanthropic activities to such a degree that we may regard them as having a quasi-professional status' although types of work were subject to trends.

19. See, for example, Pamela, 'Moderna on Matters Feminine', *The County Gentleman: Sporting Gazette, Agricultural Journal*, 26 May, 1900.

20. M. Stanley, *Clubs for Working Girls* (1890), p. 21.

those who came forward. Freeman observed, 'We often hear it said by perplexed club-leaders, "I can manage the *girls* well enough, but my *workers* are so difficult"' [italics in original].²¹ Brian Harrison describes how in 1896 the Secretary of the Cleckheaton Girls' Friendly Society branch complained that volunteers, 'had little idea of the work-situation and courting customs of the mill girls they were trying to guide, and spoke of 'the utter inability of the majority of our Members to grasp our phraseology and modes of speech'.²² Middle-class authors struggled to find an appropriate tone with which to convey their sympathy and understanding of the girls' situations and their frustration with their naïve helpers; they tended to veer between ridicule and condescension.

Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs

In Leeds, each girls' club typically had between twenty and sixty members. Most catered only for girls who had left school. Clubs were open for one or more sessions each week and girls paid around a penny per week. Activities included a wide range of sewing (both utilitarian and decorative), drill, singing, recitation and dancing.²³ Unions or associations provided the opportunity for inter-club competitions and made it possible for clubs to meet together for classes or outside speakers, or socialising. The decision to be a 'union' rather than an 'association' had political undertones: some club leaders were alert to discussions around girls' exploitation by employers and the implementation and contravention of the Factory Acts and chose the name 'union'. Others were purely social and associational.

In 1902 Hilda Hargrove, daughter of Mill Hill Unitarian minister Charles Hargrove²⁴ and honorary secretary of the church's girls' club, proposed that girls' clubs in Leeds should form an association. Ellice Hopkins had founded an association in Sheffield in 1881 and other cities had also had such organisations for several years but Hilda only learned of the concept when holidaying in North Wales. There she had encountered a worker from Bristol's Union of Girls' Clubs and, she later reminisced, 'I determined to

21. F. L. Freeman, *Our Working-Girls and How to Help Them* (1908), p. 42.

22. B. Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920,' *Past and Present*, 61:1 (1973), p. 116.

23. H. M.F. Jones, 'Darning, Doylies and Dancing: the work of the Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs (1904-1913) 20 (3), *Women's History Review* (2011), 369-88.

24. Born into the Plymouth Brethren, Charles became a Roman Catholic priest when a young man. He was in his 30s when he married a teenager and joined the Unitarians. He became a major figure in the cultural life of Leeds in the early twentieth century and was president of the Thoresby Society from 1913-1915. His life is recounted by L. P. Jacks, *From Authority to Freedom* (1920).

do all that was in my power to found a similar organisation in Leeds'.²⁵ However, possibly less outgoing than her father, Hilda became one of two honorary secretaries rather than president.

Hilda set up a meeting which brought together a small group of women who exemplified the contemporary situation: some came from comparatively wealthy families and were engaged in careers in voluntary philanthropic endeavour whilst others were early professionals. They met at Dr Lucy Buckley's home in 1904.²⁶ She was a qualified physician who lived at 7 Woodhouse Square and had practices in Park Square and York Road, all of which she shared with Dr Ursula Chaplin. Her motivation appears to have been more political than some of her fellow committee members: she represented the Association on the Girls' Clubs Committee of the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW). This suggests she was keen to raise girls' consciousness around employment rights and even to encourage activism in terms of votes for women. Lucy Buckley became the first President of LAGC.

Quakers Margaret and Mary Harvey were also founder members. They were two of the children of local philanthropist William and temperance campaigner Anna²⁷, of Spring Bank House, Headingley. LAGC's first executive committee also included members of the Middleton and Lupton families who have become the focus of twenty-first century interest due to being the forbears of the Duchess of Cambridge (formerly Kate Middleton).²⁸

Girls' Club Members

As suggested, nineteenth-century literature provided melodramatic accounts of the antics of uninhibited girls' club members who were portrayed as frequently inebriated and who swore, fought and flirted.²⁹ The language used for the expression of shock at the roughness of working girls' behaviour arguably developed from the sensationalist literature of district visiting,

^{25.} Leeds and District Association of Girls' Clubs, *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, Nov. 1931.

^{26.} LAGC, *Minute Book*.

^{27.} Anna's work with the Women's Christian Temperance Union included promoting total abstinence among women and girls and visiting police cells on Sundays. See A. G. Burdett-Coutts, ed., *Women's Mission* (1893), p. 396.

^{28.} At least four members of the family including the duchess's great grandmother were involved in girls' clubs in Leeds. Like the Hargroves, they were Unitarians: LAGC reflected Leeds itself in its non-conformism.

^{29.} See, for example, W. Reason, 'Settlements and Recreations' in *University and Social Settlements* ed. by W. Reason (1898), p. 85 and E. J. Urwick, 'Conclusion' in *Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities*, ed. by E. J. Urwick (1904), p. 306.

created a decade earlier. While some journalists and essayists revelled in describing the uncontrolled working girls' activities, girls' club leaders displayed their own worldly, realistic understanding of the young women and their situations in their accounts. They established a rival narrative of firm, honest leaders able to communicate with the spirited young women and reach the 'substratum of good underlying their character'.³⁰ The girls' vigour and robustness were celebrated alongside the behavioural transformations achieved by clubs. The emphasis is significant: the nation had been shaken by the poor condition of the country's young men when many of those volunteering to fight in the Boer War had been found 'medically unfit'.³¹ Holloway comments that girls, as future mothers, would play a key part in the fitness of future generations.³² Their 'roughness' and crude behaviours were undesirable but were indicative of underlying rude health: the girls' energy offered valuable raw material to be brought under control by workers who both modelled and encouraged self-restraint. However, whether they were doing so consciously or unconsciously, such writers arguably encouraged the acceptance by their middle-class readership of the poverty endured by the girls; such energy and joy, if redirected successfully, would not present any threat to the status quo.

Despite anecdotal accounts of the positive impacts achieved by girls' clubs, discussions were ongoing concerning whether family life was disrupted by tempting girls away from their homes. In 1888 the *Manchester Weekly Times* reported a lively debate at Manchester Girls' Club Workers' Union concerning whether girls' clubs encouraged or discouraged home life: where would girls be if they were not attending a club?³³ In 1907, *The Times* commented, 'Women workers must fight against the modern tendency of living altogether out of doors, the frequenting of public houses and music-halls, and the feeling that one could not be content and happy at home.'³⁴ Given many workers' overcrowded living conditions, this seems to be a middle-class attitude. The question was not laid to rest in the nineteenth century or early twentieth. The matter remained contentious: Bernard Davies highlights a discussion in a 1943 paper by Political and Economic Planning (an independent research organisation) as to whether organised work with young people tended 'to disrupt family life'.³⁵

30. *M(anchester) W(eekly) T(imes)*, 28 Apr. 1888.

31. In Manchester, 75 per cent were rejected according to A. Davies, p. 347.

32. Holloway, p. 12.

33. *MWT*, 3 Nov. 1888.

34. *The Times*, 22 Oct. 1907.

35. B. Davies, 'From Voluntaryism to Welfare State: A History of the Youth Service', *England Volume 1 1939-1979* (Leicester, 1999), p. 26.

In fact, most girls' clubs did not seek to attract the very poorest young women: they recruited those who were able to afford to spend their earnings on leisure. In 1908 Flora Freeman observed that girls were suspicious where subscriptions were too low: they suspected 'kidding' or 'getting at them for religion'.³⁶ LAGC had no affiliated clubs with addresses in the notorious local slums but the association always faced financial difficulties and the executive committee sought sponsors for classes which required competitors to purchase expensive materials.³⁷

The number of shocking accounts of girls' behaviour diminished during the early twentieth century and a different picture of club members during the First World War emerges from LAGC archives. At the centre of the woollen industry, Leeds was important in the production of fabric for uniforms. Club attendance was reduced as working hours increased and factories and mills recruited large numbers; St. Jude's G. C. members were 'nearly all ... workers in clothing factories which are working overtime on Government orders' and struggled to attend. Like many clubs, in 1916 St John's Club on Sweet Street West did not re-open for the winter 'owing to the darkness of the streets, and the fact that many of the members are working late'.³⁸ After the war, it took a few months for rooms to become available again, helpers to be recruited and members to be released from over-time. The number of affiliated clubs decreased. In 1922 the LAGC Executive Committee complained about poor numbers attending cookery and laundry demonstrations:

Unless more girls will undertake to go (and go when they promise to do so) we cannot repeat these classes during the coming winter.³⁹

As a somewhat punitive response to poor attendance at cookery classes, the committee declined to book Roundhay Road swimming baths for the summer season. The following year, lack of entries for the competition was attributed to the ongoing lack of helpers who were encouraged to come forward as 'teaching [girls] the useful domestic arts ... is a useful asset to the city'. Thus girls' clubs had a role to play in the post-war re-domestication of women.⁴⁰

The rhetoric employed by the speakers addressing LAGC annual meetings shifted but self control remained a theme. In 1921 the Deputy Lord Mayor 'appealed to the girls to be more self-reliant ... and observe

36. Freeman, p. 12. Flora Freeman worked with girls in London and Brighton.

37. LAGC, *Minute Book*.

38. LDAGC, *Twelfth Annual Report*, Nov. 1916.

39. LDAGC, *Eighteenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1922.

40. LDAGC, *Nineteenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1923.

discipline'⁴¹ but in 1928 Mrs Schroeder said, 'the young girl of today likes more liberty, and wishes to emancipate herself from authority, but she must learn to control her efforts, and to realise that her liberty has to be paid for by Service'.⁴² The young women of the post-war period appear to have been less enthusiastic than earlier generations about spending their spare time honing their domestic skills in the face of alternative forms of entertainment. The popularity of the recently formed Girl Guides also had an impact on membership and on the numbers of people coming forward as helpers.⁴³ In 1927 LAGC acknowledged this, noting, that 'the Guide movement is ... well established'. The Girls' Friendly Society was also seen as a rival with its annual competitions.⁴⁴

During the 1930s concerns arose about the isolation faced by girls who had been relocated from slum clearance areas to new housing estates such as Meanwood. They wished to socialise with their friends but could not afford to travel back and forth to the town centre to go to the cinema and dances or socialise in their former communities. In 1937 the matter received substantial press coverage in the *Yorkshire Post* and *News Chronicle* under headlines such as, 'Lonely girls on new estates' and 'Housing estates mean loneliness for girls'.⁴⁵ The association's organiser Kathleen Jackson wanted to set up clubs where girls could 'dance, attend physical training classes, do handwork and meet other girls' and once established, social events could be held 'to which the girls can bring their boy friends'.⁴⁶ She added that churches lacked the money and facilities to meet the need and that too few community centres were available.

Club Activities

During the early twentieth century the activities offered to LAGC club members generally included needlework, cookery, dancing and drill. Some clubs offered home nursing, elocution, drama or singing. Others provided more specialist creative activities such as millinery and leather-working: volunteers able to teach novel activities were valued. In 1914 Sheepscar Guild offered 'six lectorettes ... dealing with points of etiquette [which]

41. LDAGC, *Seventeenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1921.

42. LDAGC, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, Nov. 1928.

43. C. Oldfield, "'The worst girl has at least 5 per cent good in her': The work of the Girl Guides and the YMCA with "difficult girls" during the inter-war period' in *Essays in the History of Community and Youth Work*, ed. by R. Gilchrist, T. Jeffs and J. Spence, (Leicester, 2001), pp. 135-47. The Girl Guides were established formally in 1910.

44. LDAGC, *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, Nov. 1927.

45. 'Housing Estates Mean Loneliness for Girls', *N(ews) C(hronicle)*, 29 Jan. 1937; 'Lonely Girls on New Estates', *Yorkshire Post*, 30 Jan. 1937.

46. *NC*, 29 Jan. 1937.

were listened to with great interest, and were often followed by a lively discussion'.⁴⁷ Sadly the archives provide no further details concerning the working girls' response to the lecturettes on etiquette.

Early LAGC programmes show that needlework included both the utilitarian (darning and using the 'good' sections of worn-out garments to produce new ones) and decorative: competition classes extended from re-footing socks and converting a man's shirt into a child's dress to embroidering tray-cloths. There were intrinsic class connotations associated with the different activities: working-class women might be expected to engage in utilitarian sewing whilst the middle classes indulged in decorative work.⁴⁸ At the clubs, were middle-class helpers imposing class-based notions on working class girls by encouraging functional sewing? Were aspirational club members demanding that helpers share their artistic and craft skills? The production of embroidered runners and tray cloths is indicative of women with leisure time and many working-class homes displayed decorated runners and doilies with pride as an indicator of respectability.⁴⁹

As well as 'brightening' and 'cheering' girls' lives, clubs hoped to 'elevate' them. Overtly religious activities were not popular although Joyce Goodman notes that at one club in Manchester, once girls had become 'quieter, more polite and more modest', they were 'attentive to the Bible instruction'.⁵⁰ Some Leeds clubs including Hunslet Unitarian G. C., St. Wilfred's G.C., Harehills and St. Gabriel's Guild, Woodhouse required members to attend Sunday Schools whilst others ended the evening with prayers but few other faith-based activities are mentioned.

LAGC's creation was mainly intended to provide scope to hold inter-club competitions and these drew large crowds, particularly before the First World War. In 1909 500 seats were insufficient for the evening meeting. Olive Middleton reported on the 'marked improvement in the behaviour of the audience', presumably in comparison with previous years.⁵¹ Competing not only promoted healthy rivalry but also contributed to the development of self restraint as girls learned to exhibit appropriate behaviour when they won or lost. Helpers were required to impose rigid sets of rules. Classes such as needlework were for individuals but singing, dancing and drill were for groups who were coached. The 1908 drill competition in Leeds presented judges with a conundrum: wealthier clubs produced better entries because they were able to employ trained, experienced teachers but it seemed unfair

47. LDAGC, *Tenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1914.'

48. R. Parker, *The Subversive Stitch* (2002).

49. See Jones, pp. 369-88.

50. J. Goodman, 'Leisure for Girls: Girls' Clubs in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester', *History of Education Bulletin*, 60 (1997).

51. LAGC, *Minute Book*.

to penalise untrained teachers who 'did their best'.⁵² The enthusiasm for drill is sometimes interpreted as symbolic of an era of colonialism and associated with militarism but it could be seen as the aerobics of its day: rhythmic physical actions embodying a visible yet respectable demonstration of the girls' overall health. Both drill and dance offered means of channelling girls' excess energies constructively and could be demonstrated effectively in public competitions.

During the First World War some activities became part of the war effort. LAGC's 1914 *Annual Report* commented: 'We hope that the experience gained by competitors in former years in the knitting of socks, coats, and caps, and in the making of clothing of all kinds, will prove its value now'. Clubs sewed clothing and sent parcels to soldiers and sailors but Leeds Parish Church Girls' Club members turned their skills to making sandbags.⁵³ Curiously Sheepscar Guild was engaged in dressing dolls for girls' schools in China.⁵⁴ Clubs played an important role in providing 'hours of distraction and cheerful companionship' whilst homes were 'filled with anxiety or sorrow'. The stoical attitude was summed up as follows: 'We cannot always be on a stretch of self-sacrifice and self-neglect, and games and music and dancing still have their necessary place at the end of a day's work'.⁵⁵ During the war, the annual competition was scaled down and concentrated on relevant areas such as cookery, first aid and laundry work. After the war, activities kept pace with current developments. The competition classes extended to include photography, toy making, poster making, poetry and short story writing. Morris dancing gave way to country and folk dancing. Drill's popularity was eclipsed during the 1930s when keep fit was introduced, reflecting the Europe-wide pre-occupation with health and fitness.

Working conditions and political issues

In London in 1898, Emmeline Pethick raised the question of girls' working conditions. Many girls' club organisers around the country shared her concerns, interesting themselves in the contravention of regulations concerning hours, wages and working conditions but, as Pethick noted, 'it was not easy to arouse [the girls'] interest in these industrial questions, for [they] are fatalistic'. She found it difficult to engage them in discussions of

52. Ibid.

53. LDAGC, *Twelfth Annual Report*, Nov. 1916.

54. LDAGC, *Tenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1914.

55. Ibid.

the laws ‘passed for their protection’.⁵⁶ Lily Montagu raised awareness of the conditions faced, in particular, by young Jewish women in London. She was to foster interest in ‘the industrial question’ as for her, the usefulness of clubs could be measured in direct proportion to their impact on girls’ working lives.⁵⁷ Many organisers were convinced of the moral and social importance of developing a sense of communal obligation – of *esprit de corps* – among girls of all classes and encouraged the idea of working together to raise issues. Indirectly this would function as a preparation for suffrage and lead them to take a greater interest in political and economic affairs although the zeal did not present any fundamental challenge to the economic system which created oppression: the leaders and helpers were too embedded in their privileged class positions. They demonstrated dedication in improving aspects of the status quo with the best interests of their girls in mind.

Club associations and unions generally aimed to encourage joint activities and facilitate the opening of new clubs in areas lacking provision. Some also included overt aims specifically focussing on members’ welfare.⁵⁸ However LAGC had no such stated objectives: its aims concentrated on leisure and social activities. Both Pethick and Montagu found that leaders and helpers needed to be dedicated and persuasive to generate girls’ interest in ‘the industrial question’. Where club helpers were neutral on the matter, interest was unlikely to be aroused. LAGC’s minutes from November 1907 suggest that Dr Lucy Buckley was concerned about girls’ welfare and made contact with Lily Montagu, inviting her to travel north to address a meeting.⁵⁹

During the early twentieth century, faced with the campaign for women’s suffrage, girls’ clubs had to decide how to deal with requests from activists to address members. In June 1910 Mary Fielden, the Yorkshire Organiser of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and an active suffragette⁶⁰, asked LAGC whether she ‘might address the elder Club girls on the suffrage question’.⁶¹ The Executive Committee decided that the Association ‘could take no part whatever in political or controversial movements’ but nonetheless provided Miss Fielden with club secretaries’ addresses, delegating the decision of whether to arrange talks to individual

56. E. Pethick, ‘Working Girls’ Clubs’ in *University and Social Settlements*, ed. by W. Reason (1898), p. 105.

57. J. Spence, ‘Working for Jewish Girls: Lily Montagu, girls’ clubs and industrial reform 1890–1914,’ *Women’s History Review*, 13(3) (2004).

58. For example, the Association of Working Girls’ Clubs for Bristol and District’s objects included, ‘To circulate information about (a) Homes and other institutions helpful to girls; (b) Poor-law, Factory Acts and condition of women’s labour’ see A.M. Beddoe, ‘Paragraphs’, *The Englishwoman’s Review*, 15 Jan. 1897.

59. LAGC, *Minute Book*.

60. See J. Liddington, *Rebel Girls* (2006), p. 207.

61. LAGC, *Minute Book*.

clubs.⁶² Seeking to protect the organisation from accusations of involvement in radical activities which might put their income from subscribers and donors at risk, the committee agreed to respond to any future requests from political bodies in the same way. However, by handing over the address list, they did not deny club members the opportunity to hear Miss Fielden at a time when suffragettes were attracting local and national headlines. They also ensured that individual clubs retained self-governance and continued to be in a position to take their own decisions.

The association was unable to sustain its apolitical stance during the months immediately before the First World War when Leeds experienced a strike by corporation employees which assumed national importance. Girls' clubs' workers' and members' families doubtless were involved on both sides. The 1914 *Annual Report* hinted this and lamented the lack of street lighting which had disrupted clubs, but also suggested wider tensions in the throwaway comment:

in consequence of the general disapproval felt by the Clubs of the action of the Workers' Educational Association at the time of the municipal strike, the LDAGC has discontinued its affiliation to that Society.⁶³

The WEA presumably supported the Leeds Trade Council and unions in the strike but the nature of the 'action' is not known.⁶⁴ Although LDAGC publicly espoused an apolitical position, real participative democracy existed in clubs through the involvement of the girls in the planning and delivery of activities via members' committees. For example in 1914 'six of the elder girls' were on the committee of New Wortley Girls' Club, and St. Gabriel's Guild, Woodhouse was 'managed by a committee of senior and junior members, elected annually'.⁶⁵ Maude Stanley regarded a girls' committee as 'a very important element' but acknowledged that the idea was unfamiliar to the girls and progress slow. The committee members, she explained:

Should undertake every evening the refreshment bar, buying the food and keeping the accounts; ... give out the games, see that the new members are introduced to other girls, and that no one sits neglected by herself'. Committees offered scope for learning 'business habits', 'punctuality' and the girls should produce regular minutes and reports.⁶⁶

62. Ibid.

63. LDAGC, *Tenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1914.

64. Email correspondence (2009) with M. Chase, University of Leeds, on 'WEA and Leeds municipal strike'.

65. LDAGC, *Tenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1914.

66. M. Stanley, 'The Girl in the Corner' in *University and Social Settlements* ed. by W. Reason (1898), pp. 44-45.

Indeed Stanley thought that 'a girls' committee could really manage the club entirely alone' and only the hours they worked prevented members from taking on more.⁶⁷

By the 1940s, LAGC would only accept clubs which had established members' committees. A club without a committee which sought affiliation would be offered advice and support to create one. This reflected the national position in the sector which was, 'a matter of pride': LAGC noted, 'The National Association ... is one of the few national youth organisations in this country in which government by the members themselves plays an important part throughout the movement'.⁶⁸ Neither uniformed youth movements nor local education authorities' clubs placed similar emphasis on fostering and formalising young people's involvement. Huddersfield Education Committee was even described as being 'not enamoured' of members' committees.⁶⁹ Later, when funding was channelled via local authorities, there was a significant negative impact on young people's involvement in running their clubs. The growth of youth work as a profession ironically saw a diminution in members' participation in the organisation and management of their clubs. By the 1940s, concepts including the training of workers, the availability of central funding and state interest in the organisation of young people's leisure were established but members effectively had lost ownership of their clubs.

The Impact of the First World War

Changes occurred in terms of women's roles during the First World War and hitherto accepted norms of behaviour were transformed. The skills which the girls acquired through involvement in club committees and those developed by women philanthropists through their charitable work and campaigning were to form a significant foundation for them taking on many roles previously associated with men. The nature of young women's employment also altered. Munitions work required ever-increasing numbers and, following the introduction of conscription in March 1916, women took men's places in a range of occupations. These offered the sense of contributing to the war effort as well as higher wages and more freedom than domestic service: a greater sense of identification with the young men at the front could be gained from supplying them with armaments

^{67.} Ibid.

^{68.} Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs and Mixed Clubs, *Annual Report*, 1947-48, p. 4.

^{69.} West Riding Association of Girls' Clubs. *Minutes of Executive Committee: Secretary's Report on Huddersfield Service of Youth Clubs*, 15 Mar. 1947. WRAGC was an umbrella organisation established during the late 1930s by the National Council of Girls' Clubs.

or uniforms than from working as a servant. In Leeds, living conditions became more difficult. Girls' late hours of work and the restrictions on street lighting led to some clubs closing and others meeting (without much success) on Saturday afternoons.⁷⁰ Meeting rooms were given over to war-related activities so some clubs lost their premises. Previous wars had not had the same impact on Britain's civilian population who faced food rationing and aerial bombing as well as hitherto unimaginable numbers of dead and injured.

The war exacerbated the problems recruiting volunteers. Attempts were made to attract additional helpers by suggesting that helping at a girls' club contributed directly to the war effort: 'We ... hope that many ladies will give up one night a week, which they would in other years have devoted without compunction to some form of amusement, to helping in a girls' club, and so bringing healthy recreation and interest into lives whose need is greater now than ever before.'⁷¹ However the appeals do not appear to have led to the recruitment of sufficient long-term volunteers and in 1916 the *Annual Report* commented, 'Many of the ladies who formerly taught [singing, drilling and dancing] are now fully occupied with some form of war-work, and it is a very difficult problem to find volunteers to take their place'.⁷²

During the war restrictions on what middle-class young women, including the girls' club helpers, could see and do diminished. Those who volunteered as nurses, more used to the genteel niceties of middle-class society, now attended to the bloody and basic needs of maimed and injured men. Many men who survived the First World War had been injured or developed nervous illnesses which hitherto, Barbara Caine indicates, had been identified 'specifically' with women.⁷³ Most women had not seen or experienced men in this way before. Inevitably there was an impact on relations between the genders. The men returning from war were not necessarily impressed with the changes they perceived and tensions emerged between the ex-servicemen and the young women who had worked long hours in hitherto unfamiliar occupations. Writing in 1923 about the war's impact on Leeds, William Scott quoted soldiers who commented on girls' 'over-dress or under-dress, their giddiness and flippancy, the frequent veneer of affected masculinity'. They were 'not favourably impressed with either the tone or the manners of the majority of girls "they left behind"'. Scott added, 'The development of womanhood, in the hands of those who

^{70.} LDAGC, *Twelfth Annual Report*, Nov. 1916.

^{71.} LDAGC, *Tenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1914.

^{72.} LDAGC, *Twelfth Annual Report*, Nov. 1916.

^{73.} B. Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford, 1997), p. 180.

have professed to be its leaders, does not strike them as being on the right lines. They preferred the pre-war feminine atmosphere'.⁷⁴ By 1923 many women had lost their jobs, making way for the returning men. Holloway indicates that women were not willing to return to 'jobs in domestic service, laundry work, dressmaking, millinery and tailoring'. She traces some public manifestations of discontent: whilst many were not necessarily sorry to leave physically demanding occupations and long shifts, they were not always happy to return to pre-war models of domesticity.⁷⁵

Girls' Club Members – and Boys

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, girls' clubs offered a single sex environment which the organisers considered desirable on a range of grounds. Mixing was associated with risks of immorality and girls' reputations could be compromised: their purity needed to be protected. In the early 1800s in Huddersfield, nearly 40 per cent of brides had been pregnant and rates of illegitimacy had been high throughout the country⁷⁶ but the second half of the nineteenth century had seen campaigns against perceived depravity alongside a decrease in rates of marriage precipitated by pregnancy. For campaigners, this was ongoing work which required vigilance and determination. When London-based worker Eleanor Gregory took a girls' club on holiday in 1895, she made two rules: 'to be in every night at eight o'clock; and ... not to speak to the soldiers'.⁷⁷ In 1904 Urwick wrote of the 'remedy' of a 'hasty marriage' following a girl's 'disgrace'⁷⁸ and in 1908 Freeman's book *Our Working Girls and How to Help Them*, culminated in a sudden and significant paragraph indicating that sexual matters were being discussed by girls' club members:

Girls should be taught that destruction of life in its early stages is murder ... [they] hear this sin made a matter of conversation at their places of work, and are informed about it ... by the married women who work with them.⁷⁹

^{74.} W. H. Scott, *Leeds in the Great War* (Leeds, 1923), p. 70.

^{75.} Holloway, p. 147.

^{76.} J. Stead, 'Changing the Pattern: Everyday Life 1800-1900,' in *Huddersfield – A Most Handsome Town*, ed. by E.A. Hilary Haigh (Huddersfield, 1992), p. 639.

^{77.} E. C. Gregory, 'A Club Holiday,' *The Monthly Packet*, 1 Sept. 1895.

^{78.} E. J. Urwick, 'Conclusion,' in *Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities*, ed. by E.J. Urwick (1904), p. 303.

^{79.} Freeman, p. 135. The Offences Against the Person Act 1861 made the deliberate procuring of miscarriage illegal.

She deemed the matter a 'moral evil' but offered scant guidance to any worker encountering the situation (some must have been horrified) and did not mention that abortion was also illegal. It is hardly remarkable that many girls' club workers saw the fostering of self restraint which would protect purity, alongside a strengthened sense of morality among their members, as vital (and preferable to any form of education on such matters) and it is equally unsurprising that they generally enforced separation. Ignorance was rife and ongoing: during the 1920s Mary Welch learned about 'sex and marriage' from the married women she worked alongside: for her, the topics had been addressed neither at home nor school.⁸⁰

Some workers were not entirely opposed to fraternisation, provided appropriate preparation and supervision were guaranteed. Emmeline Pethick held that debates around trades union issues with a local boys' club had proved 'very interesting': 'the girls and boys appreciate this opportunity of discussing together'.⁸¹ However in 1904, Montagu criticised mixed clubs based on experience which showed that, for young people aged between fourteen and eighteen, they 'do not achieve the best results'. She suggested that the failure of such endeavours was due to girls' tendency to be interested in the boys 'only as potential bridegrooms' and added, 'as a rule girls run after boys and in due course the boys turn and run after girls'. 'Flirting', she commented, 'is the main object of [girls'] intercourse'.⁸² Mixed activities could be scheduled occasionally after members (both female and male) had been trained in 'responsibility and self control', although it is interesting to note that only women were involved in inculcating such behaviour in both genders.⁸³

Before 1920 LAGC archives make no mention of mixing although some clubs held 'socials' or 'open nights' to which 'friends' could be brought. In 1921 one girls' club held a very successful whist drive and dance in collaboration with the boys' club, raising the considerable sum of £22 in aid of St Dunstan's.⁸⁴ In 1929 the recently established Belgrave Girls' Club was regularly 'at home' to the boys' club, suggesting the move to mixing was gaining pace.⁸⁵ LAGC's affiliated clubs were mainly linked with churches and chapels, so the archives do not include information from clubs without religious affiliation where mixing could have been more established.

80. Todd, p. 155. She quotes Mary Welch who was a leather worker.

81. Pethick, p. 239.

82. L. Montagu, 'The Girl in the Background' in *Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities* ed. by E. J. Urwick (1904), p. 239.

83. *Ibid*, p. 251.

84. LDAGC, *Seventeenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1921. St Dunstan's is now known as Blind Veterans U.K.

85. LDAGC, *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report*, Nov. 1929.

Between the Wars

In contrast to the ex-soldiers quoted by Scott, Professor John Strong presented a positive view of young women when he addressed the LAGC annual competition in 1924 concerning progression ‘in modern times’. He commented that girls’ ‘Initiative ... resource and ... attitude towards life and its problems [do] not make the girl of today one wit less charming than the girls of the Victorian age’.⁸⁶ His words conveyed a sense of change and acknowledged the impact of the recent war. The content of speeches to LAGC reflected shifting values, expectations and standards: girls’ club members of the 1920s were living in a different society to that in which their mothers had grown up and there were changes in ways in which men and women related to one another. Albeit limited, women’s franchise had been secured and the period saw the waning of the more radical thread which had characterised earlier girls’ club work.

The National Organisation of Girls’ Clubs (NOGC) reflected the decline and ‘became more limited in its interventions with regard to girls, and to gender roles in general’.⁸⁷ Michael Butterfield and Jean Spence trace the NOGC’s history from its foundation in 1911. Before the First World War there had been a gradual move towards co-operating with boys’ clubs although establishing mixed clubs was less accepted, as exemplified by LAGC. The topic was ‘laid to rest’ when the war started and attention turned back to conditions of female labour, a concern which lasted until the war ended.⁸⁸ After the war, discussions around the desirability of mixing in clubs returned to the agenda. By the 1920s, ‘the single sex environment was increasingly associated with restrictions for women and Victorian prudery’ and women themselves felt they were ready to work alongside men on equal terms.⁸⁹ Not all men welcomed this development and in 1926 the National Association of Boys’ Clubs (NABC) declined to co-operate with the NOGC in forming a single national umbrella organisation. Whilst women were moving towards collaboration and bringing girls together with boys, boys’ clubs’ ethos was strengthening and becoming increasingly entrenched in its separation. The NABC did not consider that bringing boys and girls together was their responsibility.⁹⁰

^{86.} LDAGC, *Twentieth Annual Report*, Nov. 1924.

^{87.} A. Turnbull, ‘Gendering Young People – Work, Leisure and Girls’ Clubs: The work of the National Organisation of Girls’ Clubs and its successors 1911–1961,’ in *Essays in the History of Community and Youth Work*, ed. by R. Gilchrist, T. Jeffs and J. Spence, (2001), p. 97.

^{88.} Butterfield and Spence, p. 71.

^{89.} *Ibid*, p. 75.

^{90.} *Ibid*, pp. 88–89.

During the 1920s the popularity of volunteering at girls' clubs decreased. In 1923 LAGC attributed a decrease in competition entries 'entirely to lack of helpers'; attendance by girls themselves continued to be satisfactory.⁹¹ Fewer women were seeking voluntary outlets for their abilities and the era of philanthropic endeavour was passing. An additional explanation may lie in the increase in alternative ways of spending leisure time including going to the cinema which attracted higher numbers each year from the 1920s until late 1940s.⁹² Nonetheless girls' clubs still had an important role to play, according to Mrs H. J. Carpenter who addressed LDAGC's 26th Annual Meeting in 1930 and suggested:

One of the chief objects of a Club should be to teach the members the right use of their leisure time ... and as the daily work [is] often so mechanical and monotonous, the evening spent at the Club is so very important in helping to develop both the mind and body in the right direction.⁹³

Mrs Carpenter referred to both shorter working hours and unemployment, showing that girls' clubs were developing a new dimension during the Depression and subsequent years of economic difficulty.

In 1935 Mrs Cole, the Clubs Expansion Organiser for the National Council of Girls' Clubs (NCGC, formerly NOGC) addressed the LAGC. She 'stressed' that, 'Clubs were not to be only regarded as play centres or a place for cheap amusements, but to make the club a real training for life and to the maintaining of relationships with the World, the Home, other Clubs and with the National Movement.'⁹⁴ LAGC voted to affiliate and now had the chance to play a national role. The following year Mrs Cole reported that £450 had been granted by the King George Silver Jubilee Trust Fund to the NCGC 'to develop Girls' Club work in Yorkshire': Yorkshire now had its first paid youth workers.⁹⁵ A development organiser had been appointed to work across the county. LAGC was asked to administer the fund and to form a girls' council which would extend participation beyond club level.⁹⁶ The following year several associations including Leeds came together and created regional Yorkshire Association of Girls' Clubs (YAGC), mirroring the situation in other regions.

^{91.} LDAGC, *Nineteenth Annual Report*, Nov. 1923.

^{92.} House of Commons, *A Century of Change: Trends in the UK since 1900. Statistics Research Paper 99/111*, (21 Dec. 1999).

^{93.} LDAGC, *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report*, Nov. 1930.

^{94.} LDAGC, *Minute Book*.

^{95.} LDAGC, Minutes of 32nd AGM, 1936.

^{96.} *Ibid.*

The increased focus on girls' use of leisure was associated with the decrease in consideration of employment issues. Concerns about workers' welfare were not coupled with any activities linked to the NCGC's overt aim:

to undertake investigations and to arrange deputations to government departments and public bodies such as the local education authority, in connection with social or industrial amelioration, and to bring the club movement into closer touch with such bodies.⁹⁷

Turnbull sees the lack of activism as testament to the degree to which girls' work had parted from its radical roots. Once women's franchise had been secured, there was no further shared vision amongst activists. Women 'felt' themselves to be freer than earlier generations but Caine suggests this was to some extent illusory: limitations had evolved rather than declined.⁹⁸ In Leeds, girls' clubs focussed on 'fun and friendship', as Eveline Hazelden told the 31st Annual Meeting in 1935, adding that , 'A club has served its purpose if the girls can say, with real feeling – We have ENJOYED ourselves' [capitals in original].⁹⁹ Leaders were less preoccupied with temperance and morality in the light of shifted societal norms and club activities were less focussed on preparation for future domesticity.

Changes in girls' clubs mirrored those in society overall. Young women came into contact with young men at work particularly in large retail and industrial operations. However manufacturing-based environments tended to enshrine greater sexual division owing to occupations' gendered nature. Looking at gender relations in workplaces, Todd notes the segregation in the inter-war period resulting from the sexual division of labour, was due both to the gendering of occupations and the policies of large employers. Domestic service's ongoing unpopularity, she suggests, was due partly to its limited potential for meeting future partners.¹⁰⁰

As mixing became more acceptable to wider society, more girls' clubs opened their doors to boys. In 1943 Josephine Macalister Brew, who worked for the National Association of Girls' and Mixed Clubs, wrote, 'Opportunities for girls and boys to grow to understand one another and work together are few. The purpose of the club cannot be fully attained unless girls and boys learn together [about] the individual and social responsibilities of adult life'.¹⁰¹ The increasing acceptance of mixing was epitomised by a new youth centre in Shipley, Yorkshire which opened six evenings per week during the

97. Turnbull, p. 102.

98. Caine, p. 174-76.

99. LDAGC, Minutes of 31st AGM, 1935.

100. Todd, p. 154-56.

101. J. M. Brew and others, *Clubs and Club Making*, (1943), p. 16.

early 1940s: four mixed, one for girls only and one for boys only. However many of its activities appear more likely to have appealed to lads: physical training, boxing and Morse although ballroom dancing was also listed.¹⁰² Two months later, the boys' parliament was already 'shouldering much of the responsibility' and it was 'hoped' to develop a girls' committee. Boys outnumbered girls by 172 to 100.¹⁰³ This example epitomises the changes in work with young women and suggests the birth of a new form of marginalisation, where both boys and girls attended sessions but boys' needs and preferences were privileged and prioritised.

The state was becoming increasingly involved in work with young people. Davies traces the developments from the 1917 Juvenile Organisation Committee, created in the light of wartime conditions including a juvenile crime wave, which 'first drew the voluntary youth organisations into a policy-making relationship with the state'.¹⁰⁴ Two Education Acts (1918, 1921) gave local authorities the power to establish youth committees where voluntary bodies had not taken the initiative, and to spend public money on youth facilities. This shows the importance attached by the state to questions concerning young people's use of their leisure time. Some voluntary organisations were suspicious about state involvement possibly leading to an element of compulsion as was happening in mainland European countries such as Germany.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the increased involvement of the state heralded access to public funds for voluntary organisations which had relied hitherto on fund-raising activities, donations and subscriptions. As noted earlier, NOGC established county organisations as a conduit between themselves and local associations like LAGC and thence to grassroots clubs and vice versa. In 1941 formalised professional training courses comprising university diplomas in social science and certificates in club work were launched for Yorkshire's women workers. Leeds volunteered to pilot 'a first experimental year's training course' with theoretical work delivered by the university's extension scheme.

During the Second World War, girls' club leaders saw continued value in both single sex and mixed settings although the young people themselves favoured mixing. However, no national organisation existed to service the needs of the increasing number of mixed clubs. Ultimately the National Association of Girls' Clubs (formerly the NOGC, NCGC) instituted a committee of enquiry. The resultant report led ultimately to the organisation reconstituting as the National Association of Girls' and Mixed Clubs in 1944.

^{102.} Yorkshire Association of Girls' Clubs, *Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting*, 3 Jan. 1941.

^{103.} LAGC, *Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting*, 21 Mar. 1941.

^{104.} B. Davies, p. 15.

^{105.} *Ibid.*, p. 17.

It was, as Butterfield and Spence assert, 'pressure from local associations and clubs which drove the changes. Young people mainly wanted to associate in mixed clubs and it was necessary for the relevant organisations to adapt to changing realities'.¹⁰⁶ In Leeds, LAGC members were positive about mixed clubs and voted against changing the organisation's name to 'Leeds Association of Girls and Mixed Clubs' in favour of the less cumbersome 'Leeds Association of Youth Clubs'. However, this was a proposal which could not be acted upon owing to the continued existence of the separate NABC which expressed strong feelings on the matter. Effectively the will of Leeds's youth club members was over-ruled by the men of the NABC.

Conclusion

The first decades of the Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs provide a case study of an era when single gender work established a foundation for the development of youth work as a profession in the future. LAGC's strength lay in its collaborative approach to the establishment of the organisation: unlike many initiatives, it did not rely on the charisma of a single individual but rather drew on the skills of a large number of women. It also serves as an illustration of the change in terms of middle-class women's engagement with the public sphere at a time when unpaid work was giving way to the professions.

Girls' clubs were also evolving. Girls' clubs' history shows a number of phases, from the days when newspapers and periodicals reported tales of girls who were gradually civilised by dedicated women workers through to the time, some forty or fifty years later, when young men and women looked ahead to the changes which would be wrought by the end of the Second World War and the promises of the future including those enshrined in the creation of the welfare state. Early leaders had raised concerns about working conditions and sought to ensure clubs were staffed with women endowed with skills appropriate to the work in which they were engaged. Concerns about the necessity of protecting girls' purity underpinned the work of many clubs. Yet particularly during the days before the cinema and radio began to provide alternative forms of entertainment, girls valued the opportunity to socialise with one another and to learn different crafts and skills.

The First World War generated changes in women's role in society and led to acceptance of informal contact between young men and young women. The young people who attended mixed youth clubs during the inter-war period generally regarded single gender groups as old fashioned. Although uniformed organisations retained their single sex ethos, mixing was

¹⁰⁶ Butterfield and Spence, p. 88.

positively welcomed by girls' club members. The majority of women involved in the creation of mixed clubs appear to have envisaged the construction of equality rather than the speedy eclipse of the long history of work by women with girls as men and boys assumed central positions. Meanwhile boys' clubs remained staunchly single sex. Fifty years after Montagu wrote *The Girl in the Background*, the girl's granddaughters effectively returned to the margins of work.

After two generations of young women had attended girls' clubs, they were transformed into mixed clubs or closed, mainly because their time had passed and society had changed. In the 1940s, girls saw the move to mixing as positive as demonstrated by LAGC members. Some women workers later expressed retrospective misgivings but they did not generally predict either the way in which girls' preferred activities would be marginalised or the fact that key posts would be taken over largely by men. Their vision consisted of clubs which epitomised equality and striving in partnership; few people anticipated the reality of girls' clubs being gradually converted into boys' clubs with some attendant young women. The need for single sex work was 'rediscovered' only in the 1970s. Feminists found that the prevalence of mixed work had led to the marginalisation of girls, many of whom no longer attended clubs. Women workers had become a small minority of staff within the increasingly well-established professional field, now located mainly within local authorities. Members' committees had died out as paid workers managed programmes. Nonetheless, throughout this period, and despite a series of name changes, Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs continued its existence in the voluntary sector, bringing together diverse clubs across the region.¹⁰⁷

Huddersfield

¹⁰⁷. LAGC's direct descendent organisation, The Youth Association, celebrated its centenary in 2004 and continues to work with young people across the region.

