

**THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S
TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT: TACKLING
THE SERVANT PROBLEM, 1914-1945**

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The Central Committee on Women's Training & Employment: tackling the servant problem, 1914-1945

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Abstract

Domestic service dominated women's lives in the first half of the twentieth century. The largest sector of female employment, paradoxically there was a perceived servant problem. Defined as a shortage of female applicants, it generated much debate both within and outside Parliament.

One potential answer was training unemployed women to fill domestic service vacancies. To this end, successive Governments sanctioned and funded training centres, operating alongside State-run Employment Exchanges. This aspect of domestic service has been largely neglected by historians, yet it formed a vital component of Government policy, receiving active support from successive ministries.

This thesis focuses on the semi-autonomous organisation administering those training centres – the Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment (CCWTE). Operational from 1914 until 1940 in a predominantly male-ordered society, the female-run CCWTE played a central role in State unemployment programmes. Yet, the CCWTE gradually became confined to domestic service training, being forced to abandon its other courses. This thesis seeks to show how this narrowing of opportunities was entrenched in traditional views of women's place in the home – albeit someone else's home. The male-dominated Government's aim was twofold – reduce the number of unemployed female claimants, fill domestic service vacancies. This aim ignored a fundamental element of the domestic service – its unpopularity among workers. Without addressing root issues of status and conditions, the training scheme to solve the servant problem was doomed to failure.

This thesis explores the impact of the CCWTE's training work in relation to the servant problem, against constraints imposed by economic and political changes. Also included is an investigation of the role of official migration schemes. Since the servant problem was entwined with broader issues of employment and unemployment, this thesis affords insights into attitudes towards the female workforce, often manifested in gender and class bias, discriminatory practices and restricted opportunities.

Introduction

November 19th [1929] – Our Vicar’s Wife calls this afternoon. [...] Talk about the Riviera, the new waist-line, choir-practice, the servant question, and Ramsay MacDonald.

December 27th [1929] – Another children’s party this afternoon [...] Mothers stand about in black hats and talk to one another about gardens, books and difficulty of getting servants to stay in the country.

March 4th [1930] – Ethel [...] gives notice. Cook says this is so unsettling, she thinks she had better go too. Despair invades me.

August 3rd [1930] – Cook says that unless help is provided in the kitchen they cannot possibly manage all the work. I think this unreasonable, and quite unnecessary expense. Am also aware that there is no help to be obtained at this time of year. Am disgusted at hearing myself reply in hypocritically pleasant tone of voice: Very well, I will see what can be done. Servants, in truth, make cowards of us all.¹

The diary entries of E M Delafield’s *Provincial Lady* may have been fictional, but concern over getting and keeping servants was all too real. Domestic service dominated many women’s lives in the first half of the twentieth century. For some, the real life counterparts of the fictional *Provincial Lady*, it ensured that they lived a more or less leisured life, free from the burdens of housework. For others – the Ethels and Cooks – it meant shouldering those very burdens.

This thesis focuses on one aspect of domestic service – the servant problem – and attempts to solve it through State-sponsored training schemes.

The servant problem was a nebulous but important concept in the first half of the twentieth century, changing definition from lack of good servants to lack of any servants. Furthermore, the servant problem became gendered – by the 1920s it had become a lack of female servants. This crystallisation of what constituted the servant problem coincided with rising unemployment, worsened by post-Great War demobilisation.

The War saw widespread substitution of women for men in factories, shops and offices, opening up a wealth of job opportunities. But such opportunities were temporary, ceasing when demobilised men were reinstated and substituted women made redundant. High numbers of unemployed women claiming State benefit greatly concerned Government Ministers who were anxious to reduce both unemployment levels and benefit payments.

¹ E M Delafield *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* (Macmillan, 1930. Reprinted Virago, 1984), p.8, p.22, p.40 and p.97. For discussion of domesticity in novels and magazines, see Margaret Beetham *A Magazine of her own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800-1914* (Routledge, 1996); Alison Light *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (Routledge, 1991); Nicola Beauman *A Very Great Profession: The Woman’s Novel 1914-1939* (Virago, 1983), especially Chapter 4.

Men's unemployment levels remained higher than women's during the recessions of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet women's wartime jobs had significant impact on their eligibility to claim unemployment benefits. Many female wartime employees were either first-time workers or had switched occupations, including from domestic service. Their wartime jobs in factories, shops and offices were often of insurable status, that is, workers paid contributions to ensure eligibility for State benefit. By contrast, domestic service – an uninsurable occupation – did not entitle employees to State benefit. Thus women's enforced redundancy from wartime jobs inflated numbers of unemployed workers registering at Employment Exchanges and eligible for State unemployment benefit.

With both the House of Commons and Press vociferous about unemployment levels and the (female) servant problem, Government adopted a strategy towards unemployed women that effectively linked unemployment, training and domestic service. The idea – mooted as one solution to the servant problem – was to retrain such women to fill domestic service vacancies.

At the forefront of this strategy was the Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment (CCWTE).² This semi-autonomous body was the only official organisation in the field of women's training schemes. It formed a central plank in successive Governments' policy towards unemployed women, receiving Treasury funds and operating nationally. A few other organisations dealt with women's training, but none on the scale of the CCWTE. The smaller groups were run privately by individuals or charities, operated in a limited geographical region (for example, Cleveland Training and Employment Council) and received limited or no State administrative or financial assistance. These smaller training groups are outside the scope of this thesis, which focuses on the impact of the CCWTE, the only organisation which was directly affiliated to the Ministry of Labour and which thus represents the official arm of Government training programmes.

The CCWTE was established by the Local Government Board on the outbreak of the Great War. The resulting rapid increase in female unemployment, especially in traditional sectors like textiles, caused great anxiety and the CCWTE's remit was to deal with these women and find them alternative work. As the War progressed, the CCWTE's aims shifted to accommodate the changing situation. For example, workshops were set up to compete for War Office clothing contracts – a successful enterprise when measured in numbers of items made. In 1916 – co-incident with male conscription and women's substitution for men in factories, shops and offices – the CCWTE's work came to a close, having apparently fulfilled its remit.

² The Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment (hereinafter CCWTE) was not officially adopted as a title until 1920. For the sake of clarity, this title is used throughout this thesis.

The CCWTE had been a short-term measure, to cease at the Armistice. It was originally thought that a return to peace and a return to normal employment conditions would run parallel, thus making the CCWTE redundant. Indeed, formalities to close the CCWTE had been finalised before Ministers realised that such optimism was misplaced. Many female munitions workers were dismissed from their jobs before the Armistice, while women in the Armed or auxiliary Services would soon be demobilised. All these women were potentially likely to register for employment, thus taking unemployment numbers to higher than pre-war levels. Consequently the CCWTE was re-formed in 1919 under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour, with a new remit which emphasised training for women.

From this point the CCWTE was more closely tied to Government decisions, with an annual Treasury grant to finance training schemes. This closer alliance with Government tended to restrict CCWTE activities despite a great deal of autonomy in proposals for training schemes and their administration. Restrictions were initially not too obstructive, allowing varied schemes to operate that afforded opportunities for all classes of women. Working-class women and girls were usually offered group schemes, often training for domestic work both in Britain and abroad, although early schemes involving fruit-farming and factory-work were also available. Better-educated women could pursue individual training. Professions attracting CCWTE grants included lawyers, doctors, dentists and pharmacists. Grants were also paid to women wishing to set up in businesses, for example poultry farmers, tomato growers and hairdressers.

However, the broader economic situation affected the range of CCWTE schemes. As both levels and benefit costs of unemployment grew, Government became increasingly reluctant to fund women's training. Despite the seriousness of women's unemployment and an avowed intent to tackle it, the Government nevertheless felt that men's employment needs were greater. Therefore Ministers directed their attention – and the bulk of Treasury funds – towards male training schemes, thus placing women's training programmes in a secondary and inferior position.

By the early 1930s the CCWTE was no longer allowed to renew schemes for individual training, while group training was almost exclusively geared to domestic service. This coincided with a shift in emphasis to train girls for domestic work in Britain, the global economic depression having removed the incentive for the Dominions to 'import' trained servants. The CCWTE had been involved via its centre at Market Harborough, a joint British and Australian venture, which trained women and girls for domestic service abroad. When this venture was no longer viable, the centre ceased to function as a training and migration dispersal point, becoming instead the forerunner of CCWTE Home Training Centres. These were set up

countrywide to train young girls and women specifically for domestic service in Britain. Numbers and location of Centres varied according to local needs, often in designated Depressed Areas with high unemployment rates and/or few employment opportunities. Trainees attended on a daily or residential basis, depending on type of Centre, for courses between eight weeks and six months. Most trainees were aged 16 to 21, although by 1935 this had expanded to include girls of 14.

The problem of older unemployed women was a continuing concern for the CCWTE and in the mid-1930s the Ministry of Labour was also worried enough to allow a divergence from the CCWTE's terms which only permitted training for definite employment. While older women (defined variably as over-25, over-30 or over-35) were less likely to obtain jobs after training, it was felt that training schemes were beneficial as 'reconditioning'. Morale was boosted, pride restored and confidence increased – this in itself was deemed sufficient reason to offer special schemes to older women. But emphasis on domestic work remained since training focused on cookery, waitressing or allied tasks.

Despite State-sponsored efforts to retrain unemployed women to fill domestic service vacancies, this occupation remained an unpopular one. Previous attempts to investigate reasons for its unpopularity, such as the 1923 Government inquiry into the supply of female servants, tended to approach the problem from the employers' viewpoint. An attempt in 1931 to introduce legislation to regulate and monitor domestic service met with no success. But, in the late 1930s, ways to enhance the perceived low status of domestic service – and thus encourage women to retrain as servants – began to exercise the minds of policymakers and campaigners. The Minister of Labour himself publicly embarked on an investigation in 1938.

Efforts to instigate remedial measures aimed at solving the unpopularity of domestic service and thus the servant problem were thwarted by the outbreak of the Second World War, when national survival took precedence. The Government faced additional wartime problems over domestic service – a dichotomy between institutional and private employment. The former acquired status through being designated an essential wartime industry plus introduction of regulatory controls on wages and conditions. Conversely, private service was viewed as almost unpatriotic, although the Ministry of Labour was not oblivious to hardships caused by lack of servants. Thus, a State home-help service was launched, targeting needy households and operating on a larger scale than hitherto possible. One casualty of the War was the CCWTE, which ceased operations in 1940.

Post-war plans were laid to revitalise domestic service, through the establishment of a National Institute of Houseworkers. Contemporaries optimistically saw the Second World War as a turning point for domestic service, heralding a new start. But the War was a downward turn – domestic service never recovered its former place as a premier employment sector for women. The servantless future, predicted as early as the 1920s, had effectively arrived.

Literature Review

This thesis addresses several discrete but overlapping literatures. First is the servant problem, which my research seeks to place in the wider context of employment opportunities, unemployment strategies, and training programmes. Analysis of the servant shortage is incidental to Jackson's³ study of the middle-classes, being one problem encountered by middle-class employers. Jackson's focus on the servant problem from an employer's viewpoint thus neatly reflects the way the problem was addressed by contemporaries.

Studies by Hardyment, Cowan, and Davidson⁴ examine the impact of technological advances on housework, for example, new and better household appliances. Such advances, which characterised the interwar years, might be assumed to reduce or eliminate servants' tasks. Indeed, technology might be seen as a way to eliminate entirely the need for paid domestic service, thereby solving the servant problem at a stroke. However, the studies by Hardyment, Cowan, and Davidson reveal that modernised tasks had the reverse effect, instead often leading to the adoption of higher standards with greater emphasis on domestic skills. These studies are important since they show that the servant problem was not simply related to the shortage of servants but had a wider context within society's expectations, which the application of technology alone could not solve.

A second overlapping theme, within which the servant problem is played out and which is therefore paramount in understanding the nature of that problem, is domestic service as a female employment sector. This occupation has been well served by historical studies. For instance, the centrality of domesticity to women's lives and its ubiquity in maintaining lifestyles is reflected in general studies by Davidoff, Holdsworth, and Lewis.⁵

³ Alan A Jackson *The Middle Classes 1900-1950* (Naim, Scotland: David St John Thomas, 1991).

⁴ Christina Hardyment *Home Comfort: A History of Domestic Arrangements* (Viking/ National Trust, 1992); Ruth Schwartz Cowan *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (Free Association Books, 1989); Christina Hardyment *From Mangle to Microwave: The Mechanization of Household Work* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988); Caroline Davidson *A Woman's Work is Never Done: a history of housework in the British Isles 1650-1950* (Chatto & Windus, 1982).

⁵ Leonore Davidoff *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); Angela Holdsworth *Out of the Doll's House: the story of women in the twentieth century* (BBC Books, 1988); Jane Lewis *Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984).

Domestic service has frequently been approached as a record of experiences from servants' perspectives, relying heavily on recollection and oral testimony. Earlier examples include work by Dawes, Huggett, and Taylor,⁶ which provide interesting snapshots of individual experiences but lack a broader social, economic or political contextual background. Emphasis on recollected memories is also evident in autobiographies by former servants, of which Powell and Rennie⁷ may stand representative. Such perspectives maintain the stereotypical image of domestic service as drudgery, a view challenged by Bourke⁸ who stresses women's pride in housework, as a way of gaining status and meaning in the home. Yet, pride in housework and drudgery are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the one relating to personal attitudes and the other to physical tasks. Apparent discrepancies in imagery of domestic service underline the vast array of jobs, situations and experiences which this occupation encompassed, points I explore in my analysis of Census data.

Horn⁹, in her recent wide-ranging study of twentieth-century domestic service, combines reliance on oral testimony with other source material, thereby providing the wider social context necessary to understand the significance of individuals' experiences. Horn's study affords an opportunity to assess domestic service as a female employment sector both geographically (by investigating both British and overseas jobs) and through time (covering changes in this occupation through the entire century). Such breadth of study allows a broad overview but restricts detail.

Empirical studies of domestic service rarely adopt such a broad canvas. Wide geographical or chronological parameters, such as those adopted by both McBride and Marshall¹⁰ in their studies on household service, are useful means to determine long-term or comparative patterns within the broader context of economic, political and social changes. In contrast, analyses of domestic service in microcosm can test the validity of such long-term patterns either by supporting those conclusions or by revealing anomalies within those patterns.

⁶ Frank Victor Dawes *Not in front of the servants: a true portrait of upstairs, downstairs life* (Century Hutchinson, 1989); Frank E Huggett *Life Below Stairs: Domestic servants in England from Victorian times* (John Murray, 1977); Pam Taylor *Women Domestic Servants 1919-1939. A study of a hidden Army, illustrated by servants' own recollected experiences* (University of Birmingham, Centre for Contemporary Studies, 1976).

⁷ Margaret Powell *Below Stairs* (Peter Davies, 1968); Jean Rennie *Every Other Sunday* (Barker, 1955. Reprinted Bath: Chivers, 1975).

⁸ Joanna Bourke 'Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914' (1994) in Pamela Sharpe (ed) *Women's Work. The English Experience 1650-1914* (Arnold, 1998).

⁹ Pamela Horn *Life Below Stairs in the 20th Century* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2001).

¹⁰ Theresa McBride *The domestic revolution: the modernisation of household service in England and France, 1820-1920* (Croom Helm, 1976); Dorothy Marshall *The English Domestic Servant in History* (Historical Association, 1949).

Examples of research following a narrow framework include, for example, Ebury & Preston's¹¹ specifically regional study of Victorian and Edwardian households and Higgs'¹² analysis of the link between Victorian domestic service and household production. Both types of research – the broad canvas and the narrow framework – are essential elements of historical study which complement each other by providing a fuller picture of domestic service. Differences highlighted through these contrasting research techniques thus open up points of discussion and indicate possible areas for future research.

Domestic service, by its very structure, promotes an unequal employer-employee relationship. Studies by Davidoff and Taylor¹³ explore this power balance vital to the existence of domestic service. Davidoff highlights gender subordination, arguing that the employer/servant relationship parallels that of husband/wife. Taylor's study echoes her argument, but attributes the exploitative power of mistress over maid to class inequality. Both arguments are weakened by concentrating on one aspect, serving to diminish other factors that supported and maintained domestic service – its class divisions, its feminisation, its core element of servitude.

A third literature is the overlapping theme of the general structure of women's work. Although domestic service remained the dominant sector in women's employment before 1945, studies by Sharpe, Oldfield, John, Davidoff & Westover, and Burman¹⁴ reveal a range of employment alternatives open to women. Significantly this research highlights restrictions and barriers facing female workers, resulting in lower-paid lower-status jobs than male counterparts.

Of equal significance to research on women's employment history was regional variation, uncovering the extent and impact of local influences. For example, Roberts¹⁵ documents how Northern textile trades welcomed married women workers – an attitude often

¹¹ Mark Ebury & Brian Preston *Domestic Service in late Victorian and Edwardian England, 1871-1914* (University of Reading, 1976).

¹² Edward Higgs 'Domestic Service and Household Production' in Angela John (ed) *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Edward Higgs 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England' *Social History* 7 (1983), pp.201-10.

¹³ Davidoff *Worlds Between*; Pam Taylor 'Daughters and mothers – maids and mistresses: domestic service between the wars' in John Clarke, Chas Critcher & Richard Johnson (eds) *Working Class Culture: studies in history and theory* (Hutchinson, 1979).

¹⁴ Pamela Sharpe (ed) *Women's Work. The English Experience 1650-1914* (Arnold, 1998); Sybil Oldfield (ed) *This Working-Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945* (Taylor & Francis, 1994); Angela V John (ed) *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Leonore Davidoff & Belinda Westover (eds) *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1986); Sandra Burman (ed) *Fit Work for Women* (Croom Helm, 1979).

¹⁵ Elizabeth Roberts *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Elizabeth Roberts *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

lacking in other sectors. Davies¹⁶ examines the interaction of gender, poverty and culture which affected the working-classes in Salford and Manchester. Breitenbach & Gordon and John¹⁷ explore how Scottish and Welsh women were further constrained by the cultures and attitudes of their native countries. Regionally focused studies build a more complete picture of the complexities of employment opportunities, taking account of cultural and social mores affecting women's work. Importantly, such studies also reinforce the universality of domestic service, which remained one job both open and available to working women throughout the country.

One aspect of women's work that has been a relatively neglected area of research is that of casual and home-based employment, which many women used as an alternative strategy to boost family incomes. Studies by Rowbotham and Pennington & Westover¹⁸ seek to redress this gap in our knowledge. Rowbotham draws parallels between the sweated industries of early twentieth-century Britain and the current Third World situation, thus emphasising the conditions under which such industries flourish. Pennington & Westover convincingly argue that the dominance of women in casual and home-based jobs arises from the need to combine paid employment and domestic duties, such need rendering women unable to participate fully in the labour market.

Women's work encompasses opportunities to find employment overseas. Female migration was often closely bound up with domestic service, this being a common occupation that was open to migrants. The exodus of British workers, often to the Colonies, is competently dealt with by Searle, Barber, and Parr,¹⁹ who document how women and girls were frequently directed into domestic work, sometimes to solve the Colonies' servant shortage. London, and Kushner²⁰ fill an important gap in the link between migration and women's employment history through their exploration of the influx of foreign women to take up domestic posts in Britain. London and Kushner argue that the rationale behind the British Government's acceptance of

¹⁶ Andrew Davies *Leisure, gender and poverty: working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Esther Breitenbach & Eleanor Gordon (eds) *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800-1945* (Edinburgh University Press, 1992); Angela V John (ed) *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991).

¹⁸ Sheila Rowbotham 'Strategies Against Sweated Work in Britain, 1820-1920' (1994) in *Threads through time: writings on history and autobiography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999); Shelley Pennington & Belinda Westover *A Hidden Workforce: Homeworkers in England, 1850-1985* (Macmillan, 1989).

¹⁹ Gwen Searle 'The role of women in the emigration of children to Canada: a case study of the two initiators Miss Rye and Miss MacPherson, 1869-1914' (Oxford Brookes University, MPhil thesis, 1998); Marilyn Barber *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada* (Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Historical Association, 1991); Joy Parr *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (Croom Helm, 1980).

²⁰ Louise London 'British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees 1933-1939' in Werner E Mosse (ed) *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991); Tony Kushner 'An Alien Occupation - Jewish Refugees and Domestic Service in Britain, 1933-1948' in Mosse (ed) *Second Chance*; Tony Kushner 'Asylum or servitude? Refugee domestics in Britain 1933-1945' *British Society for the Study of Labour History* 5 (1988), pp.19-27.

European (mostly Jewish) refugees was simultaneously humanitarian and self-interest – ostensibly to give refugees a safe haven, while also seeking to alleviate Britain’s servant shortage. My thesis seeks to build on these two strands of migration by investigating the link between migrants and the servant problem.

An important aspect within the third theme of the structure of women’s work is the impact of war on employment opportunities. This aspect has been well served by historical studies. The impact arising from the Great War has received much attention, reflecting its historical significance for women’s work opportunities. The Great War was the first major conflict which actively encouraged women to participate in wartime employment, a necessity arising from the conscription of men in 1916. The exodus of men from industry into the Services thus forced the Government, employers and trade unions to accept women working in hitherto prohibited processes and jobs. Studies by Woollacott, Beddoe, Braybon & Summerfield, and Braybon²¹ fully explore this opening of opportunities which, although profound, was temporary. Their researches demonstrate how quickly women adapted to new jobs in munitions, engineering, railways, driving, instrument making. Such studies are vital in establishing how employment opportunities were socially constructed, by soundly demolishing the myth of job segregation on the grounds of women’s incapability of performing designated men’s work.

Historians share a broad consensus that wartime expansion of female employment opportunities had limited long-term benefits, with few women retaining the same level or range of jobs after 1918. Thane²² makes an important point that, while failure to hold on to wartime benefits like full employment and regular pay affected both male and female workers, it was women who suffered greater post-war losses.

There is little consensus among historians on why women failed to build successfully on wartime opportunities. Beddoe²³ argues for the persuasive effect of media and legislative attempts to encourage women back into domesticity. She sees this as especially acute in Wales due to its traditionally low levels of female participation in the labour market. By contrast, Braybon²⁴ argues for the interaction of patriarchy and capitalism with women as ‘pawns in the

²¹ Angela Woollacott *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1994); Deirdre Beddoe ‘Munitionettes, Maids and Mams: Women in Wales, 1914-1939’ in Angela V John (ed) *Our Mother’s Land: Chapters in Welsh Women’s History, 1830-1939* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1991); Gail Braybon & Penny Summerfield *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars* (Pandora, 1987); Gail Braybon *Women Workers in the First World War* (Croom Helm, 1981. Reprinted Routledge, 1989).

²² Pat Thane ‘Women and Work in Britain, c. 1870 to World War I’ in Peter Mathias & John A Davis (eds) *Enterprise and Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.63.

²³ Beddoe ‘Munitionettes, Maids and Mams’ p.190.

²⁴ Braybon *Women Workers* p.75.

battle between capital and labour'. She stresses employers' and trade unions' basic antagonism towards women workers. Unions viewed women as second-class workers in industry.²⁵ Employers claimed that women workers were a more expensive workforce – despite lower wages – due to extra costs arising from supervision, new machinery and welfare provisions.²⁶ Thus, claims Braybon, post-war prospects for women were bad, their presence tolerated only in certain light industrial work, offices and shops where they would continue in low paid, unskilled jobs requiring little training or investment.²⁷

Higonnet & Higgonet²⁸ expound a different theory to explain the failure of women to maintain their wartime gains. They contend that the nature of women's wartime work is illusory due to its inherent temporary status, non-institutionalisation, and emphasis on women's welfare connected with national health rather than industrialisation. The Higonnets see the dominant wartime ideology as nationalistic, that is, women workers were workers who merely happened to be women. By contrast, post-war ideology for women was to return to 'natural' gender relationships, in other words, centred on the home. Their argument centres on the image of a double helix, a model allowing historians to trace continuity of women's employment, notwithstanding expansion of wartime work. This model focuses on the structure of two intertwined strands, representing the roles of male opposed to female. Irrespective of culture or time, the relationship of the helix remains constant with the male role always perceived as superior to the female's. If males in one culture perform job A and women perform job B, then job A will have greater import. If another culture reverses the same roles, then job B will be deemed more important simply because it is performed by men.

This double helix model is a fine visual image of how men's and women's work is interdependent, demonstrating the false interpretation given to gender dependent job status. But it fails to explain why men's work is universally seen as more important than women's. Braybon's theory seems more satisfactory in explaining how and why society constructs and defines values, particularly in post-war Britain based on capitalism with a traditional patriarchal base. With women disenfranchised until 1918, men had the political, economic and social upper hand – and were likely to favour their own sex. But Rose²⁹ argues that women's inferior position in the labour market pre-dates industrialisation, effectively ruling out Braybon's

²⁵ Ibid, p.82.

²⁶ Ibid, p.85.

²⁷ Ibid, p.89.

²⁸ Margaret R Higonnet & Patrice L-R Higonnet 'The Double Helix' in Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp.34-6 and pp.39-40.

²⁹ Sonya O Rose *Limited Livelihoods. Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Routledge, 1992), pp.23-4.

patriarchy/capitalism theory. And both Thane and Rose³⁰ caution that women's work was not consistently or universally inferior to men's, citing nineteenth-century textile industries. Such variations in women's status over time and within industry support Freedman's warning that 'any theory which attempts to explain women's oppression through one overarching concept risks diminishing the importance of differences among women in the search for theoretical unity.'³¹

Two sectors bucking the post-war trend of excluding women from previous wartime posts were clerical and factory work. Davy's³² study of clerical work demonstrates that, as women replaced men in this employment sector, jobs become both feminised and devalued, supporting the Higgonets' argument of gender-defined job status. Factory work, notably the new light industries, is analysed by Glucksmann.³³ Case studies of consumer producers support her argument linking women's dual roles as workers and consumers. Many light industries employed women on assembly lines, producing goods for the housewife. Thus women were key players in this rise in consumerism, particularly in production of foodstuffs and domestic appliances. Glucksmann's selection of case studies, while not invalidating her well-supported argument, nonetheless leaves unanswered questions about women's role in other areas, for example, Midlands car components factories.

The impact of the Second World War on women's employment is also well served by historians. Whereas the Great War had actively encouraged women's participation in the paid labour market, the Second World War went beyond encouragement. The 1939-1945 war is significant for the introduction of labour direction of women by the State, effectively 'conscription' of women into designated essential industries. A detailed study by Summerfield³⁴ explores the impact on women's lives of this direction, focusing her research on industry. This study reveals how wartime demands of balancing paid work and family responsibilities led to extra burdens for women. Summerfield argues that post-war benefits for women's work after 1945 echoed those after the Great War, that is, they were of limited scope but highly significant. Two of these benefits were the growth of part-time work – in which women would come to predominate -- and the greater acceptance of married women taking paid employment.

³⁰ Thane 'Women and Work' p.55; Rose *Limited Livelihoods* p.154.

³¹ Jane Freedman *Feminism* (Buckingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), p.51.

³² Teresa Davy "'A Cissy Job for Men; a Nice Job for Girls": Women Shorthand Typists in London, 1900-39' in Leonore Davidoff & Belinda Westover (eds) *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: women's history and women's work* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1986).

³³ Miriam Glucksmann *Women assemble: women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain* (Routledge, 1990).

³⁴ Penny Summerfield *Women Workers in the Second World War* (Croom Helm, 1984).

Sheridan³⁵ adopts a broader approach than Summerfield's focus on industrial participation, using contemporary wartime documents to provide insights into women's lives during the war. Sheridan's source is the Mass-Observation Archive, which provides an unrivalled collection of papers written by many ordinary British citizens between 1937 and 1949. Many women were regular contributors to Mass-Observation and their diaries, reports and returned questionnaires form the basis of Sheridan's study, which allows glimpses into women's experiences both at work and at home in wartime Britain.

The fourth theme is one which closely overlaps women's employment and which focuses on women's unemployment experiences. This area has received relatively little attention. Garside's³⁶ study of unemployment initiatives ignores women, leading to an erroneous impression that Government strategies were exclusively male orientated. This omission is a serious flaw in an otherwise extensive and impressive study of measures to tackle unemployment. Perry's³⁷ study of interwar unemployment is enriched by comparisons of British, European and American experiences. However, Perry offers only limited insight into women's experiences and dismisses their direction into domestic service in a single sentence. Dewey's³⁸ study of interwar Britain concentrates on State training schemes for men, with only a passing reference to female training schemes. The focus apparent in these studies – taking men's experiences as representative of all workers' unemployment experiences – thus relegates initiatives for unemployed women to an inferior second place in the history of unemployment and training, which my research seeks to redress.

The fifth and final overlapping theme is the work of the CCWTE. This organisation was one of many committees that provided an avenue of opportunity for women seeking a role in the public arena. Collective biographies on women have done much to reclaim this aspect of women's history. Graves'³⁹ study of the political role of Labour Party women between 1918 and 1939 contrasts their achievements at local municipal level with relative failures at national level. She usefully highlights issues of class and gender, which effectively hampered women activists' role in policy decisions. Despite Graves' emphasis on Labour women's social and welfare concerns, she ignores the CCWTE and the involvement of Labour activists Susan Lawrence,

³⁵ Dorothy Sheridan (ed) *Wartime Women. A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-45* (William Heinemann, 1990. Phoenix Press, 2000).

³⁶ W R Garside *British Unemployment: 1919-1939. A study in public policy* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁷ Matt Perry *Bread and Work. The Experience of Unemployment 1918-39* (London & Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000).

³⁸ Peter Dewey *War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945* (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997).

³⁹ Pamela M Graves *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Margaret Bondfield and Marion Phillips. This is a serious flaw negating the achievements of such women at national level, via their association with the CCWTE. Jones⁴⁰ excellent study of the interaction of gender, power and social policy between 1914 and 1950 details women's wide involvement in public life. Her research reveals an extensive range of interests pursued by women from all political and social backgrounds, ranging from health and welfare to education and training. This study is enhanced by a comparative analysis with women's achievements in Europe, Australia and America. But the CCWTE is only briefly mentioned, despite involvement of campaigners such as May Tennant and Violet Markham, whose work is richly documented in this study. Moreover, Jones' reference to CCWTE support of domestic service training as part of Government unemployment policy is scant and – I would contend – misleading, by failing to appreciate the restrictive boundaries that Treasury funding exerted on the CCWTE and its training programmes.

There has been no extensive research analysing the effectiveness and impact of CCWTE training schemes, either as a proposed solution to the servant problem or as affecting women's lives. Hitherto, references to the CCWTE have been brief and incomplete. Colledge's⁴¹ small volume on Government unemployment camps is based on (male) participants' recollections. His one reference to women's training is fleeting and – worse – erroneous, confusing the work of the CCWTE and the Industrial Transference Board. A more carefully researched and accurate picture of Government training camps is found in Field's⁴² analysis. Although his focus is on male experiences, he explores the issue of women's training and the role of the CCWTE, arguing that the Government used such initiatives to reduce female unemployment and channel women into the perceived 'natural' domestic sphere. Beddoe⁴³ expands our knowledge of CCWTE centres, via her study of Welsh women's employment in the interwar years. Her focus is on the regional rather than the national, tending to ignore the broader issues of women's training and its link with the servant problem. This wider aspect is included in Horn's⁴⁴ recent study of domestic service in the twentieth century, which offers a good and detailed overview of the work of the CCWTE. Its standing as a quasi-Governmental body is emphasised by Horn's use of Ministry of Labour documents as a source.

⁴⁰ Helen Jones *Women in British Public Life, 1914-1950. Gender, Power and Social Policy* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education, 2000).

⁴¹ Dave Colledge *Labour Camps: The British Experience* (Sheffield Popular Publishing, 1989).

⁴² John Field *Learning through Labour. Training, unemployment and the state 1890-1939* (University of Leeds, Leeds Studies in Continuing Education, 1992).

⁴³ Beddoe 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams'. See also Deirdre Beddoe *Back to Home and Duty: women between the wars 1918-1939* (Pandora, 1989).

⁴⁴ Horn *Life Below Stairs*.

A forthcoming book by Laybourn⁴⁵ also covers this area, as part of his investigation into policies on women's employment and unemployment between 1900 and 1951. Complementing his previous studies into the impact of interwar unemployment on British society, Laybourn's new research focuses on women's experiences and thus includes an assessment of the work and role of the CCWTE (based on its records).

My research on the CCWTE seeks to fill an important gap in our knowledge of women's history by focusing on this Government-sponsored body which was at the forefront of State strategies towards unemployed women. This research will concentrate on the achievements and impact of the CCWTE, rather than its political aspect, seeking to extend our understanding of both middle-class and working-class women's experiences through the various and changing CCWTE training programmes.

Aims

Given this historiographical backdrop, my thesis has four interlocking aims. First, to reclaim knowledge of the CCWTE's development and work. Second, to explore the achievements and effectiveness of the CCWTE through its impact on women's experiences. Third, to explore how these training schemes highlight broader issues of female employment and unemployment. Fourth, to explore the link between CCWTE training schemes, domestic service and the servant problem, a link which led to the promotion of domestic service as a suitable job for unemployed women.

The CCWTE is a crucial focal point through which to pursue my four aims, not least because of its close association with the perceived servant problem. The CCWTE can be used as a case study to explore Government tactics that sought to deal simultaneously with issues of female unemployment and the servant shortage, since the CCWTE was instrumental in carrying out these Government tactics. The CCWTE was established specifically to deal with female unemployment through its training schemes, which became increasingly confined to domestic training. The CCWTE thus effectively encouraged women and girls into domestic service and was instrumental in trying to solve the servant problem.

My first aim to reclaim knowledge of the development and work of the CCWTE is important since it was an officially endorsed organisation acting for, yet constrained by, successive Governments. The CCWTE operated within a political framework which, in the early years of its existence, offered little power to women. Although I do not focus on the

⁴⁵ Keith Laybourn *Unemployment and Employment Policies Concerning Women in Britain 1900-1951* (USA: Edwin Mellen, forthcoming). See also, for example, Keith Laybourn *Britain on the Breadline: a social and political history of Britain between the wars* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1990).

political aspect of the CCWTE's work – its role and relationship with Government ministers – this relationship informs much of the development of the CCWTE between 1914 and 1940, providing the context for CCWTE training programmes. Similarly, I have chosen not to approach the CCWTE as a collective biography, detailing the involvement and contribution of individual members of the CCWTE committee. However, the way in which these women wielded behind the scenes power by adopting and adapting male techniques such as networking is a contributory factor in the long life of the CCWTE, particularly given the extent of antipathy and hostility towards it and its work.

My second aim – to explore the achievements and effectiveness of the CCWTE – is a significant aspect of my thesis. I seek to show to what extent the CCWTE was successful in fulfilling its remit to train women. To this end, I investigate the economic and social context in which the CCWTE operated, exploring factors which either helped or hindered the CCWTE to achieve success. The various training schemes are examined in detail, to assess how the CCWTE addressed the problem of unemployment, which women were helped under the CCWTE schemes, and whether the CCWTE opened up new employment opportunities for women. I also look at how the CCWTE affected women's lives on a more personal level, measuring this impact by an examination of the narratives which CCWTE trainees have left, which reveal their attitudes towards training and the CCWTE.

My third aim, which inevitably overlaps with the previous two, is to explore how CCWTE training schemes highlight broader issues of female employment and unemployment. The importance of the CCWTE goes beyond its existence as a training organisation. Created specifically to deal with female unemployment, the CCWTE had a specific remit was to train unemployed women for alternative work. Yet an increasing dependence on Treasury funding and Ministry of Labour sanction frustrated the CCWTE's early attempts to widen the horizons of women's training opportunities, these becoming increasingly confined to domestic work. I investigate the economic context to women's employment and unemployment, highlighting discriminatory practices that disadvantaged women. Discrimination could be expressed either through attitudes and practices within the workplace, for example, employer and trade union hostility, segregating processes and jobs as male or female occupations, or barriers to gaining entry into the professions. Government could also sanction forms of discrimination against women, for example, their treatment at the hands of Employment Exchange or Unemployment Assistance Board officials who tended to deal more harshly with female applicants.

My fourth aim – to explore the link between CCWTE training schemes, domestic service and the servant problem – is closely linked with the third. One expression of discrimination that women faced but men did not was the State-supported direction of unemployed women into domestic service. This promotion of domestic service as a suitable job for a woman is rooted in prevailing attitudes towards domestic service and the servant problem. Issues of class and gender informed the way in which contemporaries defined the servant problem. It was largely seen as a shortage of female applicants – that is, defined by employers not servants, defined as affecting women workers not all workers, and defined as recruitment difficulties that could be overcome rather than reaction against poor conditions which were not being addressed.

This thesis argues that the continuing feminisation of domestic service served to enhance and give credence to Government tactics linking women's unemployment, training and the servant problem. The CCWTE and its training schemes were to be the means by which the link would be effected, in an effort to solve the servant problem. Yet, as I seek to demonstrate, this strategy was an inappropriate solution to the servant problem.

Methods and Sources

Domestic service presents particular problems for historians. This diverse occupation could be classified in several ways – by job (ranging from charwoman to housekeeper), by employer (private or institutional, the latter including hospitals, hotels, boarding-houses), by work pattern (living-in or daily attendance), by workplace (from artisan's flat to stately home), by staff position (from single servant to large hierarchical staff), and by status (depending largely on all the foregoing). Therefore domestic service was not a homogeneous entity but a varied and complex occupation. All discussions of domestic service must bear this important fact in mind.

For statistical information on domestic service, I have relied on decennial Census Reports. There are acknowledged problems in using this source as a historical tool, pertaining to accuracy, compilation methods and function. These problems are discussed fully in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, Census Reports offer an officially endorsed snapshot at ten-year intervals (excepting 1941, due to wartime difficulties) which provide an opportunity to measure employment trends and patterns. As an uninsured trade, domestic service has no alternative means of measuring numbers, patterns or extent of occupation – there are no trade union minutes, wage board records, professional registers to consult.

Among official documents relating to aspects of domestic service, I have relied heavily on Hansard. Indexes to this account of daily work in the House of Commons provide a useful guide to the frequency of questions and discussions on this subject, as well as related issues such as, for example, women's employment, women's unemployment, and women's training. Careful reading of relevant passages affords opportunity to study a verbatim contemporary record of MPs' and Ministers' words. However, as a written text, nuances of tone and delivery are lost. To supplement Hansard I have accessed Government Command Papers, reports of commissions and inquiries, departmental memoranda, and handbooks. Other useful sources are investigative reports carried out by social groups (for example, Fabian Society, Women's Industrial Council, New Survey of London).

Determining the extent of the servant problem by measuring numbers is difficult. Even contemporary Ministers found it impossible to estimate accurately the extent of unemployment among domestic servants. In this uninsurable occupation outside State benefit schemes, unemployed servants had little incentive to register at Employment Exchanges. Therefore numbers of unemployed servants may be under-represented in official figures. Equally, many vacancies were notified and filled not at Exchanges but via traditional word-of-mouth recommendation or privately run domestic employment agencies, resulting in possible under-representation of numbers of vacancies for servants in official figures. Such two-fold under-representation prevents a true appreciation – now as then – of the servant problem.

Sources used for assessing attitudes towards the servant problem include investigative reports and surveys (such as those mentioned above), pamphlets and books published on the subject. These usually express a quasi-official and/or professional view and are therefore likely to be the more articulate members of society – perhaps employers from the servant-employing classes – rather than by servants themselves.

The paucity of documented sources for servants' views and attitudes remains a major and largely insurmountable drawback in researching domestic service. Servants' voices are rarely heard and recorded – for example, they are only occasionally found in Command Papers, investigative reports, CCWTE correspondence. To remedy this silence, I have sought organisations or publications which might stand representative of domestic servants' views. The monthly magazine *Domestic News* is apparently unique in this respect, offering an inadequate yet important balance to employers' views. Several social/educational clubs for servants cross class boundaries by involving employers and servants in joint activities. Their sparse records afford limited but useful insights into servants' attitudes towards work and leisure.

The prime source for research into the CCWTE is the Markham Papers. The numerous boxes of Minutes of Meetings provide an unparalleled record of CCWTE activities, concerns, development and decisions. The records are vast and detailed, offering a rich source of first-hand information on this organisation's work. The Minutes are complete, business-like and, as far as can be judged, honest, accurate and relatively unbiased. Hand-written additions apparently pertain to mis-recording of figures and actions with no attempt to conceal disagreements or distort the record. The Correspondence Files similarly offer significant input into a study of the CCWTE as well as highlighting the behind-the-scenes activities of Chairman Violet Markham. The Files contain a full and varied collection of reports, leaflets and letters (drafts plus replies) relating to domestic service. The narratives from trainees contained in these Files are particularly useful for assessing the impact of CCWTE training schemes on women's lives. Used in conjunction with the Minutes, the correspondence provides a detailed background to the development of CCWTE training schemes, their effectiveness and their impact on unemployed women.

The Markham Papers have been little used for a study into the impact of CCWTE training programmes. Researchers have generally focused on Violet Markham as an individual rather than as Chairman of a State-funded training organisation. I have chosen to approach this study of the CCWTE not as a collective biography investigating a group of individuals but as an organisation working alongside and on behalf of successive Governments. This approach thus focuses on the impact of the CCWTE as an entity, rather than the role of individuals within the CCWTE. The limited research published on the CCWTE leads me to believe that a detailed and extensive reading of CCWTE Minutes has not previously been made.

I had hoped to augment data from the Markham Papers with oral testimonies, but the passage of time prevented this. Only two employers of CCWTE trainees were located (via magazine appeals), both from the late period of the CCWTE. Although interesting on a personal level, the written communications contributed little of historical value.

The Public Record Office holds little material directly relating to the CCWTE. The files I located dealt mainly with the terms of its re-establishment under the Ministry of Labour in 1920 and its closure in 1940. The annual reports of the Unemployment Assistance Board provided limited information on the operation of CCWTE training schemes within the context of local unemployment situations.

Thesis Structure

The first two Chapters of my research provide context to the question of the servant problem and its attempted solution through training schemes. Chapter 1 explores how attitudes towards domestic service gave rise to a perceived servant problem. It seeks to provide evidence for the conceptual origins of the servant problem, showing how and by whom the problem was defined, and how training was the favoured solution to the problem.

Chapter 2 moves from qualitative to quantitative sources to analyse statistical data on women's domestic service obtained from decennial Census Reports. Evidence of patterns and trends in this largely female occupation form the economic context of women's employment, against which the successive chapters on the CCWTE training programmes are set.

Chapters 3 to 6 focus on the CCWTE, from inception in 1914 to closure in 1940. These Chapters analyse both the effectiveness of CCWTE training schemes, measured as part of Government strategies to deal with both female unemployment levels and the perceived servant problem, and also the impact of CCWTE schemes on women's experiences.

Chapter 3 deals with the impact of war, showing how the CCWTE's establishment in 1914 was a short-term measure to deal with rising unemployment among women, many of whom were thrown out of traditional jobs on the outbreak of the Great War. The exodus of male workers from industry and commerce after the introduction of male conscription in 1916 led to a wealth of employment opportunities for women – often in hitherto restricted jobs – and consequently CCWTE training schemes became redundant. The Armistice saw the enforced redundancy of many women from their wartime jobs as a result of a Government, trade union and employer agreement to reinstate male workers, a situation leading to a reassessment of the need to retain the CCWTE. Similarly, the Ministry of Reconstruction, set up to ease transition from wartime to peacetime, investigated domestic service as part of its brief and its 1919 Report is examined in this Chapter, in the light of increasing reluctance of women to return to or enter domestic service.

Re-establishment of the CCWTE and its wider remit under the MoL in the 1920s is dealt with in Chapter 4. With a new emphasis on training, the CCWTE evinced great enthusiasm and imagination for investigating and devising schemes for unemployed women. But Treasury constraints against a background of Government concern over rising unemployment led to restrictions in schemes offered. Nevertheless, the CCWTE provided both individual and group training, aimed at middle-class and working-class women. For the latter, opportunities were almost exclusively restricted to domestic service courses in the CCWTE's non-residential Home Training Centres. This narrowing of opportunities for women's training

coincided with publication of the 1923 MoL Report into the supply of female servants, whose recommendations to address this supply shortage are also examined in this Chapter.

Chapter 5 emphasises continuity and change in the CCWTE during the 1930s. Increasing restrictions imposed by the MoL forced the CCWTE to abandon individual funding schemes for mainly middle-class women in favour of domestic service courses for working-class women and girls. This latter scheme was expanded to include residential as well as the existing non-residential Home Training Centres. This Chapter explores CCWTE schemes against prevailing attitudes towards male and female unemployment as demonstrated in Government-sanctioned training schemes. It also investigates changes in attitudes towards domestic service, namely a growing realisation that the servant problem could not be solved by training alone but needed to be addressed from its root causes if it were to be dealt with effectively.

Chapter 6 deals with conflicts engendered during the Second World War, including conflicts of interest leading to the demise of the CCWTE as Government Ministers focused on wartime needs. It explores contradictory concerns over the issue of domestic service at a time of national survival. While the Government was not unsympathetic towards private households wishing to retain servants, the MoL was instrumental in promoting institutional domestic service as an essential wartime occupation for women. Chapter 6 also assesses the overall effectiveness and impact of the CCWTE over its lifetime.

Following on from the study of the CCWTE's work, Chapter 7 investigates the role of migration schemes in relation to the servant problem. The focus is on schemes enjoying Government sanction or support. Three aspects are covered – labour migration within Britain, emigration of British women to take up domestic service jobs abroad (in which the CCWTE was involved), and immigration of foreign workers to fill domestic jobs in Britain. Such three-fold migration highlights both diversity and similarity of the servant problem – regional diversity within Britain and paradoxically its similarity in a global context. This Chapter underlines the ineffectiveness of training schemes to solve the servant shortage in Britain.

Finally the Conclusion evaluates the CCWTE's work within the confines of domestic service training, measuring success or failure both on its own terms and within the wider context of Government strategies. Evaluation is according to four criteria – solving the servant problem, stemming the decline in domestic service, ameliorating women's unemployment, and enhancing the status of domestic service. The conclusions reached in this Chapter will seek to prove the validity of my argument that domestic service training was an inappropriate solution to the servant problem.

Chapter 1: Defining the servant problem

Aims

This Chapter seeks the conceptual origins of the servant problem. It explores how perceptions of domestic service gave rise to a new concept of the servant problem, particularly with regard to issues of class and gender. The sources – published material on a domestic work theme and often written by employers, campaigners, social investigators – do not preclude a viewpoint expressing servants' concerns. But a document's origin may reveal hidden as well as stated agendas in the text. There is relatively little documented evidence of servants' views. Therefore, the Chapter examines organisations purporting to represent servants and their concerns. Finally, the 1930 New Survey of London is analysed to determine the extent of change within domestic service.

Defining Causes

How was the servant problem defined and by whom? Was there a consensus of opinion among social groups as to what constituted the servant problem?

The servant problem was not a new concept in the 1920s. But it gained import – and a changed definition – due to unemployed women's increased visibility after 1918. Wartime jobs in factories, shops and offices were usually of insured status – entitling workers to State benefit. By contrast, domestic service was an uninsured occupation – tantamount to invisible in terms of employment/unemployment figures. (For difficulties inherent in official figures, see Chapter 2.) As Chapter 3 will show, wartime jobs opened new avenues for female employment, causing those dissatisfied with pre-war jobs to voice their discontent. Thus, the post-war period crystallised the concept of the servant problem, aligning it firmly with class and gender issues.

Before 1914, attitudes towards domestic service focused on the nobility and dignity of work, sometimes allied with a need for moral guidance. In 1906, for example, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge's small book defined domestic service as a religious duty. The title *The Hallowing of Domestic Service* encapsulated the message – domestics were following in the footsteps of Christ who 'came down from heaven to be a servant'.¹ This theme permeates the book – the kitchenmaid could avoid loneliness by remembering that 'God is watching over you' while the parlourmaid's work was like that of the 'ministering spirits all around us'.² The author clearly defined the servant problem as one experienced by servants rather than by employers – the moral tone reflecting her underlying Christian principles.

¹ Mary Ward *The Hallowing of Domestic Service* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1906), p.10.

² *Ibid*, p.41 and p.46.

Nobility in domestic service was expressed in a 1906 pamphlet on Lady Servants. This Victorian idea aimed to encourage better-educated women into (unspecified) types of domestic work. The pamphlet voiced opinions of supporters of this idea, including those embracing it on a practical level. Thus it purported to represent both employers and employees, albeit within a very narrow framework. Nobility of domestic work is clearly associated with the class of those undertaking it, for Lady Servants were seen as an elite, separated by their education and social standing. Class distinction is particularly evident in the article on the importance of labour-saving apparatus and protective devices for Lady Servants.³ Presumably lower class servants were not thought to derive the same benefit from such considerations. Indeed, concerns of such servants were ignored in the pamphlet, which is an overt promotion of Lady Servants rather than an attempt to address issues within domestic service as an employment sector.

Another example of class-defined nobility can be found in *Woman's Sphere or The Dignity of Domestic Work* written by 'an employer of servants'. She maintained that the very sanctity of an English home depended on a supply of maids-of-all-work 'to make its comfort complete'.⁴ The author's bias towards employers is clear, deeming mistresses' lack of sympathy or consideration 'the result not so much of negligence as forgetfulness'.⁵ This suggests that servants were so much part of a household's furniture that mistresses could be forgiven for overlooking them. It is therefore unsurprising that servants' concerns are also overlooked in this 1913 book.

The sense of nobility in domestic service seems to have been a common theme before 1914, promulgated by employers to attract servants and thus ensure continuation of employers' standards and habits of living. Reasons for servants' discontent are glossed over or, worse, ignored – although it is impossible to know if this was deliberate or through ignorance.

By the 1920s, the servant problem exercised the minds of writers, with a number of publications on this topic appearing. It is difficult to establish the extent of readership or the acceptance of expressed views. Figures for total publication run of each book and/or number sold – if ascertained – would not prove whether the book was read or by how many persons. Yet, since publishers wished to sell books, we may deduce that the publication of books on the servant problem indicates that there was a perceived market for such a subject.

It was generally acknowledged that the Great War – temporarily utilising female labour in hitherto prohibited 'male' occupations – had profoundly affected post-war domestic service. Contemporary authors were divided on whether the overall effect was good or bad, their views undoubtedly influenced by social background and political beliefs. Significant changes occurred

³ *Lady Servants (For and Against)* (Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, 1906), p.24.

⁴ Mrs W R Nicoll *Woman's Sphere or The Dignity of Domestic Work* (Charles H Kelly, 1913), p.14.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.22.

in the concept of the servant problem. First, there was wider acceptance that domestic service was unpopular. Second, status was acknowledged as a major factor. Third, the servant problem was crystallised and clarified. Fourth, it became gendered, restricted to female workers only.

The issue of status, at the heart of domestic service's unpopularity, was acknowledged before the War. An employer of Lady Servants expressed a pragmatic view of class difficulties between maid and mistress, when she asserted:

The position of domestic servants is undignified, and chiefly because [...] the servant has been required to sink individuality of character and conform herself to the mind of her mistress. ... The servant has been valued quite as much for malleability of mind as for technical skill, and with bad results, for the best minds are not necessarily the most malleable, and there is a sense in which "self-assertion" is a dignified assertion of true womanhood.⁶

This 1906 pamphlet linked status with Lady Servants. Ennoblement and professionalisation depended on a new educated workforce – replacing women with ladies. This seems visionary hope rather than practical suggestion, for it is unlikely that career-minded Lady Servants ever formed more than a minority of domestic servants. Indeed, a 1930 feature warned that menial positions were unsuitable for Lady Servants.⁷ Therefore this style of domestic service would not combat servant shortages in an employment sector calling for low status workers.

Status was also acknowledged as a factor in recruitment difficulties as early as 1910. The pseudonymous "Justice", author of a 1d leaflet *Solution of the Servant Problem*, admonished housewives who referred to servants as scum, urging mistresses to avoid giving the impression of maids as 'a necessary evil' but to encourage each maid to take pride in 'the dignity of her art'.⁸

Dignity was not an overriding issue for some mistresses, as evidenced in a 1914 survey by the Women's Industrial Council (WIC) published in 1916. Many mistresses saw education as a pernicious influence on potential servants. Indeed, one mistress extolled the virtues of totally uneducated servants:

I have invariably found that the more education the worse the servant. [...] The totally uneducated Italian and Maltese were the *best*, the happiest and most contented, and the French peasant type the next. I consider the Council education has ruined girls for service, and caused them to be ambitious beyond their capabilities, looking down upon domestic work when they have no qualifications for any other work or profession.⁹

⁶ *Lady Servants* pp.11-12.

⁷ Florence Jack and Philippa Preston (eds) *The Woman's Book* (London & Edinburgh: T C & E C Jack, nd [1930]), p.540.

⁸ "Justice" *Solution of the Servant Problem* (North Shields: Camden Press, July 1910), p.4.

⁹ C V Butler *Domestic Service. An Inquiry by the Women's Industrial Council* Bell (Bell, 1916. Reprinted New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1980), p.26. (Original italics) This survey relied on questionnaires to employers and employees. Employees were restricted to answering questions on specifics of work while mistresses were encouraged to comment more fully on causes of problems and proposed solutions.

She berated English girls for being 'discontented, delicate and lazy' and averred never to engage English servants under forty. She thought herself a good mistress, for 'my servants *never* leave'.¹⁰ Given that older women would not have found work easily, this reluctance to quit may be easier to understand. Similarly older women did not have the educational advantages of younger girls (universal education dating from 1870) and may therefore have been more servile and amenable to traditional class distinctions between mistress and maid.

The call for servility persisted after the War, which some commentators thought had exacerbated the servant problem. A typical example of the detrimental and harmful argument is that of William Johnson, in a 1922 pamphlet *The Servant Problem*. He blamed erstwhile servants for failing to maintain social boundaries, prompted by their lack of 'servile attitude' occasioned by 'a smattering of education and the democratic time in which we live'. Furthermore, servants' 'mental equilibrium' had been upset by the unprecedented level of wartime wages, leading them to be less adaptable and efficient.¹¹

Johnson clearly saw domestic service as a working-class female occupation. He unequivocally dismissed substitution of men for women as a dual solution to unemployment and servant shortage problems. His assertion that men took domestic jobs only in the absence of alternatives underlines the unpopularity of service and the low regard in which it was held. Johnson claimed, referring back to traditional views of domesticity as women's special preserve, that an Englishman 'loves to see a woman about the house'.¹²

Johnson, a domestic employment agent since 1899, was undoubtedly influenced by Victorian and Edwardian ideals. While aware of poor working conditions, he seems unable to break away from seeing the servant problem as solely an issue for employers.

Other writers were less keen to blame servants. In 1917 Mrs Peel criticised ignorant employers, asserting that competent sympathetic mistresses could make service 'one of the most sought-after professions open to the average woman'.¹³ In 1934 the feminist writer Winifred Holtby blamed women for the amount of housework. She averred they fussed over petty details and 'bully their families or servants into neuroses', attributing such behaviour to lack of outlet for their energies.¹⁴ Mrs Noble rebuked mistresses in 1930 for labelling servants incompetent when the fault lay with inefficient tools and appliances.¹⁵

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ [William A Johnson] *The Servant Problem. Can it be solved? By an old-established Domestic Employment Agent* (ERA Press, nd [1922]), p.4 and p.7.

¹² Ibid, p.12.

¹³ Mrs C S Peel *The Labour-Saving House* (John Lane The Bodley Head, 1917), pp.8-10.

¹⁴ Winifred Holtby *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (Bodley Head, 1934), p.149.

¹⁵ Mrs Robert Noble *Labour Saving in the Home. A Complete Guide for the Modern Housewife* (Macmillan and Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1930), p.7.

The servant problem was given credence, recognition and a gender bias by publication of the 1923 Government enquiry into the supply of female domestic servants. (See discussion in Chapter 4.) Shortly afterwards, psychologist Violet Firth published a book that approached the servant problem from a new and unusual angle. *The Psychology of the Servant Problem. A Study in Social Relationships* is important for three reasons. First, Firth adopts a psychological approach, attempting to examine the issue objectively as a 'social problem'. Second, she uses a wider social and historical context, seeking to identify underlying causes of domestic service's unpopularity and low status. Third, she takes an outsider's view, although it is questionable whether she maintains the objectivity for which she strives. Since she tends to favour the viewpoint of servants, her book provides an antidote to those presenting the problem from the employers' viewpoint. Firth moved away from defining the servant problem as one of practicalities, for example, wages and conditions. Instead she saw human relationships – notably the intense personal interaction in domestic service – as the key to both problem and solution.

Firth was aware of both the long-term existence and changing nature of the servant problem, referring to its definition by previous generations as failure to get good servants and its current definition as failure to get any servants.¹⁶ But she attributed the current problem largely to the servant-keeping class's failure to understand what being a servant really meant – this, she avowed, could be remedied by trying the experiment of working in someone else's house. Mistresses should face facts, and face them from the servant's standpoint:

It is not false ideals alone that will make girls prefer semi-starvation to housework; it is personal experience of the real hardships involved that make them struggle so bitterly against "going into service".¹⁷

Firth defined the servant problem as 'a caste war'.¹⁸ And it was this element of social status and hierarchical positioning identified as necessitating a psychological approach. This reference to 'caste' echoes the WIC survey that had defined caste as one factor for domestic service's unpopularity, to which younger servants were especially sensitive.¹⁹ This caste element manifested itself in perceived contempt from employers and servants' social equals. The WIC – and most mistresses – doubted the first existed except in servants' minds, although the WIC acknowledged the complaint to be so widespread as to have some factual basis. On analysis it concluded that such contempt was largely due to rudeness which mostly occurred with

¹⁶ Violet M Firth *The Psychology of the Servant Problem. A Study in Social Relationships* (The C W Daniel Co, June 1925), p.11.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.14.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.15.

¹⁹ The term 'caste' – redolent of Imperialism – was used in the WIC report, published 1916.

the self-made employers, and accounts for the common opinion among maids that you should not take a place with “people no better than yourself”, but it also appears among employers of a higher social class, who have not altered the methods of address of a hundred years ago.²⁰

The WIC concluded that contempt from social equals was often an imagined grievance, despite evidence from servants. A lady’s maid thought servants were ‘treated as belonging to quite an inferior race to all other workers’, a view echoed by a nursemaid. A parlourmaid stated: ‘A girl in service is ignored by people in her own social scale, merely because she is a servant’ while a cook-housekeeper bemoaned a servant’s lack of social status: ‘She is always spoken of slightly and with contempt. She is absolutely nothing and nobody.’²¹

The WIC felt social stigma arose from a combination of maids’ lack of self-respect, lack of formal training, and the fact that anyone could keep servants. This issue of employers’ class concerned the WIC greatly on this point, for it was condemnatory that the servant-supplying class of 40 years before – artisans, shopkeepers, farmers – were now servant-employers.²²

Class distinction was also one of the causes to which Firth attributed the servant problem in 1925, the others being a conflict of two standards of living under one roof, the long hours and lack of freedom, and what Firth called ‘the group tone of the servant caste’.

Firth believed class distinctions, ensuring a two-tier country of superiors and inferiors, were being eroded by universal education. She was dismissive of respect accorded by income, castigating ‘middle-class women [who] are rigorous in their enforcement of caste reverence’.²³

The conflict engendered by two disparate standards of living within one household was exacerbated by unnecessary drudgery, for which Firth rebuked thoughtless employers. She astutely summarised the heart of resentment at this disparity:

this dual standard of life under one roof will eventually prevent any settlement of the servant problem upon its present lines. However philosophically people may forego a luxury they only know by hearsay, they will assuredly want a share in anything which they see, and if denied their share, will be discontented and restless; and no concessions with regard to higher wages and better outings will eradicate this trait.²⁴

The WIC survey had revealed great variance in work and leisure hours. Mistresses thought leisure desirable but felt unable to grant more, citing servants’ untrustworthiness and inability to share tasks. Servants commonly complained about limited access to fresh air, which

²⁰ Butler *Domestic Service* p.34.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp.36-9.

²² *Ibid*, p.40.

²³ Firth *Psychology of the Servant Problem* p.23.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.26.

they felt could be easily remedied. The WIC calculated, by combining spare moments, that servants had much daily free time. But their inability to complete tasks, plan workloads, and share work with colleagues wasted time – which the WIC thought easily countered by good work methods and grouping congenial maids. Firth refuted claims of many work-free moments, stating that these did not constitute liberty, and decreed recreation a necessity not a luxury, without which a human became merely a machine.²⁵ Mistresses' great mistake was failing to see servants as people with the same needs and desires as themselves. Firth castigated them:

Would they care to live under the conditions they make for their servants? Presumably not, since, having the choice, they do not do so.²⁶

Firth's fourth cause – 'group tone of the servant caste' – derived from her psychological approach. She explained it as akin to differences between individuals and mobs, whereby groups lose civilising and controlling influences of constituent members. She claimed that servant girls had a 'social inheritance' from female relatives previously in service – thus girls carried into jobs not only their own resentment at poor treatment and low status but also an inherited resentment.²⁷ This historical sense of bitterness was hardest to combat, needing long-term and sustained efforts to resolve.

Wages were not a major cause of discontent. This accords with the WIC survey when mistresses rejected proposed State intervention in this area, for three reasons – as an intrusion into the home; impracticability; inapplicability to the (1914) state of supply and demand.²⁸ Firth asserted that, if wages were the focus of hostility towards domestic service, then higher wages would solve the servant problem quickly and simply. But, she averred, it was the sense of inferiority and treatment as automata that were major issues in service.

Firth attributed the perennial complaints of servants' inefficiency to bad training, both during service and beforehand. Mistresses were guilty by lacking qualities to train servants, for 'knowledge of the domestic arts' was not an instinctive trait of women. (Firth thus contradicts an almost universal acceptance of domestic work as woman's natural and inborn sphere.) Furthermore, disparity in lifestyles of employer and employed generated a sense of artificiality and superfluity, since the servant – taking her own environment as the norm – would view her mistress's standards as abnormal or excessive.²⁹ Ignorance of how-the-other-half-lived worked both ways, of course – and may explain why some mistresses were intolerant of their servants.

²⁵ Butler *Domestic Service* pp.49-55; Firth *Psychology of the Servant Problem* pp.35-6.

²⁶ Firth *Psychology of the Servant Problem* p.37.

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp.28-9.

²⁸ Butler *Domestic Service* p.61.

²⁹ Firth *Psychology of the Servant Problem* p.43 and p.47.

One practice contributing to low status was that of seeking servants from orphanages and workhouses, which depressed wages and fuelled perceptions of service as unskilled work. Firth noted that a girl with no alternative job and no family had little option but to remain as part of this effectively forced supply of labour. Beauchamp echoed this view in 1937, regarding girls from the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society. Such servants, without references, forfeited the luxury of choosing jobs, often receiving a pittance or only their keep.³⁰

Firth believed that different types of domestic service generated different problems. Thus, 'An abundant supply of charwomen is significant of bad times in the industrial world', reflecting labour market fluctuations.³¹ Resident domestic service presented the greatest problem, being the 'chief desideratum of the housewife' – someone constantly at her beck and call.³² Firth highlighted three drawbacks for servants – lack of relaxation and social life; conflicts due to caste distinctions and poor domestic management; lack of home life – and expressed surprise that laws of supply and demand had not already improved conditions. Referring to the 1923 report, Firth laid the blame for failure to recruit and retain resident domestics firmly at the door of mistresses – they were unable to conceive of any lifestyle except as a privileged class with 'its necessary corollary of an unprivileged class'. Thus, claimed Firth, 'The crux of the servant problem lies in the psychology of the employing classes.'³³

The concept of the servant problem – and reasons for its existence – was not static. Despite points of consensus, authors defined the servant problem differently and attributed its cause to different factors. Thus, the servant problem was not a simple issue but a complex and multi-faceted problem. The Great War, by widening women's employment opportunities, served to clarify existing dissatisfaction with domestic service jobs. Post-war attention focusing on domestic service served to publicise concerns about this employment sector, particularly from employers' viewpoints. Thus the concept of the servant problem gained greater credence.

Defining Solutions

Given the multiplicity of definitions of the servant problem, albeit with a consensus of shortage of female workers, how was it proposed to tackle the servant problem?

Regulation of domestic service was suggested. For example, in 1922 employment agency proprietor William Johnson proposed a three-stranded solution. First, domestic employment agencies should be Government licensed. Second, numbers of licences should be

³⁰ Ibid, p.48; Joan Beauchamp *Women who Work* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), p.75.

³¹ Ibid, p.54.

³² Ibid, p.62.

³³ Ibid, p.65.

restricted according to locality and demand. Third, agencies should supply servants with character books, to begin on leaving school and passed from mistress to mistress, thus avoiding the possibility of tampering by the maid.³⁴ (Johnson appears oblivious to the possibility of tampering by a mistress, indicating that he saw mistresses not servants as victims of unscrupulous behaviour.) The proposals, advocating a larger and more official role for employment agencies in placing (female) servants, clearly arose from Johnson's experiences. Despite this overt and narrow bias, Johnson attempted to use his knowledge of the situation – albeit from viewpoint of mistress rather than servant – to address the issue.

The most commonly suggested solution to the servant problem was training, although the types of training – and the rationale behind it – varied. While 'an employer of servants' advocated training in domestic work for rich and poor, thus leading to 'more fully equipped mistresses, and better qualified servants'³⁵, the objective was clearly to maintain the status quo of class distinction, diverse lifestyles and leisured existence for employers.

The review of training provision in the 1914 WIC survey was more pragmatic, although it clearly supported employers' viewpoints. The WIC concluded that domestic service suffered by being both easy and difficult to enter – anyone who was reasonably fit, healthy and honest could become a servant, which tended to lower status, with 'good' places more difficult to enter. The solution depended on the locale of recruits. Village girls, often reluctant to enter service, were in demand as servants but rural depopulation had depleted this supply. Domestic training for school-leavers would remedy this by improving initial wages. Town girls came either from the labouring classes, whose alternative employment was rough factory work with better starting wages, or the artisan class who favoured shop, office or factory work despite initially lower wages. Town-based parents preferred daughters to enter domestic service later than their rural counterparts. Girls delaying entry until 17 or 18 were either desirous of becoming a lady's maid or sewing maid (already vastly oversupplied) or disillusioned with factory life.³⁶

The WIC examined four proposals to encourage beginners – apprenticeship; on-site training; school lessons; technical training. The WIC deemed apprenticeship good in theory but 'entirely against the spirit of the age'. On-site training by mistresses existed on a small scale but was deemed old-fashioned and unsuitable for underdeveloped or delicate girls. An increase in school lessons was popular with parents and employers (some thought domestic lessons should

³⁴ [Johnson] *The Servant Problem* pp.16-8.

³⁵ Nicoll *Woman's Sphere* p.22.

³⁶ Butler *Domestic Service* pp.71-4. On the depopulation of the countryside, see, for example, Dudley Baines *Migration in a Nature Economy: Emigration and Internal Migration in England and Wales 1861-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

form half of working-class girls' curriculum) but opposed by proponents of a liberal education system. The WIC thought raising the school-leaving age to 15 would greatly simplify the domestic service problem, but acknowledged 'many valid objections' in current educational conditions. The WIC favoured technical training, perhaps influenced by their Nursery Nurses scheme. Technical training, they avowed, could be effected in three ways – continuation classes for girls aged 14-16; day schools on the lines of London Trade Schools; residential training. Day-release continuation classes for working servants – a big success in Switzerland and Germany, and believed to raise status and provide incentive – depended on employer co-operation. Day training in Trade Schools, likely to appeal to girls from the 'well-to-do artisan class', would be costly unless newly financed by old endowments. Residential training was already offered in various homes (including poor law and industrial schools), under Municipal schemes and by the WIC. Although this was localised and small scale, the WIC thought residential training the key to success, provided it combined theory and practice.³⁷

While the WIC's training proposals would enhance servants' skills, the objective was clearly to answer employers' concerns. The WIC failed to question whether servants would embark on additional training or whether trained servants would accept the low wages and poor conditions of domestic service. However, this survey was conducted in 1914 before the wartime expansion of women's job opportunities, so perhaps the WIC merely reflected a consensus of contemporary opinion that servants would remain subservient and uncritical.

The sense of domestic servants as subserviently uncritical apparently held good in 1928, when Vera Brittain warned of the need to train workers in domestic service which 'suffers from a long tradition of excessive hours, low wages and tyrannical restrictions'. Her warning was allied to the need to enhance all women's employment, for she decried the equation of women's work and inferior work.³⁸ On domestic service, Brittain stated:

There is probably no occupation in which the worker is still so emphatically regarded as having a "place", and that a very inferior one.³⁹

This belies the view of earlier campaigners that domestic service training – notably specialist groups – would lead to professionalisation. Even supporters of this ideal could be critical of the practicalities. The Central Bureau for the Employment of Women – advocates of Lady Servants – thought it impossible to determine the validity of encouraging educated women into domestic service until it was raised 'to rank among the professions'. At a joint conference

³⁷ Butler *Domestic Service* pp.76-9.

³⁸ Vera Brittain *Women's Work in Modern England* (Noel Douglas, 1928), p.30 and p.33.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.31.

with the Guild of Household Dames (involved in training Lady Servants) they conversely argued that entry of educated women would inevitably raise the status of domestic service.⁴⁰

A similar notion of 1917 asserted that:

to make domestic service popular we must make it fashionable. [...] Alter the conditions of domestic service until the profession of domestic worker attracts the educated woman, and the problem is solved.⁴¹

Employers were generally positive towards the concept of special servants' organisations with super-efficient members commanding higher wages. While the idea was operational in limited aspects (Lady Servants and Norland Nurses), employers were sceptical of practicability or success for a general organisation of servants.⁴² This suggests that employers were reluctant to pay for skilled domestic staff, preferring to exploit the class differences that divided special servants from the majority of domestic workers.

Professionalisation extended to mistresses, focusing on education and the concept of household management. Magazine articles and degrees at King's College, London were cited as evidence. Some saw training at home as paramount, advocating experience for all children in running the home. The WIC agreed that richer girls would benefit from domestic training, allowing them to manage households and servants by being better placed to estimate workloads.⁴³ Promotion of household management thus underpinned employers' concerns while simultaneously endorsing their control of the employer-servant relationship.

Adaptation was recognised as part of solving the servant problem, for example, use of labour-saving devices, either to ease servants' tasks or to replace servants. In 1923 Randal Phillips' *The Servantless House* envisaged a time when housework was no longer the province of an army of servants. Published by the up-market magazine *Country Life*, his book explores how the typical housewife's house might be physically designed, adapted or organised to minimise housework. His eminently practical book offers an intriguing insight into the latest appliances and devices – from efficient storage of saucepans, to easy clean Pyrex dishes, from simple-to-make umbrella racks, to cost evaluations of laundry options. The devices are not new inventions and, indeed, Randal Phillips acknowledges that changes in attitudes towards house design and appliances were forced upon housewives by the post-war servant problem:

⁴⁰ *Lady Servants*, p.17 and p.23.

⁴¹ Peel *Labour-Saving House* p22.

⁴² Butler *Domestic Service* p.60.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp.82-4.

Possibly if these [appliances] had been provided in the past the servant problem might not have been so difficult as it is to-day; because the heavy labour and continual work would have been eliminated, and servants would have enjoyed better conditions. [...] the plain fact is that it is these labour-saving devices in conjunction with a well-arranged plan that can make it possible to work a house successfully and conveniently without a maid.⁴⁴

Women's magazines helped promote domestic appliances as, for example, the glossy American monthly *Good Housekeeping* launched in Britain in March 1922.⁴⁵ Priced 1s, this was clearly not targeted at those associated with the drudgery of domestic service. Horwood points out that domestic interest magazines were not new, but argues that growth of such publications in the 1920s is allied to the servant shortage. Advertisers initially assumed the presence of servants, but by 1930 began to appeal directly to housewives, emphasising a shift in attitudes towards housework. From being the province of servants, this now became the housewife's true vocation in running her home successfully. Horwood cautions against attributing too much influence to domestic interest magazines, but the fact remains that readers were exposed to advertisers' promoted ideals. And many middle-class women – or those aspiring to be – may have seen technology as a way of coping with the servant problem.

The ultimate solution to the servant problem – its removal by the simple expedient of not having servants – was, in the 1920s and 1930s, a radical step beyond most people's comprehension. Published material shows that the concept was starting to find favour, albeit limited and probably via necessity rather than philosophical belief in its validity. The designs in the *Daily Mail* book of its 1920 Ideal Labour-Saving Home architectural competition illustrate how radical a shift the servantless house was. Prize-winning Design 1, a five-bedroomed house, has a maid's room between coalhouse and dining room. The maid in Design 2, a four-bedroomed house, has a room beside the kitchen plus own bedroom. Despite claims to offer comfort without domestic help, Design 3 offers its single occupier four bedrooms. Seven commended designs include the ubiquitous maid's room. Clearly the concept of the 1920 labour-saving house did not extend to dispensing with residential paid help. Only one commended entry was designed 'for the evolution of the servantless house, which does not impose slavery upon its occupier'.⁴⁶ The architect's unusual attitude thus allies the slavery of the servant (at her mistress's beck and call) with that of the employer (lacking privacy).

⁴⁴ J Randal Phillips *The Servantless House* (Country Life, 1923, second edition), p.147.

⁴⁵ Catherine Horwood, 'Housewives' Choice – Women as consumers between the wars' *History Today* 47(3), (March 1997), pp.23-8.

⁴⁶ *Daily Mail Ideal Labour-Saving Home* (Associated Newspapers, 1920), p.2, p.6, p.8, p.10 and p.11.

Few writers considered what might replace the worker in the ultimate servantless house, beyond daily maids or the housewife assuming servants' duties. Co-operative housekeeping was periodically suggested. Many ideas were vague, for example the WIC in 1914 who allied it with a need for changes in house construction plus use of labour-saving devices.⁴⁷ This was echoed 20 years later by Holtby, who berated the current system of housework for hindering progress of 'scientific labour saving' and for poor domestic architecture. She concluded that women 'determined to spend no more time than was absolutely necessary upon domestic labour could have revolutionised housekeeping within a decade'.⁴⁸ She presumably has housewives in mind, for servants would have little or no say over household equipment.

The most ardent advocate for co-operative living was Sylvia Pankhurst who promoted her view of domestic service in the journal *Workers' Dreadnought* in 1920. Written at the time of her wholehearted support for Communist ideals (having recently debated with Lenin in Moscow), the article advocated co-operative living on a grand scale:

I haven't described our Co-operative home to you. It is built round a square garden and there is another garden round it. There is also a garden on the roof. The dining-room and kitchen are on the top floor. The school nursery, crèche, and children's garden is at the end of the block of buildings. There are a tennis court, croquet lawn, a hall for meetings, concerts, dances, and so on, a sewing room, workshops for all sorts of crafts, a library and gymnasium, and two big summer houses in the garden, one of which is for the older children.⁴⁹

Firth likewise advocated communal and co-operative systems as one solution to the servant problem, to be achieved through simplification of lifestyles – reduced time spent on housework would allow many women to undertake their own domestic work. Furthermore, Frith's co-operative housekeeping system was based on commercial viability not political ideals. For example, she advocated an increase in tasks already undertaken externally – laundries, breadmaking, brewing, restaurants – with its concomitant use of specialists and technology. Such a lifestyle would reduce servility, to the benefit of all.⁵⁰

Bourke has suggested one reason for failure of co-operative housekeeping experiments to be women's resistance to sharing power with other women, asserting that women saw household tasks as defining their power in the home.⁵¹ Unlike Pankhurst, for example, Holtby did not advocate co-operative working at the expense of individualism although she expressed a

⁴⁷ Butler *Domestic Service* p.31.

⁴⁸ Holtby *Women and a Changing Civilisation* p.149-50.

⁴⁹ Sylvia Pankhurst, 'Co-operative housekeeping', *Workers' Dreadnought* 28 August 1920. In Kathryn Dodd (ed) *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.104-5.

⁵⁰ Firth *Psychology of the Servant Problem* pp.75-8.

⁵¹ Joanna Bourke 'Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914' (1994) in Pamela Sharpe (ed) *Women's Work. The English Experience 1650-1914* (Arnold, 1998), p.344.

hope that men might take a larger share of the burden. Yet like Pankhurst, whose own experiences profoundly influenced her beliefs, Holtby's personal life imposes itself in her scenario for spinsters in this future domestic life:

Spinsters will help in their spare time over-worked mothers, taking in compensation for the loss of their leisure, the tender and charming pleasures of bathing and feeding and amusing small children, and the enjoyment of returned affection.⁵²

Holtby's concern over spinsters echoes that expressed 20 years earlier by the WIC. It felt that older maids, particularly those who never or belatedly married, were 'often obviously stunted for want of something on which to lavish their affections.' The WIC solution was unpaid social service work with children and the elderly, thus also benefiting the community.⁵³ Firth echoes Holtby's view of spinsters acting as mother's helps, but offers a more balanced and employment-related scheme to benefit households with special needs, where removal of all domestic service or integration into a communal lifestyle was impracticable. Households with young children, invalids or elderly persons would benefit from a system of 'home helps', with members from the lower ranks of the class employing them. In this way they would become family members rather than servants – thus negating all current problems of class hostility, caste distinctions and disparate lifestyles.⁵⁴

All suggestions so far examined relate to practicalities of the servant problem, whether maintaining the status quo or addressing a servantless future. But emotional issues – so adroitly pinpointed by Firth – were not wholly ignored. Mutual respect between mistress and maid was a recurring theme. In 1906 one Lady Servant urged mistresses to become their maids' friend and protector. Employers of Lady Servants expressed similar opinions, one urging a do-as-you-would-be-done-by attitude in all class relations.⁵⁵ The narrower cultural and social gap between mistress and Lady Servant than was usual in employer-servant relationships may have helped a closer rapport. "Justice" – with greater awareness of wider social implications of the servant problem even in 1910 – likewise advocated mutual agreement between mistress and maid as the balancing force in domestic service. This author's views seem more pragmatic, with the maid's energetic interest and the employer's considerate attention as a mutually reinforcing work arrangement. Such arrangements would encourage the more intelligent girl to enter service, for 'To get the right sort of girl, you must give her the right kind of treatment.'⁵⁶ Similarly, Johnson

⁵² Holtby *Women and a Changing Civilisation* p.191.

⁵³ Butler *Domestic Service* p.33.

⁵⁴ Firth *Psychology of the Servant Problem*, pp.79-84.

⁵⁵ *Lady Servants* pp.7-8 and pp.12-14.

⁵⁶ "Justice" *Solution of the Servant Problem* p.3.

urged mistresses to see the employer-servant relationship as a business proposition, warning them to remember that they had bought the services of their servants, not their body and soul.⁵⁷

Firth – defining the crux of the servant problem as employers' failure to countenance lifestyle changes – saw readjustment of the employer-employee relationship as vital. Firth felt that this called for a radical shift in thinking, without which there was little hope of a solution. Equally pessimistic was her warning that success of any scheme rested as much on the spirit in which it was done as its intrinsic soundness. Therefore, willingness to face the situation, to acknowledge inequalities, and to adapt was fundamental to solving the servant problem.⁵⁸ Here Firth hit upon the crux of the solution to the servant problem for, without a radical shift in thinking, the servant problem could not and would not be solved. Until servants' concerns were recognised and addressed, until dissatisfaction was alleviated, until poor conditions and terms were remedied, the servant problem would remain.

On Behalf of Servants

Although autobiographical memoirs offer insights into servants' lives, contemporary sources are scarce. For example, two social surveys into domestic service tended to discount servants' views. The 1914 WIC survey canvassed employers and employees, but the questionnaires indicate that only employers' views were sought on wider aspects of domestic service.⁵⁹ Similarly the 1929-1930 New Survey of London (NSOL), undertaken by the London School of Economics, sent questionnaires to mistresses only.⁶⁰ Servants' views can be found in both these surveys which offer at least some insight into their expressed concerns.

What did servants see as problems? The 'caste' element, designating servants as inferior, has already been discussed. As noted, servants' views on this were often dismissed as imaginary or exaggerated, despite widespread anecdotal evidence to the contrary. Unlike many workers, servants were almost universally required to wear uniforms. The WIC was adamant that society loved uniforms. While agreeing that caps – 'trademark of modern slavery' – might be dispensed with (serving no utilitarian purpose), the WIC confidently stated that few working women wore clothes 'both so practical and becoming as the maid's cotton dresses and aprons.'⁶¹ The WIC dismissed allegations that cost of uniforms was deducted from servants' wages, since employers

⁵⁷ [Johnson] *The Servant Problem* p.11.

⁵⁸ Firth *Psychology of the Servant Problem*, pp.70-4 and pp.87-96.

⁵⁹ Butler *Domestic Service* Appendix VIII.

⁶⁰ British Library of Political and Economic Science (hereinafter BLPES), NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, Questionnaire Form. The survey was published: H. Llewellyn Smith (ed) *The New Survey of London Life and Labour* (P S King, nine volumes, 1930-35). I have used the original data and notes made 1929-1930.

⁶¹ Butler *Domestic Service* pp.61-2.

'almost always' provided special uniforms. But servants disliked wearing clothes marking them as different or 'inferior' and resented receiving uniforms as Christmas gifts.⁶²

Three other problematic areas were cited in 1914 – liberty, companionship, interests. The main drawback to domestic service almost unanimously cited by servants was lack of liberty, whether or not this affected them personally. Stating that restrictions were for servants' own good, the WIC advocated a less rigid regime based on enforcement of a few strict rules plus trust, a regime requiring better management skills from mistresses.⁶³ Freedom was still an issue in 1930, as one girl interviewed by NSOL investigators demonstrated. She remedied this by switching jobs from children's nurse to club linen-room maid, with less money but more freedom.⁶⁴ One solution offering greater liberty would have been daily instead of residential service – an idea favoured by servants but not mistresses.⁶⁵

The second problem area cited in 1914 was companionship. This could be a drawback or benefit, depending on the personality of the servant, but all servants agreed that loneliness was a major problem, affecting both single- and multi-servant households. Young working-class girls, accustomed to a lifestyle crowded with siblings, often found isolation stressful while uncongeniality within large domestic staffs could exacerbate loneliness. The sense of isolation was often deepened by the custom of banning visitors. Many mistresses did allow female visitors, and some made no visitor restrictions, but the idea of allowing strangers into the house worried many employers.⁶⁶ Institutional service also suffered companionship problems, as the NSOL survey revealed. While many girls appreciated this aspect, the matron at Guy's Hospital reported that:

Sometimes good ones leave because they don't like living with the rougher ones. They complain of bad language and so on, but as they will not give the names of the offenders nothing can be done about it.⁶⁷

Stratagems to combat loneliness varied according to circumstances and employer attitude. The matron of York Road Hospital, for example, encouraged pairs of friends to work together, her domestics coming mostly via a registry in Durham, an area of high unemployment. If an individual girl was apprehensive about seeking work in London, that reluctance might be eased by the companionship of friends. Guy's Hospital relied mainly on girls from Woolwich

⁶² For an example from c.1935 see Mabel Coppins *Beyond the Village Green* (Berkshire: Thames Valley Printers, nd [1984?]), Chapter 8 (unpaginated).

⁶³ Butler *Domestic Service* pp.13-5.

⁶⁴ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Report of interviews with servant girls at YWCA Club 27 March 1930*.

⁶⁵ Firth *Psychology of the Servant Problem* pp.56-61.

⁶⁶ Butler *Domestic Service* pp.17-9 and pp.21-2.

⁶⁷ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Guy's Hospital information obtained from Matron 11 December 1929*.

and Rotherhithe but also some from Wales, while St Thomas' had a large supply from South Wales and Northumberland mining districts.⁶⁸ The WIC survey highlighted the unusually liberal attitude of one North Wales mistress who attempted to solve loneliness by 'keeping my servants supplied with books, work, and games and by letting them use the motor for expeditions as often as possible.'⁶⁹ It is doubtful whether many mistresses were so altruistic.

Many servants regretted that their life lacked opportunity to develop interests, which awareness the WIC attributed to modern elementary education which aimed at all-round development of pupils. Servants offered suggestions for expanding mental interests, ranging from a recreation room to encouragement to develop musical talent or attend evening classes. One London general servant in 1914 felt that:

if a mistress would only realise that a maid is quite capable of appreciating a good concert or a library, and would arrange for a little time to be allowed to develop a hobby, it would tend to a much happier state of things.⁷⁰

Her words are echoed in 1930 by a complaint that 'the bad mistress ... expected you to be stupid and to have no interests beyond young men, dancing and clothes'. Furthermore, a bad mistress 'didn't think you ought to appreciate beauty'.⁷¹ Such assertions indicate a continued denial of servants' cultural and social needs – despite widespread opportunity to expand mental interests via education and leisure activities such as reading, wireless and cinema.

The WIC dismissed many servants' complaints as imagined or unreasonable. Citing the intensely personal relationship between employer and servant, the WIC stated that solutions were thus also personal and declined to suggest ways to redress them.⁷² This abnegation of responsibility in a survey which aimed to assess conditions and solicit solutions (albeit from employers) suggests that servants' voices – even if heard – were belittled, denigrated or ignored.

Publications representing servants are rare. A notable exception is *Domestic News*, first published 1915 and running until 1921 when it changed its name – and focus – to *Feminine Life*. This small monthly magazine, published for the Domestic Servants' Insurance Society, had a target audience of working servants, indicated by its low price (1d), poor quality production on cheap paper, and content. This followed a pattern of self-advertisement, romantic but wildly unrealistic stories, and educational/vocational articles such as literary extracts 'Famous Servants in Fiction' (designed to encourage readers to regard domestic work as worthy and worthwhile).

⁶⁸ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Ibid* and *St Thomas' Hospital – information obtained from sisters in charge of servants* 7 January 1930.

⁶⁹ Butler *Domestic Service* p.20.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.27.

⁷¹ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Report of interviews with servant girls at YWCA Club* 27 March 1930.

⁷² Butler *Domestic Service* p.98.

In January 1916 the Editor assured servants leaving 'their present vocation to take up war work' that they were not debarred from remaining a member of 'one of the richest and most prosperous Approved Societies under the National Insurance Act'.⁷³ This suggests that numbers of female servants choosing alternative jobs was causing concern. In February 1919 the Editor questioned whether women would return to domestic service, citing the main difficulties as 'the bogus registry, the shiftless servant and the exacting mistress'.⁷⁴ Readers were encouraged to suggest ways to popularise domestic service, these appearing in the April 1919 issue. Necessary improvements – from female servants' perspective – included limited hours with Sunday free, better wages, comfortable bedrooms, better food, more fresh air.⁷⁵ These improvements bear an uncanny resemblance to the most common complaints in the 1914 WIC survey, suggesting that they were genuine causes of widespread discontent.

The Domestic Servants' Insurance Society – an exclusively female organisation – seemed popular with its members. By 1915, three years after formation, membership was nearly 75,000 open to all those in domestic work. London boasted the headquarters plus nine branches while another nine branches served those as far afield as Manchester and Norwich, Bath and Tunbridge Wells. The Management Committee included several titled ladies – Lady St Helier (guiding light behind the Society's formation), Duchess of Marlborough, Countess of Selborne – as well as activists like Margaret Bondfield and Olive Penny (a working servant).

Members could use the Society's free employment bureau, the savings bank, or apply to the Benevolent Fund if they fell on hard times. An extra weekly contribution of 1d minimum brought increased sick pay, pension, endowments and death benefits. One major benefit open to members was the popular 'Home of Rest' near Crystal Palace affording the chance to recuperate after illness. By July 1915 the Society had moved to new offices, occupying four floors and including a free Dental Clinic for members.⁷⁶

Despite these advantages, the vast majority of female servants were not tempted to join the Society. By October 1915 membership had only increased to 77,000, falling to under 64,000 by August 1916. By May 1919 numbers were sufficiently low to prompt an editorial on how to popularise the Society.⁷⁷ Given the high numbers of domestic servants (see Chapter 2), it is odd that the Society was not more widely supported.

⁷³ *Domestic News* January 1916, p.1.

⁷⁴ *Domestic News* February 1919, p.2.

⁷⁵ *Domestic News* April 1919, pp.1-2 and 15-16.

⁷⁶ *Domestic News* April 1915, pp.10-1 and July 1915, p.11.

⁷⁷ *Domestic News* October 1915, pp.19-21 and August 1916, pp.1-3 and May 1919, pp.1-2 and 15.

Such lack of interest in organised membership is perhaps indicative of the isolated nature of servants' jobs. Unlike office or factory workers, employed alongside like-minded colleagues, servants had no history of unionisation or organised self-help. And mistresses may have been reluctant to encourage servants to take up Society membership lest it upset the status quo. Campaigner and social investigator Barbara Drake highlighted in 1920 both the paucity of trade unions for domestic servants and their small membership. The Domestic Workers of Great Britain, for example, had 'a mere handful of members'.⁷⁸ Yet without official representation, domestic service remained an isolated employment sector where servants' concerns and the often less-than-desirable working conditions found little voice and few champions.

Membership of clubs, such as those run by the Girls' Friendly Society or the YWCA, was encouraged as a means of socialisation, but the 1914 WIC survey showed that only 20 per cent of respondents were or had been members.⁷⁹ Servants' apparent disinterest in clubs may have been due to lack of liberty and companionship, locality of venues and transport. The long-established Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants (MABYS) was one of very few groups concerned primarily with (female) servants. Its focus was, as its name implies, philanthropic rather than political. It played a limited role as employment agency, mostly for private houses in affluent London areas like Kensington but occasionally in hospitals.⁸⁰

After the Great War, some attempts were made to organise servant girls. But attempts were largely on a social or quasi-educational basis. They tended to be local rather than national, instigated by a 'Lady Bountiful' – usually an enlightened mistress in an affluent area of London. For example, *The Wayfarers Sunday Association*, operating in the late 1920s from Kingsway, was aimed specifically at young country girls previously from mining areas. It aimed to provide congenial places to meet new friends – unusually, servants were encouraged to bring boyfriends. A half-crown membership entitled girls to inexpensively priced teas and suppers, as well as choir singing, drama classes, and visits to concerts, galleries and lectures.⁸¹

A more ambitious scheme was started in 1922 by Mrs Kellock of Wimpole Street. Her *Domestic Fellowship* aimed 'to create a better understanding between mistresses and maids'.⁸² Inspired by the 'opportunities for self-education, sports, acting, and recreation of all sorts, that

⁷⁸ Barbara Drake *Women in Trade Unions* (Labour Research Department, 1920. Reprinted Virago, 1984), p.180. Drake was the niece of Beatrice Webb, and for a long time was active in the Fabian Society.

⁷⁹ Butler *Domestic Service* pp.23-4.

⁸⁰ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Report of interview of Southwark Branch of Mabys Association* 21 March 1930.

⁸¹ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *The Wayfarers Sunday Association* leaflet, nd.

⁸² BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Report of an interview with Mrs Kellock*, 29 May 1930.

nearly all business girls have in these days', she decided to redress the inequality which denied servants such opportunities.⁸³ Membership was confined to those in the 'Domestic Profession either as employers or employed', with subscriptions set at 2s 6d for mistresses and 1s for maids.⁸⁴ The Fellowship was apparently exclusively female – all references are to maids or mistresses – although there seems to have been no deliberate attempt to ban males. Mistresses were expected to play an active part in the Fellowship, holding monthly meetings at home and arranging a suitable lecture, debate or other educational interest.

A leaflet listing Fellowship activities indicates attempts to broaden maids' cultural horizons as well as encourage interest in housework, either tasks or in its wider social aspect.⁸⁵ Although picnics and other leisure trips – such as art galleries, museums, Kew Gardens, the Zoo – are included, many outings and talks are of a serious nature. Lessons on housewifery abound – laundry, polishing, needlework, mending – as well as demonstrations of domestic skills via exhibitions of work and written competitions. Vocational visits include a brush-making department of the Blind Association, Newcomen Street Training School (specialising in domestic service), Frascati restaurant kitchens. Lectures vary from the practical (home-made cleansers) to the cultural (Egypt) to the educational (Henry VIII). Taking pride of place on the list is a lecture 'The Dustbins of Marylebone, and how the Borough Council makes use of the Contents', followed by a visit to the 'Marylebone Dust Destructor'. This apparently uninteresting subject was undoubtedly at the forefront of contemporary technology, thus reinforcing the growing concept of housework as a science.

One organisation *The League of Skilled Housecraft* sought to raise the status of domestic service. Founded 1922 by the Girls' Friendly Society (a long-established philanthropic association), this was unusual in having committee members from groups like MABYS and YWCA as well as representatives from the Board of Education and Ministry of Labour. Its aim was to raise standards and define domestic service as a skilled occupation, through a training system whereby servant girls over 17 studied to become Probationers and eventually League Members. Many Local Education Authorities and Domestic Training Centres⁸⁶ participated in the scheme, arranging exams in towns local to candidates, thus avoiding heavy rail fares. Successful candidates were encouraged to wear a Probationer's Badge or a League uniform: 'The colour is saxe blue: a cotton for mornings, and a pretty but inexpensive material for

⁸³ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *An Appeal to Mistresses* leaflet, nd [1929].

⁸⁴ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *The Domestic Fellowship* single-sided leaflet, nd.

⁸⁵ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Lectures, Lessons, Expeditions etc that have taken place since the fellowship was started in 1922* leaflet, nd [1929?]

⁸⁶ These were training colleges specialising in domestic subjects. Many were founded in the nineteenth century and offered courses in domestic training geared to higher grades in service.

afternoon wear.⁸⁷ Since candidates had to pay for textbooks and examination fees, it is likely that they had to purchase this uniform – which explains the ‘inexpensive material’. There is no indication that mistresses might purchase the uniform or indeed accept their servants wearing it. By 1930, the spread of the League is evident, with exams held in 36 English and Welsh counties, 627 girls having entered for the Probationers’ certificate, and 95 becoming full Members. Its official support is also evident – the Duchess of Atholl, representing the Board of Education, presented certificates in 1927, as did Margaret Bondfield in 1929.⁸⁸

The League seems a genuine attempt to address the issue of low status by instigating recognised training, but its tally of under 800 candidates reveals that the League had limited appeal. Servants’ lack of time and money to devote to training may account for this.

Attempts to organise servants, either through specialist training or as a social group, seem, on the whole, to be small-scale affairs. Although well-supported by their enthusiastic adherents, they did not have wide or ultimately sustained appeal. Neither did most organisations address the fundamental issue of domestic service as an unpopular and often denigrated job. Generally the groups are well-intentioned attempts to instil female servants with pride in their work and perhaps offer a convivial meeting place. Yet they are redolent of Victorian philanthropy – the upper classes attempting to improve the lower classes. This is not to denigrate the ladies who set up organisations for domestic servants, but highlights once again the class distinctions of servants and employers – servants were voiceless without the intervention of their social superiors.

The New Survey of London

The ‘New Survey of London Life and Labour’ (NSOL) was carried out, under the aegis of the London School of Economics in late 1929/early 1930. This was to replicate, as far as domestic service was concerned, the 1896 Board of Trade study into conditions and wages.⁸⁹ The NSOL investigators gathered information from a variety of London-based sources – statistical data supplied by Employment Exchanges; wage rates recommended by the Metropolitan Asylums Board and in LCC training colleges and specialist schools; interviews with hospital matrons and proprietors of domestic service employment agencies; and a questionnaire for mistresses. This latter sought to obtain not just factual data on wages but also opinions as to changes since 1921. Mistresses were asked to state whether they had effected

⁸⁷ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *The League of Skilled Housecraft* leaflet, nd.

⁸⁸ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *The League of Skilled Housecraft – Report January 1930*.

⁸⁹ The 1896 survey was published: *Board of Trade Report on the Money Wages of Indoor Domestic Servants in the United Kingdom* C.9346 (1899).

replacements (women for men, men or boys for women) or dispensed with servants by moving to a smaller house, using labour-saving equipment or employing daily instead of resident servants. They were also asked to comment on servants' efficiency.⁹⁰ No questionnaire was sent to servants, although their views can be found in interviews and reports.

The aim of this section is to explore how the NSOL represented domestic service in comparison to the published material examined in this Chapter. Were problems identified and defined? What solutions had been implemented and what effect did they have? In short, had attitudes towards domestic service and the servant problem changed?

The previous social investigation into domestic service – the 1914 WIC survey – had concluded that there was a need for more co-operation between mistresses and maids. The WIC pointed to domestic service's unique place in labour relations – not, as for Firth because of its human relationships, but because of its 'indefiniteness' and the fact of its being the only big industry carried out on employer's premises with board and lodging as well as wages.⁹¹ Despite refusing to be drawn on solutions to address problems uncovered in this survey, the WIC optimistically concluded that domestic service would surely be transformed to bring it more into line with other women's industries – in the meantime, the period of transition provided an excellent opportunity for experiment in addressing the issues raised.⁹²

The WIC survey had one major advantage over the NSOL survey – it covered Britain, whereas the NSOL survey was exclusively London based. Nevertheless, London as a prime employer of servants may stand as representative of the status of 1930 domestic service.

An unsigned handwritten report into institutional domestic service, dated March 1931, lists recruitment methods. Public advertisement was widely used – for example, for Metropolitan Asylums Board (dissolved April 1930), Guy's, St Thomas', and St Bartholomew's. Some institutions provided lists of requirements to MABYS who included employment agency work in their activities. Philanthropic associations involved with mental welfare preferred to place their girls into private homes rather than institutions. The Central Association for Mental Welfare felt that institutional work could not offer the level of care that their girls needed, a feeling shared by Shaftesbury Homes. London Association for Mental Welfare had one or two isolated cases of placing girls as ward maids but this was not general policy.⁹³

Although training girls for domestic service seems to have been common in mental homes and orphanages at this time, I would suggest that the placing of such girls was seen as a

⁹⁰ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, Questionnaire Form.

⁹¹ Butler *Domestic Service* p.42.

⁹² Ibid, pp.95-9.

⁹³ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Domestic Service in Institutions* 17 March 1931.

therapeutic and philanthropic undertaking rather than a sustained effort to alleviate servant shortages. This attitude apparently prevailed throughout the interwar years, such girls rarely being brought into official training programmes. (In 1936-7 the Board of Education included one orphanage among its nine Junior Housewifery Schools whose aim was to train school-age girls in various branches of domestic service. The National Children's Home and Orphanage at Turton Edgworth, Bolton offered a two-year course for girls admitted at 14 or 15. Successful trainees were openly sent into domestic service employment – this may have been linked with the State aid it received.⁹⁴)

The domestic service situation in private houses was difficult for NSOL investigators to evaluate, perhaps reflecting its greater diversity and intrinsic personal nature. Two proprietors of employment agencies, interviewed in March 1930, differed widely in their view of the situation. Mrs Hart of Islington, with 43 years' experience, highlighted servants' desire for more liberty and believed that this could be accommodated without inconveniencing mistresses. She reported a marked decline in business, reflecting the area's changed circumstances:

the best mistresses have died off. With the good ones who remain she does not have many dealings because they keep their servants. Most of the houses have been turned into flats, which often means that the mistress only wants a daily servant. A great many of the houses have been bought by Jews, who demand a high standard of work. Also the ordinary servant girl cannot do their cooking.⁹⁵

Conversely Mrs Stuart of Fulham Road maintained there had been no great change since the Great War, apart from money wages – good and bad mistresses and servants were a perennial constant and 'People have always grumbled'. The main factor in domestic service, she thought, was to get the right servant for the right mistress – all would then go well, especially if the servant was treated as a human being.⁹⁶ One 30-year-old servant with 18 years' work experience supported this view, emphasising the importance of matching servant and mistress. Her current mistress, of eleven years' duration, provided her with labour-saving equipment to ease her household tasks. Her friend had switched from nursery governess to office work, not because of job dissatisfaction but because she had become too attached to the child to face another place after he had gone to school.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Public Record Office (hereinafter PRO), ED 46/293 PART 1, *Table of schools teaching domestic service skills for school year 1936/1937* and *Minute Paper* 6 July 1938.

⁹⁵ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Report of interview with Mrs Hart at Domestic Servants Agency in St Paul's Rd, Islington* 26 March 1930.

⁹⁶ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Report of interview with Mrs Stuart, Domestic Servants Agency, Fulham Rd* 28 March 1930.

⁹⁷ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Report of interviews with servant girls at YWCA Club* 27 March 1930.

The main findings of the NSOL investigation into domestic service were brought together in a report by Clara Collet & Daphne Sanger.⁹⁸ They maintained that London had always depended on girls from rural or small urban districts to fill the majority of servants' posts and concluded that the withdrawal of this source in wartime 'fully explains the increasing shortage of experienced servants' afterwards. They argued that introduction of the Widows', Orphans' and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act 1925, implemented in 1928, had encouraged elderly women seeking entrance to insurance societies to enter private domestic service, an employment sector readily able to absorb their numbers.⁹⁹

These conclusions accord with the 1914 WIC survey's views on employment prospects. First, many employers and servants thought domestic service an excellent foundation for married life – and widows were often able to find domestic work if economic needs dictated.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, there was likely to be no shortage of vacancies. Second, there was concern over the elderly unmarried servant. In 1914 she generally had three options. A popular choice, offering a good but arduous livelihood, was to sink her savings into a lodging house, an over-subscribed market. Or she might retire to keep house for a relative, receiving board and lodging in return. Finally, she might live on her savings or become a charwoman until sickness or destitution forced her into the workhouse.¹⁰¹ The WIC proposed insurance schemes to provide future security, based on compulsory Health Insurance, Collecting Society (one per cent of respondents were members), or superannuation scheme. But they berated servants for their lack of thrift: 'Servants quite naturally often tend to be extravagant in expenditure'¹⁰² Given domestic service's low pay and insecurity, this assessment of servants as spendthrift is harsh, indicating a lack of awareness by the WIC. It is likely that servants – with financial commitments to family – were unable to save, even if they were thrifty and avoided extravagance. Therefore the introduction of State pensions, as noted in the NSOL report, would have alleviated worries over elderly or unmarried servants, who in 1914 faced an uncertain and bleak future but in 1930 London could avail themselves of new opportunities in domestic service.

Collet & Sanger argued that the decline in domestic service, inevitable during wartime as women took on new opportunities and responsibilities, had begun to recover by 1930. This was particularly so among older women whose chances of re-entering service were greatly increased

⁹⁸ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Changes in Wages and Conditions of Domestic Servants in Private Families and Institutions in the County of London* October 1930. This typewritten report with handwritten corrections is only partially paginated. I have therefore used Section Headings as an identifying source.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, Introductory Summary.

¹⁰⁰ Butler *Domestic Service* p.63 and p.65.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.68.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, pp.69-70.

by an ability to demonstrate efficiency. Opportunities for such women were enhanced by changes in legislation, such as health insurance, which removed mistresses' real fear of liability to support a sick or elderly servant.¹⁰³ Collet & Sanger saw wider changes in society having an effect on the custom of servant-keeping – for example, conversion of large London houses into small flats and building smaller family homes made it difficult to employ resident servants. Similarly, younger wives 'show a disposition to adapt themselves to the new position and to prefer it'.¹⁰⁴ It seems that, at least for some younger housewives, by 1930 the servantless house – as predicted by Randal Phillips in 1923 – was indeed becoming a reality.

Collet & Sanger's first conclusion was that the position of domestics in households with only one or two servants had 'greatly improved', attributing this to parallel changes in education and circumstances of mistresses.¹⁰⁵ I would suggest that these households were middle-class but including many on the lower rungs who might be described as upper working-class – artisans, clerks, shopkeepers. Such mistresses, unlike their higher class sisters running large households, had no tradition of servant-keeping and had failed to maintain appropriate employer/employee relationships. Their servants were likely to be at either extreme of the age group – inexperienced school-leavers in their first post, older women financially dependent on work. Collet & Sanger's inference has curious overtones of the WIC's denigration of such employers, identified in 1914 as the main culprits for bad reputations among servant-employers.

This also reminds us that the practice of servant-keeping was not a straightforward case of class distinction. Official occupational classification of domestic servants branded their work menial, of inferior standing and performed by persons of a lower socio-economic group.¹⁰⁶ But this does not automatically bestow higher status or superior classification on their employers. A one-servant household might be married shopkeepers plus young maid-of-all-work. But large households might employ servants whose background and status were seen as higher than the shopkeepers' – for example, a housekeeper in Lady X's country mansion. This cross-class element highlights difficulties inherent in generalising in such a diverse field of employment.

¹⁰³ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Changes in Wages and Conditions of Domestic Servants*, II. Changes in Wages of Resident Domestic Indoor Servants, 1. Money Wages in 1929-30 and in 1894-6 in Private Households.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, I. Changes in Numbers and Proportions of Domestic Servants 1891-1930, (e) 1921-1930.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Introductory Summary.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, *Census of England & Wales 1951. Classification of Occupations* (HMSO, 1956) and *Census of England & Wales, 1951. General Report* (HMSO, 1958). Indoor domestic servants, excluding chefs and cooks, are officially classified as Social Class IV (Partly Skilled) or V (Unskilled) (*Classification of Occupations* p. vii and p.2) and in Socio-economic Group 8 (*General Report Appendix C* p.216).

Collet & Sanger's second conclusion referred to overall growth in domestic service, both for part-timers and resident full-time workers, arguing that most families with one resident maid before 1914 now tended to employ daily workers. They attributed this change to greater use of external facilities – eating out on special occasions – and of technology – appliances like vacuum cleaners, replacement of coal by electricity or gas – which gave mistresses more freedom in their homes.¹⁰⁷ This suggests mistresses with more wealth and better education – the middle-classes. Although domestic appliances were more widespread, they were not commonplace – due to ignorance of availability, lack of money, lack of fuel supply. Therefore, mistresses enjoying this greater freedom were women with more modern houses, a relaxed or adventurous attitude towards housework (that is, less bound by traditional methods and willing to experiment with 'gadgets'), knowledge of appliances, and enough money to afford them.

Curiously lacking in the NSOL report is mention of communal and co-operative housekeeping of the type suggested by Firth in 1925 – convenience foods, external laundries, etc. Was this because such facilities were unavailable or unused? Or were they so commonplace as to merit no inclusion? Given that Collet & Sanger refer to eating out, the latter reason of familiarity may be the correct one.

The NSOL report included mistresses' comments on (female) servants.¹⁰⁸ The majority of mistresses employing one or two full-time servants expressed satisfaction. One Wimbledon lady castigated playwrights for the harm done by stage caricatures of servants, claiming that 'Maids now generally speak good grammar and dress like girls in any other calling'. A Hampstead mistress declared servants 'Readier to adopt new methods and appliances'. Mistresses employing larger domestic staffs tended not to express an opinion although those who did were less likely to complain of inefficiency. A Kensington mistress thought 'young girls straight from school more intelligent and better trained in domestic work than 10 years ago', a view echoed by a Hampstead lady who believed 'Young servants more adaptable and intelligent than the older ones'. Another Hampstead mistress bemoaned servants' reluctance to take up cooking, praising 'better class' Northern girls above London, Welsh or Irish girls. Not all comments were complimentary – a Kensington lady declared them to be 'More illiterate than before the war'.¹⁰⁹ Presumably she did not concur with the 1914 commentator who preferred uneducated servants.

¹⁰⁷ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Changes in Wages and Conditions of Domestic Servants*, Introductory Summary.

¹⁰⁸ Questionnaires were sent to employers, not servants. Since servants' comments were not invited, an opportunity to measure changes in attitudes across domestic service is lost.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, III. Changes in Real Wages, Standard of Living and Efficiency.

The NSOL survey reveals a curious situation with regards to domestic service. The impact of War appears negligible – despite employment opportunities afforded to women then. Of greater importance to domestic service are changes in legislation, technological advances, and new lifestyles. Legislation might remove fear of being responsible for an ailing or elderly servant, which in 1930 London might enhance employment prospects for older servants. (That older women might be willing to work part-time or for lower wages may also have been a factor but is not alluded to in the report.) Technology might reduce numbers of servants needed, or hours worked, perhaps paving the way for a switch from residential to daily work. Lifestyles might remove the need to have any servants, with new homes designed to be the ultimate in labour-saving. Yet, much remained the same in domestic service – low wages, low status, lack of freedom, unregulated hours. And, most of all, the overriding unpopularity for this employment by servants continued.

Conclusions

Attitudes towards domestic service intensified the concept of the servant problem. The definition of the problem changed, becoming crystallised and gender-biased after the Great War. (This gender bias is evident in the 1923 enquiry into the shortage of servants, discussed in Chapter 4.) Furthermore, the diversity of commentators led to variations in defining the servant problem, largely due to the different causes to which they attributed it. Similarly, commentators tended to be the more articulate members of society and thus the servant problem was often approached from an employer's viewpoint, stressing practicalities of servant shortages. Firth's psychological approach in 1925 stands unique in defining the servant problem as one of human relationships, the crux of the problem being defined as employers' inability to countenance changes in their lifestyles. Thus the servant problem, although broadly defined as a shortage of female servants, was a more complex and multi-faceted issue than this definition implies.

Solutions reflected this complexity. Overall, with the servant problem addressed from an employer's viewpoint, proposed solutions tended to favour maintenance of the status quo, efforts being urged in regulation of domestic service and formal training. Indeed, training appeared to be the favoured solution for many commentators, allying this with ideas of instilling pride in housework, raising status or professionalisation. However, greater awareness of the need to reassess relationships between mistresses and maids was expressed, although few went as far as Firth in asserting that employers' attitudes towards domestic service, housework and lifestyles held the key to the solution of the servant problem.

Significantly, the idea that the future might see a servantless society began to be voiced although it is unclear how serious these views were – for authors often advocated replacing residential servants with daily workers or home helps. The concept of a totally servantless society seemed beyond the comprehension of most contemporaries. The recurrent suggestions for various forms of communal or co-operative housekeeping did not find widespread favour among policymakers, despite some experiments in communal living.¹¹⁰

Voices of servants were rarely heard and often arbitrarily dismissed. Organisations working on their behalf tended to be social or educational in tone. The London-based organisations – run by enlightened mistresses – reveal a genuine attempt to ameliorate the lives of servants, but few attempted to tackle the thornier questions of living and working conditions. Servants' organisations, even those with enthusiastic supporters, were few, often localised, relatively small-scale and lacked political influence.

The Great War had negligible long-term effect on domestic service. The surveys undertaken in 1914 and 1929-1930 reveal that legislation, technological advances and changes in lifestyles had greater impact on domestic service. Yet, most core complaints from servants remained the same – low wages, low status, unregulated hours, lack of freedom. Domestic service remained unpopular, and the servant problem intensified in the eyes of policymakers.

The general economic context with regard to employment opportunities and within which the servant problem was played out is explored in Chapter 2, which uses statistical evidence from Census reports to illustrate how women's work was dominated by the domestic service sector. The role of the CCWTE in tackling the servant problem and some of its underlying causes is the focus of Chapters 3 to 6, which examine the impact of CCWTE training schemes on women's experiences.

¹¹⁰ These included experiments among more enlightened occupants at Belsyre Court, Oxford and Lawn Road, Hampstead. I am grateful to Mary Chamberlain for this information.

Chapter 2: Domestic service – a female occupation?

Aims

Domestic service as an employment sector was a broad classification, incorporating many jobs and levels of status. It was also categorised by employer – private or institutional, the latter covering hospitals, boarding-houses, hotels, etc.

This Chapter provides statistical evidence of patterns and trends in women's domestic service, with particular reference to its continuing predominance. This manifested itself in two ways – its importance when measured against other female occupations, and its perceived definition as a female occupation. Thus, the Chapter begins with an overview of women's employment opportunities, attempting to set in context the relative importance of domestic service. Statistical evidence for exploring patterns and trends of domestic service is taken from decennial Census Reports. There are acknowledged problems in using Census data as a historical tool – the analysis of these provides a warning about subsequent statistics extracted. Census figures reveal a sharp gender divide in participation rates in domestic service, and the final section explores factors for women's continued dominance in this employment sector.

Women's Employment – an Overview

As Chapter 3 will show, the Great War afforded women greater employment opportunities – at least temporarily – contrasting with a relatively narrow range of occupations (and jobs within occupations) available before 1914. Professions were another new area open to women in post-war England – thanks to legislation in 1919. Yet, this overview highlights how theoretically increased opportunities did not always create increased vacancies.

Dominance of domestic service for working-class women and paucity of openings for professional women is starkly illustrated in *The Woman's Year Book 1923-1924*. (Occupational groups in 1921 are per 1,000 occupied women; professions are individual numbers.) Domestic service held prime position in Surrey (413), Kent (360), Yorkshire (348 North Riding, 275 East Riding), Hertfordshire (338), Monmouthshire (322), Glamorganshire (280), Durham (268), Middlesex (242), London (223), Worcestershire (207), Essex (207 but 414 in rural districts). Bucking this trend, textiles came first in Lancashire (380) and Yorkshire's West Riding (335), domestic service trailing at 98 and 137. Leading occupations in Staffordshire and Warwickshire were respectively bricks/pottery/glass (175) and metal trades (162), with domestic service a relatively close second (142 and 143).¹

¹ G Evelyn Gates (ed) *The Woman's Year Book 1923-1924* (Women Publishers, nd [1923]), pp.313-8.

Numbers of professional women employed in these counties indicate that two years of legislation had had little impact on employment. London boasted two barristers, three solicitors, 332 doctors, 48 dentists and eleven veterinary surgeons. There were also five architects, nine chartered accountants and one consultant civil engineer. Durham likewise boasted four barristers, and Lancashire one. Staffordshire, Lancashire and Glamorganshire each recorded one solicitor. The more unusual professions had been penetrated – eight analytical research chemists in Staffordshire, an undertaker in Hertfordshire.² Altogether 851 professional women are recorded in 1921 in these fourteen English and Welsh counties. While individuals' determination is commendable, numbers are negligible in terms of women workers overall.

In 1928 Vera Brittain expounded her views on women's employment. She quoted a 1919 Government report giving four principal influences regulating women's work at any period – volume of trade and general labour market; regulation of employment conditions; attitude of men and their organisations; and capacity of women for new work. Brittain asserted that the first two had varied most between 1900 and 1928, while men's attitudes had changed the least, thus hampering women's capacity to take on new work. Furthermore, she argued that it was an illusion that all men had dependants while all women worked only for pin money – an frequent reason for favouring men over women when it came to jobs.³

Brittain was scathing of the ways in which women were hindered in the workplace:

The general endeavour to keep women in a depressed condition, and to treat their work as incidental to industry is still reflected in the number of processes forbidden to them in various trades, in the comparative limitation of opportunities in business, and in the refusal, in the majority of professions, to promote them to higher posts and to employ them after marriage.⁴

Unlike the editor of *The Woman's Year Book*, Brittain took a wider view of women's employment, focusing on national rather than regional breakdowns. Thus, textiles was the biggest industry employing women, with 40 per cent of all industrial women. Indeed, hosiery, shirtmaking, dressmaking and millinery were almost exclusively female trades. Other dominantly female industries included cigars/cigarettes and distributive trades. Women also figured strongly in printing, china/earthenware, skin/leather trades, and transport. However, they were restricted to certain processes, for example, skilled hand-decorating of china was primarily a male task. Some restrictions were due to trade union hostility but some derived from protective legislation. Brittain ridiculed closing the painting trade to women due to the dangers

² Ibid.

³ Vera Brittain *Women's Work in Modern England* (Noel Douglas, 1928), p.3 and p.192.

⁴ Ibid, p.4.

of lead paint – for this ‘racial poison’ (risking women’s health) was no less harmful to men.⁵ If her assertion that lead was equally dangerous for men is true, then this legislation had little to do with workers’ health. The presumption must then be that legislation was either to reinforce male hostility to women in the painting trade or allied to worries about long-term effects on women’s child-bearing abilities. (For a brief discussion of maternal welfare, see Chapter 7.)

Brittain’s book on women’s work ranged beyond an assessment of jobs current in 1928, and she argued for a widening of women’s work opportunities to benefit not just women but society as a whole. For she envisioned a community utilising:

those vital qualities of energy and initiative which, wherever they may be found, are alone capable of carrying forward the boundaries of civilisation.⁶

In contrast to Brittain, Joan Beauchamp’s 1937 volume on women’s employment was more empirical than visionary. Her statistical analyses of trades provide an interesting snapshot of women’s work opportunities in the mid-1930s. (Most figures are from the 1931 Census, with some later figures for 1934.) Branson & Heinemann document 1930s Government policy towards the unemployed – citing Ramsay MacDonald’s 1931 statement that ‘Unemployment Benefit is not a living wage; it was never meant to be that.’ They also outline the impact of the means test, which assessed a household as a unit rather than assessing individual needs.⁷ In this environment of growing unemployment and intrusive relief schemes, how were women’s employment opportunities affected? Beauchamp’s book may provide clues.

Textiles retained its prime position as the largest industrial group for women workers. Conditions appear to have worsened – a recent union agreement banned women from working on steam pressing machines, while many small Whitechapel workshops evaded Government regulations. Another traditionally female occupation, the pottery trade, continued to provide employment, with an estimated 40,000 women workers and 35,000 men in 1934. October 1931’s average earnings reveal a possible reason for women’s apparent popularity. Smaller firms paid men 46s 5d per week (3s more in larger firms) while women’s comparative earnings were 18s 2d and 22s 3d. Nevertheless, women could occasionally earn good money in the highly skilled decorative sections – over 27s for lithographers and 30s for enamellers. Women were also beginning to encroach on formerly male preserves, as in the case of saggars.⁸ (This job involved making pots to protect pottery from the heat of the kiln.⁹)

⁵ Ibid, pp.23-4 and p.26.

⁶ Ibid, p.201.

⁷ Noreen Branson & Margot Heinemann *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), p.21 and pp.33-41.

⁸ Joan Beauchamp *Women who Work* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), p.14, pp.22-4 and pp.35-6.

⁹ Donald S McLean ‘The sagger maker’s bottom knocker’ *Practical Family History* 41 (May 2001), p.19.

Other traditional female occupations such as laundry work and catering/distributive trades presented a bleaker future. Both occupations faced increasing pressure from younger workers, who especially displaced older (better-paid) women. For example, 42 per cent of shop assistants were under 21. Of 156,463 workers recorded as laundry workers in the 1931 Census 139,801 were female. Wages were very low, the 1937 minimum rate for a 48-hour week being 1s 1½d for men and 7d for women (over 18). Men usually worked on machines, deemed too heavy for women to handle, yet women were constantly sorting, mangling, folding, ironing and packing heavy laundry.¹⁰ Such division of labour hints at exclusion rather than consideration for health risks or women's alleged inferior strength.

By contrast, engineering and metal industries were booming sectors for women, generally because they were an attractive proposition for bosses who paid them far lower wages than their male counterparts. Beauchamp quotes average 1931 earnings as 52s 6d for men and 27s 6d for women. It is not surprising then to learn that Lucas in Birmingham had a predominantly female workforce, 12,000 out of 15,000 (most non-unionised).¹¹ Lack of female unionisation would doubtless be an attraction for employers, who would see women workers as less likely to agitate for higher wages or better conditions – or at least, less likely to have official support for such agitation.

Low wages and easy circumvention of regulations seem to have been other common reasons for employers to prefer women workers. For example, the tin box trade, although regulated by a Trade Board with wages set at 7¼d per hour, saw many girls underpaid by as much as 5s weekly. Replacing piecework with a modern conveyor at an unnamed Birmingham chocolate factory increased women's workload considerably – formerly packing 25-30 dozen boxes, they now had to pack 60-63 dozen in the same period. Furthermore, abolition of Saturday morning working had seen a 5s cut in wages. Beauchamp's reference to the firm's family spirit and Christian principles identifies it almost certainly as the respected Cadbury.¹²

In white-collar employment, women dominated teaching and office work. Yet even the supposed status of such work could not protect them from unemployment or monetary inequality. Two-thirds of teachers recorded in the 1931 Census were women. Over 1,000 newly trained teachers failed to find employment in 1935. Those in private schools fared worse than State employees, as did governesses. The latter tended to be unqualified, young, and receive very low wages – such criteria were favoured by employers.¹³

¹⁰ Beauchamp *Women Who Work* pp.43-4 and p.46.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.26-7.

¹² *Ibid*, pp.41-2.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.63 and p.67.

Office work was a popular choice for women, judging by the increase in employment between the 1921 and 1931 Censuses – 497,000 rising to 657,000 so recorded. Yet, according to Labour Exchange officials in 1931, female clerks' wages were declining – from a high of 70s down to 50s. This suggests that popularity of such work led to over-supply and consequently a 'buyer's market' for employers. It may also explain why young workers could be exploited, as the case of Madge illustrates. Aged 14 and engaged as a filing clerk, she was expected to carry heavy parcels and do office housework. Her hours often exceeded those stated of 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. for which she received 10s weekly without overtime payment.¹⁴

Beauchamp's snapshot of women's work in the mid-1930s reveals that alternatives to domestic service were available. But alternatives could be bound by geographical, educational or economic restrictions. The Potteries were confined almost exclusively to the Midlands region bearing this name, office work and teaching required a level of education beyond many working-class girls, laundry and shop work were both fast becoming blind alley jobs for the young. Such restrictions meant that women faced two options – seek means to overcome restrictions or take alternative employment. For many, that alternative was the almost universal job of domestic service, with servant-employing classes countrywide constantly crying out for employees. The next sections use statistical evidence from Census reports to examine patterns of women's paid employment, with particular reference to domestic service.

The Census – Problems for the Historian

Statistical data analysed in the following sections of this Chapter are obtained mostly from decennial Census Reports, for which 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, and 1951 figures are available. There are acknowledged problems in using this source as a historical tool, which may limit or distort figures obtained. It is vital to be aware of these limitations and to recognise that, while Census figures may reveal overall patterns and trends, figures may not be totally accurate.

A major drawback is that no Census was taken in wartime 1941, thus missing an opportunity to measure growth or decline in domestic service during the 1930s – the very years when great energy was directed into encouraging women to enter this occupation. If a Census had been taken, the peculiar and abnormal conditions of wartime would surely have ruled out its usefulness for such a purpose. Although the usual census date was April and the order for direction of women into war jobs was not instigated until December, it is doubtful whether a 1941 Census would have reflected 'normal' occupations – the War began in September 1939 and many people had changed jobs voluntarily without waiting for conscription or direction.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.52 and pp.56-7.

The historian must therefore concede this lack of information, attempting to analyse a 20-year period from the 1951 Census. The problem is exacerbated by the profound effect on employment patterns caused by war, being the one time that effective conscription of British women's labour was introduced. Thus, it is difficult to establish true causes for the state of women's employment in 1951 – how far was this due to pre-war trends and how far to wartime experiences? This remains an unknown that cannot be ascertained with any degree of accuracy.

Another drawback applies to all Censuses – figures depend on accurate data recording. Refusal to participate in a Census is unlikely to be a grave consideration in analysing employment figures (although the 2001 Census revealed the existence of refusals). But incorrect or misleading information presents greater and unquantifiable problems. Misinformation probably had greater impact on female employment statistics, especially domestic service, in areas where women's paid work was not seen as important as men's. Women might be reluctant to record jobs deemed temporary, casual or unimportant. Indeed, John argues that descriptive terms in employment – full/part-time, indoor/outdoor, heavy/light – are inappropriate or misleading for women's experiences. She argues that casual and seasonal work coloured perceptions of women's work, particularly for married women who might not consider home-based work as employment. We know from Roberts' oral history of working-class women that many wives turned to casual or part-time home-based work like laundry or childcare.¹⁵ Were such women recorded as employed or non-occupied? A detailed study correlating Roberts' interviewees with individual Census Returns might provide conclusive answers.

Social reasons might lead to incorrect or misleading recording of data. Women may not have admitted to paid work, perhaps fearing to lose 'respectability' (i.e. the husband alone unable to support his family) or resenting intrusive questions (perhaps allied to receipt of State benefits?). Or women may have had concurrent jobs, including one in domestic service, thus presenting problems of which job was recorded. The enumerator may have failed to record a woman's occupation, particularly if she worked for a relative or part-time. Higgs has questioned the validity of nineteenth-century Census figures for this reason, pointing out the fundamental ideological reluctance to regard women's work – especially domestic work – as of economic importance.¹⁶ Men, with their own gender-biased perceptions and prejudices, dominated the Census Office at this time.¹⁷

¹⁵ Angela V John (ed) Introduction in *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.3; Elizabeth Roberts *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

¹⁶ Edward Higgs 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England' *Social History* 7 (1983), p.203.

¹⁷ Edward Higgs 'Women, occupations and work in the nineteenth-century Census' *History Workshop Journal* 35 (1987), p.62.

Higgs alerts us to another drawback particularly affecting domestic service – problems of classification. He castigates historians for ignoring inconsistencies of classification in different Censuses, citing the 1891 Census which recorded as servants female relatives employed in housework at home. Similarly, he highlights the discrepancy over farm servants, with males recorded as agricultural workers but females as domestic servants.¹⁸ His comments refer specifically to nineteenth-century Censuses but his warnings are equally pertinent to later Censuses. For twentieth-century domestic service – as defined and categorised by Census officials – was a wide-ranging and changing classification incorporating many different types of job and levels of status. It is important therefore to be aware that straightforward comparisons of figures from consecutive Census Reports may be impossible – reference should be made to occupational definitions within the Domestic Service classification for each year consulted.

On classification, it must be noted that Census Reports use two separate but inter-related classification systems:

The occupation of any person is the kind of work which he or she performs [...] and this alone determines the particular group in an occupation classification [...] assigned. The industry in which the individual is engaged (whatever may be his occupation) by reference to the business or economic activity in [...] which his occupation is followed.¹⁹

Occupation classification is that most commonly used in Census Tables and is generally that adopted here. It is subdivided into coded groupings, related to specific jobs listed for each code. Classifications are not constant but vary over time, with subdivisions added or amalgamated. It is important to be aware of these changes, even in an apparently static grouping such as Indoor Domestic Service where recorded differentiation between, say, private and institutional service, can be fluid or non-existent. In the latter case, use of Industry Codes may offer an alternative method of extracting figures.

Two further barriers to simple comparison of Census data relate to presentation. Later Censuses offer greater statistical breakdown of information, absent in earlier Reports. More seriously, the term 'Persons engaged in' generally refers to adults, but the age of defining adults changes – ten in 1901 and 1911, twelve in 1921, fourteen in 1931, fifteen in 1951. This is a handicap in making comparisons, for example, all adults aged over fourteen, particularly if the breakdown of age groups does not match in each Report. It is therefore necessary to accept the term 'adult' as the contemporary indicator of a person of working age in the labour market.

¹⁸ Higgs 'Domestic Servants and Households' p.202; Higgs 'Women, occupations and work' pp.71-2.

¹⁹ *Census of England & Wales, 1951. Classification of Occupations* (HMSO, 1956), p.v.

The historian must also remember the rationale behind the compilation of Census Reports. As Hill warns us, the Census was not designed for use as a historical tool, even though it often serves that function.²⁰ If consideration is given to likely biases and prejudices, to varying purposes and compilation methods of Censuses, to consistent under-recording of women's employment – then Census Reports can offer a useful official source for determining the general scope and extent of domestic service as an employment sector at given dates during the period 1914-1945.

Domestic Service – a Female Occupation?

It is a commonplace that domestic service was an essentially female occupation. A comparison of persons officially recorded as employed in domestic service may determine the truth of this statement.

Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of adults recorded as engaged in 'Personal Service' (which label replaced the earlier 'Domestic Offices or Services' from 1921). This classification encompasses all occupations officially regarded as domestic service, whether indoor or outdoor, including – amongst many others – laundry workers, charwomen, caretakers, gatekeepers, gamekeepers, gardeners.

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Females	1,358,156	1,734,040	1,676,425	1,926,978	1,464,137
Males	304,195	387,677	339,944	462,935	465,624

The preponderance of women in this employment sector is clear, with between three and five times as many women as men recorded. But female dominance becomes even clearer in the subdivision 'Indoor Domestic Service' which includes both private and institutional service, but excludes charwomen (Table 2.2).

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Females	1,235,320	1,359,359	1,148,608	1,332,224	724,074
Males	64,146	54,260	61,006	78,489	66,247

²⁰ Bridget Hill 'Women, occupations and the census: a problem for historians of women' *History Workshop Journal* 23 (1993), pp. 80-2.

²¹ Figures extracted from: *Census England & Wales, 1901. Summary Tables: Area, House, and Population, also Population classified by Ages, Condition as to Marriage, Occupations, Birthplaces and Infirmities* PP1903 (Cd. 1523) LXXXIV, 1, Table XXXV, pp.188-9; *Census of England & Wales, 1911. Summary Tables* PP1914-16 (Cd. 7929), LXXXI, 383, Table 48, p.134; *Census of England & Wales, 1921. Occupations* (HMSO, 1924), Table 2, p.34 and Table 4, p.104; *Census of England & Wales, 1931. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1934), Table 2, p.22 and Table 3, p.30; *Census of England & Wales, 1951. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1956), Table 1, p.2 and p.19.

²² As Table 2.1.

The fall in female numbers is clear but not excessive, suggesting that women were primarily engaged as maids (of varying descriptions and duties) within homes or hotels or as other indoor servants (children's nurses, companions, ward orderlies). By contrast, the drop in male numbers is dramatic, indicating that most men in the 'Personal Service' classification were engaged not as footmen, butlers, pantry boys, valets but as gamekeepers, gatekeepers, chauffeurs – in other words, they worked in outdoors jobs rather than as indoor servants.

It is more difficult to determine the extent of private domestic service (see Table 2.3 where shading indicates unavailable figures). For example, the 1951 figures in Table 2.2 are ambiguous because they consist of four groupings: chefs/cooks, kitchen hands, housemaids etc, and 'Other Indoor', without differentiating between private and institutional. Therefore it is impossible to state with any degree of authenticity how many of the recorded 724,074 women and 66,247 men were privately employed. Differentiated figures are also lacking for 1921 and 1931, but are provided in Table 2.3 by use of Industry Codes.

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Females	1,192,879	1,295,991	963,965	1,142,655	
Males	47,893	42,034		35,693	

The drop in female numbers compared with Table 2.2 is far less than that for males. For example, the majority of female indoor servants were recorded as working in private employment (this does not necessarily equate with private houses, since it might include colleges or other non-commercial enterprises). Therefore most women would have been maids, cooks, housekeepers, general servants rather than hotel chambermaids, restaurant kitchen hands, hospital ward maids. By contrast, less than half of males recorded as Indoor Servants in 1931 are shown to be working for private employers. This indicates that most male servants undertaking indoor domestic service worked in hotels and/or institutions – hall porters, pageboys, boots, workhouse masters' servants. It is impossible to determine from Census figures how many indoor servants, whether institutional or private, were resident or daily, full-time or part-time. (Some later Census Reports tabulate numbers of part-timers but figures are unavailable for earlier years, thus negating opportunity for comparative study.)

²³ For 1901 and 1911 figures – as Table 2.1. For 1921 figures – BLPES, Markham Papers, File 12/1, Letter Violet Markham, 19 January 1938. For 1931 figures – BLPES, Markham Papers, File 6/14, *Unemployment Assistance Board Memo #311 – Resident Domestic Servants employed in Private Domestic Service* 12 May 1939.

The gender bias of domestic service – in all forms – is more stark when numbers in the above tables are translated into percentages of adult population and working adult population (Tables 2.4 and 2.5).

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Total adults	13,189,585	14,857,113	15,699,805	20,819,367	17,999,293
Total workers		4,830,734	5,065,332	5,606,043	6,272,876
Total Personal Service	1,358,156	1,734,040	1,676,425	1,926,978	1,464,137
% of adults	10.297	11.672	10.678	9.256	8.134
% of workers		35.896	33.096	34.373	23.341
Total Indoor Service	1,235,320	1,359,359	1,148,608	1,332,224	724,074
% of adults	9.366	9.150	7.316	6.399	4.023
% of workers		28.140	22.676	23.764	11.543
Total Private Service	1,192,879	1,295,991	963,965	1,142,655	
% of adults	9.044	8.723	6.140	5.488	
% of workers		26.828	19.031	20.383	

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Total adults	12,134,259	13,189,585	13,901,108	19,133,010	16,067,083
Total workers		11,453,665	12,112,718	13,247,333	14,063,542
Total Personal Service	304,195	387,677	339,944	462,935	465,624
% of adults	2.507	2.939	2.446	2.420	2.898
% of workers		3.385	2.807	3.495	3.311
Total Indoor Service	64,146	54,260	61,006	78,489	66,247
% of adults	0.529	0.411	0.439	0.410	0.412
% of workers		0.474	0.504	0.593	0.471
Total Private Service	47,893	42,034		35,693	
% of adults	0.395	0.319		0.187	
% of workers		0.367		0.270	

Between eight and eleven per cent of all adult females are engaged in Personal Service, against under three per cent of adult males so recorded. Percentages measured against working populations provide greater contrast – females above 30 per cent from 1911 to 1931 although dropping to around 23 per cent in 1951, males constantly below four. Indoor Domestic Service, both private and institutional jobs, reveals its predominance as a female employment sector. Of adult females, over nine per cent were thus occupied in 1901, with percentages falling steadily,

²⁴ For 1901 and 1911 as Table 2.1. For other years – *Census of England & Wales, 1921. Occupations* (HMSO, 1924), Table 4, p.54; *Census of England & Wales, 1931. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1934), p.23; *Census of England & Wales, 1951. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1956), Table 1, p.2.

²⁵ For 1901 and 1911 as Table 2.1. For other years – *Census of England & Wales, 1921. Occupations* (HMSO, 1924), Table 2, p.22; *Census of England & Wales, 1931. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1934), p.15; *Census of England & Wales, 1951. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1956), Table 1, p.2.

reaching less than half that figure by 1951. Of the adult female working population, percentage rates decline from 1911 to 1921, rise slightly in 1931 and drop sharply by over half in 1951. By contrast, only minute percentages of males are occupied thus (below one per cent of adult or working adult male populations). Figures for Private Indoor Service provide an even more convincing contrast between males and females. Unlike male participation, which is negligible, female participation remains relatively high despite a steady decline from 1901 to 1931, when measured against adult female population (1951 figures unavailable). The percentages of adult female workers in Private Domestic Service demonstrate its continuing importance as an occupation, dipping in 1921 from its 1911 level but recovering slightly in 1931 (1901 and 1951 figures unavailable).²⁶

Given this evidence – even with limitations that prevent a fuller and absolute picture – it is clear that domestic service, and especially indoor domestic service, remained a constant and ‘normal’ female employment. For although men were domestic servants, it is evident that their jobs were more likely to be within other subdivisions, such as gatekeepers, chauffeurs, grooms, hotel porters.

Domestic Service – Patterns and Trends

What patterns are discernible in women’s jobs in indoor domestic service? Different levels of detail in successive Censuses and changes in classification negate opportunity for a full assessment. Jobs are not always separately recorded – for example, waitresses and restaurant workers appear only from 1921 and 1931 respectively, whereas college servants (‘bedders’) disappear into Other Indoor Service (generally labelled Private). The subdivision Charwomen expands to include the new label Office Cleaner from 1921, presenting added difficulties of knowing whether these women were in private or business service.

The selected subdivisions in Table 2.6 aim to show what might be termed ‘normal’ domestic service – cooks, housemaids, chambermaids, waitresses and other hotel/restaurant workers, barnmaids, charwomen, hospital ward maids. Differences between these figures and those in earlier Tables arise due to the selective nature of categories and inclusion of, for example, ‘bedders’ in Indoor Private. Caution is necessary regarding 1951 figures. The 724,074 women recorded as Indoor Private include hotel staff such as chambermaids, therefore this category is over-representative. Conversely the 28,725 recorded as Indoor Hotel are restaurant

²⁶ Age distribution could influence employment. For example, an older population might employ more servants, while a younger population might offer a larger pool of potential servants.

counter hands, therefore this category is under-represented. (Shading indicates unavailable figures – category recorded or included here within another subdivision.)

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Indoor Private	1,193,296	1,299,338	963,965	1,142,655	724,074
Indoor Hotel	42,441	63,368	184,643	205,612	28,725
Waitresses			50,779	70,515	80,860
Barmaids			24,747	27,693	29,204
Hospitals etc	22,804	41,639			21,057
Charwomen	25,378	126,061	118,476	140,146	215,336
Total	1,283,919	1,530,406	1,342,610	1,586,621	1,099,256

For a clearer picture of patterns, Table 2.7 – best read in conjunction with Table 2.6 – shows calculated numerical and percentage increases/decreases for 1911-1951 compared against previous Census figures. (For example, in 1911 the number of charwomen, comparative with 1901, increased by 100,683 or 396.73 per cent. In 1921, the number of charwomen, comparative with 1911, fell by 7,585 or 6.02 per cent.)

	1911		1921		1931		1951	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Indoor Private	106,042	8.89	-335,373	-25.81	178,690	18.54	-418,581	-36.63
Indoor Hotel	20,927	49.31	121,275	191.38	20,969	11.36	-176,887	-86.03
Waitresses					19,736	38.87	10,345	14.67
Barmaids					2,946	11.91	1,511	5.46
Hospitals etc	18,835	82.60						
Charwomen	100,683	396.73	-7,585	-6.02	21,670	18.29	75,190	53.65
Total	246,487	19.20	-187,796	-12.27	244,011	18.17	-487,365	-30.72

Table 2.7 reveals an inconsistent and uneven pattern of rise and fall, reflecting fluctuations in domestic service employment. Overall the pattern is up in 1911, down in 1921, recovery in 1931 and a significant fall in 1951. However, when 1951 is compared to 1901 the overall fall is only 184,663 workers or 14.38 per cent. Was domestic service already on a downward slope with an abnormal 'blip' prior to 1911 and 1931?

²⁷ Figures extracted from: *Census England & Wales, 1901. Summary Tables* PP1903 (Cd. 1523) LXXXIV, 1, Table XXXV, p.189; *Census of England & Wales, 1911. Summary Tables* PP1914-16 (Cd. 7929), LXXXI, 383, Table 48, p.134; *Census of England & Wales, 1921. Occupations* (HMSO, 1924), Table 4, pp.104-5; *Census of England & Wales, 1931. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1934), Table 3, p.30; *Census of England & Wales, 1951. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1956), Table 1, p.19; BLPES, Markham Papers, File 6/14, *UAB Memo #311 – Resident Domestic Servants employed in Private Domestic Service* 12 May 1939; and File 12/1, Letter Violet Markham, 19 January 1938.

²⁸ Figures calculated from Table 2.6.

Certainly the erratic fluctuations do not demonstrate a steady decline or, indeed, a concerted revival of this employment sector. Is the overall fall in 1921 a result of post-war reluctance to return to domestic service (especially private employment) or evidence of alternative job opportunities? Both options seem feasible, given women's greater employment freedom in wartime.²⁹ In contrast, 1931 figures suggest that domestic service enjoyed a revival during the 1920s, at least in terms of employee numbers. With 1,926,978 women recorded as employed in 'Personal Service' in the 1931 Census, the next largest female occupational groups are clerks/typists (579,945), textile workers (574,094), makers of textile goods (542,809), shop assistants (394,531), teachers (181,806), metal workers (136,076), sick nurses (118,909), makers of food/drink/tobacco (74,888), and makers of paper/cardboard boxes and bookbinders (63,994).³⁰ One factor in this apparent 1920s revival of domestic service may be the impact of Government strategies. For unemployed women faced persuasive direction from the Ministry of Labour to enter domestic service, notably via Employment Exchanges and CCWTE training centres. (Chapter 4 discusses these strategies.)

One Census category consistently recorded separately, thus affording opportunity for sustained comparison, is Charwomen. Figures in Table 2.7 for 1911 over 1901 indicate a phenomenal growth in this sector. Although growth is not sustained at this rate – 1921 shows a slight fall – this category demonstrates its popularity in terms of attracting workers. We cannot state absolute reasons for this apparent popularity – was it women's preference for daily part-time work, or 'Hobson's Choice'? One way to assess this is by marital status. Is there a majority of widows – possibly older women restricted in job options by employers' age prejudices? Or is it mostly married women, perhaps indicating a need to combine family and working life?

Census	Single		Married		Widowed		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	
1901							25,378
1911	26,900	21.34	37,441	29.70	61,720	48.96	126,061
1921	26,041	21.98	42,722	36.06	49,713	41.96	118,476
1931	30,589	21.83	64,481	46.01	45,076	32.16	140,146
1951	21,382	9.93	149,290	69.33	44,664	20.74	215,336

²⁹ See, for example, Gail Braybon *Women Workers in the First World War* (Croom Helm, 1981).

³⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 12/1, Letter Violet Markham, 19 January 1938.

³¹ Figures for 1901, 1911 and 1921 – as Table 2.7. For 1931 and 1951 – *Census of England & Wales, 1931. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1934), Table 5, pp.59-60; *Census of England & Wales, 1951. Occupation Tables* (HMSO, 1956), Table 3, pp.46-7.

Figures show a remarkably stable proportion for single charwomen (around 21 per cent) between 1911 and 1931. By contrast, the fortunes of married and widowed charwomen are virtually reversed in the same period, the majority of charwomen being widows in 1911 (48.96 per cent) and married in 1931 (46.01 per cent). The 1951 figures reveal a significant development – married women dominate, accounting for almost seventy per cent. Why is this?

We can only speculate on reasons, but job opportunities, welfare benefits, and changes in attitudes towards women's work must be significant factors. Single women, especially, had wider job opportunities in the Second World War, usually under Government direction of female labour (effectively conscription – see Chapter 6). Such experience must have convinced many women – and perhaps some employers – that they were capable of holding down a 'man's job'. Perhaps also the sense of independence and freedom engendered by a wartime situation led to younger (single) women's self-assertion such that they were less willing to accept low status and servility. Older single and widowed women undoubtedly benefited from changes in State welfare, such as old age pensions, obviating the need to continue working into old age. This may partly account for sharp decreases in 1951 in both these groups.

The growing percentage of married charwomen poses an interesting question – since married women would, by definition, have a male breadwinner of presumably working age, why were wives increasingly turning to charring as paid employment? The idea of married women working was not – in theory – approved, being seen as reflecting upon husbands' ability to provide for their families. In practice, as Roberts showed in her study of working-class women, many women continued working after marriage to supplement the family income.³² Poorer households frequently depended on a joint income, to maintain the family. Although a marriage bar operated in many employment sectors, this was not so in textiles, where married women workers were a long established tradition, nor indeed in many types of domestic service jobs. A married woman with children was further restricted in employment choices, since she needed work to fit in with family commitments. Childminding or taking in lodgers, washing or sewing were options for those with necessary skills and space, always provided demand was there. But demand for charwomen, private or business, was presumably high, to judge by Census figures. Since charring demanded few special skills, little or no outlay in equipment, and short hours of work, it may have suited the needs of married women workers. And for those with more hours to spare, it offered the chance to work for multiple employers.

³² Roberts *A Woman's Place*. See especially Appendix 5 (pp.207-11) of respondents' biographies. Homeworking was a common strategy to boost family budgets – see Sonya O Rose *Limited Livelihoods. Gender and Class In Nineteenth Century England* (Routledge, 1992), p.8; Shelley Pennington & Belinda Westover *A Hidden Workforce: Homeworkers in England, 1850-1985* (Macmillan, 1989).

The popularity of charring is thus attributable to both preference and 'Hobson's Choice'. Women preferred daily work but had little choice of jobs, especially in domestic service – women needed to supplement family income without sacrificing family commitments. For women with no feasible alternatives, the choice of charring is more easily understood.

The geographical distribution of female servants (including hotels and boarding houses) offers an interesting snapshot. Table 2.9 figures are from a 1929 *Daily Mail* brochure. Column A shows order by total number of servants recorded, Column B by number of servants per family (C). A word of caution – figures are suspect as the original remains untraced and compilation methods unknown. Nevertheless, Table 2.9 reveals that servant-keeping was indeed a nationally available opportunity for women. Regional disparities offer surprises, since regions outside London had more servants both in numbers and per family. Yet London attracted much attention as a centre of both servant-keeping and the servant problem. Perhaps its status as capital lent it additional importance in the eyes of contemporary commentators.

A	B	Region	Families	Servants	C
1	4	Metropolitan area (London, Middlesex, Essex (part), Hertfordshire (part), Kent (part), Surrey (part))	1,975,080	298,400	0.15
2	1	South Coast (Dorset, Hants, Sussex, Surrey (part), Kent (part))	705,780	149,300	0.21
3	8	Scotland	1,108,290	122,300	0.11
4	11	Lancashire & Cheshire	1,400,950	114,330	0.08
5	9	Salop, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Birmingham	818,585	82,500	0.10
6	7	Cumberland, Durham, Westmorland, Yorkshire North Riding, Northumberland	653,035	75,250	0.12
7	6	East Anglia (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex (part), Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, Suffolk)	490,825	64,900	0.13
8	11	Yorkshire West Riding	802,615	62,860	0.08
9	4	Gloucester, Somerset & Wiltshire	377,860	58,500	0.15
10	10	Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire	557,330	48,400	0.09
11	2	Thames Valley (Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire (part))	241,365	47,500	0.20
12	3	Cornwall & Devon	252,075	43,350	0.17
13	10	South Wales (Carmarthen, Glamorgan, Monmouth)	407,825	38,400	0.09
14	5	Lincolnshire & East Riding of Yorkshire	255,100	34,530	0.14
15	3	Pembroke, Cardigan, Brecknock, Radnor, Montgomerys, Merioneth, Caernarvon, Denbigh, Anglesey, Flintshire	176,060	30,060	0.17
16	11	Northern Ireland	273,670	21,200	0.08

³³ *Sell to Britain through 'The Daily Mail'* in Alan A Jackson *The Middle Classes 1900-1950* (Nairn, Scotland: David St John Thomas, 1991), p.344.

Returning to the broader issue of female domestic service overall, the remaining key question is – what happened in this employment sector during the 1930s?

Problems in analysing the 1951 Census Report have already been mentioned, not least the 20-year gap since the previous Census of 1931. Table 2.6 highlighted further problems specific to domestic service, notably the figure of 724,074 female indoor domestic servants. This recorded total is based on Occupation Code, not differentiating between private and hotel work. The 1951 Census provides a short review based on Industry Codes which, as stated, refer to the business or economic activity in which an occupation is undertaken. Although Occupation and Industry Codes are not strictly comparable, the Census review based on Industry Codes might help to highlight changes during 1931-1951. Two sectors of the domestic service industry – Catering and Hotels, and Private Domestic Service – are examined.

Numbers of workers in Catering and Hotels were up 44 per cent on 1931 figures. The greatest increase (73 per cent) was among women who now constituted 70 per cent of Catering workers (58 per cent in 1931). Indoor domestic servants in Catering (male and female combined) rose from 133,000 in 1931 to 307,000 in 1951. Of this latter number, kitchen maids formed the largest group (170,000 or 21 per cent of Catering workers) with 94,000 chefs/cooks and 36,000 others. Waiters and waitresses represented eleven per cent of Catering workers, having increased in number by nine per cent since 1931. Numbers of restaurant counter hands showed a 92 per cent increase, but numbers of barmen/barmaids a 75 per cent decrease. Numbers of lodging- and boarding-house keepers had fallen dramatically by 45 per cent since 1931 (largely attributable to changes in definition of such houses). Regional distribution of Catering employees showed a marked divide, London and South Eastern Region taking a third of all such jobs. The growing feminisation of Catering work is demonstrated by the relative proportions of male and female Catering workers when measured against all occupied males and females. Measured per 1,000 workers, males were down from twenty in 1931 to eighteen in 1951, while females were up from sixty-four in 1931 to ninety-one in 1951.³⁴ The 1951 figures demonstrate that particular Catering and Hotels jobs fared differently over the previous 20-year period. While some changes were due to classification – as, for example, lodging-house keepers – others must be reflective of demand. But demand for women workers over men workers was still high – the gender divide had grown and the dominance of women in catering trades still held true.

³⁴ *Census of England and Wales, 1951. General Report* (HMSO, 1958), pp.200-1.

Did Private Domestic Service also hold its position as a female employment sector? As an employment sector for all workers it showed a significant fall, when measured by Industry Code, of 67 per cent over 20 years. The decline among females (68 per cent) was slightly more than among males (64 per cent). Most workers in private domestic service in 1951 were, as might be expected, employees, with only two per cent recorded as working on their own account and only 82 persons recorded as employers. Part-time workers – almost all women – comprised sixteen per cent of the total. Job distribution (male and female combined) reveals the largest group as the disparate ‘Others’, accounting for 63 per cent of private servants, and including butlers, footmen, housekeepers, companions and home helps. Gardeners formed fifteen per cent of the total and chefs/cooks eight per cent. Significantly the word ‘maid’ is not listed – indicative surely not merely of changes in naming jobs but of the drastic decline of this particular job. Nevertheless women still dominated private service in 1951 (79 per cent, down slightly from 81 per cent in 1931). Greatest evidence for decline in private domestic service by 1951 is in the figures detailing relative proportions of domestic service workers measured against all occupied workers. For example, the proportion of gardeners fell by nearly 50 per cent. More significantly, the proportion of indoor domestic servants fell from 1,178 per 1,000 in 1931 to 345 per 1,000 in 1951 – a fall of 71 per cent.³⁵ Figures for Private Domestic Service indicate that, despite the virtual disappearance of indoor servants, women still dominated this greatly reduced employment sector in 1951. The relatively high proportion of part-time work (again dominated by women) is notable, signifying a change of employer attitude – although whether by choice or necessity remains unclear.

This drastic reduction in numbers and proportions of domestic servants – whether indoor or outdoor, male or female – recorded in the 1951 Census serves to highlight the enduringly high position of domestic service as an employment sector in previous Censuses. Despite fluctuations in numbers employed in the various jobs that constituted Personal Service, the dominance of domestic service as an employment sector in earlier years is undeniable. And that predominance was particularly evident for women, whether single, married or widowed.

Domestic Service and the Dominance of Women

One question remains – why did women predominate? This section explores four factors that may have contributed to women’s continued dominance in domestic service – childhood experiences in the home, wages, opportunities, legislative discrimination.

³⁵ Ibid, pp.201-2.

Childhood experiences at home often affected boys and girls differently. For many girls, they extended the domestically-orientated schooling they received.³⁶ (For a brief discussion of curricula, see Chapter 7.) Chamberlain has shown how domestic training at home was part of many working-class Lambeth girls' experience. Gracie, born 1909, remembered how girls 'Had to make the beds, sweep the rooms out, scrub the floors, shake the carpets.' Boys were exempt from these tasks. Sisters Marjorie and Viley, born 1925 and 1926, recalled Mondays when they had to 'wash, well, rinse, blue and starch all the washing, put it through the wringer.'³⁷ Jamieson reveals a heavy household burden for urban Scottish girls despite many domestic tasks being defined as children's rather than exclusively girls' tasks. Furthermore, young women were expected to continue providing domestic help whereas young men became exempt.³⁸ Taylor argues that girls in working-class homes were prepared for domestic service not just through undertaking housework and childcare but also through learning to expect little for themselves and to comply with parents' wishes. Indeed, Taylor goes so far as to state that 'mothers were contributing to the exploitation of their daughters'.³⁹ Jamieson appears to agree with this to some extent, notably in cases of a mother's death or incapacity, with the daughter of the house automatically taking on the family's housekeeper role. But Jamieson disagrees with Taylor's emphasis, attributing this more to inequalities perpetuated by conventional gender divisions than to deliberate exploitation.⁴⁰ Bourke also disagrees with Taylor's assessment of exploitation, arguing that working-class women and girls were often eager to attend housewifery classes, in an attempt to be 'actively seeking to redefine their status as women *within* the household'.⁴¹

Household duties expected of girls by their mothers would have acted as a powerful reinforcement – that domestic work was women's work, that home-based skills could become marketable labour skills, that domestic service was an extension of home duties (perhaps particularly so within private houses where a mistress or housekeeper might be perceived as

³⁶ Gender socialisation was already prevalent in the 1880s, with girls' school attendance often presumed less important than commitments at home. See, for example, Anna Davin *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (Rivers Oram Press, 1996), pp.110-111 and pp.190-7.

³⁷ Mary Chamberlain *Growing Up in Lambeth* (Virago, 1987), pp.46-7.

³⁸ Lynn Jamieson 'Limited Resources and Limiting Conventions: Working-Class Mothers and Daughters in Urban Scotland c. 1890-1925' in Jane Lewis (ed) *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp.52-4. Educating girls for lifetime domestic skills was frequently advocated: see Anna Davin 'Imperialism and motherhood' *History Workshop Journal* 5 (Spring 1978) pp.26-7.

³⁹ Pam Taylor 'Daughters and mothers – maids and mistresses: domestic service between the wars' in John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson (eds) *Working Class Culture: studies in history and theory* (Hutchinson, 1979), p.129 and p.139.

⁴⁰ Jamieson 'Limited Resources and Limiting Conventions' pp.54-5.

⁴¹ Joanna Bourke 'Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914' (1994) in Pamela Sharpe (ed) *Women's Work. The English Experience 1650-1914* (Arnold, 1998), p.342. (Original italics)

adopting a mother's role). Such reinforcement might also dampen ambitions for alternative employment, by presenting domestic work as a natural and normal female occupation.

The important and intertwined factors of wages and opportunities have been touched upon earlier in this Chapter. Women rarely, if ever, commanded the same wage levels as men. Women's lower wage costs made them an attractive proposition for employers. An additional attraction was the fact that women were less likely to be unionised. They would thus be seen as passive and docile, in the sense of being unable to cause industrial disruption or lacking trade union support for such action. In 1919, Drake stated that only seventeen per cent of trade unionists were women, and only one-fifth of the female workforce (excluding servants) were union members.⁴² Indeed, Walby argues that trade unionism was generally hostile to women workers, citing the merger of specifically women's labour organisations into male-dominated unions and interpreting this as a loss of independence for women leading to female industrial voices being diminished.⁴³ As Brittain claimed in 1928, male hostility was rife, effectively barring women's entry into jealously guarded jobs or occupations. Certainly, employment opportunity was an important but unequal factor. Men had a greater range of jobs open to them, whether through preparation at school, apprenticeships, trade union involvement or accepted industry practice. The opening of opportunities to women in the Great War was a short-lived expedient resulting in few long-term advantages. One exception was clerical work, which favoured the better-educated woman.⁴⁴ (See Chapters 3 and 4 for a discussion of this wartime expansion.)

Allied to a perceived docility (in a trade union sense) and willingness to accept lower wages, women were frequently deemed more amenable to performing menial tasks. This, of course, was an important factor in domestic service. Allocating lower wages and menial tasks to women suggests that men servants had an element of status symbol, an important point perhaps for Lady X but of less interest to middle-class employers who simply wanted housework done. Perhaps this association of females with menial tasks reinforced domestic service's low status.⁴⁵ Malos argues, following Ehrenreich & English, that industrialisation of domestic tasks (such as soap making) under the Scientific Home Management Movement

⁴² Barbara Drake *Women in Trade Unions* (Labour Research Department, 1920. Reprinted Virago, 1984), p.237.

⁴³ Sylvia Walby *Patriarchy at Work: Patriarchal and Capitalist Relations in Employment* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), pp.174-6. The equation of women's non-unionisation with passivity is challenged by Pat Thane 'Women and Work in Britain, c. 1870 to World War I' in Peter Mathias & John A Davis (eds) *Enterprise and Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.59.

⁴⁴ Deborah Simonton *A History of European Women's Work. 1700 to the Present* (Routledge, 1998), pp.201-2.

⁴⁵ Women's association with connotations of dirt and disease is explored in Leonore Davidoff *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), Chapter 3, pp.73-102.

turned domesticity into a crusade against dirt and disease.⁴⁶ Association with terms redolent of scientific and militaristic achievement – customarily male provinces – failed to inspire men to take up the fight. Part of the answer may lie in what Davidoff terms the cultural dictates of domestic work. Noting the use of male servants in all-male situations (such as ships), she asserts that domestic work is usually performed by subordinates. For example, in colonial societies, native men worked for dominant foreigners.⁴⁷ But in Western society, in patriarchal society, in hierarchical society, it is hardly surprising – given the discrimination facing women – that domestic work was culturally constructed as women’s work.

Legislation directly pertinent to domestic service was minimal in the interwar years. Domestic service was an uninsurable occupation, that is, it was outside contributory State benefit schemes which afforded unemployed workers rights to benefit payments. This situation did not change until 1938, when institutional servants were finally included. Exclusion of private servants from benefit schemes disadvantaged workers – particularly women – who were therefore without recourse to State financial aid in times of unemployment. (The impact of exclusion is discussed in Chapters 3 to 6.) Similarly, although various regulatory Trade Boards existed for low-paid occupations, domestic service remained outside their control. Thus legislation designed to regulate and monitor employment was irrelevant to domestic service, which remained essentially an individual contract between employer and employee. (For an abortive attempt to introduce regulation of domestic service, see Chapter 5.)

One curious piece of legislation affecting domestic service was the Male Servant Licence Duty. This annually imposed tax, introduced in 1777, initially raised money to fight the American wars. Although by 1808 the tax had risen to £7 per male servant, the levy was gradually reduced to 15s in 1869, which rate remained static until 1937 and abolition of the Male Servant Licence Duty.⁴⁸ What impact did this tax have on domestic service in the twentieth century? Was it seen as beneficial, restrictive, irrelevant, discriminatory?

Although by the 1920s the tax was 150 years old, it was not simply a curiosity gathering dust on the statute books. Revisions in 1921 removed classification anomalies (mostly affecting college/university janitors), clarifying definition of a male servant as ‘employment in a personal, domestic, or menial capacity’.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ellen Malos (ed) *The Politics of Housework* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 1995, revised edition), p. 12. See also Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English *For Her Own Good* (Pluto, 1979).

⁴⁷ Davidoff *Worlds Between* p. 75.

⁴⁸ Frank E Huggett *Life Below Stairs: Domestic servants in England from Victorian times* (John Murray, 1977), p. 21.

⁴⁹ Volume 144 Parliamentary Debates, Official Report Fifth Series (Hansard), columns 1829-32, 18 July 1921 (abbreviated to 144 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1829-32, 18 July 1921).

Since the tax was a local duty, not all areas implemented it. Where the tax operated, licence defaulters were rigorously pursued. For example, Michael Peacock, a Berkshire gentleman, appeared at the county police courts in 1924. Found guilty of keeping an unlicensed gardener and house-porter, two unlicensed dogs and allowing an untagged dog to roam the highway, he was fined £7. Another owner of an unlicensed dog was fined 10s, so penalties for not obtaining Male Servant Licences were apparently stiff.⁵⁰

Repeated calls to repeal the tax were made in the House. Abolition was urged during the Great War as an incentive to employ disabled ex-soldiers, a move possibly allied to intense wartime concern over malingerers. Rising unemployment fuelled worries over its effects on male employment. For example, in 1928 abolitionists claimed that it discouraged men from becoming servants, adding that it was discriminatory by not being applicable to women. But Chancellor Winston Churchill refused to be swayed by such arguments. His main concern was financial – that local authorities would seek redress for lost income from the Exchequer, a demand he was unwilling to countenance. Successive Chancellors in Labour and National Governments adopted Churchill's stance, the major stumbling block remaining the Exchequer's liability to make good the shortfall in lost revenue. Indeed, Labour's Philip Snowden refuted claims in 1930 that the tax discouraged employers from taking on (male) gardeners.⁵¹

Certainly local authorities would have been disinclined to forego any revenue from local taxes. Yet, as Table 2.10 shows, the comparative income from dog licences and male servant licences reveals that the latter was not as lucrative as the former.

Year ended 31 st March	Dog licences		Male Servant licences	
	Number	Net Receipts £	Number	Net Receipts £
1904	1,602,974	600,958	214,388	160,871
1914	1,978,440	741,902	248,277	186,197
1924	2,488,623	933,218	173,363	130,009
1934	2,902,253	1,088,331	172,900	129,659

The decline in revenue reinforces abolitionists' views that compensation for repeal of this tax was affordable. Not until November 1931 did Chancellor Neville Chamberlain assent to consider abolition if local authorities gave unanimous consent and waived compensation.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Maidenhead Advertiser* 16 January 1924, p.2.

⁵¹ 78 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 22, 17 January 1916; 98 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2344, 8 November 1917; 100 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 436-7, 5 December 1917 and col 589, 6 December 1917; 214 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1722-3, 13 March 1928; 225 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 431, 13 February 1929; 227 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 725, 23 April 1929; 246 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1438-9, 18 December 1930.

⁵² 303 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1703-4, 2 July 1935.

⁵³ 252 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1771, 19 May 1931; 260 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 516, 26 November 1931.

In June 1934 a clause to the Finance Bill was submitted to abolish the Male Servant Licence Duty. Abolitionists argued that it worsened male unemployment, a charge refuted by Chamberlain. Two MPs argued that it was discriminatory – Sir Joseph Lamb felt it disadvantaged ex-servicemen unable to do heavy industrial work, while Miss Horsbrugh cited equality of the sexes. But Treasury resistance was crumbling, Chamberlain vowing to consider the issue when block grants to local councils became due for review in 1937.⁵⁴

The days of this controversial tax were indeed numbered, Chamberlain informing the House of its repeal from 1st January 1938. As he had earlier indicated, the review of block grants provided the means and included compensation of £115,000 annually to English councils. (The tax in Scotland had operated as an Exchequer duty, thereby resulting in a loss of about £11,000 annually to the Treasury.)⁵⁵

The Male Servant Licence Duty, instigated as a wartime expedient, lasted 160 years. It is difficult to estimate its effect on male participation in domestic service. It might be that paying a tax on male servants gave them a kudos and status that was lacking in their female counterparts. Conversely, the imposition of an annual levy on male servants would have discouraged some employers and been beyond the budget of others. The failure to instigate or extend the tax to a comparable Female Servant Licence Duty – despite the predominance of women in domestic service – suggests that the tax, providing local rather than Exchequer income (except in Scotland), was viewed as unimportant and perhaps anachronistic. Or perhaps a female servant tax would have proved problematic in terms of logistics, unwieldy to administer, and unpopular in terms of disturbing the status quo. As Census Reports show, many more women than men worked as domestic servants, especially in private homes, and the imposition of such a tax might have generated greater hostility and resentment. Equally it might have had deeper impact on home comfort and living standards for the middle- and upper-classes. Imposing a Female Servant Licence Duty might have proved lucrative if employers were willing to pay, but equally it might have proved disastrous in terms of both political survival and employee numbers. Since women dominated domestic service, many more employers would have been affected by such a tax. It is possible that extra annual payments might have caused employers to reconsider the advantages of employing domestic servants – a step likely to have exacerbated the servant problem. Is it possible therefore that a sense of self-interest and self-preservation came into play among policymakers?

⁵⁴ 290 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1427-44, 11 June 1934.

⁵⁵ 322 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1612, 20 April 1937; 324 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1871-2, 9 June 1937.

The four factors of childhood experiences, wages, opportunities, and legislation reinforced the concept of domestic work as female, restricted entry to alternative occupations, and marginalised the status of female servants by excluding them from legislative regulation and protection. Thus they underlined and contributed to women's dominance of domestic service.

Conclusions

Although alternative occupations were available to women, domestic service remained a dominant sector throughout the interwar years. This was partly due to women's inability to be regarded as equal with men – whereas many employers preferred a female workforce, this was often allied with lower wages and non-unionisation. Many occupations were effectively closed to women due to economic, educational and geographical barriers. By contrast, domestic service was available nationally.

The dominance of domestic service as female employment is evident from Census Reports. Caution must be exercised in using this source as a historical tool, for changing compilation methods, inconsistencies and inaccuracies present problems in relying on its statistical data. Equally, changes in classification of domestic service – a wide-ranging occupation – prevent a full assessment, since jobs may be categorised differently over the years. Nevertheless, if figures may not be totally accurate, Census Reports offer a useful guide to overall occupational patterns and trends.

These patterns reveal that women's participation rates in domestic service – private or institutional, indoor or out – remained high, albeit revealing changes in the workforce composition over the period and the types of job undertaken. The pre-eminence of indoor private service was matched by the predominance of women in this sector. In contrast, male participation rates in domestic service were consistently low. Furthermore, men were less likely to be indoor private servants, but in outdoor jobs such as gardeners, chauffeurs, gamekeepers or in institutional domestic service, working as porters, pageboys, workhouse servants.

Factors contributing to this dominance of women – particularly in what might be termed the 'normal' domestic service jobs of cooks, maids, waitresses, charwomen – included childhood 'training' at home, wages, opportunities, and legislation. By reinforcing the concept of domestic work as female work, childhood experiences endorsed domestic service as a female occupation. Furthermore, low wages and restricted opportunities closed many alternative occupations to women. Additionally, domestic service essentially remained outside legislative control, regulation of the industry being deemed unworkable. The effect of the Male Servant Licence Duty – a unique local government tax requiring an annual payment by employers on all

male servants – is difficult to gauge. Surviving until 1937, the tax had no female equivalent. This omission may have been allied to potential harm that such a tax might inflict – with the dominance of women in domestic service, a Female Servant Licence Duty would affect many more employers. Thus it might have led them to question the advantages of employing female domestic servants – an act which would have exacerbated the servant problem.

Despite the possible under-recording of women's employment by Census enumerators, the Census Reports reveal evidence that domestic service was an enduringly important employment sector for women, and remained so until the Second World War. It was essentially a female occupation.

Chapters 1 and 2 focused on domestic service as a general concept, looking respectively at the concept of the servant problem and at domestic service as a female employment sector. Chapters 3 to 6 now turn to the Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment (CCWTE) and its role in tackling servant shortages. Chapter 1 showed that most contributors to the debate on the servant problem saw training as the key to its solution – Chapters 3 to 6 investigate the impact of CCWTE training schemes on the servant problem, on women's employment, and on women's lives.

Chapter 3: Early days 1914-1919

Aims

This Chapter turns from domestic service as a general concept, as explored in the previous two Chapters, to its interrelationship with Government unemployment strategies. This manifested itself through the Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment (CCWTE), at the forefront of training schemes for unemployed women.

Chapter 3 deals with the establishment of the CCWTE against the background of the Great War, the initial rationale for its existence. A short study of women's work provides context for subsequent investigation into CCWTE training schemes. The impact of wartime and post-war circumstances on women's work is also examined, with particular reference to domestic service and the CCWTE.

Economic Context

It is important to put the status of women into context. Stated simply, before 1914 women were measured in relation to men. This is partly explained by the political powerlessness of women, for in 1914 no woman had the right to vote, let alone stand, for parliament. This political silencing of women would not be broken for another four years, when suffrage was granted on a limited basis, full suffrage having to wait for a further ten years. Thus women's voices could not be heard directly in national policy-making circles, a fact which disadvantaged them and marginalised their concerns.

Women were presumed to be dependent on men, first fathers, then husbands, and possibly thereafter sons. While this scenario may fit the majority of the upper and middle classes, whose women were not generally encouraged to adopt an independent lifestyle, it was not true for all women. Indeed, not all upper- and middle-class women were inclined to follow the prescribed life of idleness and, as Vicinus has shown, sought to carve careers for themselves, albeit within the confines of permitted opportunities and often with a philanthropic overtone.¹ Working-class women had a long history of paid employment, and independent women (whether through choice or circumstance) needed to generate income, there being no State aid. The 1901 Census showed an excess of almost 800,000 adult women over men in the UK, so the idea of reliance on a male breadwinner was clearly flawed. By 1908 the excess had risen to 1,300,798 and by 1911 to 1,328,625.²

¹ Martha Vicinus *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Virago, 1985).

² 131 H.C. Deb 4 s, col 1351, 16 March 1904; 191 H.C. Deb 4 s, cols 1083-4, 3 July 1908; 60 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1186, 1 April 1914.

The mythical idea that women were not contributing to family income but merely filling time before marriage was another old prejudice. The Fabian Society, a political organisation seeking to promote the tenets of socialism, published an enquiry in 1915 proving that many women worked to support themselves or their families – they had no choice:

about half the women wage-earners canvassed were supporting, wholly or partially, either children or parents, or brothers and sisters, or disabled husbands or other dependent relatives. Among laundresses, over 75 per cent. were so contributing; among cotton weavers, 66 per cent.; among needlewomen, 60 per cent.; among domestic servants, 53 per cent.; and among nurses, 52 per cent.³

Indeed in some areas, as Thane has shown, work for men was so scarce that it was the norm for married women to become breadwinners – the textile town of Dundee being one example.⁴

Prior to 1914 the plight of the working woman was simply not taken as seriously as that of her male counterpart. Many occupations were barred to women. This bar to entry arose from various factors, including industry custom and practice, trade union/employer hostility, inherent danger of certain processes (particularly if seen to affect fertility), perceived mental or physical inability of women to perform tasks. Dangerous processes would seem a genuine reason for barring women, yet this did not prevent many women from working in such occupations. Even in the 1920s it was not unusual to find women employed as screen printers in the clothing trade, a task that exposed them to hazardous chemicals.⁵ Neither had physical strength always been a factor, as John has shown in her study of women in the Victorian coal mining industry.⁶ But by the twentieth century, many such heavy labouring jobs had been gradually closed to women through legislation as a result of reforms. Yet in 1921, a small number of women were still engaged in this industry – albeit above ground – in traditional coal mining areas, 82 women in Glamorganshire and 50 in Durham, for example.⁷

This is not to say that arduous tasks were beyond the bounds of women's employment, for domestic service itself was often a harsh and physically demanding job. For if women were assumed not to have brute strength to operate as stevedores or labourers, why were they assumed to have strength enough to work in laundries hauling heavy wet linen out of tubs? As

³ Fabian Women's Group, *Fabian Tract No 178 The War; Women; and unemployment* (Fabian Society, March 1915), pp.19-20. (Original italics) For a brief outline of the rationale behind the formation of the Fabian Society in 1884, see Eric Hopkins *Industrialisation and Society. A social history, 1830-1951* (Routledge, 2000), pp.105-7.

⁴ Pat Thane 'Women and Work in Britain, c.1870-World War I' in Peter Mathias & John A Davis (eds) *Enterprise and Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.57.

⁵ Personal communication from family member, April 2001.

⁶ Angela V John *By the Sweat of their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines* (Routledge, 1984).

⁷ G Evelyn Gates (ed) *The Woman's Year Book 1923-1924* (Women's Publishers, nd [1923]), pp.317-8.

John points out, women's ability and strength were often confused.⁸ Some reasons for barring women seem rather nebulous. For instance, mental inability to perform certain jobs was usually due to lack of pertinent skills, which in turn was often allied to lack of training. Yet occupational training for women, if it existed at all, was limited in scope, thus reinforcing this perceived mental inability. Clearly, the barring of women from certain occupations demonstrates that this restriction was due to more than just physical and mental abilities.

Like employed women, unemployed women also faced discrimination. In the early years of the century unemployment was not initially the concern of central Government, early attempts to deal with it being rudimentary. The first venture was the establishment of distress committees. Applications for help came mostly from men – in July 1906, for example, only 859 of 67,000 applications received by committees outside London were from women, while corresponding London figures were 580 out of 39,495 applications. Another attempt to deal with women's unemployment was the setting up of workrooms, mostly sewing rooms, under the auspices of the Central Unemployed Body for Women's Workrooms. Between April 1906 and January 1909 a total of £14,845 was spent on workrooms for unemployed women but the outlook was grim – MPs expressed dissatisfaction with results, the Local Government Board (LGB) declined to continue financial assistance and costs were not even half recouped.⁹ Keir Hardie MP maintained that 'It is universally agreed that the position of the out-of-work woman is even more deplorable than that of the out-of-work man' because women had little recourse to casual summer work.¹⁰ But a further grant of £500 in June 1910 failed to solve problems with the workrooms and a year later they were closed.¹¹

Wages offer apparent evidence of discrimination. Women's wages were usually much lower than men's, although Thane cautions that comparison of male and female wages is not always straightforward, often being complicated by a system of piece-rates plus bonuses/fines.¹² Nevertheless, research undertaken by Fabian Society member Sidney Webb demonstrated a gap in his estimated 1912 earnings of manual workers (for which exercise he included domestic servants) – males at £1 5s 9d and women at only 10s 10½d.¹³ It is difficult to see justification for such differential, but Chinn offers three reasons for women's persistently low wages. First, opposition of (male) trade unions to female employment, coupled with customary acceptance

⁸ Angela V John (ed) *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.10.

⁹ 161 H.C. Deb 4 s, cols 420 and 422, 19 July 1906; 176 H.C. Deb 4 s, col 856, 24 June 1907; 1 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1478, 3 March 1909.

¹⁰ 6 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1157-8, 17 June 1909.

¹¹ 17 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1451, 16 June 1910; 26 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 15, 22 May 1911.

¹² Thane 'Women and Work' p.57.

¹³ Fabian Women's Group *The War; Women; and unemployment* p.5.

that women were suited only to unskilled jobs, kept women in a smaller range of lower paid jobs. Second, women's attitude to employment vindicated male prejudices because some women changed jobs often and were thus labelled an unstable workforce. Third, poverty among working-class women meant that income was vital – thus any job, however ill paid, was better than no job.¹⁴

Despite drawbacks of restricted opportunities and lower wages, many women needed to work. Domestic service was, according to Census figures in Chapter 2, indisputably the dominant sector of female employment, but women who took these jobs received less protection than other workers, both male and female. Specifically, they were denied the status of an insured trade and also such benefits as Employment Exchanges might offer them. The 1911 Census showed 6,877,338 women (defined as aged 10 and above) in gainful occupations in the UK. This was almost half the adult female population. Among the 5,854,036 such women in England and Wales were a paltry 80,000 classed as working employers and 313,000 as working on their own account.¹⁵ Clearly, most working women were employees, rather than entrepreneurs. It should be remembered that these figures refer only to women registered employed by the Census and, as Chapter 2 showed, women's paid employment might well be under-represented.

Sector	Females	Males
Domestic service (indoors)	1,260,673	41,765
Cotton manufacture	372,834	250,991
Dressmaking	333,129	3,826
Teaching (all branches)	211,183	89,648
Local Government (including Police & Poor Law Services)	176,450	
Wool & Worsted manufacture	127,637	105,552
Tailoring	127,527	127,301
Drapery	110,955	93,171
Inn or hotel service	110,506	178,550
Agriculture	94,841	1,184,714
Printing, bookbinding & stationery	87,609	161,856
Grocery	58,935	210,387
Boot & shoe making	45,986	172,000
National Government	34,089	

¹⁴ Carl Chinn *They worked all their lives. Women of the urban poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester University Press, 1988), pp.87-8. Sonya O Rose argues that women's lower wages, linked with occupational segregation, pre-dates industrialisation – see *Limited Livelihoods. Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Routledge, 1992), pp.23-4.

¹⁵ Fabian Women's Group *The War; Women; and unemployment* pp.3-4.

¹⁶ *Domestic News* February 1916, p.2.

State employment insurance before 1914 discriminated against women, especially domestic servants. There was great debate among MPs over proposed inclusion of servants in Unemployment Benefit and National Health Insurance schemes, providing payments respectively during periods of unemployment or sickness. Some held that inclusion was burdensome, unworkable, and unpopular. Others, including the Attorney General, felt that inclusion in the Health scheme was the only way to provide a safety net for ‘vast numbers of domestic servants [...] who have no provision of any sort for sickness unless they get it under this Bill.’¹⁷ It was estimated in 1911 that 800,000 English and Welsh households, some 10 per cent, employed servants, with 480,000 keeping a single servant.¹⁸ Consequently payment of sickness benefit would affect many employers. The small number of Government-approved health insurance societies for domestic servants specifically excluded foreigners and those employed partly abroad. Furthermore, casual employment exempted servants, leaving many charwomen outside the scheme.¹⁹ In contrast to this partial inclusion of servants in the Health Insurance scheme, proposals adopted covering Unemployment Benefit excluded all domestic workers not employed in institutional or business premises – effectively, all servants in private houses, the vast majority.

What direct effect did the Great War have on women’s employment opportunities? The initial displacement of many women from their traditional jobs was to be dealt with via the CCWTE (discussed later). The Fabian Society, deploring lack of official concern over unemployed women, felt that relief schemes in the early war period were hampered by using men’s figures as an unemployment measure:

when only a relatively small percentage of men were registered as unemployed, largely owing to the enormous number taken into Government pay or employed on municipal works, the percentage of women thrown out of work and standing idle without wages *was at least three times as great*. Yet the small percentage of men registered as unemployed was constantly being cited during that period as evidence that things were going on quite well, and that no exceptional measures were required. If as large a percentage of men had been registered as unemployed as there were women thrown out of work much more energetic steps would have been taken.²⁰

¹⁷ 26 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 743-4 and 829, 29 May 1911; 29 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 153-4, 31 July 1914; 31 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 572-81, 16 November 1911 and col 1105, 21 November 1911; 32 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 222-66, 28 November 1911 and cols 399-545, 29 November 1911.

¹⁸ 32 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1214, 5 December 1911.

¹⁹ 38 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1281-2, 16 May 1912 and cols 1557-8, 20 May 1912; 39 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 507-8, 10 June 1912 and cols 1846-7, 20 June 1912; 40 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 11-2, 24 June 1912; 41 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 3178-9, 7 August 1912; 42 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 336, 9 October 1912.

²⁰ Fabian Women’s Group *The War; Women; and unemployment* p.3. (Original italics)

One prejudice against women workers held that they were innately incapable of carrying out certain tasks, simply because they were women – a prejudice closing many doors to employment opportunities in the past. As late as mid-1915 one MP voiced concern that not enough use was being made of women’s labour to release men for the Services.²¹ Yet women were keen to contribute to the war effort, signing on to the official War Service Register. Despite many being deemed ineffective, by October 1915 numbers of women in industry had risen nearly 150,000 (some 6 per cent) since the war began, while substitution of women for men in clerical and commercial jobs was ‘considerable’.²² That same month 58,735 ‘effective’ women were on the Register willing to give their services as follows:

Engineering	15,412
Commercial	7,471
Agriculture	5,632
Conveyance	4,336
Dress	3,664
Professional	2,724
Shop Assistants	2,386
Domestic	2,096
Chemicals	767
Food	476
All others	13,771

The preponderance of engineering, commercial, agriculture and conveyance as well as the high number of professional women is in striking contrast to the 1911 Census in Table 3.1, suggesting that women voluntarily sought new opportunities in the labour market.

Introduction of national male conscription in 1916 saw an urgent need for women to replace men in factories, workshops and offices. The idea of women being too fragile, unskilled, untrained to carry out ‘men’s jobs’ was quickly dropped as the national war effort took precedence over old prejudices. By April 1916 some 275,000 women were substituting for men.²⁴ Braybon & Summerfield have documented the impact on women’s employment patterns. Many who took these jobs – be it munitions, Ordnance Survey, transport or a host of other newly available work – had been domestic servants. London General Omnibus Company found that most of their workers had come from this sector, while armaments manufacturer Armstrong Whitworth had 2,513 former servants in their 12,000 strong workforce.²⁵

²¹ 72 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1494-6, 28 June 1915.

²² 74 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 300, 21 September 1915 and col 1456, 14 October 1915.

²³ 74 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2014, 21 October 1915.

²⁴ 81 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1032-3, 4 April 1916.

²⁵ Gail Braybon & Penny Summerfield *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (Pandora, 1987), p.39.

In her study of women war workers, Braybon argues that wartime employment opportunities did not just mean entry into hitherto barred or restricted sectors – munitions, foundries, aircraft industry, optical instrument making, bus and tram driving. Within sectors traditionally employing women, some tasks were newly opened to them – for example, cutting out material in clothing and boot & shoe trades, compositing in the printing trade.²⁶ Woollacott's similar study endorses this opening of opportunities for working-class women, citing also higher wages and the chance to learn new skills.²⁷

Beddoe highlights the diversity of jobs, hitherto classed as male preserves, which Welsh women were permitted to enter during the war – clerks and grocery assistants, public library assistants, post office workers (including night work). The first female taxi driver in Cardiff appeared in 1915, although female tram drivers were barred until 1917 due to initial trade union hostility. By 1918 Welsh munitions factories were heavily dependent on women workers – over 70 per cent at Queensferry TNT and gun cotton plant and 83 per cent at Newport Shell Factory. Such acceptance of a female industrial workforce is especially noticeable in Wales which, as John argues, had a more marked concept of separate spheres, for Nonconformity underlined delineation of gender roles and linked women firmly with domesticity.²⁸

The effect of women's entry into commerce was belatedly acknowledged by Prime Minister Bonar Law when female conscription was mooted in 1918 – such a radical step was unthinkable, he asserted, due to its damaging effect on business, now dependent on women workers.²⁹ But concern for continuity of business affairs apparently evaporated once the war was over and unemployment amongst men rose.

Cessation of hostilities was to have as immediate an impact on employment as did the outbreak of war. The Government came late to this realisation. How did they plan to deal with the impact? Part of the plan was to re-constitute the CCWTE. (See Chapter 4). Initially demobilisation had been largely defined in terms of logistics rather than rehabilitation (except for the injured, deemed to require special consideration). In 1917 a Ministry of Reconstruction was set up whose objectives were two-fold. First, restoration of normal life, including such matters as demobilisation, housing, education, and continuation/relaxation of special wartime

²⁶ Gail Braybon *Women Workers in the First World War* (Croom Helm, 1981. Reprinted Routledge, 1989), pp.62-4.

²⁷ Angela Woollacott *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994), p.5.

²⁸ Deirdre Beddoe 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams: Women in Wales, 1914-1939' in Angela V John (ed) *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1991), p.193; Angela V John 'Introduction' in John (ed) *Our Mother's Land*, pp.6-7.

²⁹ 105 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1723, 2 May 1918.

measures. Second, restoration of normal conditions in commerce and industry.³⁰ It was this second objective which would ultimately impinge on the greater freedom of employment choice that women had enjoyed throughout the war.

A return to peacetime conditions – as affecting industry and commerce – would require reinstatement of male workers into their pre-war occupations and the consequent redundancy of women workers who had temporarily taken their places. This tactic had previously been agreed between employers, trade unions and Government under the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act. The Government probably realised that the Armistice could mirror the outbreak of war in its effects on unemployment, at least short-term, as demobilised soldiers returned. But there was little realisation of just what cessation of hostilities would mean for women's employment. Some, including CCWTE member Susan Lawrence, were aware that the transition period of a return to peacetime conditions would not be easy. Fearing that all workers would face the spectre of unemployment, Lawrence nonetheless asserted that the greater burden would fall on women workers:

Women will be the greatest sufferers during the period of change, for the very simple reason that they have – far more than men – been drafted in to new and temporary occupations.³¹

These wartime workers, many having substituted for men in insured industries, would be entitled to State benefit if unemployed.

Braybon classifies four kinds of substitution operating in wartime – complete/direct (one woman replacing one man, doing all his work), indirect (women replacing unskilled or semi-skilled men who moved to more difficult tasks), group (several women replacing a smaller number of men), and by arrangement (processes changed or new machinery installed). If many munitionettes were not new workers but from other trades or married women returning to work, the effect on female unemployment in the immediate post-war period would be intense.³² Official figures for women directly replacing men at November 1918 was stated as follows (Table 3.3):

³⁰ 96 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1606-7, 27 July 1917.

³¹ A Susan Lawrence 'The Woman Wage Earner' in Marion Phillips (ed) *Women and the Labour Party* (Headley Bros, nd [1919]), p.95.

³² Braybon *Women Workers* p.47 and p.61. Such wartime substitution has echoes in practices used by nineteenth-century industrialists to reduce wage costs – see Rose *Limited Livelihoods* p.6.

Building	15,000
Metal industries	227,000
Chemical industries	37,000
Textile industries	75,000
Clothing industries	52,000
Food, Drink & Tobacco industries	65,000
Paper & Printing industries	23,000
Wood industries	30,000
Other industries (exc coal mining)	57,000
Agriculture	38,000
Transport under Private Ownership (exc Railways)	27,000
Tramways under Local Authorities	17,000
Banking & Finance	65,000
Commerce	347,000
Hotels, Public Houses, Cinemas, Theatres	47,000
Teachers under Local Authorities	14,000
Other Professions (mainly Clerks) (exc Hospitals)	23,000
Municipal Services (exc Teachers, Tramways, Gas, Water, Electricity)	14,000

To combat the effects of both unemployment and demobilisation, the Government introduced a major benefit payable to unemployed men and women, whether ex-service personnel or civilian workers. The 'out-of-work donation', of limited life span, ran from late November 1918 and paid 29s weekly to men and 25s to women, plus allowances for children. Civilians were paid 13 weeks maximum, while ex-service personnel were paid 26 weeks maximum during the year after demobilisation. Additionally, they had four weeks' paid leave, a suit of clothes (or cash in lieu) and a gratuity. Commissioned officers, ineligible for the scheme, received a special gratuity. Applicants whose benefits were extended were forced to accept at least one week's non-payment and reduced rates of 20s for men and 15s for women. 537,000 men and 430,000 women were receiving some form of unemployment benefit in early 1919.³⁴

Receipt of out-of-work donation depended on satisfying criteria laid down by the Court of Referees, responsible for determining eligibility. One stipulation was that applicants were unable to find work. And it was in this context that women were treated differently to men.

Already in early 1919 some MPs expressed indignation that (female) ex-munitions workers refused to enter domestic service. MPs' worries may have been allayed by MoL assurances that Employment Exchanges (since 1917 under MoL control and now permitted to handle domestic service vacancies) were instructed to withdraw out-of-work donation to any woman refusing an offer of suitable employment. At this time 734,090 persons were registered

³³ Gates *Woman's Year Book* p.328.

³⁴ 112 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 339, 13 February 1919 and col 1304, 21 February 1919 and cols 1433-4, 24 February 1919.

unemployed, including 254,648 men and 428,114 women, of whom 695,998 received out-of-work donation. Most men had worked in industry (engineering, building, shipbuilding) or as labourers and factory workers, occupations open to them both before and during the war. Women's work (as Susan Lawrence had so accurately stated) showed greater dependence on war work, especially in insured trades. 103,443 women had worked in engineering and ironfounding, and a further 46,837 in munitions, trades only opened to them during wartime. Thus 35.1 per cent of unemployed women had not worked in traditional women's work. Such occupations were well represented, especially general factory workers, domestic service, cotton industry, dress. There were also 380 ex-servicewomen.³⁵

Numbers of claimants receiving out-of-work donation during 1919 continued to grow – 948,620 by late February, 988,620 by mid-March, and 1,060,245 by late March – at a total cost of around £14,300,000. Originally intended to end in May 1919 the scheme was now extended a further six months. All women, regardless of marital status, were eligible to receive out-of-work donation, provided that they had been thrown out of work by the Armistice. Most civilians receiving donation were women – 488,655 as against 209,486 men – although unsurprisingly ex-servicemen outnumbered women by 305,521 to 1,012. We can surmise that many civilian women had worked under the previously mentioned substitution schemes. It is impossible to know how many were first-time workers, entering unemployment records for the first time.³⁶

High numbers of unemployed women plus the perceived abuse of the out-of-work donation scheme fuelled fears among MPs that the State would have to keep these women. Minister of Labour Sir Robert Horne was fulsomely adamant that women would not be a burden on the country. His speech of April 1919 reveals an apparent acceptance of the validity of these claims of abuse, with a policy that discriminates against female domestic servants:

people who are drawing on the bounty of the State [...] are not entitled to discriminate as to what kind of work they are going to do. It is not going to be the choice open to anyone to refuse work if they like. They cannot refuse suitable work because they do not like it, and then come on to the State to keep them. I am afraid that a very great many of these domestic servant girls have been taking that attitude. I believe that is why we have had a considerable amount written in the newspapers on this question. But the Ministry of Labour has not been supine in this matter. We have taken every means in our power to stop the abuses that have been complained of. We have suspended 22,000 girls from unemployment donation who had refused domestic service, and our decision was upheld by the court of referees in 17,000 of those cases. Again, [the House] ought to know we have placed in domestic service, or hotel or charwoman service, 66,230 since the Armistice. That, after all, is not a record that we need blush for.³⁷

³⁵ 112 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 939-41, 19 February 1919 and cols 1125-6, 20 February 1919.

³⁶ 114 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 73-4, 24 March 1919 and cols 385-9, 26 March 1919 and col 2013, 9 April 1919 and cols 2710-1, 15 April 1919.

³⁷ 115 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 48, 29 April 1919.

Withdrawal of benefit from applicants who refused what was deemed suitable employment (that is, domestic service) was to become a long-term strategy against unemployed women.

Given the strong call for a return to normal pre-war conditions, it is unsurprising that the official view favoured a return to domestic work for women. This view was vociferously supported by the Press, the adulation which had greeted women war workers having now turned to hostility. For example, the Welsh newspaper *Western Mail* castigated unemployed women in January 1919 for their intransigent behaviour:

[women] must realise that domestic service, which they were originally engaged in, must again be their main source of livelihood, that is if they want to do anything at all. Seaside places and other holiday centres throughout the country are said to be now reaping a harvest from young women who are out for a good time on their savings as munition workers and their donations.³⁸

The *Daily News* of March 1921 actually admitted that much Press hostility was based not on concerns of social or economic issues but simply a 'dislike' of women who were refusing to return docilely to their pre-war scenario.³⁹ This demonstrates that women's participation in the labour market was hampered by prejudice against their sex and by notions of a perceived role, rather than inability to perform tasks.

However, there was dissension from some campaigners. For example, the Women's Industrial League (headed by Lady Rhondda) championed the cause of women workers but was ineffective, despite much Press coverage, due to lack of political power and influence.⁴⁰ Similarly, not all MPs felt that women were universally suited to domestic service. Concern was expressed at unfair treatment handed out by Employment Exchanges in cases where women 'refusing the first employment offered, no matter how unsuitable either mentally or physically they may be for the post suggested, their employment allowance is stopped without further notice'. An MoL spokesman dismissed claims of unfair treatment, adding that cases of suspended payment were referred to a local Court of Referees which usually contained a woman member. The claimant was allowed to attend and the Exchange could, if asked, help her prepare her case. This assurance comes when 203,109 more women registered unemployed within one month, an increase of 90.27 per cent.⁴¹ Given this sharp rise in numbers of unemployed women, we can speculate that reducing that figure – and out-of-work donation paid – would have been a priority for the Ministry. And the shortage in the domestic service sector would have presented an obvious route to follow.

³⁸ Beddoe 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams' p.194.

³⁹ Braybon *Women Workers* p.193.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.201.

⁴¹ 112 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1200-2, 20 February 1919.

This problem of recruitment of servants was one aspect of post-war life investigated by the Ministry of Reconstruction via its Women's Advisory Committee. Their report on domestic service, published in 1919, concluded that a concerted long-term effort was essential to encourage women into this occupation and so redress the perceived problem of a dearth of domestic servants. These conclusions were reached via four sub-committees into Training, Distribution, Home Helps, and Organisation/Conditions, whose findings were summarised in the Main Report. The Training sub-committee, surprised at lack of available training, recommended instigation of domestic service training – the costs involved being easily balanced, they argued, by the advantages of having efficiently trained servants. The Distribution sub-committee urged registration of domestic employment agencies plus refinement of facilities at Exchanges. The Home Helps sub-committee advocated an extension of current schemes but, to avoid conflict with another Government Committee investigating the matter, had been dissolved early. Finally, the Organisation/Conditions sub-committee urged greater leisure for servants but also stressed the need for greater co-operation in terms of interchanging duties with fellow workers. It defined the nub of the problem as the lack of training which left most servants as untrained and unskilled.⁴²

But the Report belies its apparent consensus. Two committee members signed with reservations. Mabel Birchenough thought domestic service too varied to apply one set of recommendations, fearing these would unfairly disadvantage old or delicate servants who were often valued members of households. Equally she felt that servants in 'better' households would resent interference – but given her status as Lady, she may have had mistresses' interests more at heart. Lilian Harris did not subscribe to the view that training was the key question. In her view, lack of freedom was the main objection to domestic service, an objection which she asserted could be overcome by using daily workers to replace the present residential system of servants. Labour Party member and CCWTE officer Marion Phillips, disagreeing with the Report's emphasis, refused to sign altogether, despite broadly welcoming individual recommendations. Moreover, she rejected claims that the Women's Advisory Committee should not make suggestions on minimum wages and maximum hours, issues which she put at the heart of the servant problem – it was these issues plus the lack of status which, according to Phillips, led to a shortage of servants.⁴³

⁴² *Report of the Women's Advisory Committee on the Domestic Service Problem together with Reports by Sub-Committees on Training, Machinery of Distribution, Organisation and Conditions* PP 1919 (Cmd 67) XXIX, 7, pp.2-4.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp.5-6.

The Women's Advisory Committee, acting for the Ministry of Reconstruction, tackled recruitment into domestic service from an employer's standpoint, defining the problem as a perceived shortage of suitable female servants. Although issues of terms and conditions were investigated, they were angled towards mistresses' continuing needs for trained servants. Little regard was paid to the views of servants or to the impact of wartime employment opportunities. The majority of investigators (often themselves from the servant-employing classes) apparently simply could not comprehend why any working-class woman, needing to earn a livelihood, would not be anxious to become a domestic servant.

Despite efforts to encourage women into domestic service and public condemnation (neither wholly deserved nor entirely truthful) of those who resisted, domestic service was still proving an unpopular choice of post-war employment among women. There is little narrative evidence of how employers or employees felt about domestic service. Some comments survive in the books and surveys (discussed in Chapter 1) which indicate that an existing distaste for this occupation was exacerbated by wartime experiences. Unpopularity may have been partly attributable to a new self-awareness among working women. Women had proved – at least to themselves – that they were capable of doing a man's job in factories and offices. Women had assumed positions of relative importance in the employment hierarchy. They had enjoyed greater freedom and leisure – even with the long hours worked to meet national wartime needs. They had earned better and more regular wages. Some women had even been granted the vote (although on a limited scale and scarcely affecting the woman being exhorted to enter domestic service). Having experienced such a wide range of employment opportunities in wartime, why should a woman wish to enter a low-paid, low-status occupation with little leisure and the scent of subservience which, furthermore, would negate all unemployment benefit credits accrued by working in an insurable job?

Social and economic factors arising from the war influenced women's attitudes towards paid employment. Single or widowed women might be self-reliant, without recourse to family support. Married women might need to be breadwinners, especially if their husbands were not yet demobilised, unfit to work through injury or unable to find work. All household budgets would have been hit by the increase in food prices (118 per cent above 1914 levels), making women's contribution to family income more necessary for survival.⁴⁴ Women from middle-class backgrounds might be left without family financial support, perhaps needing to earn a living for the first time.⁴⁵ The experience of wartime employment, whether for working- or

⁴⁴ 110 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1648, 31 October 1918.

⁴⁵ Examples of straitened circumstances arising from the war among middle-class families are noted in BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Grants sanctioned, 13 May 1920.

middle-class women, may have encouraged them to seek jobs offering greater stimulus or better prospects than the restrictive conditions of domestic service could provide. Thus aspirations, fuelled by wartime experiences, joined with economic necessity.

The Introduction to this thesis outlined the lack of consensus among historians to explain the short-term and temporary nature of wartime expansion of women's employment. Whichever competing theories are suggested to explain lack of sustained benefits to women from wartime work, one thing is clear from empirical evidence. The overwhelming call was for a return to pre-war status quo, certainly for women's employment. The war had seen a temporary industrial need that women had filled – now these women were expected to return to their previous occupations. And, as Chapter 2 showed, the dominant female occupation was domestic service.

The CCWTE

Chapter 1 demonstrated that the favoured solution to the perceived servant problem was for some form of organised training. The limited domestic service training in existence before 1914 had been neither uniform nor widespread, and thus failed to tackle the servant shortage effectively. At that time two London Trade Schools – Sir John Cass and Newcomen – had recently begun offering such courses, while the Women's Industrial Council instituted an experimental school in 1912 in Birmingham for training nursery maids. Some local education authorities provided continuation classes in domestic subjects for girls over 14 (i.e. over school-leaving age) while others operated residential training schemes. These might be in co-operation with existing colleges, for example, Wiltshire using Trowbridge School of Cookery or Somerset paying for training at Glastonbury. Kent provided 30 free scholarships at a Bromley training school. Brighton operated a Municipal School for Home Training for 40 girls on a twenty-one week course at 6d per week, while Liverpool charged £1 for their similar fifteen-week course. This latter type of training was ostensibly for home duties rather than service, but authorities admitted that they had no difficulty finding employment for their trained girls.⁴⁶

The CCWTE was to become the foremost provider of domestic service training, operating on a national scale. As Chapters 3 to 6 will show, the CCWTE's training schemes differed from pre-Great War domestic service training by being targeted towards unemployed women and girls. Equally, although domestic service training became the mainstay of CCWTE schemes, initially this type of training was not its major concern.

⁴⁶ C V Butler *Domestic Service: An Enquiry by the Women's Industrial Council* (Bell, 1916. Reprinted New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1980), Appendix I, pp.114-7.

The CCWTE came into existence, under the aegis of the LGB, as a direct consequence of the War – specifically, unemployment generated by the outbreak of war. The CCWTE's remit was threefold. First, to devise training and work schemes for female workers unemployed on account of the war. Second, to consider and report upon such schemes. Third, to distribute available work to prevent over-time and part-time concurrently in one trade. This last aim included acceptance of War Office contracts, seeking specifically to help displaced shirt-makers and skilled needlewomen.⁴⁷

The inaugural meeting took place on 19th August 1914, just fifteen days after the declaration of war by Britain. This was the only time the CCWTE met under its original name 'Queen's Employment Advisory Committee', this being changed to 'Central Committee on Women's Employment' two days later. The twelve Committee women represented a wide range of interests and political beliefs, as well as cut across class divisions. To assist them, two Advisory Boards were set up. The official advisors comprised Miss (later Dame) Adelaide Anderson (Principal Lady Inspector of Factories), Miss Clapham (Head, Women's Department Labour Exchanges), Miss Durham (LCC Technical Training Organiser) and Miss Wilson (Insurance Commission). The commercial advisors – representing interests of industry, trade and workers – were Mr Blackwell (Messrs Crosse & Blackwell), Mrs Chamberlain (Women's Horticultural and Agricultural Union), Lord Emmott, Mr Glanfield (London Federation of Wholesale Clothiers), John James (Shirt and Collar Makers Federation), Sir Charles Macara, Gordon Selfridge, Seebohm Rowntree, and William Thomson (Yorkshire Textile Trade).⁴⁸

Seventeen of the initial twenty-five persons involved were women – indicating possible awareness by the LGB that these intelligent public-spirited women were ideally placed to recognise the needs of other women and devise means to fulfil those needs. Although in 1914 no women exercised power in the traditional manner that men did – they had no political voice, and no business or school network – there was a vast amount of behind-the-scenes power wielded.⁴⁹ This was channelled in two ways. First was the informal network of family and friends, often from society's higher echelons, including contacts in government and business circles. Second was the experience gained from active involvement in political and social campaigns. CCWTE committee members were adept at using both channels to further the aims of their organisation, such behind-the-scenes power undoubtedly playing a large part in its sustained existence.

⁴⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/10, undated paper.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Helen Jones *Women in British Public Life, 1914-1950. Gender, Power and Social Policy* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education, 2000).

The CCWTE Committee members had a vast collective resource to call upon, ranging from experience in trade unionism and factory inspection to social networks among politicians and policymakers. The leading light of the CCWTE in these early days was trade unionist Mary Macarthur (1880-1921), whose close friendship with Queen Mary ensured the latter's public support for the CCWTE. Other members included May Tennant (1869-1946) who brought first-hand knowledge of working women's conditions from her previous work as factory inspector as well as a potential channel to political influence through her sister-in-law Margot Asquith. Trade unionist and Labour party member Margaret Bondfield (1873-1953) later had the distinction of being Britain's first woman Cabinet Minister. Labour party activists Marion Phillips (1881-1932) and Susan Lawrence (1871-1947) later became Labour MPs. Violet Markham (1872-1959), who took over Chairmanship of the CCWTE in 1925 and was involved with the Unemployment Assistance Board from 1934 to 1946, counted many influential friends in political circles. She was also on the Executive Committee of the National Relief Fund, the main source of income for the CCWTE at this time.⁵⁰

The CCWTE Committee, therefore, included some formidable personalities with a strong tradition of active campaigning both in a political and community spirit, plus a knowledge – via familial connections – of how the influential networking system worked. The CCWTE therefore is a prime example of how women could wield – albeit limited – political power at a time when their voices were unrepresented in national Government.

The eagerness with which the CCWTE approached its work is evident from the frequency of Committee meetings, the regular attendance of members, and the thought which they gave to alleviating distress caused by the effect of war on women's employment. Indeed, by September the CCWTE had suggested a number of schemes, quoted below:

- A. Training workers in trades in which new openings are now offered for British trade.[...]
- B. Training in skilled trade in which there is normally a shortage of labour, such as machinists, hand-ironers, etc. [...]
- C. Training in domestic economy, especially cooking.
- D. Production of useful articles, such as clothing for cases of distress, nightdresses, bed jackets for poor sick women nursed in hospitals or in their own homes, all kinds of garments, but especially knitted garments for poor babies, cheap cradles, and various accessories which are often lacking but are always desirable in the nursing of the sick poor and in maternity cases. In the selection of the particular articles to be made in any locality it would be necessary:-

⁵⁰ Jones *Women in British Public Life*, passim; Helen Jones (ed) *Duty and Citizenship. The Correspondence and Political Papers of Violet Markham, 1896-1953* (The Historians' Press, 1994), pp.7-9. Initially the CCWTE received monies from Queen's Fund and National Relief Fund – see BLPES Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Accounts 10 October 1914.

- (a) That nothing should be undertaken which would, but for the scheme, be produced and purchased in the ordinary course of business.
- (b) That articles produced would not be offered for sale, but would be given [...] to persons who had no purchasing power.

Every article produced should be stamped in such a way as to identify its origin, and pawnbrokers should be circularised with a warning against accepting articles so stamped in pawn.

- E. Altering, making and mending of workers' own garments.⁵¹

Despite emphasising feminine pursuits (cookery, garments), there was realisation that women might usefully train in new or hitherto prohibited trades. The CCWTE was constrained by the need to seek approval for trade training from relevant Government departments. One important stipulation was that the CCWTE's work 'should not compete in any way with ordinary industry' and that 'it should be of such a nature as to maintain or impose the efficiency of the unemployed women'.⁵² These restrictions necessarily limited the scope of and hampered development of CCWTE schemes. In turn, this limitation would impact on the range of employment and training offered to unemployed women who came under the aegis of the CCWTE. The fear, expressed by the Fabian Society (and noted earlier), that women's unemployment was treated less seriously than men's seems to be borne out by reactions in the House of Commons. Public acknowledgement that women had indeed been thrown out of work by the war coincided with the imminent publication of the CCWTE's Interim Report in March 1915.

The CCWTE was quick to organise itself into five sub-committees. The Administration sub-committee acted as an LGB/CCWTE communication channel, had powers to act in an emergency, and supervised the Contracts and Direct Employment Department's work. The New Trades sub-committee investigated possibilities of training women in trades where new openings occurred, preparing detailed schemes for consideration. Two areas – domestic economy and skilled trades experiencing shortages – were the province of the Training Schemes sub-committee. Production and distribution of 'useful articles' to people without purchasing power came within the ambit of the Employment Schemes sub-committee who also arranged schemes for women to make, alter and mend their own clothes. The Juveniles and Professional Women sub-committee dealt with unemployment among those two groups.⁵³

⁵¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/10, *W.E.R.1 General Outline for Special Schemes of Employment for Women*, 31 August 1914.

⁵² Fabian Women's Group *The War; Women; and unemployment* p.16.

⁵³ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 31 August 1914.

These sub-committees illustrate that the CCWTE did not see itself confined to so-called women's work but rather as an agent of providing work for women, even if that meant exploring new avenues. With enthusiasm to carry out its remit, what employment schemes did the CCWTE devise and how successful were they? Did they make an impact on women's unemployment? Did they open up new opportunities?

Unlike Government, the CCWTE was quick to realise that women's unemployment had worsened at the outbreak of war. The CCWTE's Contracts Department was a major plank in its schemes, successfully swinging into action as early as September 1914. In its first phase it employed women, many from hard-hit textile trades, in workrooms to make military clothing for the War Office. It is a measure of official concern over women's unemployment that this important contract was switched from its original fulfilment in Canada to the CCWTE. Even more so, since some items had to be redesigned to allow for manufacture in England. The success of the Department is evident, with some 1,000 women kept in regular work for upwards of two years, by which time many had transferred to munitions factories. The list of goods produced during that period, the majority for the Government, is impressive – 2,000,000 pairs of socks; 1,415,000 shirts; 80,000 pairs of gloves; 50,000 service dress bags; 20,000 body bands; 18,000 cotton drawers. Although such work followed the tradition of women's employment in textile trades, it is noteworthy that the CCWTE paid piece rates much higher than usual trade rates, 100 to 300 per cent higher.⁵⁴ While the Contracts Department offered no new avenues for women workers, it nevertheless ensured textile workers were able to maintain their skills.

In a move reminiscent of early distress committees (referred to earlier), the CCWTE set up workrooms to provide training for unemployed women. One was at Cradley Heath where in January 1915 the 83 women worked mainly on knitting and sewing. These former chainmakers, tailoresses, needlewomen and brickyard workers also heard talks on hygiene, sanitation, nursing and domestic work. The LGB reported enthusiastically on the capable managers and the cheerful and clean women and girls who were making good progress, although it is clear that vetting of women was rigorous:

Many cases have thus been removed from the Relief List; several applications were refused as unsuitable, and undeserving applicants detected. The scheme is a distinct success, so far.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 16 September 1914 and Final Report of Contracts Department, 30 July 1919.

⁵⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/10, LGB Intelligence Department Report dated 29 January 1915.

Not all workrooms were so fortunate. A report to the CCWTE in July 1915 on five London workrooms expressed concern at the fate of their 297 trainees, all aged over 30. Of these, 156 trainees were deemed unemployable, 103 due to ill-health and the rest because they were over 60 and thus faced age prejudice from employers. Of the remaining 141 women, 66 were over 50 and a further 53 over 40. The report's author concluded that difficulties arose due to three factors. First was age, because many employers would not employ women over 40 – some set an age limit of 30. Second, health problems prevented many women from doing a full day's work over a five-and-a-half-day week – some had difficulty standing for long periods or kneeling while others had poor eyesight or hearing. Third was the current depressed state of certain trades where women had previously worked. Among listed trades were some undoubtedly considered frivolous during wartime – gentlemen's hat trimmings, mount gilding, silk weaving, military embroidery (gold/silver), straw hat work, cambric ties. The conclusion was that only 45 out of 297 trainees were realistically likely to find work.⁵⁶ After discussion the CCWTE Committee decided to remove the unemployable women from the workrooms, referring them for help to their local Employment Committee. This treatment seems harsh, but the women may have fared better than the remaining trainees (presumably deemed employable) because within two months it was decided that the workroom scheme was no longer viable. The 45 women were given notice and the workrooms closed, although with the proviso that they might re-open if the situation changed.⁵⁷ It did not and the decision in September 1915 marked the end of this particular scheme.

The London workrooms highlighted how women's employment was often dictated by health concerns, rendering them unfit for work. They also showed a widespread prejudice among employers against older women, which would have restricted such women's job opportunities, even in peacetime. Thus, poor health and inherently prejudicial attitudes could bar women from entering new or alternative employment.

One CCWTE scheme that seemed to answer older women's employment needs was the Home Helps Scheme, established in 1914. Proving popular with trainees, the scheme was apparently based on current local authority schemes such as Home Helps and Schools for Mothers which, as both Davin and Lewis document, arose out of concern for child and maternal welfare. This concern had earlier been brought to the fore by the poor health of

⁵⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/11, Report on residue of women in 5 experimental workrooms, July 1915.

⁵⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 21 July 1915 and 22 September 1915.

(working-class) Army recruits during the Boer Wars.⁵⁸ Despite the scheme's popularity with trainees – and its evident suitability for older workers – the Government refused to renew the relevant CCWTE grant beyond October 1915. The CCWTE felt that the Government's desire to 'secure the return of these women to normal employment' was a misreading of the situation, but was powerless to continue the Home Helps Scheme.⁵⁹ A few trainees found jobs as Home Helps for Lambeth, Westminster and Poplar Councils or with the Islington School for Mothers. Others were fortunate to get private work. The scheme's closure meant that women were denied an opportunity to retrain for alternative employment, despite the ease of recruitment and good placement rates. It was acknowledged that:

There is no doubt that the training they have had has enormously increased their chances of employment, and though they are practically all quite elderly, the improvement in character and capacity has been very marked in nearly every case.⁶⁰

Further traditionally-based employment was on offer to women via the CCWTE's Mayoral Schemes – training schemes in areas of perceived distress and offering mainly sewing workrooms. Numbering 74 in 1915, most were open for limited periods and were expected to adhere to strict CCWTE guidelines. Quality and content of schemes varied enormously, as did cost. Burnley was the most expensive and largest Mayoral Scheme – three workrooms running respectively for eight, two and one month at a cost of nearly £3,172. Burnley's intake of over 700 women illustrates how hard hit the town had been. The largest London workroom was Islington with 538 women, costing over £2,400 during its eight-month existence. Some workrooms earned praise. Poplar, spending nearly £1,640, was singled out for its 'considerable ingenuity' which 'offered helpful object lessons' to its 279 workers. Hammersmith was honoured by a visit from Queen Mary who, impressed with the efficiency and work, 'requested that a large number of garments should be sent to her at Buckingham Palace'. (There is no record of what these garments were or what the Queen intended to do with them. Given her admiration for Macarthur and her interest in the CCWTE, it may be that she wished to demonstrate public support for its training schemes.) Other workrooms were singled out for a bad record, like Walthamstow which suffered many problems. Its 123 women included many who refused to take jobs in the adjoining City and even one woman who was convicted of 'obtaining assistance by fraud' and fined £5 or 30 days' hard labour.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Jane Lewis *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England 1900-1939* (Croom Helm, 1980); Anna Davin 'Imperialism and motherhood' *History Workshop Journal* 5, (Spring 1978), pp.9-65. See also Chapter 7 of this thesis.

⁵⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 22 September 1915.

⁶⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/11, Report on Home Helps Scheme, 21 September 1915.

⁶¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/11, Mayoral Schemes, nd [1915].

Domestic work was also much in evidence in Mayoral Schemes. Cardiff was complimented on providing 'several furnished rooms in order that the [82] women might be taught practical housework'. And Swansea's Juvenile Training Scheme, costing £35 for five months, was highly commended both by the CCWTE and locally for the training its 17 girls received:

The housewifery, laundry and cookery teaching was given in the Domestic Economy Model Home. Great appreciation of the Scheme was expressed by the Manager of the Labour Exchange.⁶²

The fortunes of Mayoral Schemes depended heavily on locality, former trades, current vacancies, and the competence (or otherwise) of those running each workroom. These factors necessarily affected the ability of the CCWTE to provide meaningful and useful employment for unemployed women, whether on a temporary or permanent basis. Accrington and Blackburn enjoyed a trade recovery, leading to their early closure. But Bolton's cotton operatives apparently boycotted the Mayoral Scheme, presumably finding alternative employment or means of survival. Kidderminster's energetic sub-committee subsequently placed many of its 187 workers in nearby munitions factories but Nottingham fared less well. The city's dependence on lace trades led to a worrying situation for the 300-plus women at its workroom, as evidenced by the expenditure of over £2,200 during six months. Many of these lace workers were 'old and quite unsuited for other employment', having been engaged in specialist lace work at home. The City of London – perhaps an indication of its central role in the business world – ran a six-month commercial training scheme for 254 girls at a cost of almost £2,000.⁶³

Although the above schemes were firmly based in traditional female occupations, the CCWTE was not averse to experimenting in efforts to find work for unemployed women who came within its scope. But Government held the purse-strings and their approval was necessary before schemes could be put into operation. This tended to limit CCWTE options because the Government was neither as adventurous nor as imaginative as CCWTE sub-committees. Consequently many proposals investigated by the sub-committees never saw light of day. Nevertheless schemes were instituted for training in such diverse areas as poultry farming, fruit preserving, leather machining, grocery retail and clerical work as well as the usual domestic economy.⁶⁴ Most of these schemes were group training and, given employers' prejudices against

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 23 September 1914, 25 November 1914, 27 November 1914 and 24 February 1915; and Financial Report for 8 weeks to 18 March 1916.

older women workers noted above, it is likely that trainees would have been younger working-class women thought likely to benefit from training when they re-entered the labour market.

The CCWTE did not neglect better-educated women. Details are tantalisingly sparse, but Financial Reports between 1914 and 1916 refer to a £5,000 grant for schemes for 'Professional Women'. Two schemes paid monies for fees, travel and expenses to individual women for training, presumably at specific institutions. Clerical training and midwifery were probably included. By early 1916, when 'Professional' schemes finished, over £952 had been paid out.⁶⁵ This allocation of less than twenty per cent of monies available might indicate that such training was neither needed nor wanted. But it is more likely that women who might have benefited from this scheme were, between 1914 and 1916, attracted to other occupations such as clerical work or Service organisations like FANY or VAD.⁶⁶

The introduction of male conscription in 1916 and the subsequent substitution of women for men in hitherto prohibited jobs (as discussed earlier) explains why CCWTE schemes, set up to alleviate distress among women thrown out of work by the war, were concentrated into the two years to 1916. From that point, the spectre of unemployment for women largely vanished – as long as war and male conscription lasted. With the abundance of new opportunities for women, the need for CCWTE schemes disappeared as female unemployment reduced. Unemployment caused by wartime displacement had been the keystone of the CCWTE's establishment, and it does not appear that any further role was envisaged for the organisation at this time. However, the CCWTE had built up an efficient organisational structure, making good contacts among policymakers, as well as gaining valuable experience in the difficulties of running women's training and work schemes. These would prove useful for its re-constituted organisation during the 1920s and 1930s, giving it a firm basis on which to operate.

The CCWTE was, by October 1919, in the final process of winding-up.⁶⁷ At this late stage the Ministry of Labour (MoL) stepped in, to re-constitute the CCWTE with a revised and expanded remit. By this time it had been realised that transition from wartime conditions back to normality was not as easy or as simple as previously envisaged.

⁶⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Financial Reports between 28 November 1914 and 22 January 1916.

⁶⁶ For an example of wartime employment among young middle-class women, see Vera Brittain *Testament of Youth* (Victor Gollancz, 1933. Reprinted Fontana, 1979).

⁶⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 13 October 1919.

CCWTE schemes between 1914 and 1919 were successful within limitations. Although few new opportunities were opened, there is little doubt that many women found employment through, and directly benefited from, the CCWTE. Trainee numbers are unavailable, but included 1,000 working in the Contracts Department. The Mayoral Schemes catered for as few as 17 women and as many as 700 in their workrooms, depending on local circumstances and needs. Other CCWTE schemes were small, for example, 14 women on grocery training, 39 on leatherwork, and 57 on clerical training.⁶⁸ It is unknown how many professional women received help. Neither does narrative evidence survive to gauge how the CCWTE schemes impacted on women's lives. The CCWTE's remit had been to allay the problems of female unemployment arising from the displacement of workers on the outbreak of war, a remit it had fulfilled within the confines of the restrictions placed on it by providing an opportunity for some unemployed women to find alternative employment.

Conclusions

The Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment (CCWTE) was initially established by the Government as a short-term measure to deal with rising unemployment among women displaced from their jobs at the outbreak of war in 1914. Although under the aegis of the Local Government Board, the CCWTE exercised a modicum of autonomy, but its semi-official position (with reliance on co-operation and funding from Government coffers) dictated that many of its innovative plans remained at the drawing board stage. Nevertheless, the twelve CCWTE women – from a wide range of class, political and social backgrounds investigated, established and administered schemes to provide employment for women. Most schemes for the working-classes were rooted in the workshops idea, which had formed the basis of pre-war attempts to deal with unemployment, and were based on traditional women's tasks such as domestic work or textiles. For better-educated women, the CCWTE offered limited training in clerical work and the chance to undertake individual professional training.

When male conscription was introduced in 1916, new employment openings for women arose in industry and commerce where they effected a replacement workforce for men now in the Services -- substitution. At this point the CCWTE effectively became redundant, seemingly having fulfilled its original remit.

⁶⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Final Report of Contracts Department 30 July 1919; File 3/11, Report on results on training in Grocery & Leatherwork, nd [1915] and Report on Clerical Workers Training Schemes, nd [1915] and Mayoral Schemes nd [1915?].

The Armistice saw a repeat pattern of rising unemployment among women, as Government, trade unions and employers implemented their previously agreed plan to reinstate male workers. The strong call for a return to a pre-war status quo – upheld by this alliance and supported in the Press – effectively negated gains made by women during their wartime employment. Men dominated Government – women, with little political power despite achieving partial suffrage in 1918, were effectively excluded from policy decisions.

Women were urged to return to their perceived natural sphere of the home, a call underpinned by Government policy to persuade unemployed women into domestic service, despite its unpopularity. The Ministry of Labour sought to effect persuasion by withholding unemployment benefit from women deemed refusing suitable jobs – inevitably domestic service. Furthermore, the Ministry of Reconstruction, established to ease transition from wartime to peacetime, investigated and reported on recruitment into domestic service as part of its brief. This investigation, approached from an employer's standpoint, effectively underpinned the existence of the perceived servant problem, defining it as a shortage of female servants.

The implications for women's post-war unemployment – undoubtedly coupled with the rising costs of benefit entitlements – led to a reassessment of the need to retain the facilities of the CCWTE and its subsequent reconstitution under the Ministry of Labour.

Chapter 4: New beginnings 1920-1929

Aims

As Chapter 3 showed, realisation dawned that transition from wartime to peacetime – and the desired return to pre-1914 normalcy – would be neither easy nor rapid. The CCWTE, previously a stop-gap measure to deal with wartime exigencies, was now reconstituted under the MoL. This closer affiliation led to the CCWTE's becoming closely tied to Government policy and Treasury restrictions. This Chapter demonstrates how the new relationship between Government and CCWTE restricted the scope of training. As attitudes towards unemployed women hardened, the Government sought to forge a link between its policy on the twin problems of female unemployment and the servant problem, and the role of the CCWTE.

Two factors affecting development of CCWTE schemes were unemployment levels (including juveniles) and the continuing perceived servant problem. These factors are examined to provide context for an analysis of the CCWTE's training options in the 1920s.

Economic Context

The 1920s saw a persistently high level of unemployment, which Hatton contends was relatively unique to Britain. The Government's dilemma was to provide benefits that did not encourage long-term unemployment.¹ Changes in unemployment classification to encompass casual workers and 'temporarily stopped' meant that Employment Exchange applicants had different employment needs.²

While unemployment was not a new problem, levels were exacerbated by conditions at the end of the Great War (discussed in Chapter 3). The rising numbers of benefit claimants arose partly from a faster-than-expected rate of demobilisation of soldiers, a tactic necessitated by threats of mutiny.³ Many men returned to their pre-war jobs under the agreed Government-employers-trade union pact, but one unexpected problem was numbers of unemployed females registered at Exchanges and eligible for benefit. About 1½ million more women entered industry between 1914 and 1918, comprising women returning after marriage, switching from other occupations (including domestic service) or taking first-time paid employment. For example, in October 1918 women formed 56 per cent of Glasgow munitions workers.⁴

¹ T J Hatton *The Analysis of Unemployment in Interwar Britain: A Survey of Research* Discussion Paper No 66 (Centre for Economic Policy Research, 1985), p.1, pp.5-6 and p.13.

² T J Hatton *Vacancies and Unemployment in the 1920s* Discussion Paper No 10 (Centre for Economic Policy Research, 1984), p.7.

³ Gail Braybon & Penny Summerfield *Out of the Cage. Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (Pandora, 1987) p.119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.38-9; Joan Beauchamp *Women who Work* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), p.24.

By 1920 out-of-work donation – already costing £53 million – was restricted to ex-service personnel, accounting for a steady decline in claimant numbers, 45.84 and 16.45 per cent of November 1919 equivalents for men and women in July 1920.⁵ The potential financial burden, especially to support new claimants for State benefits, must have alarmed the Treasury. Around one third of the 60,000 women and girls registered unemployed in August 1920 came from insured trades, while many of the 189,851 registered men were presumably from insured occupations. With less than 20 per cent of unemployed men found jobs, the Government was forced to consider how to tackle the situation.⁶

Choosing to focus on male unemployment, the Government instituted relief schemes such as road building. A more ambitious scheme employed 150 labourers at Whipsnade Zoo. Minister of Labour Dr Macnamara said that unemployment relief schemes for women were ‘beset with difficulties’ and impracticable to implement⁷, which perhaps accounts for the subsequent lack of interest in investigating practicable alternatives to domestic service. Numbers of registered unemployed at Exchanges continued to rise steadily, reaching 745,000 males and over 295,000 females by February 1921, the figures giving credence to Ministers’ plans to tackle male unemployment as a priority.⁸

Official figures present problems, largely ignoring women working in uninsured trades or at low wages falling outside benefit entitlement criteria. Similarly, legislation excluded agricultural labourers and domestic servants from benefit schemes.⁹ The first exclusion affected both sexes, but the second disadvantaged women especially and prevents a true appreciation of the scale of unemployment. Unemployed women might consider registration futile if ineligibility for benefit brought no financial gain. Likewise, control over job choice might be easier if servants used traditional word-of-mouth recommendations or private employment agencies.

Table 4.1 reveals the dominance of traditional trades, supporting Census figures for female employment in Chapter 2. Given the servant shortage, the numbers of unemployed servants seems surprising but, as Chapter 2 demonstrated, the term ‘domestic service’ covered many jobs. Thus not every servant would have pertinent skills, while attitudes to residential/daily and private/institutional work were also factors in finding a job.

⁵ 128 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1709-10, 3 May 1920; 129 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1388, 19 May 1920; 131 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 55, 28 June 1920 and col 446, 30 June 1920; 132 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 986, 26 July 1920.

⁶ 133 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 393, 11 August 1920; 134 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 366, 3 November 1920.

⁷ 135 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1469, 2 December 1920; 138 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1790-1, 2 March 1921; 234 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 131, 21 January 1930.

⁸ 136 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 505-7, 15 December 1920 and col 1319, 20 December 1920; 138 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 556, 21 February 1921 and cols 911-2, 23 February 1921.

⁹ Pat Thane *Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1996, second edition), pp.138-9.

Largest Categories Male		
Engineering & ironfounding	88,000	
General labourers	81,000	
Transport trades	52,000	
Building & works of construction	42,000	
Largest Categories Female		
Domestic service	26,000	
Textile trades	24,000	
Clothing trades	22,000	

Women's work, broadly similar to pre-war years, suffered a post-war backlash due to men's fear of being displaced in the workplace. The call for women to return home was allied to ideas of femininity. (Many women in wartime jobs dressed in masculine attire of trousers or overalls, serving to underline assumption of a male employment role.) Also, growth of consumer goods necessitated a growth in consumerism, in other words, emphasis on domesticity.¹¹ Glucksmann's analysis of consumer goods and the concomitant impact on factory methods and practices reveals women as key players as workers and consumers.¹² Confusion about women's role was rife, for example, Labour party women urging equal job and training opportunities whilst simultaneously promoting domesticity and housework.¹³

One post-war gain was clerical work. Demarcation in this increasingly feminised employment sector is neatly captured in the title of Davy's article 'A Cissy Job for Men; a Nice Job for Girls'. Opening another avenue for women's work, especially among lower-middle-class girls, clerical work suffered from over-supply resulting in fierce competition for jobs.¹⁴ An inevitable result must have been a lowering of wages, perhaps explaining why men forsook clerical work – and once women replaced men, the job would have lost status.¹⁵

Animosity towards unemployed women persisted: Why, asked MPs, pay benefit to residential servants employed seasonally in hotels and boarding-houses who refused jobs in

¹⁰ 136 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2112, 23 December 1920.

¹¹ Gail Braybon *Women Workers in the First World War* (Croom Helm, 1981. Reprinted Routledge, 1989), pp.220-1.

¹² Miriam Glucksmann *Women assemble: women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain* (Routledge, 1990). See also Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹³ Braybon *Women Workers* pp.224-5.

¹⁴ Teresa Davy "A Cissy Job for Men; a Nice Job for Girls": Women Shorthand Typists in London, 1900-39' in Leonore Davidoff & Belinda Westover (eds) *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: women's history and women's work* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1986), p.131 and p.138. See also Peter Dewey *War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945* (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), pp.59-60, and p.118.

¹⁵ This illustrates the point about job status being dependent on gender made by Margaret R Higonnet & Patrice L-R Higonnet 'The Double Helix' in Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987). See discussion in Introduction to this thesis.

private houses? Why pay benefit to any unemployed woman capable of domestic service? One suggestion for exclusion of all young women from State benefit was firmly rejected.¹⁶

A Fabian Society survey (discussed in Chapter 3) had demonstrated that many women were sole or joint breadwinners. Given the effects of war among men – casualties leading to death or disability – it is likely that many women needed to earn their own income.¹⁷ Indeed, a 1924 inquiry revealed that around 62 per cent of female claimants were single or widowed¹⁸, suggesting that many supported themselves, without recourse to familial aid when unemployed. Census figures for the main working population (age group 20-59) support this suggestion, showing a rise of 5.7 per cent for men between 1911 and 1921 and 10.4 per cent for women, with women outnumbering men by 10,829,000 to 9,481,000. In the age group 20-39, women outnumbered men by 6,315,000 to 5,343,000.¹⁹ Such imbalance meant that women's employment could be a significant source of income to the household budget.

Yet many MPs feared that unemployed women were, in the main, malingerers arbitrarily refusing to take good jobs. The Minister of Labour assured them that steps were taken to ensure that unskilled unemployed women could not refuse what Exchanges deemed suitable jobs without risk of losing benefit. Furthermore, the Minister stated that benefits were strictly monitored, especially it seems for women claimants:

Applicants [...] are registered for, and may be offered, work in any employment for which they are suitable [...] The mere fact that the applicant dislikes the employment does not in itself make the employment unsuitable. There must, in addition, be some satisfactory ground for the objection. For example, if a woman who is prepared to accept day work as a domestic servant objects to becoming a resident domestic servant, that is not, in itself, a ground for holding that resident domestic service is not suitable employment in her case; there must, in addition, be for example, some valid objection arising from her domestic ties.²⁰

Here is discrimination on two levels. With Exchanges having the upper hand on filling vacancies, unemployed women lost control over what job they took. Servants were unable to reasonably refuse a switch from non-residential to residential employment, this accommodation and restriction of freedom element rarely being a factor in other jobs. Women without dependants were further discriminated against, refusal being only justified by 'domestic ties'. Thus a single or childless woman would find it harder to justify to the court of referees why she was unwilling to accept a residential post.

¹⁶ 177 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 745, 9 October 1924; 179 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 973, 17 December 1924; 180 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1930, 25 February 1925.

¹⁷ See also Braybon *Women Workers*, p.181.

¹⁸ 181 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2291-2, 18 March 1925.

¹⁹ *Census of England & Wales, 1921. General Report with Appendices* (HMSO, 1927), Table XXXIII, p.65.

²⁰ 139 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 710-1, 10 March 1921.

Women with recent industrial experience found that pre-war work, notably domestic service, disadvantaged them. The MoL explicitly stated that 'Domestic service would in general be regarded as suitable employment for a woman who, prior to the War, was in domestic service.'²¹ Thus a woman in an insurable trade, having paid contributions under the Unemployment Insurance Acts and claimed benefit on that account, was not immune to being directed into domestic service, an uninsured occupation. While retaining full benefit of contributions for one year, she could not secure full benefit thereafter unless paying 12 more contributions within five years.²² With the prospect of losing such hard-earned benefit rights, it is little wonder that women were wary of entering domestic service.

A 1921 MoL order sought both to clarify the position on domestic service and unemployment benefit and to assuage MPs' fears over unemployed women. The order refuted claims – dubbed 'of very doubtful reliability' – that Exchange officials actively discouraged women from taking domestic jobs unless these met specific conditions. The order stressed 'substantial evidence of successful endeavour' of Exchanges in filling domestic vacancies. The function of Exchange officials was '*confined to deciding whether or not the applicant for Unemployment Benefit has unreasonably refused an offer of suitable employment.*'²³ But MPs' fears were not quelled, for alleged abuse by unemployed women of the benefit system – usually unwarranted allegations – were repeatedly made in the House and indeed continued into the 1930s.²⁴ Yet employment officials reputedly had a keen eye for perceived abuse of the system:

Any claims for benefit by women normally engaged in private domestic service would be disallowed. There are many vacancies for properly trained resident domestic servants, and [] benefit is not paid to any woman for whom domestic service can be regarded as suitable employment.

A woman who is suitable for but refuses domestic service would not be granted unemployment benefit. On a good many occasions claims [...] have been rejected on this ground.

Women for whom domestic service is suitable employment and who refuse offers of employment in that occupation are not allowed benefit. Special steps have for a long time past been taken to enforce this rule, and [...] it is being effectively carried out.

[Institutional domestic servants] are always considered first of all, if there is no institutional vacancy, for ordinary domestic service before benefit is granted.²⁵

²¹ 139 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1045-6, 14 March 1921.

²² 138 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1788, 2 March 1921.

²³ 146 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 421-3, 10 August 1921. (Original italics)

²⁴ See, for example, the case of Emily Newman: 141 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1712, 10 May 1921.

²⁵ 153 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1578-9, 4 May 1922; 153 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2175, 10 May 1922 and col 2398, 11 May 1922; 160 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1949-50, 28 February 1923.

The practice of disallowing benefit to claimants was a powerful disincentive. The most common reason for female claimants in 1927 was not genuinely seeking work – about half of all claims refused – with refusal of suitable work accounting for about 10 per cent. Although unstated, it is likely that many refusals were for domestic service. Refusal of suitable work also accounted for almost one quarter of claims disallowed for extended benefit. Both married and single women were presumed to have recourse to financial or practical help from relatives.²⁶

Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson, staunch advocate for the working classes, contrasted the benefit disallowance rate for male claimants of one in seven with women's rate of one in three. She further asserted:

The average period of extended benefit granted to men is 12 weeks, compared with only four weeks granted to women. They are paying on the same terms as the men and yet the scales are weighted as heavily against them. For any woman to get extended benefit [...] she has to be a thoroughly artistic liar. It is not the girl who can tell an artistic tale who is turned down. [...] The girls who go into the workshops and who are unaccustomed to state their case and who do not understand the position find themselves, perhaps, faced by a chairman who very often bites their heads off [...] or asks them impertinent questions. The girls get embarrassed and find themselves outside the room with their benefit disallowed before they know where they are.²⁷

This suggests that (often young) claimants experienced an unsympathetic hearing from panel members, perhaps as a result of class divisions that prevented decision-makers from truly appreciating claimants' circumstances and background.

The perception of benefit claimants as malingerers, which Laybourn suggests is due to changing attitudes coupled with high unemployment, is borne out by numerous assurances MPs sought about claimants. He contends that much policy (such as the Anomalies Act) was directed against women, forcing claims on health not unemployment grounds.²⁸ Yet Lewis's study into child and maternal welfare policies shows that women's health insurance benefits were not universally applicable and that working-class women were often regarded as feckless and ignorant.²⁹ Can we assume therefore that a woman would be more successful in claiming health instead of unemployment benefit? It seems doubtful.

²⁶ 204 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1901-3, 5 April 1927. Assumptions of family support similarly shaped nineteenth-century Poor Laws, based on the premise of husband as breadwinner and wife as domestic manager: Sonya O Rose *Limited Livelihoods. Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Routledge, 1992), p.53.

²⁷ 193 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 654, 18 March 1926.

²⁸ Keith Laybourn *Britain on the Breadline: a social and political history of Britain between the wars* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1990), pp.74 and 76.

²⁹ Jane Lewis *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900-1939* (Croom Helm, 1980), p.43, p.61, pp.76-8, and p.184.

Labour's 1924 administration had led to a slight adjustment in Exchange policy towards female applicants, acknowledging that not all unemployed women were suitable for domestic work. This largely related to women in trades with irregular employment patterns – factory or mill work, for example – whose skills were valuable to industry.³⁰ But many unemployed women still faced the prospect of direction into domestic service or withdrawal of benefit if they refused.

Interestingly, there is little evidence of MPs' concern over men falsely claiming unemployment benefit. It is difficult to know why they focused on women. Did high levels of unemployment among men give greater credence to their claims? Did the historically higher incidence of men in heavy industry and commerce – with insured status – lend validity to their unemployment? Was it a resurgence of the traditional view of woman's place in the home – and a corresponding antagonism to their presence in the labour market?

If it was due to a resurgence of woman's 'natural place' then MPs were surely heartened by Exchange placements for 1921 which show promotion of domestic service (Table 4.2). While women had not left the labour market, they were at least taking up their domestic duties in another woman's home.

Jobs	Women		Girls		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Domestic service	142,984	65.97	22,877	37.47	165,861	59.71
Dress	19,699	9.09	5,999	9.83	25,698	9.25
Textiles	11,114	5.13			11,114	4.00
Commercial & clerical	10,927	5.04	5,111	8.37	16,038	5.77
Messengers			5,998	9.82	5,998	2.16
Others	32,018	14.77	21,072	34.51	53,090	19.11
TOTAL	216,742	100	61,057	100	277,799	100

Calculated percentage shares of job categories confirm that domestic service was by far the largest female employment sector, over half of all jobs filled by women and girls. For girls, domestic service is also the single largest category, over one-third of jobs filled. The new sector of commercial work, although far smaller, has an almost identical share to the traditional dress sector. For women, domestic service occupies almost two-thirds of jobs filled. These percentages support the statistical analysis in Chapter 2, which clearly showed the dominance of domestic service as a female occupation.

³⁰ 172 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 421-2, 9 April 1924; 173 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1399-1400, 14 May 1924; 174 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 398-9, 28 May 1924; 175 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 632, 26 June 1924.

³¹ 150 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 991-2, 15 February 1922.

A breakdown of the domestic service sector (Table 4.3) reveals the type of jobs for which women and girls were most in demand:

Job	Women		Girls		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Resident	38,790	27.13	6,830	29.86	46,093	27.79
Non-resident	31,991	22.37	14,102	61.64	45,620	27.51
Waitress	11,842	8.28	579	2.53	12,421	7.49
Laundry	5,214	3.65	764	3.34	5,978	3.60
Charwomen	54,319	37.99	148	0.65	54,467	32.84
Other domestic	828	0.58	454	1.98	1,282	0.77
Total domestic service	142,984	100	22,877	100	165,861	100

Calculated percentage shares reveal that, together, charring, residential and non-residential posts account for 88 per cent of domestic jobs filled by women and girls. Diversity between women's and girls' jobs is more marked. For girls, the largest category is non-resident posts, with resident posts about half that total – together making up 91.5 per cent of vacancies filled. For women, the largest single type of job is charring, resident and non-resident posts trailing by some 10 and 15 percentage points respectively. Together they make up 87.5 per cent of women's vacancies filled. Although the share of laundry jobs is similar for women and girls, there is a greater proportion of women than girls in waitressing.

Census statistics (Chapter 2) on charring as an occupation are supported by Table 4.3 figures for vacancies filled. Charring's relative popularity was, in Chinn's view, due to three factors – the woman retained greater independence, she could maintain her own home, she could more easily terminate employment if other work became available or her wages became superfluous.³³ These factors offer feasible reasons for charring's popularity, given many women's antipathy to residential service.

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 highlight problems of classification, a particular difficulty within domestic service. For example, the stereotypical charwoman is an older woman taking casual work, but these Tables show a small number of girls filling such vacancies. It is unclear if their jobs were the same as for adults – perhaps girls were so-called 'step-girls' (i.e. responsible for whitening front-door steps) and it is official classification that includes their jobs here. Similarly the categories residential and non-residential indicate one condition of employment and do not define actual jobs. They might range, for example, from kitchen-maid to housekeeper, from single-servant to large hierarchical staff, from artisan's house to stately home. We cannot

³² Figures from Table 4.2: 150 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 991-2, 15 February 1922.

³³ Carl Chinn *They worked all their lives. Women of the urban poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester University Press, 1988), p.106.

differentiate from the figures. Such problems provide a timely reminder that ‘domestic servant’ is merely a simple term for a varied and complex occupation – domestic service was not a homogeneous entity.

MPs suggested that Employment Exchanges, with heavy workloads, should discontinue domestic service placements, leaving these to private agencies and situations vacant columns in the Press. But the Minister of Labour stated: ‘Inasmuch as domestic service offers a possible avenue of employment for unemployed women, I am not prepared to discontinue dealing with this class of work.’³⁴ This indicates the Government’s keenness to control female employment and to retain ability, via the machinery of Exchanges, to direct women into specific sectors.

Table 4.4 details jobs filled by adult women for 1925 and 1926. Listed in descending order of jobs filled (column 1) as determined by 1925 figures with a comparison order for 1926 in column 2, the final column (Change) is the calculated increase or decrease in actual numbers of jobs filled within that sector:

Order	Category	1925	1926	Change	
1	1	Domestic Service	129,847	112,034	-17,813
2	2	Textile Trades	52,825	62,393	9,568
3	3	Clothing Trades	40,452	33,154	-7,298
4	7	Pottery, Earthenware etc Glass Trades	24,293	11,094	-13,199
5	4	Food, Drink & Tobacco	15,863	14,497	-1,366
6	5	Commerce, Banking, Insurance & Finance	11,930	12,086	156
7	6	Miscellaneous Trades & Services	11,794	11,646	-148
8	8	Metal Trades	5,521	5,990	469
9	11	Engineering etc	5,454	3,943	-1,511
10	9	Transport & Communication	5,289	5,278	-11
11	12	Agriculture	4,407	3,051	-1,356
12	10	Printing & Paper Trades	4,133	4,690	557
13	14	General Labourers	3,275	2,485	-790
14	13	Sawmilling, Furniture & Woodwork	2,594	2,505	-89
15	15	Other Manufacturing Industries	2,498	2,411	-87
16	16	Leather & Leather Goods	2,281	1,721	-560
17	17	Ammunition, Explosives, Chemicals etc	1,392	1,127	-265
18	19	Construction & Repair of Vehicles	541	329	-212
19	18	Brick, Tile etc Making	327	463	136
20	20	Metal Manufacture	321	294	-27
21	21	Building & Construction of Works	56	93	37
22	22	Shipbuilding & Ship Repairing	43	52	9
23	23	Mining	13	46	33
24	24	Gas, Water & Electricity Supply Industries	9	2	-7
		Total	325,158	291,384	-33,774

³⁴ 146 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1398-9, 17 August 1921.

³⁵ 202 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1121-2, 17 February 1927.

Types of jobs filled remain remarkably static, with traditional sectors taking the lion's share. Although Domestic Service shows a marked fall in number of vacancies filled for 1926, it retains its dominant position. The increase in vacancies filled in Textile Trades perhaps signals a recovery from problems of short-time working. Feminisation of domestic service is visible by translating numbers of jobs into percentage rates of all vacancies filled by women – 39.93 and 38.45 per cent respectively for 1925 and 1926 – which contrasts sharply with domestic service jobs filled by men (translating into percentage rates of just 1.71 and 1.87 respectively).³⁶

Dominance of Domestic Service indicates that the policy of directing unemployed women into domestic work was adopted and implemented by Exchanges. If demand for servants was high, so was the resistance of many women to entering domestic service and the policy of withholding benefits must have been a driving force in persuading them to take such jobs. For although, as Table 4.4 shows, women had alternative employment opportunities, these were restricted by regional availability, physical demands of tasks, attitudes of employers, union practices, and skills required. For many working-class women, with limited education, such restrictions formed indomitable barriers, considerably reducing their choice of employment.

This choice was further dependent on the economic state of industry, perhaps making women vulnerable to official policies of job direction. The *Woman's Year Book* optimistically reported that 1923 had seen a 'pronounced upward tendency' in women's employment sectors, citing recovery of such diverse industries as chemicals, rubber goods, pottery, laundry, lace. Nonetheless it could not gloss over the depressed state of other traditionally female industries – cotton, woollen & worsted, food/drink.³⁷ Indeed, between December 1922 and September 1923, the percentage of workers in insured trades who were drawing benefit had fallen to 9 per cent from 10 per cent for men but had risen to 6 per cent from 4 per cent for women – this increase directly attributable to heavy unemployment in the cotton and woollen trades.³⁸ It is not difficult to imagine women from these depressed industries as prime targets of Exchanges in its drive to promote domestic service.

Ignorance of conditions in domestic service seems to have been common, especially among the servant-employing classes.³⁹ If ignorance was truly widespread – as seems to be so among those making and implementing policies – then it is not difficult to see why domestic service was so assiduously promoted as a means of combating two problems in one.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ G Evelyn Gates (ed) *The Woman's Year Book 1923-1924* (Women Publishers, nd [1923]), pp.34-5.

³⁸ *Report to the Minister of Labour of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Present Conditions as to the Supply of Female Domestic Servants* (HMSO, 1923), Paragraph 63, p.28.

³⁹ 214 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1128, 7 March 1928.

Unemployed juveniles presented particular problems for Governments trying to balance educational and unemployment needs. State benefit was restricted to juveniles in insured trades, excluding many of the 12,000 girls registered unemployed in August 1920.⁴⁰ Little seems to have been done for unemployed juveniles at this period, despite suggestions that emergency schools be set up. Funds for such a venture were not forthcoming and, to counteract school-leavers' poor job prospects, parents were encouraged to keep children at school longer. Such words can have been scant comfort to the thousands of boys and girls then on Exchange registers.⁴¹

Philanthropic and professional organisations might co-operate to find young people jobs. A plea to employers to find clerical work for girls roused violent opposition from one MP, who felt that this not only took work from disabled ex-soldiers (a recurring theme in many Parliamentary debates at this time) but also ignored the demand for domestic servants.⁴²

But examination of Exchange vacancies filled in 1921 reveals that direction of unemployed girls into domestic service had already begun:

Category	Filled
Domestic service Resident	6,830
Non-resident	14,102
Waitress	579
Laundry	764
Charwoman	148
Other domestic	454
Total domestic service	22,877
Dress	5,999
Commercial & clerical	5,111
Messengers	5,998
Others	21,072
Total non-domestic service	38,180

Non-domestic jobs in Table 4.5 outstrip domestic service, but this is accounted for by the undefined category 'Others' which presumably contains no class reaching 5,000 vacancies filled. The largest named categories are non-resident domestic service (23.1 per cent) and resident domestic service (11.2 per cent), together accounting for over one-third of posts filled.

Special arrangements for juveniles were occasionally introduced, for example, London continuation school pupils registering for employment without having to go to the local Exchange. Ostensibly this was to avoid disrupting school attendance, but had the added but

⁴⁰ 133 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 393, 11 August 1920.

⁴¹ 135 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 675-6, 25 November 1920 and col 1469, 2 December 1920; 136 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1319, 20 December 1920; 142 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 14, 24 May 1921.

⁴² 145 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 832-3, 29 July 1921 and col 1385, 3 August 1921.

⁴³ 150 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 991-2, 15 February 1922.

unspoken advantage that successful applicants did not appear in unemployment figures. Suggestions for training classes for unemployed juveniles were deemed too costly.⁴⁴

By 1923, the picture was changing as the MoL and Board of Education co-operated in setting up Juvenile Unemployment Centres (JUCs), with 75 per cent State-funding and 25 per cent LEA-funding. Industrial areas were chosen as sites – London, Cardiff, Manchester, St Helens, Derby, Barrow, Aberdeen. Physical recreation was universal, but only boys had technical training and handicraft courses. These often had a local bias – Yarmouth taught net making and navigation as befitted its maritime connections. Girls learned housewifery. Attendance was voluntary except those aged 16 to 18 receiving unemployment benefit.⁴⁵

LEA response to Government proposals depended on individual members' concerns.⁴⁶ Thus a national scheme such as JUCs succeeded or failed on local attitudes and circumstances, highlighting interaction of central policy and regional diversity. Employers' attitudes on juvenile training played a part, many employers' associations arguing for a system uniting education and training as an integral part of the industrial process.⁴⁷ How far JUCs met industry's requirements is a matter of conjecture.

By 1925 the curriculum in JUCs had a pronounced differentiation for boys and girls, as the following demonstrates:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| <i>Boys</i> | Physical training, including gymnastics and organised games.
Arithmetic.
English, composition and letter-writing.
Wood or metal work.
Drawing, practical and technical. |
| <i>Girls</i> | Physical training, drill, dancing and organised games.
Drawing.
Singing.
Domestic subjects, including cookery, needlework and laundry.
Hygiene and baby welfare.
Arithmetic, related to household accounts.
English, composition and letter-writing. |

In addition, the curriculum, both for boys and girls, includes lectures on general subjects, on local history, travel, citizenship, etc, and for those seeking commercial employment instruction in shorthand typewriting, bookkeeping is available. Debates are also a feature at many centres.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ 152 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2218-9, 5 April 1922; 155 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1061 and 1673, 20 June 1922.

⁴⁵ 161 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 835, 8 March 1923.

⁴⁶ Marion Bartlett 'Education for industry. Attitudes and policies affecting the provision of technical education in Britain, 1916-1929' (University of Oxford, unpublished DPhil thesis, 1995), p.265.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.196.

⁴⁸ 183 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 927-9, 6 May 1925.

These lessons, reminiscent of elementary schools, ensured girls received domestic training, eminently suitable for work as servants. Commercial training was perhaps only available under enlightened or progressive LEAs, which suggests that girls were directed into domestic service as a first option. Thus, unemployed girls were guided into work as servants, redressing both unemployment and the perceived servant shortage.

JUCs were designed as a short-time measure, but rising juvenile unemployment forced a rethink. The new 1924 Labour administration pledged to continue the work of JUCs as a means not only of giving children a useful education but also of stopping them 'kicking about the streets'. To that end, Centres in needy areas were fully State-funded. JUCs were successful, within limitations, with 53,000 youngsters between September 1923 and April 1924. Yet even an expanding JUC network left many unemployed juveniles unable to participate.⁴⁹

Breakdown of JUC provision in 1928 is revealing. Five Scottish cities offered twice as many centres for boys than girls. Wales favoured boys, with 12 towns catering for boys and only Cardiff accepting girls. England's balance of centres was more even, with ten providing equal facilities for boys and girls. Gateshead and Liverpool favoured boys by offering an extra centre. Two Northern JUCs were exclusively female, while ten were exclusively male.⁵⁰ Overall, unemployed girls had 32 JUCs, all including training in skills useful for employment as domestic servants.

Beddoe supports this dominance of domestic training for Welsh girls, arguing that such workers formed a vast labour resource for the south and south-east of England. Living in areas reliant on heavy industry afforded girls few employment opportunities. Domestic service was an expedient measure, especially for a girl fortunate enough to find work among her compatriots in London dairies, which maintained strong links with Wales.⁵¹

Juvenile Unemployment Centres were renamed Junior Instruction Centres (JICs), with Minister of Labour Margaret Bondfield stressing their welfare element. Whereas unemployed adults received specific job-orientated training, JICs

do not train for specific occupations but provide instruction, largely of a practical nature with a view to preventing demoralisation during periods of unemployment, and facilitating the absorption of the boys and girls into employment.⁵²

⁴⁹ 170 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2000-1 and 2085, 10 March 1924; 26 March 1924; 173 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1333, 14 May 1924; 175 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 413-4, 25 June 1924; 180 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1651, 23 February 1925; 184 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1973, 10 June 1925; 185 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1546, 24 June 1925.

⁵⁰ 213 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 234-5, 9 February 1928.

⁵¹ Deirdre Beddoe 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams: Women in Wales, 1914-1939' in Angela V John (ed) *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), p.197 and p.198.

⁵² 233 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 483-4, 11 December 1929.

Notwithstanding this laudable objective, Labour's policy on juveniles could not sustain 100 per cent funding beyond January 1930. Despite receiving 75 per cent grants, at least one LEA was forced to close its juvenile centres. State funding became conditional on set quotas of unemployed juveniles, length of unemployment, and attendance levels.⁵³

Bartlett argues that, despite their original aim to teach employable skills, JUCs were never part of the technical education system, but rather a means of dealing with social problems of juvenile unemployment.⁵⁴ This is a valid argument, for Ministers were keen to stress the need to keep idle (and potentially disruptive) juveniles off the streets rather than offer specific job training. Alleged links between juvenile unemployment and misbehaviour seem to have applied more to boys, for there is little doubt that JUCs/JICs accentuated servility via domestic skills for unemployed girls, even without ostensible direction into domestic service.

If Government was reticent about using juvenile training centres to promote domestic service, specialist schools were more open about their purpose. King's thesis on girls' vocational training highlights the role of London trade and domestic schools.⁵⁵ She argues that training extended domestic lessons taught in elementary schools, citing evidence that the Chief Woman Inspector was aware in 1923 of the vocational purpose of training.⁵⁶ By 1929, the success of such vocational training for girls was openly acknowledged:

There is little to be said about the training given for domestic employment, except that the Trade School provides a bridge over the difficult age gap between 14 and 16. It is a common place that girls cannot be absorbed into a good type of domestic employment before 16 and that as they enter other occupations in the interval they seldom go into service later. Girls trained for domestic employment in London do extremely well [...] and a good proportion remain in service.⁵⁷

King's assertion supports my examination of training for unemployed girls, which emphasised domestic skills. Chapter 3 referred to pre-war Trade Schools promoting domestic training. All 1920s training centres sanctioned by Government adopted a similar objective – acknowledged or otherwise – for their female attendees. If the needs of unemployed juveniles differed from those of adults, the ultimate goals of Government policy did not – unemployed females of whatever age were to fill domestic service vacancies.

⁵³ 233 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 478-9, 11 December 1929; 234 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1151-2, 30 January 1930.

⁵⁴ Bartlett 'Education for industry' p.340.

⁵⁵ Sarah King 'Girls' Vocational Training Schools in London: A Study of the Inter-War Years' (University of Greenwich, unpublished PhD thesis, 1994), especially Chapter 3.

⁵⁶ PRO, ED 22/143/556 Memorandum TG1459/23, 22 November 1923. Cited in King 'Girls' Vocational Training', p.195.

⁵⁷ PRO, ED 10/152 Paper U13 Memorandum Miss H Sanders on the subject of apprenticeship and rates of wages in relation to pupils in London Trade Schools for Girls and in Junior Technical Schools for Girls, undated. Cited in King 'Girls' Vocational Training', p.195.

Unemployment in the 1920s remained a major worry for the Government. Juveniles received special attention, linking welfare and training. Recorded unemployment figures for adult men, consistently higher than for women, indicates why male unemployment was given precedence. Equally, the perceived servant problem, with vacancies for domestic servants, presented an apparently easy route for dealing with female unemployment.

The 1923 Government Inquiry into Domestic Service

In April 1923 the servant situation – that is, the perceived servant shortage – was considered so bad that the Minister of Labour appointed a Committee to investigate the whole issue of the supply of female servants and in particular the effects of the Unemployment Insurance Scheme in this connection.

This inquiry is important for four reasons. First, it gave credence to the servant problem. Second, it identified it as peculiarly female. Third, it was a unique attempt to address the problem, no other Government actions being given the same status. (The 1919 Report was part of a Reconstruction programme rather than a discrete inquiry – see Chapter 3.) The 1923 inquiry, therefore, consolidated attitudes towards domestic service and underpinned assertions of those identifying a servant problem. The fourth factor highlights how women, the majority still disenfranchised, could take an active and potentially influential political role. The exclusively female Committee consisted of Ethel Wood, Florence Harrison Bell, Mrs E M Burgwin, Leonora Cohen, Flora Fardell, Jane Hannay JP, Margaret Hurst, Rosalind Moore, Lady Procter, Anne Strachey JP, Julia Varley, Margaret Wintringham MP.⁵⁸

The Committee decreed that, due to widespread interest in the servant problem, the Press should have access to witnesses' evidence – resulting in the majority of the meetings being held in open session. With a remit to address the issue of servant shortages, the Committee felt itself duty-bound to investigate reasons for 'unpopularity of household work'. To this end, it examined oral and written evidence from across Britain, acknowledging that conditions varied regionally, and focused on groups and representatives rather than individuals, a stratagem thought to provide a more balanced and typical result.⁵⁹ Yet analysis of the evidence reveals a bias towards the servant-employing classes. Only nine representatives of domestic servants are listed, including trade unionist Margaret Bondfield. Similarly, the 73 oral witnesses included six Government officials, six educationalists, twelve local employment/juvenile committee members, three employment agency proprietors, fifteen employers, but only ten employees.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Report [...] as to the Supply of Female Domestic Servants*, Paragraph 77, p.35.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, Paragraph 2, pp.4-5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, Paragraph 3, p.6 and Appendix A, p.36.

Aspects covered included training, registry offices, working conditions, references, status, and the impact of the Unemployment Insurance Scheme. 'Psychological Aspects' were also explored, the Report blaming the 'intensely human' nature of service for difficulties in addressing problems.⁶¹

The Report's main conclusions were summarised under ten points. First, training was necessary to enhance the skilled status of domestic service. Second, standards of efficiency, for employers and employees, should be established via examinations and certification. Third, inclusion of domestic workers in industrial improvement schemes would remove the stigma of distinction from other workers. Fourth, standardised employment conditions, whilst desirable, were beyond the scope of legislation and should be set through local agreements. Fifth, status, although crucial, could only be influenced indirectly. Sixth, misunderstanding of conditions of paying unemployment benefit was rife. Seventh, such benefit payments had little connection with the shortage of female servants. Eighth, unregulated registries exploited the shortage. Ninth, servants' recreational and social needs, currently restricted, should be catered for. Tenth, day work might be the future of domestic service, if employers were adaptable.⁶² Thus the Committee conceded the existence of a servant problem – defined as a shortage of female servants, but thought it both exploited and exaggerated. Training was the key to a solution, backed by such legislative actions as would be effective and enforceable.

The Committee also investigated accusations against women refusing to enter domestic service. Accusations were commonplace, occupying much Press space and parliamentary time. Appendix D of the Report is extensive and revealing, both of contemporary attitudes towards unemployed women and of servant-employing classes' expectations. It details complaints about the effects of unemployment benefit on domestic service, including several printed as letters in April's *Daily Mail* and cases published by the National Citizens Union.⁶³ These complaints offer an insight into attitudes towards servants, but offers no countering views from servants, an imbalance consistent with much material relating to domestic service at this time.

Hostility towards women accused of malingering was largely unfounded. A letter from a Bournemouth-based Lieutenant-Colonel, claiming no response to advertisements for servants, was proven bogus – he did not exist and two replies reached the Dead Letter Office. Mrs Hughes of Kensington wrote that even good wages failed to attract servants from Employment

⁶¹ Ibid, Paragraph 34, p.18. Psychologist Violet Firth explored the human relationship aspect more fully in 1925 – see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

⁶² Ibid, Paragraph 75, pp.32-3.

⁶³ Ibid, Appendix D, pp.42-53. All examples quoted come from Appendix D. The National Citizens' Union (formed in 1919 as the Middle Classes Union) was a non-affiliated group claiming to represent the views and interests of the middle-classes.

Exchanges – no application was found at local Exchanges. Miss Sargant of Westcliff, asserting that abolition of dole to servants would ease her work as a domestic bureau owner, could produce no supporting evidence. Chester's Mr Potts declared it disgraceful for girls to receive dole during a servant shortage, especially as he was unable to get a cook – Chester Exchange did not know Potts and all but three of 77 women claiming benefit were entitled to covenanted benefit. (Covenanted and uncovenanted benefit differed according to amount of contributions paid by the claimant while working. Uninsured trades were outside this scheme.)

Cases lodged by the National Citizens Union also proved false. Claimant B of Evesham allegedly refused domestic work until her unemployment benefit was cut – Evesham Exchange had records of two girls called B. One had drawn covenanted benefit, with no attendance since February 1923. The other, an experienced factory hand, drew covenanted benefit in December 1920, with no attendance since 1921. In another case, K of Muswell Hill claimed that E of Highgate refused a job to avoid losing dole – local Exchanges recorded neither E nor K.

Individually reported cases likewise proved mistaken or possibly malicious. Mrs S of Poplar allegedly refused work despite her husband receiving dole – neither person was traced. An informant claimed that about 40 girls suitable for domestic service were drawing benefit at Cliffe-at-Hoo – in fact, only two women drew covenanted benefit and none uncovenanted. Mrs E accused servants obtained via Exchanges of contriving dismissal to avoid losing dole money, forcing her to close her house – when challenged, she refused to co-operate with the inquiry.

This plethora of accusations highlights hostility towards unemployed women, even when fully entitled to benefit. Were such accusations genuine mistakes and misunderstandings? Or were they an orchestrated media campaign? Certainly the *Daily Mail* letters must be viewed with suspicion, for they coincided with a series of articles 'Scandals of the Dole'. Invited to give evidence, the author declined to attend or make available data on which he based his articles.⁶⁴ Given the demonstrated falsity of many of the letters, it is tempting to suspect the validity of 'Scandals of the Dole' and ascribe to it the simple aim of creating scandal to boost circulation.

Little action followed the Report's publication, except a Government rethink on funds for CCWTE domestic training schemes, then facing an uncertain future (see later). Since the 1923 Inquiry singled out the CCWTE for praise, it was judicious of the MoL – as instigators of the Report and masters of the CCWTE – to offer public support. Despite publicity and expectations, there is little evidence for action directly attributable to the 1923 Report. Its main consequence was, as stated, to give credence to the existence of a servant problem. In this respect, it promoted the idea of domestic service as suitable work for unemployed women.

⁶⁴ Ibid, Paragraph 3, p.6.

The CCWTE

Chapter 3 showed that the CCWTE was initially a short-term measure to deal with unemployment resulting from the outbreak of war in 1914. The Armistice heralded a mirror situation of high female unemployment levels and it was clear to the Government that the CCWTE had a future role to play in this area.

Mary Macarthur, passionately concerned for the plight of working women, was a key player in the CCWTE's re-establishment. She must have been heartened by Minister of Labour Sir Robert Horne's agreement to re-appoint the CCWTE on the same lines as before, unless Committee members desired otherwise. They did, insisting that their title incorporate the word 'training', a significant element in future work. The new CCWTE was not an empty gesture but intended to exercise its powers, the MoL providing a suite of rooms plus small administrative staff. The CCWTE's powers were limited, for its remit clearly stated that it was to

consider, devise and carry out special schemes of work and *training* for women unemployed or women whose earning capacities or opportunities have been injuriously affected as a result of conditions arising out of the war⁶⁵

A return to job normality was clearly expected, if more slowly than previously envisaged. There is no recorded acknowledgement that unusual wartime employment conditions might have long-term repercussions, either societal or personal. No time-scale or deadline was set for the expected life of the new CCWTE. Government assessment and funding, carried out annually, indicates that the CCWTE was seen as a temporary expedient to deal with a specific situation, presumably expected to diminish as post-war Britain re-built itself.

Whilst CCWTE members were to enjoy an unprecedented amount of autonomy, they were nevertheless restricted by their accountability to – and need for approval from – the MoL. Therefore the female-run CCWTE needed to cultivate good relations with the male-dominated Government. It should be remembered that no woman had been able to vote or stand in national elections until 1918. The long road to – partial – female suffrage indicates that much prejudice against women in positions of power remained. For this reason, the social connections of CCWTE members – noted in Chapter 3 – were a vital means of infiltrating the networking system and trying to use it to their own and their clients' advantage.

The annual funding exercise fostered uncertainty and ambiguity in the CCWTE's existence, handicapping its ability to develop and maintain training schemes. Given this – and the antipathy the CCWTE faced from MPs decrying female unemployment as of little import – it is remarkable that the CCWTE survived for so long. This enduring existence is due in no

⁶⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 8 January 1920. (My italics)

small part to the women who formed its Committee, for CCWTE Minute Books reveal numerous minor battles with Government ministers, civil servants and Treasury officials. It is against this underlying antipathy, hostility and political impotence (only partially alleviated by full suffrage in 1928) that the re-constituted CCWTE's role should be assessed.

In the context of persistently high unemployment, coercive policies against unemployed women, vociferous campaigns to return to pre-war status quo, and an emphasis on domesticity, it is not surprising that the CCWTE became heavily involved in domestic service training. But initially several training schemes were set up, not all domestically orientated.

One of the most successful was the awarding of Individual Grants, which afforded better-educated (usually middle-class) women opportunities to train in specified professions and skilled trades. The scheme has clear origins in the MoL's Women's Training Branch. The MoL scheme, offering 5,000 training places, faced both Treasury restrictions and Trade Board objections. Opportunities ranged from medicine, pharmacy, health visiting, social welfare, teaching of both Physical Culture and Domestic Science to horticulture, bee keeping, poultry/fruit farming, art/dress design, jewellery, home helps (targeted towards older women).⁶⁶ The CCWTE enthusiastically embraced the idea of Individual Grants, carefully interviewing applicants and awarding grants for a wide variety of training courses.

How successful was this CCWTE scheme? In terms of popularity, there is no doubt of its success, attracting many more applicants than it could handle. Table 4.6 shows current number of grants sanctioned (many extending over several years) and cost:

Period up to	England & Wales			United Kingdom		
	No. of Grants	Total Cost £	Average Grant	No. of Grants	Total Cost £	Average Grant
10 May 1920	49			52		88
31 December 1920	943	99,571	105	1,174	120,166	102
30 June 1921	1,746	176,524	101	2,317	231,363	100
24 January 1922	2,721	265,721	105	3,602	375,506	104
14 July 1922	3,071	320,340	104	4,172	427,088	102
16 May 1923	3,034	328,848	108	4,145	428,737	105
16 September 1923				4,119	429,761	104

England & Wales received the lion's share of grants, reflecting surely demographic spread and pattern of relevant training establishments. The average grant of around £105 is not excessive, given the training received and the type of professional woman this would produce. This

⁶⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Women's Training Branch MoL, 10 December 1919.

⁶⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Boxes 3/1, 3/2 and 3/3, Statements of Grants sanctioned to 10 May 1920, 31 December 1920, 30 June 1921, 24 January 1922, 14 July 1922, 16 May 1923 and 16 September 1923.

scheme was surely advantageous, to trainees and the national economic wealth, with professional women enhancing both their own employment status and filling vacancies within their chosen fields.

This popular CCWTE scheme provided great diversity. Ex-munitionette Miss Baron, a clergyman's daughter, received £418 for a three-year Physical Culture course. Former VAD Miss Greatorex received over £306 to take up dentistry. Miss Gale received an £11 grant to follow in her architect father's footsteps. Miss Worster received £20 for welfare training at the London School of Economics. Miss Corner, no longer able to rely on her family's financial support, was awarded £175 to attend Battersea Polytechnic's two-year Institutional Housekeeping course. Miss Jeffreys, 51, facing a 'change in her circumstances as a result of the war', decided that 'cookery is the best training she can take.' She received nearly £42.⁶⁸

By 1921 the CCWTE also awarded grants for academic expenses – for example, Royal College of Music and Somerville College – and for vocational courses like hairdressing. Academic successes included Monica Cobb (highly placed in her final Bar exam, later specialising in criminal cases); Audrey Topsfield (Honorary Scholar of Somerville) and Leonora Payne (winner of the Batsford Architecture Prize).⁶⁹

Posts subsequently obtained by trainees (Table 4.7) underline the wider economic contribution made by the CCWTE Grants Scheme and its success in turning out employable women:

Trainee	Post Obtained	Salary
Miss Wilson	Lecturer, Pathology & Entomology, Swanley Horticultural College	£120 p.a.
Miss Dugger	Clerk, Maternity & Child Welfare Committee, Hammersmith	£150 250 p.a.
Miss Oswald	Private Secretary to Sir Robert Jones (surgeon)	£250 p.a.
Miss Lloyd Thomas	Senior English mistress, Birkenhead High School	£225 p.a.
Miss Brown	Teacher under Transvaal Education Department	£330 p.a.
Miss Grant	Head Cook, Messrs Rowntree's Chocolate factory	£175 p.a.
Miss Turner	Radiographer, Middlesex Hospital	£3 p.w.
Miss Drew	Shorthand typist, <i>The Times</i> newspaper	£4 p.w.

This CCWTE scheme benefited those women, mainly from the middle-classes, who could afford to devote time to training for a career. Many applicants' families had been left in straitened circumstances by the effects of war on savings and unearned income. Some

⁶⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 13 May 1920.

⁶⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Minutes 14 July 1921, 10 November 1921 and 3 August 1922 and Box 3/3, Minutes 11 October 1923.

⁷⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Minutes 3 August 1922.

applicants had been training for the professions before the war but now required financial assistance to complete courses. Others clearly had not been in paid employment before, except for wartime work as Government clerks, VADs, or munitionettes.⁷¹ The over-subscription of the CCWTE scheme suggests that middle-class women seeking grants for professional training had few alternative sources of assistance. Equally it suggests that such women were keen to take advantage of new professional opportunities.

Vera Brittain, writing in 1928, saw the 'commercial side of domesticity' as offering a good source of employment, with a high demand for trained institutional domestic workers.⁷² Certainly, the innovative CCWTE scheme offering financial grants towards professional training – including high-status courses like housekeeping – reflects the tenor of the times, for women had finally been allowed entry to professions under the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919.⁷³ But Brittain lamented women's slow progress overall in this arena, her concern supported by the recorded low numbers she quotes.⁷⁴ How many of such women were helped via the CCWTE scheme remains a tantalising question. The CCWTE probably contributed only marginally to women's overall professionalisation, but it was a worthy effort to cater for better-educated but financially distressed women wishing to avail themselves of new opportunities.

Despite the CCWTE scheme's evident success, the MoL withdrew support for new applications in 1924.⁷⁵ Initially, the scheme had been financed out of the Relief Funds at the CCWTE's disposal, until these monies were exhausted when the Treasury took over funding.⁷⁶ Now the Conservative Government withdrew State support, a decision not reversed when the Labour administration took office that same month. This Government action is not difficult to understand. The scheme benefited women of higher class and education, ambitious in their future employment and perhaps less likely to register unemployed. Few working-class women could satisfy entrance criteria for training courses. And it is clear, from prevailing attitudes towards unemployed working-class women (their treatment at Employment Exchanges, for example), that such women were destined – in policymakers' eyes – for domestic service. Indeed, the writer of an inter-Departmental letter bemoaned that fact that not all CCWTE group schemes obliged trainees to enter domestic service, claiming 'That is the only object of training them.'⁷⁷

⁷¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Grants Sanctioned, 13 May 1920.

⁷² Vera Brittain *Women's Work in Modern England* (Noel Douglas, 1928), pp.45-8.

⁷³ Eric Hopkins *Industrialisation and Society. A social history, 1830-1951* (Routledge, 2000), p.171.

⁷⁴ Brittain *Women's Work* p.14.

⁷⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/3, Minutes 10 January 1924.

⁷⁶ PRO, LAB 2/919/ED 1284/1922, Memo giving short précis of history of CCWTE, nd.

⁷⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/14, Letter George Murray to Laurie Brock, 19 November 1921.

So what group training schemes did the CCWTE offer? In mid-1921 the MoL decided to tackle the twin problems of unemployment and servant shortages via domestic training. As an incentive the MoL agreed to spend £1 (maximum £50,000) for each £2 the CCWTE spent. While retaining full responsibility for training and administration, the CCWTE was constrained by the need for MoL approval on content and scope of schemes. Moreover, the CCWTE was forced to spend Treasury money on domestic training 'unless exceptionally strong reasons exist in favour of another form of training.'⁷⁸ Given the constant trumpeting of domestic service as suitable work for unemployed women, the likelihood of alternative training was thus dependent on private funds available to the CCWTE. And such funds were minimal.

The first Homecraft Training Schemes got underway in May 1921, initially five centres for about 250 trainees. Eleven schemes were in preparation, with further co-operation promised. The purpose of the Homecraft Training Scheme was explicitly stated in CCWTE Minutes. On 12th May, the CCWTE expressed a hope that trainees would enter domestic service but agreed that 'women were not being asked to sign an undertaking before entering the Classes.' This suggests encouragement rather than coercion. Removal of this clause two weeks later effectively reversed this.⁷⁹ By July it was agreed that juveniles (aged 16 to 18) should be eligible for the scheme. Many younger workers, initially taken on after the Armistice to replace exhausted war workers, had now flooded the labour market. The CCWTE assured the MoL that no juvenile would be taken into the scheme at the expense of an adult trainee. Although young girls were not required to give a specific undertaking, they were explicitly told that 'the purpose of the scheme is to fit them for domestic service'⁸⁰ – another clear marker of coercion.

In November 1921 it was felt that domestic training could usefully be extended to cover both vocational and non-vocational purposes. The existing Homecraft Scheme was to be purely vocational, training women for paid domestic work. Additionally, new Homemakers Classes would offer domestic training as a means of maintaining morale among unemployed women.⁸¹

Many women in public life supported the idea of domestic training. Women trade unionists together with MPs Nancy Astor and Margaret Wintringham were instrumental in obtaining a further MoL grant of £50,000 for Homecraft Schemes in mid-1922.⁸² A 1923 issue of *Labour Woman* praised Homemakers Centres, urging increased State funding. The *Woman's Year Book* likewise praised the schemes but thought public funding unlikely for expansion.⁸³

⁷⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Minutes 14 April 1921.

⁷⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Minutes 12 May 1921 and 26 May 1921.

⁸⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Minutes 14 July 1921 and 22 September 1921.

⁸¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Minutes 10 November 1921 and 22 November 1921.

⁸² BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Minutes 3 August 1922.

⁸³ Braybon *Women Workers* p.225; Gates *Woman's Year Book* p.352.

But criticisms existed. Inclusion of Singing in the Homecraft curriculum engendered Press criticism, despite contemporary educational and medical belief that singing benefited a trainee by modulating her voice and so 'renders her more suitable for her work' although the link between singing and employability was not clarified. CCWTE member Lady Askwith was keen to press the views of her fellow members on the middle-class National Citizens Union, sufficiently resentful of CCWTE dominance to call for its winding-up.⁸⁴

The consensus of opinion was, nevertheless, on the side of domestic training for unemployed women. Yet the future of CCWTE Homecraft schemes looked shaky, the MoL having fixed a closure date of March 1923. Despite an expressed desire to tackle female unemployment and the servant problem, the MoL was reluctant to fund domestic training schemes for servants beyond that date, citing financial constraints. By late 1923 the MoL had changed its mind and offered a grant for Homecraft courses. It cannot be coincidental that 1923 saw publication of the Report into the supply of female domestic servants (discussed earlier). This had been an MoL initiative and it would have been embarrassing – perhaps even political suicide – for the Ministry to ignore the Report's recommendations, which centred on training. Furthermore, the Report authors had singled out the CCWTE for praise, albeit assuming its work to be of a transitory nature:

We hope sincerely that the [CCWTE's] fine work will continue until trade conditions have become more normal, and whilst regarding such training as an emergency measure and not as a permanent factor in the provision of domestic workers, we think it highly desirable that these opportunities should not be withdrawn.⁸⁵

But the new MoL grant came with conditions unacceptable to the CCWTE. The main sticking point was trainee maintenance rates. By February 1924, with new terms agreed, a maximum £50,000 grant was promised. The scheme was widened to cover all unemployed women aged 16 to 40 (excluding juveniles eligible for youth training). The two schemes were united under a new name – Home Training Centres. A major concession was the MoL's agreement to waive the pledge to enter domestic service.⁸⁶

The new Government grant gave the scheme a new lease of life. In April 1924 there were 47 Centres in operation for 2,338 trainees with another 30 Centres under consideration. Bondfield, to avoid a conflict of interest, had resigned her CCWTE membership on becoming MoL Parliamentary Secretary in the 1924 Labour government. In this capacity she expressed

⁸⁴ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/2, Minutes 12 October 1922. Cause of this resentment is unclear. The National Citizens Union ostensibly advocated abolition of the CCWTE on economic grounds, a view strenuously opposed by Marion Phillips who felt this argument would jeopardise all training for women.

⁸⁵ *Report [...] as to the Supply of Female Domestic Servants*, Paragraph 26, p.14.

⁸⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/3, Minutes 6 November 1923 and 7 February 1924.

'great satisfaction at the way in which the work of the Centres was being carried out' when she visited them. Success rates – in terms of filling domestic vacancies – depended on local employment opportunities. A residential course in Aberystwyth in Spring 1924 resulted in all 18 trainees entering domestic service, and a further course was planned despite the potentially heavy cost of £22 per head. The Birmingham Superintendent received a salary increase to compensate for her extra workload when trainee numbers doubled there.⁸⁷

The number and location of Home Training Centres during the 1920s was not static, neither did it follow a straightforward pattern of expansion. Availability of Centres depended on several factors. First was finance. With limited funds, the CCWTE was constrained in the number of Centres it could establish and maintain. Second, co-operation of local authorities was essential to ensure premises, publicity and applicants. Third, with a remit to help unemployed women, the CCWTE was obliged to focus on localities suffering excessive hardships. This combination of factors explains the fluid nature of Home Training Centres. Some Centres existed for a few months, others ran almost continuously. Many operated sporadically as and when demand matched available resources. Numbers of Centres and training places fluctuated widely, with emphasis on so-called Distressed Areas (notably Wales and Durham) from 1928.⁸⁸

Other group schemes included refresher courses for clerical workers. Despite feminisation of clerical work, pertinent skills were rarely taught in elementary schools at that time, therefore targeting women with previous experience was probably a wise choice. Certainly, there was no shortage of applicants. Local employment situations dictated location of courses – revived fortunes in the clerical employment sector in the Midlands meant switching the focus to London. The CCWTE was anxious not to add to the over-supply of clerical workers yet keen to help such unemployed women. The CCWTE's clerical training was a relatively short-lived and small-scale scheme, despite popularity with applicants and an employment success rate of 75 per cent.⁸⁹

CCWTE sub-committees continually explored schemes for trade training – weaving, power machining, invisible mending, hairdressing among others – but regretfully rejected them on grounds of impracticality or trade hostility. Job prospects were also a decisive factor. Sometimes lack of facilities to carry out training led to the CCWTE declining offers, as happened with an LCC proposal for tailoring classes.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/3, Minutes 10 April 1924 and Box 3/4, Minutes 9 October 1924.

⁸⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 9 October 1925, 10 June 1926, 12 July 1928 and 13 June 1929.

⁸⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/3, Minutes 8 March 1923, 12 July 1923 and 9 October 1924.

⁹⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/3, Minutes 11 December 1924.

The major influence on establishing training schemes remained the Government. In her study of women in public life Jones implies that restricting women's training to domestic service was down to CCWTE decisions rather than Government policy.⁹¹ This claim is refuted by a perusal of CCWTE Minutes, which reveal great discussion and anguish over inadequate grants received and the frustration felt by CCWTE members at their inability to relieve distress among unemployed women.⁹² Conflict between the CCWTE and MoL over the types of courses on offer was largely resolved to the CCWTE's disadvantage, for the Ministry's financial upper hand dictated terms.⁹³ It is evident that, tied to receipt of annual MoL grants, the CCWTE's independence and innovation in training had largely to be sacrificed. It was not a situation to please Committee members but they realised that strident protests at imposed limitations or conditions might jeopardise the very existence of the CCWTE.

This realistic acceptance of their position indicates how CCWTE members adopted conciliatory approaches to ensure continuation of their organisation. While such acceptance might seem to support Jones' argument for the CCWTE being responsible for its limited training opportunities – by being subservient and acquiescent – it can equally be interpreted as a mark of strength and perspicuity in a male-dominated world. The women who formed the backbone of the CCWTE had long experience of campaigning (as shown in their short biographies in Chapter 3). They knew when to fight and when to admit defeat. If they lost chances to offer innovative training courses to unemployed women, they nevertheless ensured that the CCWTE remained alive to offer help, albeit of a restricted and limited nature.

Despite some difficulty in recruitment, which the CCWTE tackled by producing its own publicity posters, trainees seemed genuinely grateful for the chance to train. A snapshot of attendance at Home Training Centres in June 1929 reveals a high take-up rate for places:

Area	Places	Trainees	By Age Group			
			< 16	16-18	18-21	21+
NE	572	557	—	188	253	116
NW	200	138	—	3	65	70
SW	54	45	—	1	4	40
Wales	200	196	3	124	53	16
Scotland	90	77	3	40	21	13
Totals	1,116	1,103	6	356	396	255
Percentage		90.8	0.6	35.1	39.1	25.2

⁹¹ Helen Jones *Women in British Public Life, 1914-1950. Gender, Power and Social Policy* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), p51.

⁹² See, for example, BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 11 February 1926, which reveal the difficulty of the Minister of Labour in obtaining grants from the Treasury for the CCWTE.

⁹³ Beddoe 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams', p.196.

⁹⁴ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Home Training – places & attendance for week ended 1 June 1929.

The sparse surviving narrative evidence from trainees confirms not just their appreciation of CCWTE training courses but also how these impacted on their lifestyles, health and ambitions:

I am in better health than when I worked in the factory. I had one rise in wages after I had been here six months. I appreciate my training very much, and it shall stand out in my future career as something that has been very worth while, something that shall make me wish every girl could have. That three months' happy company of other girls after the same aim in life is a thing I would not have missed for anything in the world.

I am very happy in my new work, and the people with whom I work treat me as though I belonged to them. I do not think I shall ever regret taking up domestic work. I thank you and the committee for the training I had, and earnestly hope that the girls' homecraft training will keep going on. I think it is the best thing that ever happened to me, and so does all my family. I should like to hear if all the girls are as happy as I am.

I like it very much and am very happy. I was over 15 years in soap works, but got stopped through electric machines, so it seemed very strange at first. I was sorry to leave the training centre as I was very happy. Mrs J did her best for each one of us. It was not her fault if we did not learn anything.

I should like to tell you how much I enjoyed my 13 weeks at the centre and what a lot of good I found it, as being a tailoress and working long hours I did not have any opportunity to learn much about housewifery, especially the cooking part, and what I was taught at the centre seemed to just put me on my feet, and, above all, gave me confidence to strike out in a new line, which I have wanted for a long time but did not see how I could manage it. I would like you to know I am quite happy in my work and my new home, and hope later on to further improve my position by taking some special course of training in housekeeping.⁹⁵

Mistresses were also appreciative of the CCWTE schemes for training servants. Lady Steel-Maitland, wife of the then Minister of Labour, expressed satisfaction with the 'very nice and well-trained kitchenmaid from the Chatham Centre' whom she engaged.⁹⁶ Indeed, the CCWTE actively encouraged friends to approach the Centres when hiring staff and even produced a leaflet with suitable application form inside. High profile visits to CCWTE training centres from royalty and civil dignitaries helped to publicise both the schemes and the availability of trained servants.⁹⁷

Throughout the 1920s the major provider of women's training nationally – as officially sanctioned by successive Governments – remained the CCWTE. The dominance of domestic training is evident when total expenditure for CCWTE schemes during the 1920s is examined. Since the cost per trainee was much lower for Home Training than for Individual Grants (often for professional courses), Table 4.9 indicates that many more unemployed women received

⁹⁵ 205 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 601-2, 14 April 1927. Quoted by Margaret Bondfield.

⁹⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 10 December 1925.

⁹⁷ See, for example, the numerous press cuttings in BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/23.

training in domestic service skills than for professional careers. Equally, domestic courses lasted a few weeks, whereas professional training was over a period of years (accounting for Individual Grants expenditure after 1924 as women completed courses).

Year	Homecraft & Home Training	Homemakers	Outfits for Domestic Service	Individual Grants	Clerical & Miscellaneous
1920	—	—	—	27,774	—
1921	45,649	—	5,190	155,131	—
1922	108,188	26,764	3,738	138,546	—
1923	83,217	1,527	2,210	56,123	1,617
1924	136,078	1,501	1,331	19,914	6,290
1925	103,183	—	944	6,722	8,729
1926	74,224	—	874	1,953	4,622
1927	45,999	—	603	459	237
1928	53,716	—	452	240	—
Total	650,253	29,792	15,343	406,861	21,495
	695,388			428,356	

By late 1929 the Home Training Centre scheme was being developed to include residential courses. Such a move, requiring lease or purchase of suitably large premises, underlines commitment by both the CCWTE and its financial masters, the Ministry of Labour, towards female domestic service training. It was to reach its apogee in the 1930s.

Conclusions

High levels of female unemployment in the 1920s – particularly noticeable in the immediate post-war period with more women eligible for state benefit – were a major concern to Government. The Ministry of Labour was keen to reduce unemployment figures, the Treasury was keen to reduce financial cost. Government policy towards unemployed women demonstrated a stark differentiation – women were more likely to be penalised by having benefit withdrawn for refusing a ‘suitable job’. Employment Exchanges were instrumental in implementing this policy, aided and abetted by Courts of Referees, the ultimate arbitrators on appeals against stoppages of benefits. The discriminatory element of Government policy is clear from the designation of domestic service as a suitable job for almost any unemployed woman and the appreciably higher incidence of benefit disallowance applied to women rather than men.

Many women, especially those with experience in insured trades, were reluctant to enter domestic service, not least because as an uninsured occupation, this could jeopardise future

⁹⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Income and Expenses for 9 years ended 31 December 1928. Annual amounts are rounded to the nearest whole pound, which explains apparent discrepancies in “Total”.

benefit claims. Yet Exchange officials paid little heed to women's previous work experience, the overriding factor apparently being to remove unemployed women from the register.

The Government also targeted unemployed girls in their drive to fill domestic vacancies. Whereas boys took courses geared towards local circumstances (for example, maritime skills in coastal regions), girls were invariably taught domestic skills. Such training fitted them for domestic service, although the links between juvenile training and employment were not always openly stated, unlike London Trade Schools, for example, which made no secret of the aims of their domestic training courses.

High levels of female unemployment gave rise to renewed claims of a servant problem, this being given greater credence by an MoL Report in 1923. This investigation into the supply of servants – carried out by an all-female committee – seems to have had little practical results beyond defining the servant problem as a female phenomenon and linking it with unemployment, with dire consequences for women's future training programmes.

The central plank in implementing Government policy towards unemployed women was the CCWTE, re-established under the MoL with a revised emphasis on training. Initially, schemes were instigated for middle-class women to fund professional training, as well as group schemes for clerical work and domestic service. Despite great enthusiasm and imagination for investigating and devising schemes, the CCWTE found itself increasingly constrained by its reliance on annual Treasury funding.

As the 1920s progressed, and co-incidental with publication of the 1923 Report, CCWTE schemes became more narrowly focused on domestic service courses in one of its non-residential Home Training Centres. The CCWTE was effectively forced to abandon existing or potential schemes for alternative training courses, having no recourse to private funding. This situation did not please members but they realised the vulnerability of their position. Indeed, praise in the 1923 Report for the CCWTE's successful work led to an about-face by the MoL, who had been keen to discontinue funding even for the CCWTE's domestic service training. It is a measure of the strength and experience of the CCWTE's female Committee that this organisation survived the antipathy and hostility it experienced.

Official training schemes, coupled with the coercive direction of benefit claimants into 'suitable' jobs, ensured that women and girls faced increasing pressure to fill the perceived shortage within domestic service. By linking female unemployment and the servant problem, the Government thus forged a direct link between these two perceived problems, the policy to deal with them, and the role of the CCWTE.

Chapter 5: Continuity and change 1930-1938

Aims

Although the CCWTE continued to play a key role in implementing Government policy towards unemployed women, the expansion of State-sponsored training changed that role. This Chapter explores the significance of those changes as it affected not only CCWTE training schemes but also unemployed women generally.

Continuity is examined through two influential factors – unemployment levels (including juveniles) and the perceived servant problem. A comparative analysis of State funded training programmes seeks to demonstrate continuity of discrimination against women. The exploration of the CCWTE's work reveals continuity in course content but change in training provision. This continuity/change manifested itself in expansion of existing non-residential CCWTE Home Training Centres to include residential courses, the rationale being an analogy to residential domestic service – giving trainees skills plus the semblance of 'living in'. Also explored is an important change in attitude – growing realisation that the servant problem had to be addressed from its root causes if it were to be solved.

Economic Context

The 1930s, dubbed Depression Years, are associated with images of unemployment, hunger marches, means tests, relief schemes – Hatton contends that the 1930s recession and recovery was a shared Western experience.¹ Unemployment patterns for Britain support the image of Depression, with registered levels of unemployed persons rising to over 2,900,000 in January 1933.² It is unclear whether the subsequent fall in numbers was due to better job opportunities or simply non-registration. One thing is clear – successive Governments were keen to avoid burdening taxpayers with high unemployment costs. Yet, while overall unemployment remained high, the number of registrations was volatile, depending on claimants' circumstances. Some were temporarily unemployed (short-time working), some found jobs, some had exhausted benefit entitlement, some were disallowed benefit, some simply de-registered.

¹ T J Hatton *The Analysis of Unemployment in Interwar Britain: A Survey of Research* Discussion Paper No 66 (Centre for Economic Policy Research, 1985), p.1.

² 252 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 752, 8 May 1931; 275 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 534, 2 March 1933 and cols 1324-5, 9 March 1933; 277 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1032, 4 May 1933; 285 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 562, 1 February 1934; 291 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 526, 21 June 1934; 293 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 323-4, 1 November 1934; 297 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2092-4, 14 February 1935; 308 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1106-8, 13 February 1936; 317 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1015-6, 12 November 1936; 323 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 504-5, 29 April 1937; 326 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 215-6, 6 July 1937.

Employment Exchanges struggled to find jobs for the millions on their books, with vacancies filled in April and May 1932 at barely six and four per cent of those registered.³

This struggle was probably complicated by difficulties in matching age and experience of claimants with vacancy specification. Although unemployment affected all age groups, the experience varied (Table 5.1). The long-term unemployed – out of work for more than six months – and juveniles presented particular problems. Juveniles' youth may have disadvantaged them, due to lack of experience, lack of skills, and lack of 'networks' within the job market. Their one main advantage – cheap wages – could be a double-edged sword, when employers had a seemingly constant supply of younger cheaper employees.

Age group	Total	Males	Females
Juveniles aged 14-17	135,476	76,510	58,966
Young persons aged 18-20	243,794	161,544	82,250
Aged 21-34 (estimated)	1,082,000	856,000	226,000
Aged 35-49 (estimated)	699,000	603,000	96,000
Aged 50-64 (estimated)	566,000	529,000	37,000
TOTAL	2,726,270	2,226,054	500,216

Table 5.2 (specifically for juveniles) illustrates regional disparity in unemployment levels. In 1934 it was claimed that three of the eight depressed areas – North-east, North west, and Scotland – had half the country's unemployed. This regional inequality stems partly from a reversal of pre-1914 unemployment patterns. The north had double the unemployment rates of the south, due to failing fortunes of major nineteenth-century industries such as textiles, coal, iron, steel and shipbuilding which had been predominantly northern based.⁵

Division	21/1/29	27/1/30	26/1/31	26/1/32	23/1/33	22/1/34	28/1/35
London	9,240	8,564	12,892	16,987	16,837	12,937	11,412
SE	6,010	5,805	8,355	8,970	10,186	7,904	9,474
SW	5,888	5,847	7,723	8,134	8,814	9,230	11,083
Midlands	9,518	8,405	17,418	15,702	15,645	8,507	10,565
NE	20,541	20,273	29,915	28,123	30,091	25,019	33,120
NW	17,877	21,599	36,889	27,174	27,484	24,412	30,764
Scotland	10,049	11,511	18,869	20,096	20,705	19,035	27,903
Wales	6,246	6,547	9,613	10,290	10,072	10,023	14,979
GB	85,379	88,551	141,674	135,476	139,834	117,067	149,300

³ 267 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1104, 22 June 1932.

⁴ 261 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1458, 16 February 1932.

⁵ 291 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 587, 21 June 1934; Hatton *The Analysis of Unemployment* p.25 and p.30.

⁶ 297 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2092-4, 14 February 1935.

Fewer women registered unemployed than men. Nancy Astor MP acknowledged this in June 1930 (citing respectively 400,000 and 1,000,000), but argued that the plight of women was more serious, for women's unemployment had risen at almost twice the rate of men's in the past year. While deploring the emphasis on domestic training – agreeing that some women was suitable for the job – Astor's support of such retraining, particularly among unemployed textile workers, reveals a pragmatic attitude – any employment opening for women was welcome.⁷

Female unemployment was not just a concern for young single women, as the breakdown of women claimants in Table 5.3 illustrates:

Division	Single/Widows	Married	Total
London & South Eastern	22,912	22,432	45,344
South Western	8,253	5,011	13,264
Midlands	32,164	44,990	77,154
North Eastern	40,075	33,405	73,480
North Western	96,629	109,956	206,585
Scotland	32,305	22,043	54,348
Wales	6,088	990	7,078
TOTAL	238,426	238,827	477,253

The figures refute oft-made allegations that married women did not – and did not need to – take paid employment. The significant regional variance in numbers of married claimants is possibly related to local attitudes towards women's work and to types of employment available. High figures for married claimants in the Midlands and North West may be due to the dominance of local textile trades, which traditionally did not exclude married women. Low numbers of Welsh claimants accords with Beddoe's assertion of a low economic activity rate for Welsh women.⁹ This is most likely due to the dominance of heavy industry that afforded few employment opportunities for women.

Married women's employment was often dictated by household budgets, if the husband's wages were insufficient to support the family. Paid employment outside the home – often casual work like charring or seasonal jobs – was one economic strategy adopted by working-class married women. Women using their homes as workplaces might be employed within the community, as washwomen or childminders. Home-based women might also take on work from local factories – finishing clothes, making boxes, or similar time-consuming and

⁷ 240 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 488-90, 18 June 1930.

⁸ 244 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 872, 5 November 1930.

⁹ Deirdre Beddoe 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams: Women in Wales, 1914-1939' in Angela V John (ed) *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), p.195.

repetitive tasks. Whether outside or inside the home, these casual jobs were almost universally characterised by low pay, low status and lack of prospects. Other time-honoured strategies to cope with the family budget included credit and State relief. Credit arrangements could be formal, for example, pawnbrokers, hire purchase, or 'tick' at local shops. Informal credit arrangements might be mutual self-help among neighbours, ranging from borrowing a cup of sugar to offering temporary (unpaid) help with childcare. State relief – often a last resort of the working-class woman – tended to change over time, from Poor Law relief from the nineteenth century to a less intrusive form such as widows' pensions from 1925.¹⁰

By May 1935 unemployment expenditure was £107,000,000 annually.¹¹ One way to cut this high cost to taxpayers was to retrain the unemployed to fill vacancies in employment sectors where demand outstripped supply. As in the 1920s one sector called out for new workers – domestic servants, particularly females, were in high demand and short supply.

How many vacant domestic service jobs and unemployed servants were there? Even Ministers of Labour found it difficult to estimate true numbers of unemployed domestic servants. Margaret Bondfield acknowledged that not all unemployed servants registered at Employment Exchanges, rendering an estimation of vacancies for private domestic service jobs impossible.¹² Given that private domestic service was uninsurable with no right to unemployment benefit, plus the desire of many women to choose their own jobs, this lack of accurate information is unsurprising, but prevents a true appreciation – historical as well as contemporary – of the domestic service problem.

A contemporary author, writing in 1937, urged caution in taking female unemployment figures at face value. Beauchamp quoted figures of 244,552 women and 54,290 girls registered unemployed at August 1936. She claimed that it was necessary to add at least 20 per cent to these official figures, basing this on a discrepancy between the 1931 Census and Labour Exchange figures – respectively 557,374 and 449,285.¹³ This highlights the difficulty of assessing unemployment for those in uninsured trades.

¹⁰ Jane Lewis *Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984), pp.52-67. On casual work, see also Elizabeth Roberts *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) and *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Shelley Pennington & Belinda Westover *A Hidden Workforce: Homeworkers in England, 1850-1985* (Macmillan, 1989). On credit arrangements, see also Shani D'Cruze 'Women and the family' in June Purvis (ed) *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945, an introduction* (UCL Press, 1995), pp.64-5; Melanie Tebbutt *Making Ends Meet: Pawnbroking and Working-Class Credit* (Leicester University Press, 1983); Ellen Ross 'Survival networks: women's neighbourhood sharing in London before World War I' *History Workshop Journal* 15 (1983) pp.4-27.

¹¹ 301 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1859, 16 May 1935.

¹² 244 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1473, 11 November 1930; 245 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 582-3, 20 November 1930.

¹³ Joan Beauchamp *Women who Work* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), p.76.

Promotion of domestic service for unemployed women continued, as figures relating to Exchange placements during 1930 seem to confirm. Table 5.4 gives vacancies filled in specific trade groups plus calculated percentages of each group relative to overall placements:

Men			Women		
Trade	No	%	Trade	No	%
Total	1,083,189	100	Total	476,587	100
Including:			Including:		
Public works/general labouring	350,214	32.33	Domestic Service	153,325	32.17
Building	154,676	14.28	Cotton	43,034	9.03
Transport	92,165	8.51	Dress	35,729	7.50
Engineering	75,143	6.94	Commerce	23,242	4.88
Shipbuilding	34,743	3.21	Misc Textile Trades	22,780	4.78
Commerce	33,730	3.11	Food, Drink, Tobacco	13,124	2.75

Roughly one third of claimants was directed into a single trade group – public works/general labouring for men, domestic service for women. Men's traditional sectors – Building, Transport, Engineering, Shipbuilding – account for about another third of placements. This indicates industries able to sustain at least a reasonable demand for workers, thus offering men greater job choice. By contrast, women's traditional sectors – Cotton, Dress, Miscellaneous Textile Trades – accounts for only about one fifth of placements. This suggests several possibilities – trades were suffering and could not sustain a demand for workers, demand for workers could not be met by the available applicants, demand for other jobs was higher and/or more popular, demand for other jobs was deliberately manipulated by Exchanges. The dominance of domestic service placements was probably a combination of all four possibilities.

Catering was one area of domestic work where vacancies were more easily filled. Catering establishments ranged from multiple chain restaurants to small private concerns, and wages varied accordingly – from a high of £3 to as low as 10s in 1937.¹⁵ But the trade lacked security, often leading to blind alley jobs. The seasonal short-term nature of such jobs, especially in seaside towns, may have been an attraction. An unsatisfied demand for staff allowed workers to pick and choose jobs, easily changing an unsatisfactory job. This seems to be borne out by Exchange figures for ten English seaside towns, of persons normally occupied in hotel/catering jobs. Similarly, the proportion of unemployed servants in hotels, boarding-houses, restaurants and clubs suggests relatively low unemployment rates in this sector, especially among women, indicating a certain level of job satisfaction lacking in private domestic service.¹⁶

¹⁴ 252 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1338-9, 14 May 1931.

¹⁵ Beauchamp *Women Who Work* p.45.

¹⁶ 328 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1788, 10 November 1937; 331 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1287-8, 10 February 1938.

Exchanges must have been all too aware of the increasing reluctance of unemployed women to take domestic posts with private employers, despite coercive attempts by Exchange officials, courts of referees and Unemployment Assistance Boards. All three organisations were instrumental in trying to direct unemployed women into domestic service to fill a perceived shortfall in supply. Antipathy towards private domestic service (notably residential posts) is evident in decreasing numbers of vacancies filled in the late 1930s, in contrast to the relative ease of filling vacancies in hotel/catering jobs at seaside resorts.¹⁷ Employers used Employment Exchanges facilities more than ever, but the unpopularity of domestic service amongst workers prevented Exchanges from filling this type of vacancy as easily as other occupations.¹⁸

Specialised Employment Exchanges were a practical expression of Government policy in directing claimants into occupations. The London hotel/catering trades Exchange opened in November 1930, followed by similar Exchanges in Cardiff, Sunderland and Keswick. In 1933 a special Exchange was opened for London building trades. Although such Exchanges achieved 'notable success' Ministers had no plans to extend the system.¹⁹ Presumably specialisation was a local answer to a specific problem, an adjunct rather than an integral part of the system.

As in the 1920s, unemployed women continued to be at the mercy of a policy which could strip them of benefit if they refused to take what Exchanges deemed a suitable job – as Chapter 4 showed, this usually meant domestic service. Women's appeals against stoppages were often disallowed on 'suitable job' grounds. Yet, Beauchamp's 1937 book reveals that coercion of unemployed women was no secret:

Labour Exchange officials actually try to force insured workers to take domestic service jobs in which the pay is less than 10s a week. A case is reported from Sunderland in which a shop assistant, aged 17, was offered a daily domestic job at 7s a week. She refused, and was actually disqualified for benefit for six weeks. Thus is the seal of approval put on the sweating of young girls.²⁰

She castigated the appeals panel for ignorance of the circumstances of those over whom they wielded power, citing the case of a girl unable to take a job due to lack of money for a uniform:

The Court of Referees did not explain that they expected her to steal the money for the uniform, although that seemed to be the only course open to her. The complete lack of imagination of the Court of Referees is shown by the fact that in many cases where the claimant is sufficiently alert to appeal to the Umpire, their decisions are overturned.²¹

¹⁷ 337 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 721-2, 20 June 1938; 345 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 3028, 6 April 1939.

¹⁸ 326 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 206, 6 July 1937; 331 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 868, 8 February 1938 and col 2048, 17 February 1938.

¹⁹ 251 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1123-4, 23 April 1931; 273 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 488, 15 December 1932; 280 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1676, 18 July 1933; 341 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1917-8, 24 November 1938.

²⁰ Beauchamp *Women who Work* p.74.

²¹ *Ibid* p.77.

Work experience, inadequate conditions, and family circumstances were major issues for women when considering a job offer. Four Chorley women were disallowed benefit because they refused to switch from their insured trade as weavers to domestic service in Salford, an area of high female unemployment. Lack of detail on Exchange vacancies could mislead applicants about jobs, particularly acute at seaside boarding-houses. Bondfield sympathised, stating that a girl leaving a job which had been misrepresented should not jeopardise the right to benefit. It is unknown if this ideal was carried through into practice. The position of unmarried daughters refusing a 'suitable job' due to household responsibilities remained ambiguous.²²

The Minister of Labour succeeding Bondfield in 1931, Sir Henry Betterton, introduced an important change in unemployment policy in November 1931, which directly benefited women. Trainees completing courses at CCWTE centres had previously been forced to wait ten weeks before making claims, but this waiting period was abolished.²³ The impact of this policy change is unknown but may have encouraged women to undertake training, now that they no longer faced financial penalties for failing to find a job on completion of a CCWTE course.

White-collar work, especially in clerical jobs, saw gains – in terms of numbers employed if not in wage rates – for women in the 1930s. The amalgamation of insurance, banking and commercial firms which often led to rationalisation and mechanisation also led to the displacement of men by machinery and lower paid women.²⁴ Lower pay also affected women teachers, not just during their working lives but on retirement. For example, in 1934 women received an average £334 on retirement compared to men's £537, while pensions in that year were valued at £124 for women and £198 for men.²⁵

Factory work was another employment sector that expanded in the 1930s. The advance of technology and the rise of consumerism brought changes to working practices which led to greater opportunities for women, notably in light engineering and other industries adopting production line techniques. Many such industries produced the new consumer products such as radios, gramophones, electric irons, as well as packaged foods (biscuits, cakes, bread, ice cream). Glucksmann has analysed the attraction of the new industries for women workers, despite the inherent pressure of deadlines and production targets that they worked under.²⁶

²² 251 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 329, 16 April 1931; 253 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 197-8, 3 June 1931; 255 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2434, 30 July 1931.

²³ 259 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 660-1, 17 November 1931.

²⁴ Beauchamp *Women who Work* p.56. See also Deirdre Beddoe *Back to Home and Duty: women between the wars 1918-1939* (Pandora, 1989), pp.72-4; Teresa Davy "A Cissy Job for Men; a Nice Job for Girls": Women Shorthand Typists in London, 1900-39' in Leonore Davidoff & Belinda Westover (eds) *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: women's history and women's work* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1986).

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.64.

²⁶ Miriam Glucksmann *Women assemble: women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain* (Routledge, 1990). See also Beddoe *Back to Home and Duty* pp.66-9; Lewis *Women in England* p.158.

Despite new and expanded opportunities, however, women faced barriers to employment. Legislative barriers often cited health and safety as a reason for barring women from certain tasks or jobs, ostensibly seeking to protect them from undue risks.²⁷ The State benefits system could effectively bar women from employment, as happened with the 1931 Anomalies Act. By defining women's employment needs as different to men's, this Act categorised married women who left the labour market for any length of time as retired.²⁸ Certain occupations adopted a marriage bar, applied only to women, forcing them to leave jobs on marriage. This bar tended to affect middle-class women more than working-class women as it operated in white-collar sectors such as the Post Office and teaching.²⁹ The marriage bar might be softened by a gratuity – 50,000 of the 77,329 women employed in Civil Service clerical jobs had completed 6 years' service and were thus eligible for a gratuity on marriage.³⁰

Despite increased employment openings to women through acceptance into offices, factories and the professions, domestic service continued to be heavily promoted. But this promotion ran parallel with women's continued reluctance to enter domestic service and antipathy towards it.

The 1931 Domestic Service Bill

The perennial problem of status remained a stumbling block to all efforts to make domestic service an attractive employment proposition. But the 1930s saw an important change in this respect – the realisation that, if it were to be solved, the servant problem needed to be addressed from its root causes. One attempt was the Domestic Service Bill, launched in 1931.

The House of Commons repeatedly saw questions raised about the servant problem from MPs who supported and MPs who opposed direction of women into domestic service. This direction was often linked with numbers of unemployed female benefit claimants – seen by many as evidence of malingering and wilful disregard of job opportunities. Parliamentary exchanges often heated and reveal entrenched views on both sides, not necessarily linked to political party, although clearly ideology influenced attitudes. Much opposition came from MPs in areas of heavy unemployment or with large working-class populations, perhaps reflecting greater awareness of problems inherent in domestic service, knowledge gained from constituency members who worked in this occupation.

²⁷ Penny Summerfield *Women Workers in the Second World War* (Croom Helm, 1984), pp.21-2; Lewis *Women in England* pp.188-9.

²⁸ Beddoe *Back to Home and Duty* p.87; Lewis *Women in England*, p.190.

²⁹ Beddoe *Back to Home and Duty* p.61 and pp.82-3; Lewis *Women in England*, pp.197-9.

³⁰ Beauchamp *Women who Work* pp.58-9.

Despite occupying much parliamentary time, the issue of the regulation of domestic service proved one that successive governments were unwilling to tackle. Part of this reluctance was undoubtedly due to the intrinsically private nature of domestic service – any State regulation would necessarily have impinged on employers' privacy. Not only would the machinery to carry out such regulations create inconvenience, difficulties of administration, and financial burden for taxpayers, it would inevitably lead to resentment and threat of failure and thus perhaps political suicide for the party who introduced it. Regular calls for a Trade Board for private domestic servants met with no success, Margaret Bondfield stating that the MoL had no power to act.³¹ This highlights how the isolation of domestic service from other employment for women, being categorised as outside the bounds of trade boards.

One MP with a keen interest in the plight of servants during his political career was Geoffrey Mander. Parliamentary debates on domestic service invariably brought some contribution from him. For example, in March 1930 he urged legislation to enhance the status of domestic service, to be achieved by regulating work conditions in the same manner as nursing.³² In April, he raised the issue of status, asking which recommendations of the 1923 domestic service report had been implemented.³³ (See Chapter 4.)

In 1931 an attempt was made to tackle the fundamental issue of status in domestic service, often seen as the root of the problem. This attempt was important for seven reasons. First, it sought to regulate and monitor domestic service. Second, it sought to improve working conditions. Third, it sought to establish training standards. Fourth, it sought to make domestic service an insurable occupation. Fifth, it sought to give servants a voice. Sixth, it sought to achieve these aims through legislation. Seventh, it linked unpopularity of domestic service with its conditions and with the servant problem.

The Domestic Service Bill – launched by Messrs Mander, Adamson, Rhys Davies, Gray, Kingsley Griffith, Lovat-Fraser, Simon and Sir Ernest Bennett – sought to establish a five-strong commission, to include three women. Its duties would be four-fold – to review employment conditions and seek to raise status; to promote consultative employer/employee councils; to consider the best training methods and who should organise these; to consider, jointly with the MoL, questions of recruitment, issue of certificates of efficiency, and the desirability of bringing domestic service into the Unemployment Insurance Acts.³⁴

³¹ 237 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2390, 10 April 1930.

³² 236 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1462, 13 March 1930.

³³ 237 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1436, 3 April 1930.

³⁴ 253 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 821-7, 9 June 1931.

Mander argued that, despite the satisfactory working conditions of the majority of the 1,100,000 workers covered by the Bill, the minority needed State intervention. He felt strongly that this would combat the invidious animosity and antipathy towards domestic service, not least because it was closely bound up with issues of class and gender:

The difficulties [...] are psychological. There has arisen in the past, for some reason, a sort of feeling that domestic service is inferior, is of a nature that ought not to be undertaken by all sorts of people. [...] we want to do something to raise the status, and make people feel that the occupation of domestic service is as dignified and as honourable as any other occupation [...] and that it ought not to be confined necessarily to one class of the community.³⁵

Mander furthermore urged a domestic service charter to deal with ‘the very real difficulty’ inherent in this occupation, acknowledging that the personal and intimate nature of private domestic service rendered unworkable the overt regulation normal in other trades.³⁶

The Bill was not universally welcome. Ellen Wilkinson opposed it, on the grounds that legislation could not effectively deal with ‘the vexed problem’, arguing that such complicated legislation was counterproductive and would lead to total inaction.³⁷ Her objection may be valid, since private domestic service was difficult to regulate and control, but the objection of such a champion of women’s rights must have been disappointing to Mander and colleagues.

The vote was 212 to 89, in favour of allowing Bill 169 to be brought for its first reading. Such a Bill, and the resultant vote, indicates a willingness to approach the issue of domestic service seriously and to tackle root causes of its unpopularity. But this optimism was misplaced, for Bill 169 disappeared without trace. I can find neither evidence of subsequent readings in the House nor further debates on its proposals. It certainly never made the Statute books. Perhaps the proposals were subsequently considered too radical, too expensive, or – being related to domestic service and thus women’s employment – too unimportant to pursue.

Bill 169 appears to have been a lone attempt to address issues of domestic service status via legislation, which suggests that such employment was not held worthy of MPs’ attention. This is strange since a glance at Hansard shows that domestic service – or rather women’s antipathy to it – was a constant political worry to innumerable Honourable Gentlemen (and presumably their wives).

Domestic service was partially recognised when institutional servants were finally included in State unemployment insurance schemes. Despite repeated calls for inclusion of all

³⁵ Ibid, col 822.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, cols 824-5.

servants³⁸, legislation passed in 1938 granted insurable status to an estimated 170,000 institutional servants.³⁹ Private servants – a considerable proportion of female domestics – were excluded. Cost of potential benefit claims was undoubtedly one deciding factor, since institutional service apparently presented no administrative barrier. If women could claim benefit, they might become more critical of working conditions in private domestic service. Was the Government anxious to avoid this situation? The result would be a deepening of unpopularity of domestic service and a consequential worsening of the servant problem.

Taylor describes the servant-mistress relation as one ‘between radically unequal individuals in which power and subordination were continually reproduced’.⁴⁰ This unequal power struggle was reproduced within State machinery. This is unsurprising, given that those wielding power were likely to be servant employers. Indeed, Firth’s psychological study of 1925 into the servant problem had highlighted the need for these classes to view the problem from the workers’ perspective, but there was little evidence in the 1930s that this was happening.⁴¹

Nevertheless, MPs of differing political beliefs made repeated but ineffectual attempts to ameliorate domestic service conditions, ranging from holidays to accommodation, from hours to wages.⁴² But calls for Government to regulate domestic service fell on deaf ears. This political deafness remained constant, no matter which party held power – successive Cabinets maintained an unchanging policy of non-interference on regulating domestic service.⁴³

The CCWTE

Chapter 4 revealed CCWTE training schemes during the 1920s becoming increasingly confined to domestic skills. What schemes did the CCWTE offer in the 1930s? Was it successful in introducing new and alternative training schemes for women? To provide background and context to an analysis of the CCWTE’s contribution, I first examine State training directed at men and juveniles, in which the CCWTE played little part.

³⁸ 238 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1102-3, 8 May 1930; 244 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1064, 6 November 1930; 303 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2013, 4 July 1935; 308 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1161, 13 February 1936; 310 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2098, 2 April 1936.

³⁹ 323 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1221, 6 May 1937; 329 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1381, 25 November 1937; 330 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1998, 22 December 1937.

⁴⁰ Pam Taylor ‘Daughters and mothers – maids and mistresses: domestic service between the wars’ in John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson (eds) *Working Class Culture: studies in history and theory* (Hutchinson, 1979), p.133.

⁴¹ Violet M Firth *The Psychology of the Servant Problem* (C W Daniel Co, 1925). See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

⁴² 245 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2406, 4 December 1930 and cols 1511-2, 27 November 1930.

⁴³ 238 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2027, 15 May 1930; 245 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2369, 4 December 1930; 252 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 536-7, 7 May 1931; 254 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 590-1, 25 June 1931; 254 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1435-6, 2 July 1931; 297 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2049, 14 February 1935; 321 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 516, 4 March 1937.

In the early 1930s the Minister of Labour Henry Betterton defined his unemployment policy as restoration of industrial activity, the only effectual means for re-employment.⁴⁴ To this end, the Government established two types of training centres for men. Government Training Centres, originally designed for young unemployed men, had been extended in 1927 to provide unemployed men from depressed mining districts with skills as handymen and learners. By 1931, ten Government Training Centres catered for 3,770 trainees. The small numbers trained were put down to the MoL's belief that training should be limited to job prospects, bolstered by the relatively high cost of training plus the perceived bad effect on recruitment of having many men without work even after training. Another factor was trade union hostility towards and suspicion of trained men. Transfer Centres provided reconditioning courses for men aged 18-35 who were ineligible for Government Training Centres. By the end of 1930, ten such centres existed catering for 1,880 men.⁴⁵ By December 1932, men had 25 centres (offering different levels of training) catering for some 5,000 trainees.⁴⁶ This included one Physical Training Centre being managed on behalf of an anonymous donor. I have found no reference to benefactors for women's training centres.

By 1933 some 4,000 men had profited from six-month courses at nine Training Centres to enhance marketable skills – all were expected to find jobs. Some 9,500 men from Depressed Areas had attended eleven Instructional Centres – clear evidence of localised high male unemployment – receiving 'conditioning, without the practical certainty of a job being found'. These figures bolstered Betterton's claim that increased expenditure on men's training was fully 'justified on every ground, both social and economic.'⁴⁷ Yet unemployment training was not universally welcomed, one MP stating that 'training [...] for industries which already have large numbers of unemployed is wasting time'. This criticism has face value but is harsh – some men learnt basic skills for lower industrial grades, such as 'improvers' in the furniture industry.⁴⁸

1933 saw a change in training provision, with the opening in May of five experimental summer camps for men.⁴⁹ Courses apparently involved physical activities, possibly agricultural and forestry work. A philanthropic element is evident, with trainees expected to benefit from fresh air and sunshine. No such camps were envisaged for women.

⁴⁴ 281 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 291-2, 9 November 1933; 286 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1105, 28 February 1934.

⁴⁵ Eveline M Burns *British Unemployment Programs, 1920-1938* (Washington, USA: Committee on Social Security, Social Research Council, 1941), pp.75-7.

⁴⁶ 273 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 491-2, 15 December 1932.

⁴⁷ 275 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 592-3, 2 March 1933.

⁴⁸ 269 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1126, 27 October 1932; 274 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2042-4, 24 February 1933.

⁴⁹ 277 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 983, 4 May 1933.

In 1934 Betterton declined to respond to calls to open southern-based training centres to local men, declaring that this would introduce an entirely new principle – that it was ‘the duty of the State to train men for industry’. He denied that Government had ever made such an admission, believing it industry’s duty to train the workers it needed. To critics who felt that the Government had departed from its principle in setting up the centres, Hudson asserted it was:

the only means by which successive Governments have been able to get men out of the depressed areas, where they have no chance of a job, into other areas where they have some chance.⁵⁰

The denial that it was Government’s job to train men for industry is at odds with Ministers’ earlier assertions to focus on industrial activity. If the rationale for training centres was to re-deploy men, then Government was indeed training men for industry’s purposes. If Government was not acting to meet industry’s needs, what was the function of training centres? These apparently conflicting statements in the House indicate a measure of uncertainty and confusion within Government circles over the purpose of training centres.

A new venture in men’s training was the establishment of the Park Royal waiters course in 1937. Despite a waiting list of applicants among its preferred clientele of men from Special Areas (hitherto Depressed Areas, the Minister of Labour Ernest Brown had no plans for expansion.⁵¹ Perhaps he realised the limited appeal to men with experience in heavy industries that characterised Special Areas.

Table 5.5 gives figures for the three main types of men’s training centres run by the MoL between 1925 and 1939. The numbers found work and unplaced refer to men completing courses. The gap between numbers admitted and numbers completing courses are accounted for by trainees being dismissed or leaving voluntarily. It should be noted that Transfer Centres ran only between 1929 and 1932, their place being taken by Instructional Centres (which also included the summer camps noted earlier).

Type of Centre	Admitted	Completed	Found work No/percentage		Unplaced
Government Training Centre	120,130	88,638	79,468	89.7	9,170
Instructional Centre	123,251	98,018	21,442	21.9	76,576
Transfer Centre	22,398	16,934	15,746	93.0	1,188
Totals	265,779	203,590	116,656	57.3	86,934

⁵⁰ 291 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 678, 21 June 1934.

⁵¹ 317 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1887-8, 19 November 1936; 319 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 183-4, 20 January 1937 and col 1040, 28 January 1937.

⁵² BLPES, Markham Papers, File 7/29, Memo from Mr Wadell, MoL, 12 July 1939.

The low placement rates in Instructional Centres highlight one flaw in the ostensible rationale of training centres – to provide employable skills. With few job placements, why were instructional centres not branded a failure and closed? Clearly the welfare element – so-called ‘conditioning’ – was thought important. In which case, why was similar training not offered to women? Why were female trainees expected to find jobs when some male trainees were excused this objective? There are no obvious answers.

Men’s employment needs were given priority, with training centres catering for their differing levels of employability. Industrial retraining allowed some men to enter new trades, while others benefited from ‘conditioning’ training without expectation of finding work afterwards, a scheme not offered to women. The Government’s priority for dealing with male unemployment can be seen in the MoL’s 1938 advertising brochures. One highlighted the opportunity to ‘Learn a New Trade’ – bricklaying, carpentry, cabinet making, coach trimming, instrument making, among others. The large brochure on Instructional Centres used glossy colour photographs to emphasise the benefits of this scheme.⁵³ No MoL brochure exists for women’s training in the 1930s beyond those published by the CCWTE itself.

State training for juveniles continued that set down in the 1920s. Junior Instruction Centres (JICs) offered less a vocational training than something akin to the ‘conditioning’ in men’s instructional centres. State funding of JICs – run jointly by central and local government – could be 100 or 75 per cent, depending on perceived need. The list of grant-aided councils underlines regional variation of provision, presumably reflecting regional unemployment levels noted earlier.⁵⁴ (See Table 5.2 and Appendix II) The Government was at pains to explain that many LEAs not participating in this JIC scheme were not necessarily driven by unwillingness but by lack of trainees.⁵⁵ (See Appendix III) This indicates regional variation in juvenile unemployment, although other factors cannot be ruled out – limited funds, unwillingness on the part of either LEA or potential trainee, restricted job opportunities, lack of imagination.

In December 1934, with 123 JICs in operation, 53 were in Special Areas – South Wales, Scotland and Durham. Average attendance figures highlight the dominance of boys at JICs – almost twice as many as girls in November 1935.⁵⁶ Why was there an imbalance? Was it the effect of mainstream education, which tended to emphasise boys’ learning – thus instilling in boys a stronger desire to avail themselves of any instructional opportunities? Did parental attitudes influence attendance? Were boys simply seen as more worthy of attention?

⁵³ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 7/29, *Learn a New Trade at one of the Government Training Centres*, (MoL, 1938); *Instructional Centres*, (MoL, 1938).

⁵⁴ 249 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2036-7, 18 March 1931.

⁵⁵ 267 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1103-4, 22 June 1932; 274 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2041-2, 24 February 1933.

⁵⁶ 295 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1795, 6 December 1934; 307 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1401, 16 December 1935.

Certainly alternatives to JICs seemed to favour boys. Trainees at six London centres catering for those under 18 were often boys in blind-alley jobs, such as van-boys, messengers, hotel pages, thrown out of work at age 16. Initially, youngsters were often unwilling to attend – indeed, there were sometimes almost riots. Nonetheless, such centres were thought an invaluable asset in exploiting the potential of such boys, helping them discover new talents.⁵⁷

Another option was junior technical schools, expanded over the previous ten years. But the ideals and actuality of technical and vocational education did not always match. Studies by Bartlett of technical training and King of trade schools have also made this point.⁵⁸

Unemployed juveniles in the 1930s continued to be treated differently from their adult counterparts. There is no evidence of change in the discriminatory nature of girls' training, which continued to focus on domestic skills. Whilst the ultimate objective of juvenile training schemes might be to fit unemployed youngsters for jobs, lack of prospects and experience severely hindered this aim. Additionally, the Government was alert to the special needs of juveniles – to keep them occupied, to maintain some form of education, to curb potential misbehaviour, to prevent them becoming accustomed to a life of idleness.

What was the CCWTE's contribution to State training schemes and to ameliorating female unemployment? The CCWTE was a formidable group – at least in personalities. In July 1930 the executive committee comprised 23 members, including two inactive due to current posts as Minister of Labour (Margaret Bondfield) and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health (Susan Lawrence). Members could boast social standing, in terms of class or community service, with much experience of women's issues in Government service or trade union activity.

The CCWTE was keen to begin its new venture, seeking to turn a setback into an opportunity. In the 1920s the CCWTE had been involved in training girls for domestic service overseas, via residential courses at Market Harborough. (This venture is discussed in Chapter 7.) Market Harborough was destined to form the nucleus of a new and sustained training programme. High recruitment and placement rates of the now-defunct scheme encouraged the CCWTE to revive it as a purely British scheme. The CCWTE and MoL were united in their vision of a more sustained and permanent scheme of domestic training than Home Training Centres, which tended to follow local unemployment trends.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ 264 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1291-2, 18 April 1932.

⁵⁸ See discussion in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Marion Bartlett 'Education for industry. Attitudes and policies affecting the provision of technical education in Britain, 1916-1929' (University of Oxford, unpublished DPhil thesis, 1995); Sarah King 'Girls' Vocational Training Schools in London: A Study of the Inter-War Years' (University of Greenwich, unpublished PhD thesis, 1994).

⁵⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 13 June 1929 and 11 July 1929; 234 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1201, 30 January 1930.

The recruitment success of non-residential Home Training Centres – and the high job placement rates – fuelled hopes of similar success for the new venture of residential centres.⁶⁰ The rise in numbers of juveniles trained at non-residential centres by 1930 is considerable – perhaps due to the relative ease of placing them in domestic service. While adult rates are undeniably high, the perceived tractability (and lower wages) of young girls may have made them a more attractive prospect to employers. Equally younger servants were less likely perhaps to have family commitments which might interfere with their paid employment.

Most CCWTE centres were non-residential and took the bulk of training places. As in the 1920s, location of centres and duration of courses was fluid, reflecting local needs and circumstances. Parallel with these centres, were residential training centres, the first being ‘Newbold Beeches’ at Leamington Spa, accommodating 40 trainees. The course, lasting eight to ten weeks, taught cookery, laundry, housewifery, needlework, general knowledge, health. No fees were charged, trainees receiving 2s 6d weekly allowance plus board and lodging plus travelling expenses from home. They were also given materials to make a servant’s outfit. In 1931 there were five residential centres – Leamington Spa, ‘The Elms’ (Market Harborough), ‘Appleton Hall’ (Warrington), ‘Harden’ (Newcastle), ‘Millersneuk’ (Lenzie, Scotland) – with ‘Lapsewood’ (Sydenham, London) opening shortly. Two special centres at Burnley and Leeds catered for older women. Of the non-residential centres, eighteen were in England, twelve in Scotland, eleven in Wales.⁶¹

Voluntary organisations also taught domestic skills to unemployed women and wives of unemployed men. Alternative schemes included St Mary’s Training Centre at Portobello Road, London and Brighton & Hove School of Cookery. But non-CCWTE scheme’s contribution to ameliorating female unemployment appears minimal. Of 5,768 females found jobs via State schemes between October 1931 and February 1933, most were from CCWTE centres (5,716 of the 6,812 who completed courses).⁶² With almost 84 per cent of trainees completing courses, the CCWTE accounted for 99 per cent of State-funded female trainees who found work. Although small, the figures reveal the effectiveness of training unemployed women.

A potentially important change for training schemes came in 1934 with legislation enabling provision by either the MoL or the soon-to-be-established Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB).⁶³

⁶⁰ 239 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 414-6, 21 May 1930.

⁶¹ 246 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 512, 11 December 1930; 252 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1336, 14 May 1931; 253 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1965-6, 18 June 1931.

⁶² 274 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1147, 16 February 1933; 276 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 474-5, 23 March 1933 and cols 1151-3, 30 March 1933.

⁶³ 286 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1244-5, 1 March 1934.

However, the advent of the UAB seems to have had little practical effect on training provision. The list of Government-sanctioned training centres at March 1934 (Appendix IV) contrasts the wide range of men's courses and the restrictive nature of women's. Apart from CCWTE centres, there is one alternative for women – Brighton & Hove School of Cookery. The message to unemployed women seems clear – your place is in someone else's home. Certain MPs found this unacceptable, dismissing women's training as providing 'servants for the rich'. The views of 1,028 female trainees at CCWTE centres in June 1935 are unrecorded.⁶⁴

What were the residential centres like? A 1935 CCWTE brochure gives an indication of physical surroundings for residential trainees. It declares 'Newbold Beeches' at Leamington:

A delightful house standing in 2½ acres of garden and woodland on a hill on the outskirts of this pleasant health resort.⁶⁵

And indeed the accompanying photograph, though small and grainy, promises luxury probably undreamed of by young working-class trainees. All CCWTE residential centres were situated in large houses, with acres of garden. 'The Elms' in Market Harborough was described as 'a charming old Georgian house' while 'Appleton Hall' was 'a very fine mansion' and 'Millersneuk' was 'a fine country house'. Even today the images of the centres are impressive and in the 1930s must have appealed to young working-class girls. Whether such grandeur was a deliberate attempt to woo recruits is unclear, for residential centres needed houses sufficiently spacious to provide classrooms, dormitories, recreational facilities, dining rooms, extensive kitchens and laundries as well as private staff rooms. Perhaps the grandeur was merely an additional bonus.

Government Ministers were not averse to expressing public approval of CCWTE residential centres. The five-year anniversary of 'Appleton Hall' in 1936 caused Minister of Labour Ernest Brown to express satisfaction with the scheme's long-term results. Citing high recruitment, completion and placement rates, Brown felt that expenditure on this Warrington centre had been and remained justified.⁶⁶ It is noticeable in Hansard that many references to training schemes for unemployed women include an expressed 'justification' for expenditure – an element usually lacking for men's schemes. This indicates that although CCWTE schemes had Government approval at the highest level – Ernest Brown was an old adversary of Violet Markham and seems genuinely to have supported the principle of women's training – there was considerable dissension about the need for such schemes. It is to the CCWTE's credit that it managed to sustain the training programme in the face of such public discord.

⁶⁴ 287 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1357-60, 22 March 1934; 304 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1194-5, 18 July 1935.

⁶⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 7/17, Brochure CC90 *Residential Training Centres for Domestic Workers*, October 1935.

⁶⁶ 308 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1608, 18 February 1936.

Brown outlined the rationale behind CCWTE schemes, emphasising the different objectives of non-residential and residential centres. The latter were located in areas with good employment prospects while non-residential centres were concentrated in areas of heavy unemployment, often mining districts. For example, in February 1937 London, Bristol and Liverpool each had one non-residential centre while the North-east had two, Scotland three, the North nine and Wales thirteen. Training courses lasted 13 weeks, or longer for younger girls, and trainees received a free outfit. Despite the ease with which trainees found jobs, there was 'considerable difficulty' in finding recruits, which Brown attributed to unwillingness and ignorance. Unwillingness arose when chances of finding industrial work seemed favourable, while many remained ignorant of the CCWTE schemes.⁶⁷ Yet non-residential centres were not alone in suffering recruitment problems, for in April 1937 only one-third of residential places were filled. No matter how competent the teaching, how good the employment prospects, how luxurious their surroundings, residential centres suffered from the persistent problem of unpopularity of domestic service. Indeed, one MP obliquely referred to this problem when he asked whether any training centres existed for mistresses 'where they can be taught to treat their maids properly'.⁶⁸

The CCWTE instigated short courses for special groups of unemployed women, for example, seasonal workers or older women (usually defined vaguely, but generally over 30). In summer 1930 experimental courses were held for 82 women over 35 in Burnley and Sheffield.⁶⁹ In summer 1934 a waitressing course was held in Newcastle for 32 women, of whom 30 found work. About six months later, 20 were known to be in employment, including two temporary staff retained permanently at Harrogate Hydro.⁷⁰ One girl expressed not only her satisfaction with her temporary job in Scarborough but also her ambition to seek work in London:

I have settled down to my work splendidly and could not wish to work for a nicer employer than Mrs Dobson. There were fifty visitors staying at this hotel and I do all the cooking, several of them complimented me for my good cooking, and Mrs Dobson is very satisfied with my work. My wage with tips included, average 30/- per week. The holiday season will end in September, so I am going to apply for a situation as cook in London when my time is up here, so if I am able to get work in London, I shall endeavour to see you, as I wish to extend my thanks in person.⁷¹

⁶⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/6, Home Training Centres – Attendance Return, 27 February 1937; 321 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2228, 18 March 1937.

⁶⁸ 321 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2228, 18 March 1937; 322 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1012, 14 April 1937.

⁶⁹ 245 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1305-6, 26 November 1930.

⁷⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/5, Training Course for Seasonal Workers at Newcastle 6 June – 17 July 1934; Report on Placing and Subsequent History of Newcastle Waitresses Course, nd [November 1934].

⁷¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/5, Training Course for Seasonal Workers at Newcastle 6 June – 17 July 1934.

Later courses for older women included cookery training at Elgin Avenue and Grosvenor Road, London. Table 5.6 indicates the variety of ages, backgrounds and skills of older trainees helped by the CCWTE:

Previous Work	Age	Post Obtained
Shop assistant	56	Morning work in Holland Park private house
Shop assistant; own business	55	Housekeeper, Over Thirty Association Hostel
Drapery assistant; lady help	53	Holiday relief matron, Dr Barnado's
Clerk	52	Cook-housekeeper, private house
Florist before marriage	52	Cook-housekeeper, private house
Photography	51	Housekeeper for doctor
None	51	Cook-general, private house
Milliner; telephone supervisor	50	Cook-housekeeper for doctor
Nurse	49	Cook-housekeeper, private house
Carriage cleaner	48	Cleaner, Marks & Spencer, Oxford Street
Art teacher; receptionist	47	Relief matron, Dr Barnado's
Factory worker; domestic	43	Temporary cook, Marks & Spencer
Actress; wardrobe mistress	41	Wardrobe mistress for touring company
Children's nurse; daily cleaning	37	Assistant cook, LCC hospital
Laundry worker	35	Cleaner in hairdresser's shop
Factory worker	31	Daily cook-general, Osterley private school
Typist	30	Cook, Hog's Back Hotel, Surrey

In April 1930 the CCWTE briefly revived one non-domestic service training option – Individual Vocational Training, previously closed in 1926 due to lack of State funding. To its credit, given an emphasis on domestic training, the CCWTE apparently convinced Ministers to finance this revived grant scheme. It was open to women over 18 registered unemployed, with no chance of reabsorption into their own occupation, whose needs were not met by Home Training Centres and who needed help in training. In depressed mining areas women with no work experience were also eligible. For the year ended April 1931, the CCWTE made 219 grants for courses in shorthand typing (118), comptometer operating (44), cookery (24), nursery nursing (19), institutional housekeeping (8), midwifery (5), and poultry farming (1).⁷³

Like its 1920s counterpart, the Individual Vocational Training Scheme was both vastly over-subscribed and short-lived. Over-subscription is easy enough to understand, this being one of the few (possibly the only) scheme offering such grants. Initially the annual Treasury grant included an allocation to the Individual Vocational Training Scheme, allowing the CCWTE to endorse longer-term training for applicants. But an unexpected cut of £3,000 in promised

⁷² BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, *Listing of Placings Elgin Avenue and Summary of Report on Placings from Grosvenor Road 1st March – 31st July 1938.*

⁷³ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/5, *Statement – Average Cost of Training per Course – year ended 30 April 1931.*

Treasury funding forced the CCWTE to reassess its financial commitments for various training schemes. It was reluctantly agreed to suspend recruitment to the Individual Vocational Training Scheme from October 1931, except for 'exceptional cases'. By July 1932, the CCWTE were facing additional problems with this scheme. Noting that many applicants were well-educated women over 30 who were 'in great need of help', the CCWTE decided to exercise its discretionary powers and use its own small cache of non-Treasury funds for urgent cases.⁷⁴ This decision indicates that the CCWTE recognised the need of middle-class women for training. However, the cut in Treasury funding effectively ended the awarding of truly individual grants for, as comparative costs (Table 5.7) show, the relatively high cost of such grants were beyond the CCWTE's own meagre funds.

Scheme	Course duration	Cost per head	Includes:
Day Centre	13 weeks	£13-10s aged under 18 £16-15s aged 18-21 £20 aged 21/over	Maintenance payment Capital/running costs
Residential Centre	8 weeks	£16-6s	Maintenance payment
Individual Vocational	Various – max 1 academic year	Approx £30	Fees Maintenance payment
Older Women's Course	17-20 weeks	Approx £30	Capital/running costs

Comparative costs reveal that decisions on whether to continue specific courses rested not on employment sector buoyancy/depression, financial considerations, or popularity (in terms of recruits), but rather on Government dictates. Such decisions underpin both the vulnerability and impotence of the CCWTE in terms of funding, administration, scope – indeed, its very existence. The decision to withdraw State support of the Individual Vocational scheme cannot have been purely financial, for the relatively high cost of £30 matches the older women's courses. It is likely that course content or class of applicant had more significant effect on ministerial decisions. Individual Vocational Training was the only CCWTE scheme not confined to domestic work, and it is not surprising – given the past history of women's training provision – that it was soon axed. Thus choices for unemployed women – particularly the better-educated middle-classes – were severely curtailed.

The Individual Vocational Training Scheme was revived in name, but was effectively group training for clerical work or specialist cookery. Numbers were small, for example, 18 girls entered the Pitman Jubilee Scholarship in 1935. About half the 45 women attending a 1933

⁷⁴ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/5, Minutes 8 October 1931 and 14 July 1932.

⁷⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/17, MoL Draft Evidence to Royal Commission, nd (December 1930), Paragraphs 75-8, pp.28-9.

specialist cookery course had secondary level education, and included 30 women over 40. Some had clerical experience, others had not worked before, one was a professional cellist.⁷⁶

Although the focus of women's training remained domestic service, there were limited attempts at expansion into alternative opportunities. In 1938 the MoL allocated an unspecified amount 'to a scheme conducted by another organisation'. This was possibly the Yorkshire-based Cleveland Training and Employment Council, set up in 1932 under the chairmanship of the local MP's wife to find jobs for Cleveland youngsters outside their own depressed area.⁷⁷ In 1937 the UAB called for factory training for unemployed women and, in 1938, a special training course for female factory workers was indeed set up on an (unnamed) 'trading estate' of the English Special Areas Commissioner. The same year the MoL funded a local authority course for female silk weavers, organised in West Cumberland Special Area.⁷⁸ But such sporadic and localised attempts were never a serious threat either to the dominance of domestic service training or to the key role of the CCWTE. It had ventured into industrial training in 1932, experimenting with a class for 48 female weavers, burlers and menders in Shipley. The revival of the woollen trade had led to a shortage of such workers, and the CCWTE circumvented its remit by funding the venture from its own monies to benefit more than one firm.⁷⁹

The major drawback to promoting domestic service remained the unwillingness of potential employees. Ministers acknowledged the disinclination of women from industry to switch to domestic service. Underlying reasons – poor conditions, low status, lack of freedom, isolation and loneliness, loss of unemployment insurance rights – were ignored. Servants had reason to fear unemployment, with only institutional workers covered by the benefit scheme. This threatened loss of benefit rights, inherent in entering domestic service, remained a serious obstacle for any woman failing to find work in her normal insurable trade.

The question of status – an elusive quality defying definition but at the root of antipathy to domestic service – remained an apparently insoluble problem. By the late 1930s it was widely realised that solving the servant problem went hand in hand with tackling root causes of domestic service's unpopularity. Theories were expounded in the House on how to raise status, such debates invariably raising counter arguments from those who felt domestic service needed no improvement. House of Commons debates in 1937 highlight recognition of the CCWTE's work and illustrate tenor of arguments and prevailing attitudes.

⁷⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/5, Minutes 9 February 1933 and Report on Special Cookery Class January-September 1933; Box 3/6, Minutes 10 October 1935 and 4 May 1936.

⁷⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/19, Letter Miss Tomlinson to Violet Markham, 17 May 1933; 332 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 518, 24 February 1938.

⁷⁸ Burns *British Unemployment Programs* p.272.

⁷⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/5, Minutes 10 March 1932.

June's debate focused on the issue of training. Thelma Cazalet felt that dealing with the poor status and conditions in domestic service would automatically lead to adjustment of wages, free time and companionship.⁸⁰ This naïve view reveals that Cazalet, like many contemporaries, failed to appreciate fundamental problems in domestic service – its unpopularity among working women and engrained attitudes towards it. If a long-term training programme plus good mistresses was all it needed to raise status and conditions of domestic service, then why had it not already improved? For Cazalet herself highlighted the CCWTE's training work and the existence of many good mistresses.

Mr Sexton called domestic service class-based slavery with servants treated like outcasts – 'the very Cinderellas of our social life, and there are still some ugly sisters in the world'. He asserted that girls from Special Areas entered service through economic necessity not through any desire to leave home, serve the rich, or wear 'the badge of servitude'.⁸¹ He recognised that domestic service was often a last resort when all other options were closed, thus underlining the unpopularity and servile status of domestic service which alienated many working women.

July's debate brought recognition from Minister of Labour Ernest Brown for the 'very remarkable work' of the CCWTE, the 'oldest of the affiliated organisations of the Ministry of Labour'. Brown invited MPs to visit the CCWTE's 'admirably run' domestic training centres where they would be impressed by work undertaken. He asked MPs to consider how to address 'vital obstacles' – traditional antipathy, leisure, lack of status – affecting the current poor view of domestic service to make progress in 'one of the noblest things that men and women can do, that of assisting to make comfortable and happy homes'. As a measure of his esteem, Brown asserted that such a move must be made 'through the great machinery' of the CCWTE.⁸²

His appreciation of the CCWTE seems genuine but, since Brown was the Minister charged with solving female unemployment and the servant problem, it was in his Government's interest to support and encourage the CCWTE's work – at least as far as domestic training was concerned.

Brown's fulsome appreciation of domestic service as a noble occupation for men and women (interestingly he refers to both sexes) brought supportive responses. Some MPs maintained that objections to service were rooted in Victorian and Edwardian days, when conditions were 'intolerable or humiliating'. One MP, dismissing as 'pure snobbishness' the labelling of domestic service as derogatory, listed numerous advantages for girls following this occupation – accommodation, food, good wages, household training, and bequests from

⁸⁰ 325 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1283-5, 23 June 1937.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, cols 1298-9.

⁸² 326 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 210-1, 6 July 1937.

grateful mistresses. An (unidentified) newspaper report of a servant inheriting £10,000 plus dog and canary from her mistress was cited to support this last claim.⁸³ Such comments reveal an ignorance of domestic service as experienced by most workers – conditions may have improved since Edwardian times, servants may have received bequests, but these were not the norm.

Unswayed by such praise for domestic service and evidently unimpressed by the possibility of a servant inheriting her mistress's wealth (not to mention canary and dog), another MP expressed adamant opposition to 'shameful' domestic service which prevented girls from doing useful and productive work. He furthermore proposed an examination for employers, those failing to be 'sentenced to a certain period of domestic service.'⁸⁴ It is difficult to gauge the tenor of this speech from reading the text in Hansard, but this suggestion appears to be neither serious proposal nor frivolous banter. Rather it seems an attempt to awaken MPs from their complacency over the realities of domestic service. Hansard conveys no idea of how the House reacted, but many responses must have been derisory.

These lengthy 1937 debates illustrate both continuity and change in domestic service issues among MPs. They continued to be concerned over domestic service. Attitudes remained divided. The link between unemployment and the servant problem was evident, if less overtly stated. There is one striking change – greater awareness of the roles played by status and working conditions, and a growing realisation that these issues had to be addressed.

One unusual (possibly unique) event which sought to address these issues and in which the CCWTE was involved was the *Domestic Services Exhibition and Conference* staged in January 1938 at Westminster, London. The organisers were clear in their stated aims:

By means of demonstrations to mistresses and servants [...]; by means of competitions such as table-laying, shoe-cleaning, using a vacuum-cleaner, taking a telephone message, cooking a meal etc; by focussing public attention on this important service it is hoped that a step will be taken to solve this problem which drives so deeply into the roots of our National Life.⁸⁵

The Exhibition boasted a wealth of support – including National Federation of Women's Institutes, National Union of Townswomen's Guilds, the philanthropic Girls' Friendly Society, YWCA, Salvation Army, Electrical Association for Women, Women's Gas Council, and Good Housekeeping Institute. The list of 23 patrons – only five were men – reads like a 1930s Who's Who of campaigners for women's interests. From a broad political and social spectrum, they included Ellen Wilkinson, Thelma Cazalet, Geoffrey Mander (MPs deeply

⁸³ Ibid, cols 279-80 and col 284.

⁸⁴ Ibid, cols 281-2.

⁸⁵ PRO, ED 46/293 Part I, Domestic Services Exhibition Poster.

involved in debates on women's issues), Lady Gladstone of Hawarden and Dame Margaret Lloyd George (from noted political families), Caroline Haslett (Electrical Association for Women), Miss Eland (Principal, National Training College of Domestic Subjects), and the feminist writer Vera Brittain.⁸⁶ That such persons were willing to link their names to the Exhibition indicates how seriously they viewed domestic service. Equally, since the aim was to promote service, alternatives to domestic service were not viewed as a viable option – the status quo of mistresses and maids was to be (hopefully) maintained.

The Domestic Services Exhibition ran for seven days. Lectures included promotion of social groups like Wayfarers Guild (see Chapter 1), practical advice on healthy lifestyles, debates on the relative merits of factory work and domestic service, and employer-employee discussions on the servant problem. The CCWTE's contribution was a lecture by the Superintendent of Lapsewood Training Centre on 'How to get training if you are unemployed'.⁸⁷

The 1938 Exhibition seems a genuine attempt to address the escalating servant problem both by alerting potential employees to training opportunities (including CCWTE courses) and the facilities of social/welfare organisations and by allowing public debate on the problem and its solutions. Despite impressive support, its success – if any – can only have been limited and of short duration. This was due to two factors – an insistence on maintaining the status quo against evidence that such domestic service was in serious decline, and external events.

The Exhibition coincided with a highly publicised campaign by Minister of Labour Ernest Brown to devise ways to make domestic service more attractive. The *Evening Standard* reported in December 1937 that Brown was to 'resume his search for a solution of the domestic servant problem'. This, according to the newspaper, would involve a charter relating to employment conditions – something previous Governments had studiously avoided. The *Sunday Express* told its readers in January 1938 that Brown would seek the CCWTE's advice over proposals to solve the 'problem of servant shortage' – which proposals (wrote the reporter) would include more leisure, modern devices, higher status.⁸⁸

The Minister of Labour's publicly stated intention to tackle the domestic service problem – with CCWTE help and advice – suggests that serious attempts were being made to address the issue from the servants' viewpoint. For low status, limited leisure, and poor conditions were issues noted by servants in the Women's Industrial Council survey in 1914.

⁸⁶ PRO ED 46/293 Part I, *Domestic Services Exhibition – January 15-21 1938*.

⁸⁷ PRO ED 46/293 Part I, List of Conference lectures and discussions.

⁸⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/20, Cutting *Evening Standard* 28 December 1937 and Cutting *Sunday Express* 16 January 1938; 331 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2048, 17 February 1938.

(See discussion in Chapter 1.) Nearly a quarter of a century later it seemed that workers' complaints were going to be dealt with, at last.

The 1937 debates, the 1938 Exhibition and Brown's campaign to tackle the domestic service problem suggest that women resisted entering service, and would be equally resistant to the CCWTE's training programmes. Is this borne out by the narrative evidence?

There is no doubt that mistresses appreciated the CCWTE's work. Two letters from Preston housewives to the local Home Training Centre in 1932 illustrate this:

I have had two of your girls, and cannot speak too highly of your methods of training. The first one stayed with me till she married, and the second is still here. Of course, in three months one doesn't expect them to learn everything but you inculcate the right ideas and what is very important, respect for their work and their mistresses – believe me after twenty years experience of maids I am very grateful for that.⁸⁹

She is a nice bright girl, most willing and obliging and does the work quite as well and even better than some of the maids I had before the War. She is quite equal to any trained maid I have had, and she takes a real interest both in the house and us. I hope we shall keep her for some time as she seems quite settled and happy and we shall do our best to make her feel at home. If all your girls are as nice then mistresses will be lucky.⁹⁰

Satisfied mistresses might sometimes act as unofficial publicity agents for the CCWTE output of trained girls:

My mistress is very enthusiastic about the training centre. We have another maid here from the Stockton H.T.C. and she persuades all her friends to send for their maids there. I am very happy here, and would like to thank the Committee for their interest.⁹¹

It is clear that many unemployed women appreciated the opportunity to attend CCWTE courses, residential or non-residential, as the following selected comments demonstrate:

I shall always remember and appreciate the training which I received at the Blyth Training Centre. I can always say that the Centre taught me one method and I have found out that that is the one and only way to succeed in service, to be methodical. [...] The only thing I regret is not having gone to service sooner than I have done.

I thank the [Glasgow] Training Centre for what it has done for me. I have got a good post and I am very happy here and I get a lot of outings. I would never have been a servant but for the training I received as I knew nothing about housework.⁹²

⁸⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/18, Letter Mrs Ashworth to Miss Spooner, 31 January 1932.

⁹⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/18, Letter Mrs Haworth to Miss Spooner, 14 January 1932.

⁹¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/19, *Report of enquiry into post-training histories of trainees from the Residential & Non-residential Domestic Training Centres of the CCWTE*, Appendix III, nd [c.1933].

⁹² *Ibid.*

I want to assure you I am more than grateful for the training I had in the [Ystrad] Centre and that it quite brought me out in life and showed me the right way to go about things of which I had no idea of before.

I think domestic service is fine for a girl, especially if she happens to get a good situation like I have. I cannot understand why more girls are not anxious to take service as they receive every encouragement and help from the Training Centre.

I desire to say that the training received is invaluable to those taking domestic work. I could certainly not have done my work here without it, and I am very thankful indeed for the kind attention given to me while at the [Rotherham] centre and also since I have been away. I have been in my present situation 16 months, and see no reason for wanting to go home and being out of work, as I have never done any work whatever before going to the centre. You will I hope realise how thankful I am for the chance I had.⁹³

Such comments about changes in lifestyle are typical of comments made by trainees, indicating that without the CCWTE such changes would have difficult if not impossible to make. However, not all trainees were enamoured of the domestic service posts they found and often reverted back to their former jobs:

I had two posts as Cook-General, and found neither of these places were suitable, so I went back to my usual work as shop-assistant. Before I went to the [Liverpool] Training Centre I was 8 yrs in a large draper's firm in town. I am now working in a draper's shop. I gave this work a fair trial, and find I am not suited for it.

I went back to the mill – I have got used to it. I like domestic work, but I did not care for the place where I was at because the work was too hard for me. But if I ever have to go out again I would like a place where I had no cooking to do.

I have returned to my own trade of weaving. I left domestic service because the place was not suitable and my sleeping accommodation was very uncomfortable. I can only say that my state of health was considerably worsened after that fortnight than it was before I went. I am quite comfortable where I am now and have no intention of entering domestic service again.⁹⁴

Occasionally, the bad experience of domestic service left a deeper impression, as in the cases of these Liverpool and Warrington trainees:

I left domestic service because I expected to be treated as a human being and not as a dog – I did not expect it to be easy – Nobody will have you if you don't work but we can only do our best, and I am sure we all make mistakes. I do not profess to know everything nor have a college education but I know how to treat people. No wonder there is unemployment, who would work for such people – only those with no respect for themselves. Maybe I was unlucky but it was a wonderful experience anyway. I have not had a job since as my parents would rather I stayed at home than work for such.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Most of the employers seem to think we are not properly trained and if one does their utmost it does not seem to please them. I have held this post for four months last Tuesday the matron sent for me and after telling me all my faults and I might say a few of my good points left it to me to give my notice in. I have almost had enough of domestic service.⁹⁶

But the CCWTE training went beyond the chance to change jobs. Better health, good food and pleasant surroundings are all mentioned as associated benefits:

I am not hard-worked and I get liberal outings and the people I am with are very considerate about my welfare, always ready to share in my joys and sympathise in my sorrows

I have benefited greatly by my training at Auchinreith Training Centre, I was an industrial worker previous to going there. I am now in a position to earn a better and much cleaner living than before. I have two sisters namely Ellen and Mary both went to the Training Centre at Hamilton. Ellen went 8 years ago to it and got her first job from there she has been in employment since. Mary went to Auchinreith centre 4 years ago and got her first job from there she also has been in constant employment since. I hope to be able to say the same in the future as them. It is a great benefit to those who like to put their mind to their betterment. I have two brothers (unemployed) I would be only too glad so would Father and Mother if there were only the same could be done for them.⁹⁷

I was a shop assistant for five years and I can honestly say I learned nothing of any value to me in comparison with my 3 months training. My health has improved since I took up domestic work and I am much happier, contented and independent. ... now I feel confident I could take a place in any house and do the centre justice.⁹⁸

I am writing thanking you very much for helping to get me to this situation. I am settled now so I am going to stick it. I baths every night before going to bed so I am going to do my best to be a lady. The Children and my Mistress thinks a lot of me ... I am trying my very hardest to do as you told me to I hope I will succeed in doing so. This is the best situation I ever had I have plenty to eat so I will soon be big and strong.⁹⁹

Conclusions

The 1930s saw continued high unemployment that successive Governments sought to solve through retraining and re-deployment. Regional variations in unemployment levels tended to focus attention on areas of high unemployment – likely to be areas of heavy industry where male employment predominated. Thus, training became focused on these high-profile areas. The expansion of State-funded training schemes that characterised the 1930s was therefore much more favourable to men than to women, a fact partially acknowledged by Ministers. For

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 12/2, Letters from trainees, nd [c.1934-1936].

⁹⁹ Ibid.

it is clear that the plight of unemployed men was seen as more serious and worthy of attention than that of unemployed women.

Emphasis on men's training at the expense of women's has its roots partly in prevailing attitudes to paid employment, tending to characterise men as breadwinners and women as guardians of home and family. (But which ignored the actual situation in many households, particularly those with no male breadwinner or who needed double income to survive.) This attitude was bolstered by the continuing perceived shortage of domestic servants, which Government saw as a convenient sector into which to direct unemployed women. Direction was achieved, as in the 1920s, through encouragement, persuasion and frequently coercion, using the machinery of Employment Exchanges and Unemployment Assistance Boards.

The CCWTE continued to play a key role in providing training for unemployed women. But increasing dependence on annually assessed Treasury funding led to tighter control by the MoL and a narrowing of training opportunities offered by the CCWTE. Powerless to act without MoL sanction, the CCWTE was unable to expand its training schemes. After a short-lived revival of the individual vocational grant scheme and an experimental foray into industrial training, the CCWTE was constrained to provide domestic service training in one form or another.

The major change in women's training provision was not in course content but in type of arrangement. Concurrent with non-residential Home Training Centres – a feature of the 1920s – the CCWTE offered residential courses. The rationale for this change seems to have been to provide a more sustained and permanent training scheme than hitherto attempted, moving away from the non-residential centres that had followed local trends in unemployment. By offering the chance to 'live in' while training, the CCWTE was effectively allowing trainees to become accustomed to the constraints of residential domestic service.

Of wider import, and a major change in attitude, was a growing realisation that the servant problem would continue unless root causes of its unpopularity were tackled. A publicly-staged Domestic Services Exhibition in 1938 sought both to maintain the status quo and to popularise domestic service, offering mistresses and maids the chance to discuss the problems of service. Debates in the House of Commons reveal entrenched views on both sides of the argument, with domestic service (especially for women) labelled both a noble profession and slavery. An early attempt in 1931 to introduce legislation to regulate domestic service failed, but the expressed desire for improvements in the conditions of domestic service received a boost in 1938 when the Minister of Labour publicly vowed to tackle this issue. By 1938 it seemed that the concerns of servants, expressed as long ago as 1914, were finally to be addressed.

Chapter 6: Struggling to survive 1939-1945

Aims

This Chapter investigates the place of domestic service and the role of the CCWTE in wartime Britain, when Government faced contradictions over employment. On one hand, it needed a workforce geared to meet war needs – the means adopted are examined, with particular reference to women’s work. Conversely, the Ministry of Labour faced a dichotomy over domestic service – while not wholly unsympathetic towards private households wishing to retain servants, the MoL was instrumental in promoting institutional domestic service as an essential wartime occupation for women. The conflict engendered by this private-versus-institutional issue is explored here, as is briefly the post-war conflict between women’s roles as mothers and workers.

Having held a key position in State training initiatives since 1914, the CCWTE found itself sidelined during the war. The mounting conflict between the CCWTE and Government is assessed, in the light of the CCWTE’s subsequent demise and the immediate post-war promotion of domestic service.

Economic Context

Although Chapter 5 pinpointed 1938 as heralding a new era for domestic service – with Minister of Labour Ernest Brown publicly embarked on a quest to improve status and conditions – these expectations failed to materialise. Brown’s good intentions were overtaken by the outbreak of war in September 1939. The problems of one employment sector were overshadowed by Government’s need to focus on national survival. Even had Brown remained in office in Churchill’s 1940 Government, it is unlikely that he would have had time, energy or inclination to fulfil his pledge on domestic service. His successor Ernest Bevin had more urgent employment problems to consider – not the headache of vast numbers of unemployed as in the 1920s and 1930s, but the demand of critical wartime industries for workers.

During 1939 unemployment was still causing concern. In March Brown informed MPs that training courses for the unemployed were being tailored to meet varying demands of industry. Men’s training for building trades had diminished but training for engineering had increased. New courses had begun to train men in semi-skilled work for the aircraft industry and – an experiment – to train women, hitherto ‘virtually confined to domestic service’ training, in factory methods.¹

¹ 344 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1430-1, 2 March 1939.

Although this experimental course indicates a Government already alive to potential wartime labour shortages, it is clear that many MPs still focused on filling domestic service vacancies. Trade union help was canvassed, Brown being urged to enlist union leaders' help to fill vacancies in 'well-paid and well-treated domestic employment'. Further suggestions included a national women's service board on the lines of the Milk Marketing Board 'to produce Grade A women'. But Brown had recently rejected a TUC deputation's request for an inquiry into domestic service, on the grounds of not serving any useful purpose since the problem was not uniquely British. One MP having highlighted the role of the Domestic Servants' Union in protecting servants from 'cheap-minded and inconsiderate' employers, Brown added that it was interesting that 'for the first time' the TUC had 'accepted responsibility for forming this union [...] to help servants'.² Yet Brown gradually distanced himself from the servant problem.³ This indicates his awareness of the threat of war, which would dictate switching focus from the servant shortage to issues of wider national importance.

Women were clearly expected to form a vital part of a wartime workforce. In July 1939 women with 'special professional, scientific or technical qualifications' were requested to register with the MoL, in expectation of being called upon to meet the extra technical and professional wartime needs of both Government departments and industry. In October Brown declared Government employment policy to be utilisation of the 'full resources of our man and woman power'. In November legislation was urged to promote employment of older women (defined as over 30) – employers to be offered inducements to take a fixed proportion of such workers. But Brown dismissed the idea as impracticable. It is unclear whether this idea was prompted by anxiety over women's unemployment or over employers' shortages. If the latter, then the current training of over 60,000 men, many unemployed, for war industries was surely gratifying.⁴

The MoL (renamed Ministry of Labour and National Service, stressing connotations of wartime needs) continued to provide training centres for unemployed men, although – unsurprisingly – a scheme for demobilising soldiers was suspended. With numbers of applicants at a record high, intensive efforts were also made to fill 2,332 equipped but unfilled places were made via broadcast and Press, as well as via changes in eligibility and better financial allowances (especially for married men).⁵

² 346 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 465-6, 20 April 1939.

³ 347 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1591-2, 18 May 1939.

⁴ 350 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1641, 27 July 1939; 352 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 489, 11 October 1939; 353 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 57, 7 November 1939; 355 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 219, 30 November 1939.

⁵ 357 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1564, 22 February 1940.

Employment Exchanges also had a role to play in filling wartime jobs. In February 1940 it was acknowledged that, due to the war, re-classification of registered unemployed might be necessary – however, Exchanges were already trying to place men and women in suitable necessary jobs. Exchanges had always recorded applicants' subsidiary or alternative jobs and steps were being taken with appropriate employers and trade union representatives to allow speedy transfer of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers to meet wartime needs.⁶

There were worries that women's labour was being wasted. The new ministers in Churchill's administration were at pains to emphasise their commitment to the war effort. In June 1940 Lord Privy Seal Clement Attlee refuted claims of lack of co-ordination of activities among women's organisations for the war effort and firmly rejected the idea of compulsory service for women. Minister of Labour Ernest Bevin assured MPs that employment of women in large organisations was encouraged, asserting that factories not training centres offered the best training. Eleanor Rathbone evidently disagreed, for she asked what use was made of the CCWTE 'which has done good work but which is not being fully utilised'.⁷ Attlee's and Bevin's attitudes are difficult to explain. Shortage of manpower in this war was likely to be as severe as in the Great War, where women had formed a replacement workforce. Was reluctance to train and direct women due to a belief that they would once more willingly step into the (short term) breach? Or was it feared that women would demand better terms than their 1914 predecessors? Having failed to gain long-term benefits from previous war experiences, would women undertake to fill the breach again on similar terms? Dilution and the Restoration of Pre-War Practices had seen women used effectively as a reserve army of labour, a point made by Braybon but questioned by Walby.⁸ Summerfield has argued that mobilising women for war presented three distinct problems. First, there was no guarantee that women would switch from old occupations to new jobs in industry. Second, there was the willingness – or otherwise – of married women to take on paid work in addition to their family responsibilities. Third was the age-old problem of whether employers and unions would accept women workers.⁹

Contemporary evidence bears out the under-use of female labour at this stage. London Employment Exchanges, for example, frequently rejected women over 45 for war work, although Minister of Labour Ernest Bevin denied that a woman's age presented a barrier.¹⁰

⁶ 357 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 975-7, 15 February 1940; 361 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1355, 13 June 1940.

⁷ 362 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 156-7, 19 June 1940 and col 575, 27 June 1940.

⁸ Gail Braybon *Women Workers in the First World War* (Croom Helm, 1981. Reprinted Routledge, 1989); Sylvia Walby *Patriarchy at Work: Patriarchal and Capitalist Relations in Employment* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), pp.74-80. See also discussion in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁹ Penny Summerfield *Women Workers in the Second World War* (Croom Helm, 1984), p.24.

¹⁰ 362 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1351, 11 July 1940.

Excepting civil defence and welfare, openings seem rooted in domestic arenas rather than factories, offices, the Services. A partial explanation for not harnessing women's labour power may lie in the progress of the war, for Britain had undergone a period of calm after September 1939 – the so-called Phoney War. Indeed, Bevin asserted that war itself was one of the greatest obstacles to employment of men and women, because war did not necessarily ensure available work. This brought a sharp retort from one MP that this was simply bad organisation.¹¹

As the war progressed changes to employment policy were implemented, notably placing workers into designated essential industries. In January 1941 Bevin stated his intention of replacing men with women in firms working on Government contracts. Acknowledging local resentment against firms adopting this policy, Bevin pledged his full support. Women would be put on 'work suitable to them' thus releasing men for work which 'necessitates the employment of men'. Furthermore, Bevin was adamant over diverting people from inessential to essential work, seeking to reassure MPs who felt keeping five or more servants hampered the war effort.¹²

Despite Bevin's assertions that the MoL was well placed to co-ordinate wartime demands for workers, MPs expressed worries over the 'large numbers' of young women who had left areas subjected to enemy attack but were now 'living in idleness' in safe areas. The Minister was urged to take steps to recruit these women into 'the service of their country'. Bevin assured MPs that steps were taken to encourage such women to register for work but added that many had never been wage earners before and thus presented a 'more difficult problem'.¹³ Juveniles also presented a problem, largely due to the growth of in-job training which adversely affected recruitment to Government training centres.¹⁴

Definition of essential work seems to have been somewhat fluid, perhaps reflecting the changing needs of a nation at war. It is clear that at this stage domestic service was not viewed as essential, although – as this Chapter will demonstrate – this view was modified. Essential work would have entailed employment within sectors designated vital to national survival – food production, transport, power, medical services, public services (police, fire), government administration (local/central), children's services (education, welfare, nurseries), the Armed Services, heavy industry (mining, steel, shipbuilding), and factory and office work in support of the war effort.

¹¹ 364 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 982-3, 15 August 1940.

¹² 368 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 208, 22 January 1941 and cols 651-2, 30 January 1941.

¹³ 368 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1373, 12 February 1941; 369 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 992-3, 6 March 1941.

¹⁴ 373 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2104, 7 August 1941; 377 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 397, 22 January 1942 and cols 898-9, 29 January 1942.

The most significant policy change for women was the Employment of Women (Control of Engagement) Order, effective from 16th February 1942. This Order, subsequently modified to extend the criteria, constituted effective conscription – the first time in British history that such a step was taken. Initially, it prevented employers from offering a job directly to any woman aged 20-30 and such women from taking a job directly from an employer unless she held a Ministry permit to do so. Exemptions applied to a woman with a child under 14 living with her or who was blind. Occupational exemptions included agriculture, horticulture, forestry, professional sick nursing, midwifery, and teaching in university or school. By March, 100 private employment agencies had been approved under this Order – involving such bodies as University Appointments Boards, Industrial Welfare Society, Institute of Labour Management, Institute of Hospital Almoners, Society of Radiographers, Society of Women Housing Managers, and the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes.¹⁵

Bevin confessed to disappointment that the system in industry made it difficult to get women workers accepted. This he attributed to two causes. First, trade unions were wary of losing hard-fought gains – something he had personal knowledge of as a former union leader. Second, there was a need to avoid a repetition of the ‘terrible industrial disturbance’ generated by soldiers back from the Great War who found ‘bitter disappointment’ on returning to their work. (The bitter disappointment of women workers thrown out of work by the Armistice apparently eluded him.) Bevin further argued in his defence that, contrary to popular belief, there was no surplus of women for him to use as a resource. In fact, the number – some 11 million either not gainfully employed or in domestic work – was about the same as the final year of the Great War. Therefore it was vital to move people from non-essential to essential occupations wherever possible. This might mean married women replacing mobile women (defined by Government as those having no familial ties) in local factories. Bevin concluded by expressing Government’s ‘admiration and heartfelt thanks’ to the women who had responded ‘so nobly to the nation’s need’. He praised their courage and fine example, declaring that victory would have been nearer if everyone had shown similar energy, adaptability and unselfishness. He ended by referring to a nation favoured with ‘a devoted womanhood’.¹⁶

‘Conscription’ of women was to have a major impact on employment patterns, significantly increasing women’s presence in industry. As the regulations were modified during the war, larger numbers of women were affected, including married women and mothers.

¹⁵ 377 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 929, 29 January 1942; 378 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1633, 19 March 1942. See also Gail Braybon & Penny Summerfield *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars* (Pandora, 1987), pp.159-160.

¹⁶ 378 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 893, col 895 and cols 899-900, 5 March 1942.

Summerfield has analysed this impact on women workers, focusing on their industrial presence. She argues that Bevin only reluctantly introduced female 'conscription', preferring to maintain a semblance of voluntary effort rather than compulsion.¹⁷ Her study shows how the burden of war work impinged especially on women with children, with household chores being made harder under wartime conditions – food queues, rationing, childcare. This last was a major problem. In an effort to persuade mothers to assume a greater role in wartime employment, the Government made concessions to their needs. One example was the creation of nurseries – admittedly too few and for wartime only.¹⁸

Many women – weary of their double burden of paid and unpaid work – may have been relieved to relinquish their wartime jobs. But other women were denied a choice on employment. Most trade training – including artificial limb making; building (bricklayers, carpenters, painters, plasterers, plumbers, wood machinists); building & civil engineering fitting; draughtsmanship; electricians; hairdressing; tailoring; typewriter repair; watch & clock repairing; welding – was firmly based in traditional male trades and this is reflected in the numbers of trainees (2,766 men and 51 women).¹⁹ As Braybon & Summerfield illustrate, some women were reluctant to return to their former jobs – for instance, women in Royal Ordnance factories who preferred the improved conditions and wages there to those of their old jobs in textile mills. And in an echo of attitudes after the Great War, trade unions were reluctant to support – or were even hostile towards – women workers who protested against dismissal. Similarly, office workers found themselves demoted or moved back into their segregated 'female' jobs.²⁰

Yet, almost immediately, Government was faced with a seemingly impossible dilemma. On one hand, it needed women back in their traditional role in the home to concentrate on motherhood and thus boost the population, the decline of which had been of great concern even before the war.²¹ On the other hand, it needed women to work in factories to boost the export drive vital to provide funds to support an impoverished post-war country. To counter the exodus of women from industry, Attlee's Government was forced to institute campaigns for recruitment, although with apparently limited success.²²

¹⁷ Penny Summerfield *Women Workers in the Second World War* (Croom Helm, 1984), pp.34-7.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Chapter 4.

¹⁹ 414 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1363-4, 18 October 1945; 421 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2499-50, 16 April 1946.

²⁰ Braybon & Summerfield *Out of the Cage*, pp.259-261.

²¹ For concerns over decline in Britain's population see, among others, Peter Dewey *War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945* (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), pp.48-52; Deirdre Beddoe *Back to Home and Duty: women between the wars 1918-1939* (Pandora, 1989), pp.104-9; Diana Gittins *Fair Sex: family size and structure, 1900-39* (Hutchinson, 1982), pp.76-80.

²² Arthur Marwick 'A social history of Britain 1945-1983' in D. Punter (ed) *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies* (London & New York: Longman: 1986), p.21 and p.28; William Crofts 'The Attlee Government's Pursuit of Women' *History Today* 36(8) (August 1986), pp.29-35.

The longer term impact of State intervention on women's employment is clearly seen by comparing workforce percentages within specified occupations for 1939 and 1943 and 1948/1950:

Occupation	1939	1943	1948	1950
Chemicals	27	52	31	
Commerce	35		38	
Local/national Government	17	46	38	
Engineering	10	34		21
Metal manufacture	6	22		12
Transport	5	20		13
Shipbuilding	2	9	3	

Table 6.1 demonstrates how women's employment patterns were changed not only during the war – thanks to 'conscription' plus the greater acceptance of women working in industry – but also that post-war gains were consolidated in many areas. Admittedly, 1943 levels were not maintained, but industrial occupations frequently showed a marked improvement for female participation over 1939 rates.

Government concessions (such as nurseries) plus the introduction of female 'conscription' had altered the composition of the female labour force during the war. Whereas only 16 per cent of working women in 1931 were married, by 1943 this has grown to 43 per cent. Similarly, whereas most working women in 1931 were aged 18-24 (41 per cent) with only 16 per cent aged 35-44, by 1943 this had evened out to 27 and 26 per cent respectively.²⁴ Summerfield argues that these changes in marital status and age distribution were permanent legacies of the war but ones which did little to advance women's employment opportunities in post-war Britain.²⁵

The 1942-43 Government Inquiry into Domestic Help

Domestic service remained a constant worry during the war, although emphasis shifted to institutional forms – canteens, hospitals, laundries. As the war intensified, more women entered industry and other essential jobs. Some undoubtedly sought excitement, others the chance to contribute to the war effort, while some perhaps hoped to forestall the forthcoming compulsory direction of women.

²³ Summerfield *Women Workers*, pp.29-30, p.187 and p.199.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.31.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.188.

This redistribution of women's labour affected domestic service. One hard-hit sector was the laundry industry. In April 1941 the Government was forced to acknowledge that laundry workers provided a vital service to the health and efficiency of hospitals, nursery schools etc. Furthermore, laundry workers – male or female – who wished to change jobs were urged to take advice from Employment Exchanges, who would likely advise them to stay put. By September the MoL was forced to take steps to avoid laundries being depleted of staff, including a May 1942 announcement that women laundry workers would not be called up.²⁶

Another sector seriously affected was domestic service in hospitals and similar institutions. In October 1941 Eleanor Rathbone MP highlighted shortages of domestic staff in many voluntary hospitals, causing some to consider closure. Ernest Brown, now Minister of Health, assured her that he was aware of the problem. He pointed out that domestic employment in hospitals was recognised as 'one of the services of most urgent national importance' and was actively recruited for by the MoL. To this end there was no intention of calling up female domestics in child welfare institutions. Announcements for exemptions of other domestic workers followed – hospitals in October 1941 and private nursing homes (unless exempted) in March 1943.²⁷

A 1930 survey had claimed that servants considered institutional service superior to private service, rarely changing from the former to the latter. Three reasons for its alleged popularity were defined working hours, daily work, companionship.²⁸ Hospital matrons interviewed in the survey substantiated these claims. Although London hospitals lacked a standard work pattern, there was greater recognition of regular free time for servants. For example, at York Road General Lying In Hospital, resident staff had at least one hour off daily plus one free afternoon and evening weekly and alternate Sundays free. Even on non-free days they were permitted to go out after noon provided their work was complete. The cook was also allowed one weekend free each month, while 'Other servants are sometimes allowed a weekend if they have been good'. Many daily servants at this hospital were local women 'within a penny bus-ride'. Their hours were not rigidly fixed – they had to complete their tasks before leaving – but they were offered breakfast, dinner and, if on the premises, tea.²⁹

²⁶ 370 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1670, 10 April 1941; 374 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 318, 11 September 1941; 379 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1381, 7 May 1942.

²⁷ 374 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1096-7, 9 October 1941; 383 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1086-7, 6 October 1942; 387 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1347-8, 18 March 1943.

²⁸ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *Domestic Service in Institutions* nd [1930].

²⁹ BLPES, NSOL, Parcel 4, File 4/4, *General Lying In Hospital, York Road* information obtained from *Matron* 18 December 1929.

While institutional domestic service may have been a more popular job with women, the strains imposed on wartime hospitals promoted fresh worries – not for workers' welfare but to ensure that institutions could cope adequately and recruit staff. The importance of such work was boosted by Minister of Labour Ernest Bevin's decision in July 1943 to appoint a committee to investigate institutional domestic service. Specifically its remit was to investigate wages and conditions of domestics in the health service.³⁰

Chairman Sir Hector Hetherington (Principal, Glasgow University) was assisted by Mr Darbyshire (Vice President, London, Midland & Scottish Railways) and Dorothy Elliott (National Union of General & Municipal Workers). Their report, published in November, was accepted by Bevin who appointed a small Advisory Committee of fifteen members.³¹ The Chairman was MoL Parliamentary Secretary Mr McCorquodale, with CCWTE member Violet Markham as Vice Chairman.³² The recommendations of the Report and the added status these gave to institutional domestic service was to have a profound significance for domestic service as an employment sector, effectively divorcing the two aspects of institutional and private work.

Following publication of the Hetherington Report, the Government's main priority was to supply domestic workers to hospitals and other institutions, aided by a specific recruitment campaign. Adopting the Report's recommendations on improved wages and conditions, the publicity campaign, 'in full swing for some time', was getting a good response – 4,000 domestic workers were placed in hospitals and institutions, 500 in children's homes and 460 in the schools meal service in February 1944. In March another 4,000 were placed in hospitals.³³

Between January and September 1944 over 34,000 women were placed in domestic work in hospitals, mental institutions, sanatoria, nursing homes, children's homes (compared with almost 12,000 in private households and as home helps.) The net increase during the first six months of 1944 in full time institutional domestic staff was approximately 5,500. Overall, 38,000 women and 3,000 men were placed in hospitals, sanatoria, mental institutions and nursing homes between the time of granting special priority for such domestic service and November 1944.³⁴

³⁰ *Report of the Committee on Minimum Rates of Wages and Conditions of Employment in connection with Special Arrangements for Domestic Help* PP 1942-3 (Cmd 6841), IV, 271.

³¹ 391 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1799-1800, 29 July 1943; 393 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 868-70, 4 November 1943.

³² 396 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 340-1, 20 January 1944. See also PRO, LAB 18/105/ET 403/1945 Standing Advisory Committee on Institutional Domestic Employment, Meeting 21 December 1943.

³³ 399 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1570-1, 4 May 1944. See also PRO, LAB 18/105/ET 403/1945, *Domestic Employment Statistics* March 1944.

³⁴ 403 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2402, 18 October 1944; 404 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2093-4, 16 November 1944; 406 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 771-2, 7 December 1944.

The solution to the shortfall in institutional domestics became firmly gender biased. The Minister of Labour saw women as filling the gap in this now essential work, for a 1944 MoL memorandum drew attention to training available 'at Government expense':

This is the latest step taken by Mr Bevin towards providing hospitals and institutions with the domestic workers they need. The shortage of such workers has been one of the country's most pressing *womanpower* problems, and this scheme of training is a fresh contribution to its solution.³⁵

The end of the war had a detrimental effect on such domestic recruitment. Having filled nearly 50,000 institutional vacancies during 1945, Exchange placements fell sharply after the war ended.³⁶ It seemed as if another crisis in domestic service was looming.

But if institutional domestic service was given top priority, private domestic service was not ignored, despite a clear conflict between keeping domestic servants in private households and meeting the shortfall in essential war industries. Whereas institutional service gained new status by its inclusion as essential work plus a Committee to monitor and regulate conditions and wages, private service suffered additional ignominy. Still labouring under the perennial stigma of low status, it was now often viewed as tantamount to evading wartime obligations. Yet the Government – surprisingly, given its aim to use all labour power to meet wartime needs – was not oblivious to the pleas of those who spoke for the servant-employing classes.

The Hetherington Report accentuated the difference between institutional and private domestic service. Despite repeated calls from MPs for action to be taken over the problems inherent in retaining servants in private houses, the Government declined to instigate any kind of inquiry or make legislative changes affecting the pay and conditions of private domestic service. Ministers' main concern was to direct women into work of national importance, in keeping with the 'great and increasing' demands on woman labour. Furthermore, Bevin thought that 'the experiment of doing a little domestic work by the families themselves might have a good effect'. To Eleanor Rathbone's plea for giving the ATS priority due to its grave shortage of domestically experienced women, Bevin replied that all Services were suffering a shortage but that he was attempting to use 'lower grade categories for kitchen and domestic work in the Army'. This would, he said, release other women for factory jobs.³⁷

³⁵ PRO, Lab 18/105/ET 403/1945, Press Office MoL *Government Training in Domestic Work* 25 May 1944. (My italics)

³⁶ 420 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 933, 12 March 1946; 424 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1509-10, 27 June 1946. See Chapter 7 of this thesis for a short discussion on post-war recruitment for domestic service.

³⁷ 374 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 691, 2 October 1941 and cols 1091-2, 9 October 1941; 376 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2088, 18 December 1941.

Part of the problem with non-institutional domestic service was its inherently private nature, a personal contract between mistress and maid. Calls to set standard regulation for minimum and maximum servants per household based upon its needs and to recognise domestic service on this defined basis as a form of National Service were dismissed by the MoL as impossible. Guidelines had been issued to the effect that pre-war levels could not be maintained but that women deemed essential to households would not be moved unless they could be replaced. Special consideration applied when only one domestic worker was employed in certain types of households – those with young children, invalids, aged/infirm persons; those where both husband and wife worked or where the employer was a doctor; those where employment was on a farm and some farm-work was also undertaken.³⁸ Such undertakings were reiterated after the introduction of ‘conscriptio’ of women’s labour. The fact that MPs were assured that there were no proposals to abolish or control domestic service employment agencies suggests that private domestic service was expected to continue.³⁹

Nevertheless private domestic service remained a problem. During 1943 Bevin expressed his intention to consider the matter.⁴⁰ An exchange of letters between Bevin and Violet Markham (apparently regarded as the oracle on domestic service problems) reveals Bevin’s deep anxiety over dealing with private domestic service. Markham cautioned him of difficulties inherent in any scheme, adding that direction into private households would ‘raise a storm of protest as to who did or did not get help in this way’.⁴¹ Such cautionary advice highlights the difficult nature of private domestic service as an employment sector, exacerbated by the wartime demands on women’s labour. It also explains why no investigation, similar to the Hetherington Report, was undertaken into the wages and conditions of private domestic service. To define, implement and regulate recommendations in millions of households, with a myriad of different working arrangements among servants, would have been impossible.

Bevin did devise one scheme, that of home helps, which had a quasi-institutional aspect. The idea was not new, but the scale and organisation was. This Ministry of Health scheme operated in selected households to relieve stress. Priority cases included expectant women, mothers after confinement, and young mothers with large families, as well as doctors’ and farmers’ households and those containing invalids or large numbers of war workers. Home helps were a short-term service provided by many local authorities to provide help to mothers

³⁸ 377 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 565-6, 27 January 1942.

³⁹ 385 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 840, 26 November 1942, col 1171, 2 December 1942 and cols 346-7, 18 November 1942.

⁴⁰ 387 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 837, 11 March 1943.

⁴¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 12/2, Letter Violet Markham to Ernest Bevin, 18 October 1943. See also Letter Ernest Bevin to Violet Markham, 5 March 1943.

during childbirth or with sick children.⁴² Bevin's home helps proved broadly popular both with participating workers and local authorities, despite some claims of unfairness in allocation. By February 1945, with 19 welfare authorities establishing schemes, over 18,000 vacancies for domestic service had been filled during 1944 in private households where lack of such help caused exceptional hardship. And by July 1945 – when 180 local authorities had introduced home help schemes – nearly 25,000 persons had been placed into households suffering exceptional hardship during the previous twelve months.⁴³

The private-versus-institutional issue presented an apparently insoluble problem, not least because private domestic service was deemed beyond the scope of State intervention. While this had formed a peacetime barrier to regulating and monitoring employment conditions, in wartime it served to highlight and accentuate problems of private domestic service. The Hetherington Report, by focusing on institutional service and designating it an essential wartime occupation, accentuated the differences between institutional and private domestic service, underlining the latter's low status and unpopularity.

The 1944-45 Inquiry into Domestic Service

Whereas the Hetherington Report had been confined to the requirements of wartime institutional domestic service, the 1944-45 Inquiry's remit was to investigate how domestic service could be revitalised after the war.

The MoL expressed determination to address this problem. They felt that many women were 'certain' to work in domestic service, and therefore it was important to set standards of wages and conditions to attract women into this 'valuable and necessary profession' after the war. Moreover, domestic service should not be a privilege for the rich but available across the community to help ease 'household duties on the harassed housewife'.⁴⁴

One MP advocated raising the status of domestic service through a workers' charter covering all aspects of wages, hours, conditions. He begged the Minister of Labour – referred to as the parliamentary representative of 'Mrs Mopp' (a character in a popular wireless comedy) – to continue his support of domestic servants and to remove inequality and suffering. There seem to have been suggestions of compulsorily recruiting servants into post-war private households, the MoL being moved to refute publicly any such plans in November 1944.⁴⁵

⁴² 391 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 363-4, 15 July 1943; 399 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 381, 20 April 1944.

⁴³ 407 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2244-6, 8 February 1945; 413 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 845, 23 August 1945; 420 H.C. Deb 5 s, WQ cols 403-4, 21 March 1946.

⁴⁴ 399 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1572-5, 4 May 1944.

⁴⁵ 401 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 314-5, 21 June 1944; 404 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 935, 2 November 1944.

There was great optimism over the future of post-war domestic service, the Second World War being hailed as a beneficial turning point in this hitherto unpopular employment sector – at least, in early post-war months. One MP felt the war had forced recognition of the value of the woman ‘who does the drudgery at home and in institutions’, maintaining that attitudes towards servants were changing as people realised how central the ‘skivvy’ was to their mode of life. The current servant shortage – designated appalling by some MPs – should not be satisfied through unemployment as in pre-war years, because alternatives to domestic service would be available. A fellow MP declared that no one was ‘entitled’ to domestic service unless servants were accorded the status and prestige to which they were entitled.⁴⁶

Another perceived benefit was the determination to organise domestic service to avoid post-war servants suffering the grievances of their pre-war counterparts. This would require regulation – presumably by central government – and therefore the Government commissioned Florence Hancock and Violet Markham to investigate the matter. Their report, undertaken in 1944-45, aimed to provide a ground plan for post-war policy on organisation of domestic service.⁴⁷ Although the women provided a full and thorough overview of potential problems facing post-war Britain regarding domestic service, there seems to be an element of resignation underlying their recommendations. Perhaps Government Ministers and report authors realised that the status quo of the unequal relationship between mistress and maid could not realistically be revived. It is tempting to view this report as a sop to those urging improvements in domestic service, as mere window-dressing. Yet Hancock & Markham were not dilatory or half-hearted in their investigations. Indeed, when Markham accepted the brief in February 1944, she wrote hopefully and with the benefit of many years’ experience in the CCWTE:

A national basis for domestic work backed by a powerful Minister is a new departure which may change the whole outlook on this unpopular form of employment.⁴⁸

Publication of the report was constantly delayed, apparently due to lack of Government interest. Presented to Bevin in July 1944, the report did not appear as a White Paper until mid-1945, which greatly worried Markham who felt opportunities were being missed.⁴⁹ The cost factor of any scheme also worried Markham.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ 411 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1532, 12 June 1945.

⁴⁷ *Report on Post War Organization of Domestic Employment* PP 1944-5 (Cmd 6650), V, 1.

⁴⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 12/2, Letter Violet Markham to Miss Smieton MoL, February 1944.

⁴⁹ 415 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2323, 15 November 1945; BLPES, Markham Papers, File 12/2, Letter Violet Markham to Myrddin Evans MoL, 23 March 1945 and Letter Miss Smieton MoL to Violet Markham, 7 May 1945.

⁵⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 12/2, Letter Violet Markham to Mrs Vesta Gill, 31 January 1945.

The main result of the Hancock-Markham report was the establishment of a National Institute of Houseworkers. Its primary function was to raise the status of domestic service, attracting workers into institutions suffering acute shortages. It would also establish domestic service training, via technical schools, Government centres or its own courses. Trained workers would be placed via Employment Exchanges either directly with employers or as part of a local government home help service. This last option built upon Bevin's wartime scheme. However, the National Institute's scheme would operate in a new way. A core of trained staff, located at selected sites, would be available to housewives on an hourly basis, thus targeting women who could not afford or did not require full-time help. Additionally, the Institute would co-operate with the Education Department to instruct housewives in up-to-date methods of housewifery and also research all problems of supply and demand of private domestic servants.⁵¹

The Board of Directors of the National Institute represented many different interests and backgrounds – officials, union activists and those directly involved in the domestic service industry. Violet Markham – with her vast experience of training and encouraging women into domestic service through her years on the CCWTE – was appointed chairman of the Advisory Council set up to assist the Institute.⁵² The make-up of the Board suggests that voices of both employees and employers would be heard.

The Institute was a laudable attempt to address the issue of status in domestic service and continued for some years, but without notable success. Yet, contemporary observers were still of the opinion that domestic service would be revived, albeit with greater dignity. Burton, for example, writing in 1944 felt sure that, since the issue of status was now recognised, there was no real barrier to making domestic service an attractive proposition.⁵³

Certainly the Report's proposals opened up new possibilities for domestic service, especially the home helps scheme. The availability of trained domestic staff at a local centre would be a revolutionary concept in domestic service provision. Employers could hire their staff on a periodic or one-off basis. The workers would gain greater status, freedom and choice by working on a freelance basis but with the knowledge that their skills were in demand. Had this centralised home helps scheme gone into operation, it may indeed have revitalised and revolutionised domestic service. But the quest for status – which the National Institute of Houseworkers was supposed to confer upon domestic servants – came too late in the history of domestic service training.

⁵¹ 418 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1883-4, 7 February 1946. See also PRO, LAB 70.

⁵² 425 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1857-8, 23 July 1946.

⁵³ Elaine Burton *Domestic Work. Britain's Largest Industry* (Frederick Muller, 1944), p.4.

The CCWTE

It is noticeable that no wartime schemes dealing with domestic employment involved the CCWTE, a body long associated with domestic service. So why did the CCWTE not play a key role in women's wartime training? Concern had been expressed in the House that insufficient use was being made of this organisation's abilities.⁵⁴ It is inconceivable that the CCWTE administration – with some 25 years' experience – could not have handled such schemes. And since its chairman Markham was heavily involved in the 1944-45 Report and in the subsequent National Institute of Houseworkers, the non-involvement of the CCWTE cannot be due to a perceived lack of trust by Government Ministers in its abilities.

Nevertheless, CCWTE committee members were obliquely criticised, not so much for their actions but apparently for their age. In 1939 one MP urged Minister of Labour Ernest Brown to fill CCWTE Committee places as they became vacant with 'young women from all classes of this community, keen to see this problem vigorously attacked, with a vigorous type of mind brought to bear on it.' Assuring current CCWTE members that he intended no offence, the MP felt that younger women of all backgrounds would make a 'positive contribution' towards solving 'this very serious national problem'.⁵⁵ The inference seems to be that these older women (the most senior now in their late 60s and often active in public life for many years) were staid and out of touch with modern thinking. The CCWTE Minutes record no response. This public criticism seems to be an isolated occurrence and without direct consequences.

Training centres for the unemployed, including the CCWTE's, ceased in September 1939. Many premises were commandeered under Government sanction to meet perceived needs as evacuation centres for civil servants, Armed Services or other public groups. The CCWTE had been considering possible wartime contributions since 1938 and in February 1939 were discussing the fate of CCWTE training centres in the event of an emergency. The members agreed to close all day centres, due to the impossibility of protecting them or continuing their courses in wartime. They also decided to close all residential centres except Market Harborough or Leamington, to be retained as staff headquarters. This action, reasoned the CCWTE, would cause minimal disruption when re-occupation become possible.⁵⁶ It seems clear that the CCWTE had no desire or plans to wind up operations. Rather the reverse, if consideration was being given to possible re-occupation.

⁵⁴ 364 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 377-8, 8 August 1940; BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/21, Letter Irene Ward to Ernest Bevin, 19 August 1940.

⁵⁵ 348 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 143-4, 5 June 1939.

⁵⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 13 October 1938 and 9 February 1939.

Closure of CCWTE training centres accorded with Government policy of closing all State-sponsored training centres – including juveniles' and men's – immediately on the outbreak of war. But the CCWTE had no plans to cease operations, being keen to use its administrative skills to support the war effort. In September 1939, Markham proposed switching training to institutional cooks and ward-maids. The Ministry of Health, she added, welcomed their suggestion of organising communal feeding stations for evacuees. Bondfield, referring to the CCWTE remit to train unemployed women, felt that many women finding themselves unemployed might usefully train as canteen cooks or in other roles for which demand arose.⁵⁷

The training of canteen cooks was the only wartime CCWTE scheme. Grants were sanctioned for three months to about ten such centres. With its remit to train unemployed women, the six-week courses were only open to women aged 18 to 40, unemployed due to the war. Women received instruction to fit them for jobs as canteen managers – bulk cooking, marketing and costing, as well as food values, menus, and simple book-keeping. The focus was on cheap nourishing meals using simple equipment as might be found in communal feeding centres, ARP canteens etc, where the trained cooks might expect to be employed. Difficulties arose, but not with trainees who were

most interested, and easy to teach and most of them should be capable of responsible posts after training. The teachers are very much impressed with the responsiveness and intelligence of these women, after their long experience of women and girls, who have been unemployed for long periods.⁵⁸

The unexpected problem was disposal of the food. The original idea had been to combine practical training of canteen cooks with the feeding of local communities, but the locations of training centres, usually in evacuable rather than reception areas, often made this impossible.⁵⁹

Canteen courses seemed popular, most trainees being deemed 'an excellent type'. By January 1940, with the end of the three-month sanction in sight, the seven training centres were showing good results. Some 82 per cent of the 130 trainees completing courses were placed in posts, including hospitals/institutions, business firms, private service, and – most popularly to judge by placement statistics – the NAAFI. Nevertheless, the CCWTE complained that lack of premises hindered its task.⁶⁰ By February, with canteen course placements reaching 88 per cent, the MoL sanctioned five centres for another three months.⁶¹

⁵⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 21 September 1939.

⁵⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, *Report on Courses for Canteen Cooks* November 1939

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 9 November 1939 and *Report on Course for Canteen Cooks* January 1940.

⁶¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 11 January 1940 and 8 February 1940.

No narrative evidence from this period survives. But the fact that recruitment presented no problems indicates that unemployed women welcomed the CCWTE canteen courses as a means of training for useful wartime work. Placement rates support this. The NAAFI was reported as so appreciative of the skills of CCWTE trainees, that in South Wales the NAAFI was willing to take almost the entire output.⁶² The small training centres – about 430 women were trained between October 1939 and June 1940⁶³ – generated great loyalty among staff and good relations with local communities. For example, although the last course sanctioned at Maida Vale training centre ended in January 1940, staff offered to stay – without pay – until it was certain that no renewal of sanctioned courses was forthcoming. Markham particularly praised this centre, citing the usefulness of training and the ‘valuable work in feeding unemployed women.’ Staff were anxious to continue this feeding and to ‘avoid losing the local interest and the valuable placing connections which had been built up’. Since rent was paid until November, there would have been little additional expense.⁶⁴

But the CCWTE was keen to widen its horizons, seeking to use its experience of training schemes for the war effort. Talks were held with a number of organisations, such as the WVS and Women’s Land Army, to explore avenues where they and the CCWTE could work together to train women for the war effort.⁶⁵ The possibility of undertaking some trade training was mooted, although this would normally be beyond the CCWTE’s remit. Particular areas where the CCWTE felt it could be useful were machining and clothing – reminiscent of their initial work in the First World War (see Chapter 3).⁶⁶ In view of an expected influx of women into munitions and believing it essential to plan and organise training courses well in advance of their need, the CCWTE wrote to the MoL expressing readiness to give every help in training women for the anticipated requirements of modern warfare.⁶⁷ Such a proposal accorded with Government intentions, for an MoL manual on wartime training for engineering stated:

Women are admirably suited for performing manufacturing operations such as airplane assembly, light machine work, winding electrical coils, light assembly work of all kinds, inspection, testing, core making in foundries and light press work.⁶⁸

⁶² BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, *Report on Course for Canteen Cooks* January 1940.

⁶³ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, *Summary of Work of the CCWTE 1914-1940*, nd [1940].

⁶⁴ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 11 January 1940.

⁶⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 9 November 1939 and 2 April 1940.

⁶⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 21 September 1939.

⁶⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 8 February 1940.

⁶⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 26/31, *Manual on Training for Wartime Work in the Engineering Industry*, July 1940.

However, these avenues for potential schemes for training women led to nothing as far as the CCWTE was concerned. And it was at this point that relations between the MoL and CCWTE soured. CCWTE Minute Books reveal a growing sense of frustration, Bondfield even suggesting mass resignation to force a Government decision. CCWTE members were well aware of their relative insignificance within the MoL but also aware that experience built upon training women could be utilised to further the war effort and should not be wasted. Letters sent by Markham at this time reveal the extent of that frustration.

Markham's letter in April 1940 to Ernest Brown, Minister of Labour revealed her anger at the CCWTE being sidelined. Trading on her long acquaintance with him, Markham wrote bluntly of the 'grotesque' situation in which the CCWTE found itself. Acknowledging that changes were inevitable, she nevertheless felt that 'we deserve a more dignified end than what appears to be a squeezing out process.' Assuring Brown that the CCWTE Committee – 'a troupe of aged pre-war follies' – would not cavil if the official consensus were for the CCWTE's winding up, she urged him to make use of their experience in establishing and running training schemes. Concluding with apologies for troubling Brown with the affairs of the CCWTE – 'a very small pebble on your beach' – Markham asked that he lend a favourable ear to their request to discuss the matter with him frankly. Brown's encouraging response promised to look into the points raised, assuring her (in a handwritten postscript) that 'Small pebbles are often very valuable.'⁶⁹

Markham advised her fellow CCWTE members of her actions. Her tone was frank and realistic about the chances of a positive response:

I cannot conceal from you that I find myself increasingly anxious and disturbed about the position in which the Committee finds itself. That position is unsatisfactory in the extreme and I feel the time has come for us as old colleagues and friends to face it frankly, and to come to some conclusion as to our future policy. I have had no reply at the time of writing from Sir Thomas Phillips, [at the MoL] but unless the Ministry of Labour are ready to concede [to Markham's request for greater freedom for the CCWTE] I do not think I could advise the Committee to continue its present meagre activities.⁷⁰

A deputation of CCWTE members to the MoL did take place but matters discussed were overtaken by events. Ernest Bevin replaced Brown as Minister of Labour and the CCWTE was left in the dark as to its future.

⁶⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/21, Letter Violet Markham to Ernest Brown, 4 April 1940 and Letter Ernest Brown to Violet Markham, 6 April 1940.

⁷⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Letter Violet Markham to CCWTE members, 20 March 1940. See also Letter Violet Markham to Sir Thomas Phillips, 12 April 1940.

Having initially construed the lack of attention given to the CCWTE as due to wartime pressures, Markham had 'reluctantly come to the conclusion that [...] the Ministry has no real wish to see the work of the Committee carried on'.⁷¹ Therefore a special meeting in June 1940 put a formal end to the CCWTE. Markham resigned, having warned her colleagues beforehand of this action. Bondfield's proposal that the CCWTE committee follow its Chairman's example was adopted. It was then agreed that a formal letter be sent from CCWTE members to Bevin outlining reasons for their actions, giving a résumé of their work and stressing the unsatisfactory position since the outbreak of war.⁷²

The final meeting of the CCWTE – the 196th – took place in August 1940, to deal with the legal processes of winding up. Bondfield had previously explained that, under the Trust Deed, money could not constitutionally be handed over to the Treasury (a restriction which may not have helped improve bitter relations at this time). Apart from small financial gifts to staff members, the bulk of CCWTE money was transferred to the Maida Vale Centre. This remnant of CCWTE training was to continue under a new committee (including Markham and Mr Paxon, formerly of the MoL). These last Minutes record that the CCWTE 'would go out of existence on 30th September 1940'.⁷³

The Times of 15th August carried an article entitled 'A Good Work Ended', which referred to the demise of the CCWTE as 'a war casualty, much to be regretted'. Briefly outlining the training programmes over some twenty years, it concluded:

Without a grant from the Ministry of Labour it could not continue, and rather left in the cold, a body which has steadily and efficiently carried out its activities in one way or another for more than a quarter of a century has resigned. The Ministry has nothing that can quite take its place.⁷⁴

I can find no acknowledgement in the House at this time (or indeed later) of the key role the CCWTE had played in implementing Government policies on training unemployed women during the 1920s and 1930s. Neither Bevin nor his Ministry made any further public reference to the CCWTE, either its past work or its dissolution. Despite wartime demands, it would not have taken much time or energy for an official recognition of the CCWTE to be made in the House of Commons. This omission seems to indicate a dismissal of their existence and a denigration of the work they had done. Having served successive governments for over 25 years, the CCWTE surely deserved better treatment at the hands of its Government masters.

⁷¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Letter Violet Markham to CCWTE members, 24 June 1940.

⁷² BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 28 June 1940.

⁷³ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, Minutes 13 August 1940.

⁷⁴ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/21, Cutting *The Times* 15 August 1940.

This was not quite the end of the story for the CCWTE. Wrangling between the MoL and former officers of the CCWTE continued into 1941, mainly over gratuities to be paid to former CCWTE staff. But this matter was eventually settled. The Maida Vale Canteen Training Centre was formally opened in October 1941 by Lady Woolton (wife of the Minister of Food).⁷⁵ The Centre continued in existence, training women for canteen work, until at least the late 1940s. Its winding up reveals again a brusque attitude from the MoL. In March 1950 Mr Paxon requested confirmation that disposal of monies on closure of the Maida Vale Canteen Training Centre would not contravene legal restrictions. Inter-departmental MoL memoranda declare not 'the slightest interest', one writer stating 'I propose to wash my hands of this by saying that the Ministry will raise no objection.' Despite this avowed disinterest, matters dragged on and clearance to wind up the Maida Vale Canteen Training Centre was eventually given only in April 1951⁷⁶ – the last vestige of the CCWTE training programme finally disappeared.

Considering the significant change in women's employment patterns during the war (see Table 6.1, for example), it is clear that the CCWTE's wartime contribution was minimal. Only 430 women were trained in canteen cookery, largely due to the restrictions on applicants – single women and widows unemployed on account of the war. Applications from soldiers' wives and other suitable women were disallowed due to strict regulations governing the CCWTE. Calls by Committee members to expand both their client base and their course provision (particularly into industrial training) met with blank refusal.

The CCWTE – an assessment

This Chapter has demonstrated the CCWTE's ineffectiveness during the Second World War, resulting in the CCWTE's demise. But overall, during its twenty years operation under the aegis of the MoL, what impact did the CCWTE have on women's employment prospects?

Restrictions governing its operations meant that the variety of training courses the CCWTE could offer was narrowed, despite repeated attempts by Committee members to widen its training base. Schemes to benefit middle-class women – grants for long-term individual training in the professions, clerical retraining – were of limited duration, despite their great popularity among applicants. Most CCWTE schemes were aimed at working-class women and, although some alternatives were available during the twenty years, the schemes were mainly designed to encourage unemployed women into private or institutional domestic work.

⁷⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/22, Letter Violet Markham to Lady Woolton 10 October 1941 and Maida Vale Minutes 6 November 1941.

⁷⁶ PRO, LAB 18/413/ET 1306/1947, Memo T W F Dalton to Solicitor, 11 March 1950; Memo to Mr Bradshaw, 18 April 1951; Letter T W F Dalton to Mr Paxon, 24 April 1951.

Table 6.2 gives CCWTE expenditure between 1920 and 1941.

Category	£
Homecraft Training Centres + Domestic Servants Outfits	212,367
Scholarship Scheme	407,000
Special Training Courses	1,034
Travel/Medical Expenses for Candidates	965
Recreation Hut (Leamington Spa)	272
Grant to Mary Macarthur Holiday Home	11,452
Administration	676,063
Balance to Maida Vale Canteen Training Centre	991

These figures suggest that the Scholarship Scheme (individual training) formed the bulk of CCWTE training, but this is inaccurate. Individual training schemes operated in only two periods – between 1924 and 1926 and again between 1930 and 1939 – whereas domestic training schemes operated from 1921 until 1940. Thus individual schemes for middle-class women were less prominent than group schemes for working-class women. In total, over 90,000 women and girls were assisted via the CCWTE between 1920 and 1940, but only 1,464 grants were made for individual training.⁷⁸ Thus, while individual training took the largest share of monies paid to training schemes – almost twice that paid to schemes for domestic training – the numbers of women helped into professional and vocational careers was small. These ranged from shorthand typing and clerical machine operating to hairdressing and midwifery, and included the higher ranks of domestic work such as nursery nursing and institutional housekeeping. To benefit from CCWTE individual training schemes, applicants would have required better education (some were university graduates), higher ambition for a long-term career, the ability to undertake longer-term training (perhaps over several years) and the resources to be non-wage earning during that time. Such commitments clearly were beyond many unemployed women's scope. The bulk of the 90,430 CCWTE trainees received instruction in domestic work, fitting them to become domestic servants in private houses, hotel chambermaids, waitresses and – in the later stages of the CCWTE's existence – canteen cooks. Despite attempts to offer alternatives to its core courses in domestic training, the CCWTE offered little opportunity for unemployed women to widen their employment horizons and therefore had little impact on women's employment prospects between 1920 and 1940.

⁷⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/22, *Statement of Receipts & Payments 1/1/1920 to 31/1/1941*, June 1941.

⁷⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/7, *Summary of work of the CCWTE 1914-1940*, 1 July 1940.

However, on a personal level, the CCWTE could claim greater success. The existence of training centres required an administrative and teaching staff which, if small, nevertheless offered work to suitable women (CCWTE employees were predominantly women). This Chapter has shown the depth of loyalty of CCWTE staff – willing to work unpaid until final decisions over the future of training schemes had been made. With regard to trainees, the narrative evidence (see especially Chapters 4 and 5) demonstrates how the opportunity to attend CCWTE training courses impacted on women's lives. This evidence highlights not only the scarcity of training for unemployed women and the appreciation shown towards the CCWTE for the chance to retrain, but also highlights the very personal effects of that training – changes in lifestyle, health benefits, realising old ambitions and occasionally making new ones. Without the CCWTE, these unemployed women would have been unable to change their lives.

Conclusions

The Second World War had a profound if short-term effect on women's employment. This was largely due to a new attitude from Government ministers who were forced to recognise the importance – and difficulty – of recruiting women into essential war work. Unlike the Great War, which had relied on women's voluntary action, the Second War saw the introduction of legislation for 'conscription' of women. This was a novel approach, never attempted before, which ensured direction of women's labour as the State dictated. This seems to have been a political step taken reluctantly by Minister of Labour Ernest Bevin, who would have preferred to rely on voluntary action. But exigencies of war and demands of industry were clearly overriding factors in the introduction of such unprecedented legislation.

Certainly, the Second War followed its predecessor in its attitudes and actions towards women workers at the end of hostilities – as in 1918, women were expected to return to their previous jobs or to their homes. One post-war difference was the realisation that women's labour power was also vital to the export effort to revitalise an impoverished nation – a need which caused some headache for Attlee's Government.

Domestic service held a strange position during the war – seen as both an essential service and a waste of resources. This paradox arose because of the way in which different types of domestic service were viewed. Institutional service – especially in medical and children's institutions – became an official part of the war effort, designated an essential occupation. Furthermore, it was given added status by the 1943 Hetherington Report, a Government initiative seeking to regulate wages and conditions.

Conversely, private domestic service was frequently castigated as inessential and sometimes bordering on sedition. Nevertheless, the Government was not oblivious to the needs of certain households with regard to domestic servants and a scheme was worked out which afforded necessitous households the right to retain (female) servants. Additionally, a home helps scheme – on a larger scale and more organised than hitherto attempted – was introduced under Government sanction to provide temporary domestic workers to specific types of needy households.

The war was hailed by some as a turning point in domestic service, as a time when the value of such work had been given its true worth. The 1944-45 Hancock-Markham report on post-war domestic service led to the establishment of a National Institute of Houseworkers, whose aim was to raise the status of domestic service to allow it to take its rightful place as a valued female profession.

Optimism over changed attitudes and the effects of the Institute proved misplaced, for domestic service never recovered its pre-eminence as a female employment sector. If the Second War was a turning point for domestic service, it was downwards not upwards. As Leonora Eyles had foreseen in 1941, the war heralded ‘the final departure of the domestic servant class’.⁷⁹ Her prophecy echoes that made by Randal Phillips who had written in 1923:

Looking into the future indeed we may picture a time when the domestic servant we used to know shall have become an extinct being.⁸⁰

By 1945 it seemed that the future had indeed arrived.

The CCWTE was keen to contribute to the war effort, urging that use be made of its 25 years’ experience in training women. Yet the CCWTE’s absence from the bulk of wartime training or re-deployment schemes is noticeable. Only one CCWTE scheme operated – that of canteen cookery, a short-term and limited scheme which had minimal impact on women’s employment. Relations between the CCWTE and MoL soured considerably during the war. Finally, frustrated by the Ministry’s offhand treatment, the CCWTE resigned en masse. The bitterness in the relationship is evident from the total lack of appreciation made to the CCWTE by the MoL, whether in the House, in the Press or directly. Thus, as the First War had seen the birth of the CCWTE, so the Second War saw its death.

⁷⁹ Leonora Eyles *Cutting the Coat* (London and Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1941), p.25.

⁸⁰ J Randal Phillips *The Servantless House* (Country Life, 1923, second edition), p.9.

The impact and effectiveness of the CCWTE over its lifetime leads to contrasting conclusions. Overall, between 1920 and 1940, the CCWTE had little impact on women's employment opportunities, failing to widen the scope of its training schemes beyond the emphasis on domestic work. Of the 90,430 women assisted via the CCWTE, only 1.6 per cent were helped to enter vocational and/or professional work. However, on a more personal level, the chance to retrain under the aegis of the CCWTE – whether for a profession or for the unpopular sector of domestic service – could enhance and change women's lifestyles.

Chapter 7: Migration

Aims

Migrants were often seen as a partial solution to the servant problem, via internal migration (movement of labour around Britain) or external migration (emigration of British workers – mostly to the Dominions – and immigration of foreigners). The schemes in this Chapter illustrate that Britain was not alone in suffering servant shortages and significantly reveal the inadequacy of training schemes to solve its servant problem.

The Servant Problem – Diversity and Similarity

The three-fold movement via internal and external migration reveals regional diversity of Britain's servant problem and conversely its global similarity. There was a degree of commonality in European women's experiences of domestic service, until political beliefs introduced a divergence of aims.¹ The Nazi doctrine of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* encouraged domesticity, primarily to boost Germany's birth rate. Similar effects resulted from France's obsession with *dénatalité* and Italy's pro-natalist policies under Mussolini.²

British experience differed, despite fears engendered by the nation's poor health. The low quality of recruits during the 1899-1902 Boer Wars prompted calls for an investigation into citizens' health. The appointed committee's name – Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration – underlines worries about the consequences of a nation unfit to fight. As both Lewis and Davin demonstrate, the committee's 1904 report had a profound effect on maternal and infant welfare programmes.³ While concern for national fitness – to be achieved through social welfare programmes – echoes European concerns, one difference lay in Britain's emphasis on improving health as well as boosting population. Whereas German, French and Italian mothers were applauded and rewarded, British mothers were not financially encouraged to have families. Vigorous campaigns for family allowances finally succeeded in 1946⁴, possibly fuelled by worries over potentially low post-war population, expressed as early as 1943.⁵

¹ Deborah Simonton *A History of European Women's Work. 1700 to the Present* (Routledge, 1998), pp.202-5.

² Lisa Pine *Nazi Family Policy, 1933-1945* (Berg, 1997); Pat Thane *Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1996, second edition), pp.254-5 and pp.265-6; Richard Tomlinson, Marie-Monique Huss, and Philip E Ogden 'France in Peril: The French Fear of *Dénatalité*' *History Today* 35(4) (April 1985), pp.24-31.

³ Anna Davin 'Imperialism and motherhood' *History Workshop Journal* 5 (Spring 1987), pp.9-65; Jane Lewis *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England 1900-1939* (Croom Helm, 1980).

⁴ Leonore Davidoff & Belinda Westover 'From Queen Victoria to the Jazz Age: Women's World in England, 1880-1939' in Davidoff & Westover (eds) *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work* (Basingstoke and London, Macmillan, 1986), p.6.

⁵ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 26/33, Lady Simon *Memorandum on population in England* 17 June 1943.

One consequence of the aforementioned 1904 report was a determination to stress domestic subjects in girls' school curriculum, linking this with the state of the nation's health.⁶ Studies into nineteenth-century education – notably by Silver & Silver of a London National school, by Digby & Searby into the relationship between school and society, and by Gomersall of working-class girls⁷ – demonstrate that gender division of education was already present before the much-publicised concern occasioned by Boer War recruits. As Davin emphasises, a correlation between schooling and work was being voiced as early as the 1880s – stressing the usefulness of domestic subjects for (working-class) girls' roles as housewives and housemaids.⁸ Nevertheless, Hunt's study of the interrelationship between gender and education policy shows that the greater emphasis on and expansion of domestic subjects in English schools from 1902 onwards led to a reshaping of girls' curriculum and thus to a differentiation between state education offered to boys and girls. This view is supported by Moore, in her analysis of Scottish education.⁹ Turnbull sounds a note of caution on provision of domestic subjects teaching. For not all schools offered lessons in cookery, laundry and housewifery, reasons including opposition by school boards (often on financial grounds), lack of suitable accommodation and lack of water supplies (particularly in some rural areas).¹⁰

Nevertheless, official policy for expansion of domestic subjects in elementary schools would also provide (working-class) girls with skills to fit them for domestic service. And since this was an occupation with fundamentally universal tasks, the resulting pool of young trained working-class female labour would be available to fill demand when and where it arose. Their differentiated curriculum thus equipped girls to become part of a mobile workforce, learning domestic skills which were in demand countrywide and indeed globally. Effectively girls became a potential partial solution to the servant problem.

⁶ 149 H.C. Deb 4 s, col 1325, 20 July 1905; 22 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 549-50, 2 March 1911.

⁷ Meg Gomersall *Working-Class Girls in Nineteenth-Century England: Life, Work and Schooling* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1997); Anne Digby & Peter Searby *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981); Pamela Silver & Harold Silver *The Education of the Poor: The history of a National school 1824-1974* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

⁸ Anna Davin *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (Rivers Oram Press, 1996), pp.150-1.

⁹ Lindy Moore 'Educating for the "Women's Sphere": Domestic Training Versus Intellectual Discipline' in Esther Breitenbach & Eleanor Gordon (eds) *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800-1945* (Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp.10-41; Felicity Hunt *Gender and Policy in English Education 1902-1944* (Heimel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

¹⁰ Annemarie Turnbull 'Learning Her Womanly Work: the Elementary School Curriculum, 1870-1914' in Felicity Hunt (ed) *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women, 1850-1950* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.96.

Internal Migration

Internal migration – labour movement around the country – was not a new twentieth-century phenomenon. Workers in a free labour market (as opposed to a system of feudal serfdom or fixed-term indenture) are not one homogeneous group seeking jobs only in the immediate vicinity. Voluntary migration arises from personal desires – enhanced prospects, search for adventure, escape from responsibilities, economic necessity. Perhaps the greatest instance of this last is the Industrial Revolution, with an unprecedented movement of labour – workers, including women, migrating from rural communities to urban factories and mills.¹¹ The growth of transport networks aided voluntary migration, particularly peripatetic jobs such as railway employees, building labourers and craftsmen, and journeymen of various trades. Such jobs had, argues Davidoff, been a key factor in the demand for lodging houses.¹²

Internal migration in the nineteenth century remained a matter of choice – albeit with limited alternatives. The twentieth century saw a change in the concept of internal labour movements, facilitated by Government intervention. This Chapter is not concerned with voluntary internal migration but with State involvement. This manifested itself in two ways – establishment of a network of Employment Exchanges operating an informal system of labour migration (attempting to match supply and demand), and instigation of more formal transference policies (using coercion and disincentives to encourage labour movement).

Before 1910 employment exchanges were run by private concerns or organisations such as the Central (Unemployed) Body for London. In July 1907, for example, 2,952 vacancies were filled, representing 28 per cent of applications received. Government Employment Exchanges, responsible to the Board of Trade, came into existence under the 1909 Labour Exchanges Act, initially in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Dublin. In contrast to privately-run exchanges, Government Exchanges operated on a grander scale. In the first year 450,000 vacancies were notified and 370,000 applicants placed, including 60,000 women. By May 1911 daily registrations at the 100 Government Exchanges were running at 5,000-6,000 with over 2,000 vacancies and 500 casual jobs being filled.¹³

¹¹ See, for example, Steven King & Geoffrey Timmins *Making Sense of the Industrial Revolution. English economy and society 1700-1850* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp.222-7; Eric Hopkins *Industrialisation and Society. A Social History, 1830-1951* (Routledge, 2001), pp.25-6 and pp.86-7; Martin Pugh *Britain since 1789. A Concise History* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1999), Chapter 4; Trevor May *An Economic and Social History of Britain 1760-1990* (Longman, 1995, second edition), Chapters 1 and 2; Asa Briggs *A Social History of England* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), Chapter 8.

¹² Leonore Davidoff 'The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century England' in Sandra Burman (ed) *Fit Work for Women* (Croom Helm, 1979), p.79.

¹³ 181 H.C. Deb 4 s, col 1149, 22 August 1907; 7 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1004, 5 July 1909; 9 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1064, 16 August 1909; 21 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 634, 10 February 1911; 26 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 505-6, 25 May 1911.

But domestic service – despite being the largest single employment sector for women – initially remained outside the scope of Exchanges. The Board of Trade promised neither to interfere with the work of the prolific domestic employment agencies, nor to accept vacancies for indoor servants in private houses. By mid-1914, with 442 Employment Exchanges open in the UK, the ban on domestic service placements had been slightly relaxed (notably for girls under 17¹⁴) and Exchanges often advised domestic servants to enter institutional service in hotels. Within a short time of their establishment Exchanges were becoming a valuable resource for workers – 1,877,221 individuals made 2,973,189 applications in 1913. And despite non-involvement in private domestic service, Exchanges were also becoming a valuable resource for women, 215,310 having found work for the year to September 1914.¹⁵

During the Great War, in a marked change to previous policy, Exchanges handled all types of domestic service jobs – a temporary expedient that was not rescinded. Inclusion of domestic service, as Chapters 3 and 4 showed, had a marked effect on regulation and direction of women's labour. The transference of the Exchange network in 1917 from Board of Trade to Ministry of Labour control offered the potential to integrate the twin aspects of job vacancies and employment training, for the MoL now oversaw both.

The War boosted the success rate of Exchange placements from its pre-war decline. This was probably due to increased activities of Exchanges (including private domestic service vacancies), plus an increasing willingness to use Exchange facilities by both applicants and employers. Nevertheless, as calculated rates in Table 7.1 show, enforced redundancy of women from munitions factories plus demobilisation seriously affected numbers of unemployed individuals seeking work and the success rate fell dramatically in 1919.

Year	Individuals applying	Individuals placed	Success rate %
1910	1,127,447	unknown	—
1911	1,513,369	469,210	41.62
1912	1,643,587	573,709	37.91
1913	1,871,671	552,306	29.51
1914	2,164,023	814,071	37.62
1915	2,326,803	1,058,336	45.49
1916	2,843,784	1,351,406	47.52
1917	2,837,650	1,375,198	48.46
1918	3,045,263	1,324,743	43.50
1919	5,003,786	1,137,875	22.74

¹⁴ 29 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2096, 17 August 1911; 35 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 373, 6 March 1912; 48 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 517, 10 February 1913; 64 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 874-5 and cols 900-2, 7 July 1914.

¹⁵ 58 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 585, 16 February 1914; 75 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1187, 10 November 1915.

¹⁶ 127 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 76, 22 March 1920.

Unfilled vacancies for domestic service remained problematic, for correlation of vacancies and claimants was not always straightforward. The Employment Exchange system operated on a national level, with great variation between districts over numbers of vacancies and claimants. It was not a simple case of stating that the number of domestic service posts was matched or exceeded by the number of female claimants looking for work. However, the greater acceptance of Exchanges after the Great War – both as a means of notifying vacancies and of registering intention to work – meant that the Exchange network could be utilised to facilitate co-ordination of supply and demand between districts. In this way, the network was crucial for effective labour migration within Britain.

Labour migration suffered from two interrelated factors – claimants' unwillingness to move to jobs in new districts plus officials' determination to use their powers to persuade claimants to do so. Exchange officials constantly encountered antagonism to labour migration. Power to withhold benefits might be used to persuade claimants to accept jobs away from home, but this ploy was not always successful. In 1919, having successfully appealed against benefit stoppage for refusal to accept a Woolwich job, one girl was asked to go to Cardiff. Unwilling to be forced, the girl withdrew all benefit claims. Similarly, in 1924, girls refusing to travel 150 miles from Glasgow to Elgin for employment had benefit stopped for six weeks.¹⁷

Training allied to labour migration was a Government policy followed throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Similar schemes operated in Nazi Germany and the United States. Field argues that the rationale behind Hitler's and Roosevelt's training policies was 'a mass crusade for national regeneration and mobilization' whereas British policy was rooted in a revival of the work ethic and a desire to return to a more stable social and economic order.¹⁸

British labour migration found practical expression in the Transference Scheme, to retrain the unemployed for new jobs away from areas of high unemployment. Training in new skills offered one solution, but invariably involved migration – moving from unemployment blackspots into expanding areas suffering labour shortages. Unemployment blackspots, designated Distressed Areas (later renamed Special Areas, stressing positive rather than negative aspects, perhaps), were often areas of traditional heavy industry – coal mining, shipping, steel – which was generally the province of male employment. The traditional view of men as family breadwinner was undoubtedly a guiding factor in the Government's drive to focus on retraining men rather than women from these areas. The shortage of domestic servants offered an easy escape from the problematic issue of addressing female unemployment. If the received view of

¹⁷ 121 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1014-5, 19 November 1919; 179 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 141-2, 9 December 1924.

¹⁸ John Field *Learning through Labour. Training, unemployment and the state 1890-1939* (University of Leeds, Leeds Studies in Continuing Education, 1992), pp.2-3.

a working woman was an unmarried working-class woman, then there was arguably no valid barrier to her moving away to find work. And residential domestic service provided not only paid employment but also accommodation, thus eliminating housing/homelessness worries.

One commentator on British unemployment programmes, writing with hindsight in 1941 for an American social research council, estimated that the transference scheme peaked in 1936 with 28,000 participants. Whilst acknowledging the ideals behind the policy of labour migration and the Government's enthusiastic adoption of these ideals, Burns outlines what she believed to be limitations to success of transference, citing seven major drawbacks. First, local authorities might be reluctant to encourage new workers into their region, fearing future claims on financial resources. Second, families were often unwilling to move because of family ties and/or a belief in a revival of local industries. Third, Depressed Areas were frequently sites of heavy industry which involved transferees in a change of occupation, for which many were unsuited. Fourth, parents were often reluctant to send children away from the family unit, while fifth, many homesick youngsters returned home. Sixth, the Transference Scheme tended to drain Depressed Areas of their most active members, leaving towns full of older people or the long-term unemployed. Seventh, and allied to this draining effect, was the tendency of transference schemes to create a disproportionately large public assistance problem.¹⁹

The network of Unemployment Assistance Boards (UABs) implemented State transference policy, in conjunction with their main task of determining eligibility for payment of allowances to the unemployed. But theoretical policy was not always translated into actuality, with UAB officials frequently facing antagonism to labour migration from female claimants. Manchester women with their own homes or family dependants were reluctant to enter residential domestic service.²⁰ Since such servants were rarely allowed to furnish their rooms or have dependants with them, the women's reluctance is understandable but apparently baffled the (middle class) administrators of the UAB. Similarly, in 1938 all twenty migrant male miners to Nottingham returned to Wigan within a year while 50 coal mining vacancies in Derbyshire attracted only two St Helens miners, despite a higher than average local unemployment rate.²¹ Clearly, whatever the economic advantages to the Government of labour migration, there was – as Burns later theorised – strong resistance to the scheme amongst those it most affected.

Directly linking training and industries could produce better results. In South Wales, the Government established several training centres. Pentrebach prepared men for vocational

¹⁹ Eveline M Burns *British Unemployment Programs, 1920-1938* (Washington, USA: Committee on Social Security, Social Research Council, 1941), pp.267-9.

²⁰ PRO AST 12/34 UAB Manchester (1) District, report for 1937 17 January 1938, p.32.

²¹ PRO AST 12/38 UAB Manchester (2) District Annual Report 1938 29 November 1938, pp.2-3.

training, transferring 786 men by the end of January 1937. Brechfa instructional centre, where most of its total 3,140 male trainees were from South Wales, found jobs for about 16 per cent of them. By April 1937 new training centres at Treforest and Newport, additionally providing medical, dental and optical treatment, offered men three months' training in factory methods for jobs in newly established local industries.²² Despite Minister of Labour Ernest Brown's earlier avowal to do everything possible to help unemployed men and women, there was no comparable training for unemployed women in the area. Yet, Glucksmann's study of new light industries (such as food production and electrical engineering) has established that women were both willing and able to handle such jobs, particularly on the new assembly lines. Indeed, many employers preferred this non-unionised labour force who were likely to marry and change from producers to consumers of their products. Their vacant positions on assembly lines were easily filled by younger women (probably therefore at a cheaper wage). Glucksmann's study reveals that factory workers included ex-servants, many having migrated to the Midlands and South-East where new light industries proliferated.²³ Since women proved themselves capable workers in light industries, there is reason to accept Field's argument that the MoL training programme for women was designed not to enhance employment prospects but to remove them from the labour market and return them to their perceived sphere of domesticity.²⁴

Three factors continued to inform official attitudes towards the unemployed – emphasis on men's training/employment at the expense of women's, the traditional view of domestic service as women's work, the servant problem. This combination resulted in discriminatory practices towards unemployed women, a phenomenon discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 with regard to treatment meted out by Employment Exchanges and Benefit Appeal Courts. Such discriminatory practices were repeated within the context of labour migration, as demonstrated by many Unemployment Assistance Boards. For example, Durham displayed something of a split personality when dealing with registered applicants, some 70 per cent of the district's 36,249 unemployed in November 1937. Welfare schemes – instructional classes, sports amenities, allotments, chicken-rearing, coal picking from slag heaps – were instituted to alleviate boredom and distress.²⁵ Yet UAB treatment of those refusing or relinquishing work (Table 7.2) demonstrates a sharp contrast to this philanthropic attitude and also a stark gender split – acknowledged as such in the report.

²² 319 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1743-4, 4 February 1937; 323 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 505, 29 April 1937.

²³ Miriam Glucksmann *Women Assemble. Women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain* (Routledge, 1990). See especially Chapter 7, pp.226-56.

²⁴ Field *Learning through Labour* p.36.

²⁵ PRO AST 12/34 *UAB Durham District. Report for the Year ending 31st December 1937* January 1938, p.1 and pp.4-6.

	Refused work	Relinquished work	Total	Total on Live Register
Men	382	328	710	34,000
Women	175	74	249	2,300
Total	557	402	959	36,300

Whilst all such cases were deemed to justify punitive action (i.e. withholding allowances), action was taken in only 598 cases, to avoid exacerbating family hardship. Eighty per cent of men's refusals were for jobs in local pits, whereas half of women's refusals were for jobs outside their home town. Yet men were treated more leniently than women – 75 per cent of single men and 50 per cent of married men having allowances reduced, as against 97 per cent of all women. While stating that 'very few married men are penalised for refusing work away from home', the report castigated women as being 'more flagrant than the men; most of the refusals were inexcusable and could only be attributed to a desire to live on state assistance as long as they could do so with impunity.'²⁷ This harsh judgement on women refusing to leave their home town indicates that the traditional view of male breadwinners and female dependency held sway in Durham. Whereas the wife of an unemployed Durham man might not suffer by having allowances cut if he refused or relinquished work, a self-supporting woman following the same course as her male counterpart could expect harsher treatment.

A similar attitude was evident in a 1938 Liverpool UAB report, with young women more likely to be censured than young men. Despite local women's traditional jobs in factories or in trades allied to the shipping industry, the UAB chastised women for reluctance to retrain for domestic work, which represented the main chance of employment. This chastisement seems undeserved, for only 618 of 4,474 Liverpool women interviewed were deemed suitable by the UAB for domestic training with only 89 admitted to the local CCWTE training centre. Although entry standards were held by the UAB to be 'restrictive' it was acknowledged that many women in Liverpool were 'of a poor type' and thus unsuitable for retraining as servants.²⁸ It seems that UAB officials clung more to prejudices about women's traditional employment sectors rather than accept evidence for their continuing unemployment. In this sense, UABs actively promoted Government policy, which sought to solve the servant problem through coercive direction, rather than address issues of local unemployment among women.

²⁶ Ibid, p.9.

²⁷ Ibid, pp.9-10.

²⁸ PRO AST 12/38 UAB Liverpool District Report for the Year ended 31st December 1939 p.9. See also BLPES Markham Papers, File 7/21, Miss Ibberson Notes on a Sample of the Board's Register of Women Interviewed in London, Manchester and Liverpool 1937.

The failure to appreciate reasons behind women's reluctance to change jobs and/or location is one possible factor in the fall in recruitment to training centres. By January 1937, when the CCWTE was operating 37 centres for domestic service training (plus there were two schemes operated by voluntary organisations providing domestic service training for men), there was 'considerable difficulty' in getting both male and female trainees. A concerted effort to publicise and promote domestic training via personal interview, poster display and leaflet distribution sought to redress this difficulty, particularly in Special Areas and other places of high employment where the merits of domestic work and transference were highlighted.²⁹

Although Government saw advantages in linking unemployment and the servant problem as a means of addressing both issues, incentives targeting prospective applicants failed to take into account cultural reasons for reluctance to train for jobs far from home. As Mrs Huw-Davies reported to the CCWTE, North and Mid Wales was much influenced by Methodism, with a strong prejudice against sending girls away from home, while at the same time being enthusiastic for secondary education (thus delaying entry into the labour market).³⁰ Although John argues that Welsh Nonconformity traditionally delineated gender roles, firmly linking women and domesticity³¹, it seems that cultural factors mentioned by Huw-Davies overrode considerations of domesticity when it involved paid service in someone else's home.

One major barrier to labour migration, particularly relevant to domestic service among young females, was the issue of safety and welfare. Concern was fuelled by the migration of young Welsh or Northern girls to take up domestic service posts. In April 1932, one MP questioned the desirability of sending young Northern girls to domestic employment in London – about 20,000 annually he reckoned. Admitting numbers of girls migrating to London as domestic servants to be 'very considerable', the Home Secretary sought to reassure the worried MP by referring to the work of the Central Council for the Social Welfare of Girls and Women in London.³² Yet worries about welfare of young girls – mostly domestic servants – were repeatedly voiced in the House of Commons during the 1930s. Ministers declined to become involved in matters they felt to be beyond their jurisdiction, as in the case of unregulated or unreliable employment agencies. Moreover, it was denied that exploitation by employment agencies of young girls migrating to cities was a widespread problem.³³

²⁹ 319 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1041-2, 28 January 1937; BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/5, F A F Livingstone *Work of A Publicity Officer in the NE Area* February 1935.

³⁰ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/5, Mrs Huws-Davies *Possibilities of a Residential Centre in North or Mid Wales* (nd [1934?])

³¹ Angela V John (ed) 'Introduction' in *Our mother's land: chapters in Welsh women's history, 1830-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp.6-7.

³² 264 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1618, 21 April 1932.

³³ 317 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1889-90, 19 November 1936; 325 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1649-50, 28 June 1937.

Nevertheless cases of neglect and abuse were not unknown, particularly amongst vulnerable young domestic servants. In 1936 the MoL was notified of an extreme case involving a Welsh servant Mildred Jones aged 15 working in London's East End for a hairdresser and his wife. The details in the social worker's letter would hardly have eased parents' fears for their daughters working away from home:

[Mr R] attempted to interfere with her. The child, although it was nearly midnight, was so frightened she ran away, but Mr R, before she went, forced her to sign a paper that she went of her own free will. Fortunately Mildred knew a nice woman, living fairly near and she went to her. [...] The Rs (Mrs R is as equally unpleasant as Mr R) are sure to get another Welsh girl and perhaps one who is quite friendless in London.³⁴

Suggestions were made that Welsh parents be apprised of dangers inherent in sending daughters into service in London and advised that they do so only through the auspices of the MoL. Certain CCWTE training centres catered mainly for migrant trainees, for example, 'Lapsewood' in London – praised by MP Thelma Cazalet in June 1937 for its efficient and happy atmosphere – which took girls from Special Areas, including South Wales.³⁵ Bad publicity over safety fears must have deterred some girls from migrating, despite the chance to train as servants.

Government policy of the 1920s and 1930s strongly endorsed internal labour migration, via its official machinery of Employment Exchanges, Transference Scheme and UAB network. But policy was not easily translated into action. Despite high regional levels of unemployment and concomitant hardships, despite exhortations by Exchange and UAB officials, despite threat of cessation of benefits and allowances, there was much resistance among workers to the idea of being transferred away from home and family. Indeed, Field contends that little of the vast shift in Britain's population between 1921 and 1939 was due to direct Government activity.³⁶ Clearly the possibility of female labour migration to fill domestic service vacancies could only be achieved if women were willing to migrate, were of a suitable educational standard and temperament, and had no restrictive ties binding them to their home town. Coercion, although frequently used, was not a universal stick with which to beat an unwilling donkey.

³⁴ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/6, *Memorandum on the problems arising out of the Transference of Girls from the Depressed Areas of South Wales into Domestic Work in London, and the wider problems of the influx of girls into work under unregulated conditions* July 1936.

³⁵ 325 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1283, 23 June 1937

³⁶ Field *Learning through Labour* p.12. See also Peter Dewey *War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945* (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), pp.119-121.

Emigration from Britain

Although internal migration underlines regional variations in supply and demand, the servant shortage was not a uniquely British phenomenon. A global problem, its existence in Empire countries had a pronounced effect on British emigration. This might seem surprising, given that women could easily find domestic service jobs in Britain. But emigration offered more than just employment – for women it offered excitement, adventure, perhaps marriage (especially in countries where, unlike Britain, men outnumbered women). From the Government's viewpoint it offered a chance to redress the sex imbalance (perceived as particularly acute after the Great War) and to reduce numbers of unemployed women.

Before 1914 stress was laid on redressing the sex imbalance rather than reducing unemployment. (This reflects contemporaneous priorities of society – harking back to the Victorian 'surplus woman' question³⁷ – and lack of State welfare for the unemployed.) In 1911 the Board of Trade exhorted Labour Exchanges not to hinder any woman wishing to take employment in the Dominions. Similarly, the Home Secretary acknowledged that 'excess of females over males in the population of the [UK]' might partly resolve itself by emigration of women who were 'welcomed in many parts of the Empire'.³⁸

His view was supported by the eagerness of Empire countries seeking British workers. Western Australia's Premier travelled to England in 1910 to oversee the sailing of about 100 female servants, perhaps attracted by average weekly wages (with board and lodging) of 30s for cooks, up to 20s for maids, up to 40s for general servants, and up to 30s for nursemaids. By 1913, female emigration was openly encouraged as the solution to the imbalance of the sexes. Certainly figures for female emigration show a pleasing growth rate for proponents of such schemes. Forming 38 per cent of all emigrating adults in 1905, women constituted 46 per cent in 1912 – in fact, female emigration had seen a 156 per cent increase between 1902 and 1911.³⁹

Reasons for this growth are unclear but were possibly allied to expansion of voluntary societies promoting women's emigration. Most of these seem to have focused on unattached women (although sometimes with dependent children) and on domestic work. In her analysis of immigrant domestic servants into Canada, Barber notes the British Women's Emigration Association (BWEA), founded 1884. Despite avowed aims of redressing the sex imbalance and

³⁷ See, for example, May *An Economic and Social History of Britain* pp.290-2; Shani D'Cruze 'Women and the family' in June Purvis (ed) *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945, an introduction* (UCL Press, 1995), p.56; Martha Vicinus *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Virago, 1985), especially pp.2-6 and Chapter 1; Jane Lewis *Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984), p.ix and p.4.

³⁸ 22 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2216, 15 March 1911; 28 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 371, 12 July 1911.

³⁹ 16 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1673, 18 April 1910; 52 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2266, 8 May 1913.

exerting a civilising influence over the indigenous (male) populace, the BWEA – soon the largest female emigration society – sent most of its 16,000 emigrants to Canada into domestic service. In 1890 the BWEA expanded operations to include a training home for English gentlewomen to become ‘home helps’, while in 1912 Mary Fitzgibbon founded Queen Mary’s Coronation Hostel for Gentlewomen in Vancouver, British Columbia. This hostel offered a three-month course in housework to British-born women seeking employment in the province. Although this hostel continued accepting emigrants in the interwar period, the ‘home helps’ schemes remained relatively small. The Salvation Army sent about 15,000 single women – most into domestic service – to Canada in the years between the founding of its emigration department in 1903 and 1914.⁴⁰ If women became more aware of overseas opportunities, they would – perhaps – avail themselves of them, especially with the added lure of adventure.

Emphasis on emigration to reduce unemployment in Britain became stronger around 1914. During the early months of the War MPs recommended training women to fit them for work in the Dominions, thereby helping reduce unemployment in Britain.⁴¹

Queen Mary, deeply interested in the work of the CCWTE, communicated her wish for this organisation to become involved in the emigration of girls to Australia to work as servants. At this stage, the CCWTE was content merely to outline conditions for the operation of such a scheme. For example, wages should be paid at the current local rate. There should be a safe-haven so that a redundant emigrant ‘may not, from lack of a home, be forced to stay in any undesirable situation’. Finally, refusal to emigrate should not affect entitlement to relief.⁴²

But the War interrupted the free flow of migrants, and revival of such schemes – on a larger and more purposeful scale – had to wait until the 1920s.

The Government’s main contribution to emigration during the interwar years was the 1922 Empire Settlement Act which, as its name suggests, was designed to assist willing emigrants – men, women and children – to start new lives in the Dominions. Even before this scheme became operational, the Empire had been a popular choice for voluntary migrants, as the following statistics for 1920 indicate.

⁴⁰ Marilyn Barber *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), pp.10-1.

⁴¹ 68 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 243, 16 November 1914.

⁴² BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 2 September 1914 and Memorandum on Emigration, 7 September 1914.

Destination Country	Adults		Children under 12	Total
	Male	Female		
British North America	47,546	49,478	21,813	118,837
Australia	10,374	13,261	5,339	28,974
New Zealand	5,303	6,885	2,665	14,853
British South Africa	6,290	6,737	2,130	15,157
India & Ceylon	5,225	5,394	1,569	12,188
Other British Empire	5,052	2,775	758	8,585
Total British Empire	79,790	84,530	34,274	198,594
United States	30,227	37,664	9,260	77,151
Other Foreign Countries	4,965	3,205	1,187	9,357
Total Emigrants	114,982	125,399	44,721	285,102

The reason for higher numbers of women over men emigrating in 1920 is unclear. Many would undoubtedly have been dependants, but there was also a history of female emigration as workers in their own right. Canada had long favoured adult female immigrants from Europe and especially Britain, a bias presumably rooted in historical and cultural ties of settlement. For example, British women formed over three-quarters of Canada's overseas female immigrants between 1904 and 1914, this high percentage perhaps boosted by the strong presence of emigration societies such as the BWEA (see earlier).⁴⁴ The introduction of emigration schemes under the 1922 Empire Settlement Act would have built upon this well-established practice of British female emigration to take up domestic work in the Dominions.

Child emigration to Canada was also well established, boys and girls working respectively as indentured agricultural labourers and domestic servants. Parr shows that 80,000 British children – one third of them orphans – were sent to Canada between 1869 and 1924. Her study, focused on campaigners modelling themselves on Victorian philanthropist Lord Shaftesbury, illustrates heavy involvement by Barnardo's, Church of England Waifs and Strays Society, Macpherson Homes, and Quarrier Homes of Scotland.⁴⁵ Despite the apparent worthiness of these organisations, not all child emigrants went willingly or legally, a small percentage departing under Court Order or without parental consent. Indentured juveniles, bound until 18, theoretically faced severe penalties for absconding – jail or heavy fine.⁴⁶

⁴³ 144 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2231-2, 20 July 1921.

⁴⁴ Barber *Immigrant Domestic Servants* pp.8-9.

⁴⁵ Joy Parr *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada 1869-1924* (Croom Helm, 1980), p.11 and p.35. See also Gwen Searle 'The role of women in the emigration of children to Canada: a case study of the two initiators Miss Rye and Miss MacPherson, 1869-1914' (Oxford Brookes University, unpublished MPhil thesis, 1998).

⁴⁶ Parr *Labouring Children* p.67 and p.92.

The link with employment – and particularly domestic service – was not the initial rationale behind the 1922 Empire Settlement Act, despite advantageous side effects of reducing British unemployment. As late as April 1925, during a Parliamentary debate on Empire Settlement it was stressed that this should not be linked to unemployment. However, the Government acknowledged links with employment prospects, although it rejected suggestions for training schemes to help potential emigrants find work abroad, saying such schemes were best done in the adopted country. No reasons were stated but, with rising unemployment, financial considerations must have played their part. Yet just two months later in another debate, emigration was castigated for failing to solve the unemployment crisis.⁴⁷

In a complete reversal of policy, late 1925 saw the first training scheme directly and overtly linked with Empire Settlement – a residential centre at Claydon, Ipswich offered men agricultural training. By June 1926, 94 trainees were bound for Canada and Australia, with five men failing to complete the course.⁴⁸ By February 1927 Empire Settlement training schemes were gathering pace, with Claydon and Brandon centres catering for 250 men at a time. By the end of 1926 another 192 men had trained for between four and six months – at an approximate weekly cost (excluding capital charges) of 50s each – and migrated. The MoL, responsible for the training centres, announced that:

the Overseas Settlement Department are arranging with the [CCWTE] to establish an experimental residential centre for training about 40 women at a time for domestic service in Australia.⁴⁹

Domestic service training under the aegis of the CCWTE was thus to be the only Empire Settlement option offered to women. Despite this restricted opportunity, the proposed scheme was broadly welcomed by MPs, including Margaret Bondfield (still a CCWTE Committee member). She envisaged a wider course of training than merely domestic service skills, implying that she viewed emigration as more than just a solution to the Colonial servant problem. She was adamant that overseas success was closely bound with training currently offered to women in Britain, urging expansion in this area:

I make a special plea that it should be regarded as vital that, side by side, with the migration of men, the migration of women shall be made possible, at least in equal numbers, if not in greater numbers. That can only be done – and I say it deliberately, having had a great deal of experience in this matter – by a very large extension of training work in this country.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ 182 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1611, 1613 and 1620, 2 April 1925; 183 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1423, 11 May 1925; 186 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 132, 6 July 1925.

⁴⁸ 188 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1371, 25 November 1925; 196 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 921, 3 June 1926.

⁴⁹ 202 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 769-70, 15 February 1927.

⁵⁰ 204 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 517, 22 March 1927.

This speech implies something of a crisis in female emigration, in contrast to the previously high numbers, a fact underlined by Mr Amery, Minister for Dominion Affairs:

At present the figure is, roughly speaking, five men to four women, excluding children, and this leaves a deficit in the migration of women which, added to the fact of the excess of men in the Dominions and the excess of women here, shows that there is still a case for doing a great deal more to encourage the migration of women.⁵¹

Reasons for this 'crisis' in female emigration are obscure. Perhaps male emigration was targeted – a brief but small-scale 1920s revival of the Victorian labour colony movement offered farm training to men via the Salvation Army and Hudson's Bay Company.⁵² Did more single men (without female dependants) emigrate? Were women discouraged by limited training and work opportunities? Was increased State welfare a newly available economic safety net?

Clearly the fall in female emigration worried the Government. Amery stressed ventures to redress this decline, including Australia's willingness to help train women (the forthcoming CCWTE centre). Assisted or free passage favoured certain emigrants. Australia offered free passage to women entering domestic service, saving them £11. Canada reduced fares, allowing travel to Winnipeg for under £5 and Vancouver for £8, and increased assistance to juveniles to \$100. New Zealand, keen to attract females under 40 and males under 19, offered qualifying emigrants free passage, while single men paid passage at a reduced fare of £11.⁵³

The Canadian Assisted Passage Agreement reveals the dominance of domestic service, underlining the global nature of the servant problem. Grants for fares were available to any woman prepared to undertake domestic work regardless of her experience. With little demand for inexperienced servants, grants (determined by the Canadian Government) went mainly to trained servants or inexperienced workers with pre-agreed situations. 826 emigrants – 144 men, 412 women and 270 children – received assisted passage between December 1926 and February 1927.⁵⁴ Canada, faced with falling numbers of British female recruits for domestic service, specifically targeted unmarried female servants abroad. As well as assisted passage, Canada's Immigration Department provided Homes of Welcome, serving as both arrival point and social centre. Canadian preference for British women still held good – half of British immigrant domestics between 1926 and 1930 were helped under the Empire Settlement Scheme. Other European female immigrants did not qualify for assisted passage but faced restrictive immigration regulations effectively directing them into domestic service.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Ibid*, col 526. However, there had always been a gender imbalance in emigration.

⁵² *Field Learning through Labour* p.26.

⁵³ 204 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 525-6 and col 528, 22 March 1927.

⁵⁴ 204 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 881-2, 28 March 1927.

⁵⁵ Barber *Immigrant Domestic Servants* pp.15-6.

Not all British emigrants qualified for assistance under Empire Settlement schemes, as Amery's speech (below) indicates. His words reveals the extent to which such women were directed into domestic service, thus addressing the overseas servant problem:

There are openings for women overseas in professional capacities, but apart from wives and nominated women, *assisted passages are as yet only given to women able and willing to take up household work, and who undertake to remain in such work for twelve months.* The total number of women of 12 years of age and over who proceeded to other parts of the Empire during 1926 was 48,608. The number over 17 years of age assisted under the Empire Settlement Act was 18,668.⁵⁶

The proposed scheme to send female servants to Australia was finally agreed. In April 1927 a Market Harborough house was converted into a training centre. Like migrant men's courses, the CCWTE course was residential, but scale of operations was smaller – 40 trainees at a time and for ten weeks. The cost, estimated at £7,500 for the first year, was jointly borne by the Australian and British Governments. The CCWTE's function was 'the organisation of the actual training, in which it was felt that their experience would be invaluable'. The CCWTE was assured of adequate safeguards on trainee selection, the voyage, wages and work conditions.⁵⁷

Hitherto the CCWTE had declined to be involved in training women for emigration.⁵⁸ Now, embarking on this venture and anxious to protect its reputation, it warned 'Nothing would destroy the success of the Centre more certainly than any large proportion of failures among the girls either as trainees or on arrival in Australia.'⁵⁹ Moreover, the CCWTE believed itself adept at choosing suitable girls:

After all some 30,000 of these young women have passed through our hands, and we have a good deal of experience as to what sort of stuff is trainable and what is not.⁶⁰

Although female emigration, especially to the Empire, received cross-party support, concern was expressed over welfare, especially the issue of women's protection both aboard ship and after arrival. A document outlining welfare arrangements indicates safeguards – employers guaranteeing jobs for twelve months minimum, 'New Settlers Leagues' to meet ships on arrival. On board, girls were in the charge of a Matron, expected 'to do much to relieve the monotony of the long voyage to Australia'.⁶¹

⁵⁶ 204 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1429-31, 31 March 1927. (My italics)

⁵⁷ 205 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 634-5, 14 April 1927; BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 9 December 1926 and 7 April 1927.

⁵⁸ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/1, Minutes 17 February 1920.

⁵⁹ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 3/15, Letter Violet Markham to Dame Meriel Talbot, 7 December 1926.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ 208 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1725, 11 July 1927; BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Arrangements for welfare of women in Australia, nd [1927].

Anxiety over the Canadian child emigration scheme (indentured boys and girls) also surfaced. A 1924 investigatory delegation spent two months in Canada. Generally approving the scheme, its members advocated that emigrants be at least of school leaving age. Eventually, in 1928 Canada banned immigration of children under 14 and unaccompanied by their parents.⁶² This ban effectively ended use of foreign child labour to fill domestic service posts.

During the 1920s Australia remained a popular choice for emigrants, although some had little choice of destination if departing under the Empire Settlement scheme or one of Australia's campaigns for foreign workers. Nevertheless not all emigrants came under these schemes and the net percentage increase of population directly due to British emigration reveals a remarkable and sustained growth – between 1922 and 1926 annual percentage increase was 81, 84, 70, 73 and 87.⁶³ Claydon and Brandon centres indicate Australia's popularity as both destination and emigration training scheme, their success rates centres in November 1927 suggesting active support from trainees for the Government's emigration policy. There is a high emigration rate and a very low withdrawal rate.

	Claydon		Brandon	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Men who completed course	903		561	
of whom found jobs	850	94.13	514	91.62
of which jobs in Britain	279	32.82	49	9.53
of which jobs overseas	571	67.18	465	90.47
of which in Canada	256	44.83	210	45.16
of which in Australia	315	55.17	255	54.84

Such figures must have fuelled hopes for the CCWTE's Market Harborough centre, officially opened by the Duchess of York in December 1927.⁶⁵ Within a year, 228 trainees had sailed. The CCWTE course at 16 guineas per head was more expensive than men's courses at under £3, but may be due to two factors – higher standards of equipment and furnishing, partial amortisation of capital costs. Canada and New Zealand expressed interest in the CCWTE scheme. The Government seemed justified in linking training, domestic service and female emigration. But fewer applications and fluctuating costs dampened such satisfaction.⁶⁶

⁶² Parr *Labouring Children* p.153.

⁶³ 211 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1874-5, 12 December 1927.

⁶⁴ 212 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 595-6, 22 December 1927.

⁶⁵ Vera Brittain *Women's Work in Modern England* (Noel Douglas, 1928), p.32 (footnote 18); BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 13 October 1927.

⁶⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 9 February 1928, 12 July 1928 and 11 October 1928 and Statements Australian Training Centre Market Harborough for Half Year ended 30 September 1928 and for Half Year ended 31 March 1929.

Non-CCWTE schemes for female emigrants included limited training in agricultural work linked to domestic work, as the MoL explained in May 1928:

The Scottish Council of Women's Trades has inaugurated a scheme for placing Glasgow girls on farms in Scotland to learn household work with a view to settlement overseas. For women who can pay their own fees there are courses in agriculture and domestic science provided by various education authorities; a special overseas settlement course in agriculture and domestic science is provided at Hutton by the Lancashire County Council.⁶⁷

Clearly, courses such as those at Hutton were beyond the reach of many unemployed women. Potential working-class emigrants still had only one training option – the CCWTE's Market Harborough scheme for domestic service. Such employment was actively promoted in the Government *Handbook for Women who are thinking of Settling Overseas*, the January 1928 edition quoting seemingly generous wage rates for domestic servants. But officials were forced to admit that rates were 'approximate only and intended merely as a general guide.'⁶⁸

The future for Government emigration policies looked, on the face of it, bright. The Empire Settlement Scheme was still live, and by the end of 1928 over 300,000 persons had been assisted at a cost of £4,649,383. Yet this was not as generous as it appears, since for 1928 alone a total of 136,834 persons emigrated.⁶⁹ Re-calculating this figure at 102,625 for nine months of the annual total, the 38,003 Empire Settlement emigrants represent about 37 per cent of that figure. By calculating a cost per head based on annual numbers of emigrants and expenditure (Table 7.5), it is possible to surmise who was assisted under this scheme. Assuming that amounts represent estimated cost of passage and that only persons unable to afford passage were eligible for Government assistance, we can speculate that such emigrants would be working-class with less disposable income and usually employed in lower status jobs.

Financial Year	Emigrants	Expenditure £	Cost per head (£)
1922-1923	13,340	35,464	2.66
1923-1924	39,766	424,882	10.69
1924-1925	40,739	423,622	10.40
1925-1926	45,166	569,875	12.62
1926-1927	66,306	1,128,896	17.03
1927-1928	56,871	1,282,906	22.56
1928-1929 (9 months to 31/12/28)	38,003	783,738	20.62
TOTAL	300,191	4,649,383	15.49

⁶⁷ 217 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1500, 21 May 1928.

⁶⁸ 219 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 11-2, 25 June 1928.

⁶⁹ 225 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 438-9, 13 February 1929 and cols 567-8, 14 February 1929.

⁷⁰ 225 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 438-9, 13 February 1929.

Until 1927 both proportion and actual numbers of women emigrants under the Empire Settlement scheme increased⁷¹, bearing out my earlier contention that awareness of opportunity tended to boost emigration. Free training and passage also undoubtedly encouraged women desirous of going overseas, albeit initially as servants. By July 1929 the Dominion Affairs Minister was happy to tell the House:

there is every indication that the demand especially for single women trained for household employment is practically unlimited. [We are] keenly alive to the importance of the migration of women. Free or assisted passages to the Dominions are available for women. [...] The Government has also co-operated in establishing domestic training centres in this country, and further centres are being opened. Arrangements are made in co-operation with the Governments, voluntary organisations and private residents in the Dominions for the reception and after care of women. I am considering further methods of drawing attention to the openings for women, and the most effective means of stimulating this particular branch of migration.⁷²

The dominance of domestic service for women is evident from this speech. Voluntary organisations were now receiving Government help to run centres on similar lines to that at Market Harborough. Despite no knowledge of actual course content, it appears that CCWTE and non-CCWTE training schemes operated on a broadly similar basis.

Table 7.6, outlining schemes available under the Empire Settlement Act at the end of 1929, highlights the differentiation of both training and employment:

Type of Centre	Instruction	Method of Selection
Three permanent Farm Training centres at Brandon, Carstairs and Claydon – 620 places. Three as-required centres on Forestry Commission estates (Cranwich, High Lodge, West Tofts) – 600 places.	Men – farm work course 12 weeks minimum.	By relevant Dominion Authority representative. Voluntary applicants aged 19 to 35 for Canada, aged 19 to 25 for Australia
Four residential centres, for domestic work overseas, run by voluntary organisations, with MoL financial assistance – 150 places.	Women – basic general housework course 8-12 weeks.	By relevant Dominion Authority representative. Women aged 18 to 35.
Market Harborough residential centre, for domestic work in Australia, run by CCWTE. Administered by Dominions Office (Overseas Settlement Department). Cost shared by British/Australian Governments.	Women and girls -- domestic subjects course 10 weeks.	Women – by Women’s Sub-Committee of local Employment Committee. Girls – by Juvenile Advisory Committee of local Employment Exchange. Females aged 16 to 35.

⁷¹ 227 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1290-1, 29 April 1929.

⁷² 230 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1286-7, 24 July 1929.

⁷³ 233 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 479-84, 11 December 1929.

The number of training centres was roughly equal, but the number of places – 1,220 for men, about 200 for women – indicates a greater preoccupation with men. This suggests that female unemployment was perceived as less important and less urgent, marginalised in the wider context of economic problems. Such marginalisation is probably rooted in traditional attitudes towards female employment – that women were dependants with male breadwinners (thus ignoring both female heads of households and a necessity for dual incomes in some poorer households) and that women were only marking time until they married and left the labour market (thus ignoring self-supporting single and widowed women). In Government-sanctioned centres men receive agricultural training – a traditional employment sector but also providing skills men might later use on their own account rather than as employees. In contrast, women's training is confined to the traditional female sector of domestic service and, while such skills might benefit them in their own homes, it would not open new job opportunities. Equally, these domestic skills could be directed into solving overseas servant shortages.

Training centres boasted a total 9,785 men admitted to courses by the end of 1929, with 731 currently in training. By the following month there were 868 male trainees, plus 60 female trainees at hostels for overseas domestic service. Emigration rates for trained men appeared good – 2,366 emigrants out of 2,830 applicants for Australia (83.6 per cent) and 4,892 emigrants out of 6,810 applicants for Canada (71.8 per cent).⁷⁴ Field disputes official claims of success at men's training centres, alleging a high drop-out and expulsion ratio, although this seems at odds with these percentages and the figures in Table 7.4 earlier.⁷⁵

Whatever the truth of the claims, it is clear that the Government had a vested interest in presenting a positive picture of emigration schemes – to appease MPs who objected on moral or economic grounds, to persuade taxpayers of their value and worth, to arouse new interest from overseas, and importantly to attract new recruits.

Critically, success depended on continued demand from the Dominions, whose policies were determined by internal economic and political fortunes. Already by late 1929, the situation was changing. Suspension of Australian assisted passages put the emigration scheme for female domestic servants in jeopardy – the future of the CCWTE scheme looked bleak.⁷⁶ The solution of overseas servant shortages, hitherto through the 'export' commodity of trained female servants from Britain, was no longer viable in the worsening global economy. Funding from the Australian Government ceased, as did the CCWTE's residential training courses.

⁷⁴ 234 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 129-32, 21 January 1930; 236 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 616-7, 6 March 1930.

⁷⁵ Field *Learning through Labour* p.53.

⁷⁶ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 21 November 1929.

Confusion at this time led to erroneous Press reports that the Market Harborough scheme had failed, publicity that angered CCWTE members. Both Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb) and Colonel Manning, Australian Director of Migration, were quick to express appreciation of the CCWTE's overseas scheme.⁷⁷ Likewise, global economic depression hit Canada who was forced in 1930 to cease recruiting foreign servants. This was at a period when, paradoxically, her domestic service industry increased in importance, due to lack of alternative female employment (especially in rural areas where many foreign servants had worked) coupled with increasing male unemployment.⁷⁸

But State involvement in the link between female emigration and domestic service was not yet dead. In April 1930 the Government co-operated with seven residential centres run jointly with voluntary or philanthropic organisations. As neither the MoL nor the CCWTE was involved, it is unlikely that these small schemes were viewed as part of the wider issue of women's unemployment. Market Harborough had ceased as a CCWTE dispersal point but remained in the hands of the Dominion Affairs Department where in July 1930 sixteen trainees were bound for Australia, Canada or New Zealand.⁷⁹ This seems to have been the last concerted effort to train servants for overseas.

By 1931 the death knell also tolled for the much-vaunted Empire Settlement Scheme. By June the governments of Britain, Australia and New Zealand agreed to suspend assisted passages, partly due to fewer emigrants and more returnees – 27,151 migrants left the UK for the Empire during 1931 while 53,181 made the reverse trip. This unwelcome trend was also becoming evident among younger people aged 12 to 20 with numbers of emigrants falling sharply and returning emigrants rising.⁸⁰

In November 1931 the Empire Settlement scheme was in disarray. Global economic conditions now led British Ministers to discourage emigration. Assisted passage depended on exceptional circumstances, for example, family reunion. Migrants paying passage had to comply with stricter regulations on health and character, plus convince the accepting country that they would not become a public charge. The British Government distanced itself from the Settlement scheme, declining to accept responsibility for any migrant wishing to return home, maintaining that migration had always been a voluntary decision. By late 1934 the Minister for Dominion Affairs stated that, since success depended on overseas opportunities, no emigrants would be encouraged unless they had a 'fair chance'.⁸¹

⁷⁷ BLPES, Markham Papers, Box 3/4, Minutes 13 February 1930 and 10 April 1930.

⁷⁸ Barber *Immigrant Domestic Servants* p.18.

⁷⁹ 237 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1467, 3 April 1930; 241 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1762, 21 July 1930.

⁸⁰ 253 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1605-6, 16 June 1931; 267 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 926, 21 June 1932.

⁸¹ 259 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 678-9, 17 November 1931; 293 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 812, 6 November 1934.

In late 1936 the Empire Settlement Scheme was all but dead. Adults were denied assisted passage while juveniles went only to specific training centres, notably Fairbridge Farm Schools in Western Australia and British Columbia and Barnardo's Farm School in New South Wales.⁸² (Girls were probably not involved in these farm training schemes.)

Between 1922 and 1936 some 405,000 emigrants had been assisted at a cost of £6,099,046 or about £15 per head. CCWTE training costs for adult women at that time ranged from around £16 for domestic training in day centres or £20 in residential centres to £30 for both older women's courses and Individual Vocational courses (see Table 5.7 in Chapter 5). As Table 7.7 reveals, expenditure on assisted emigration varied according to destination. This probably relates to that country's financial contributions, rather than distance or training costs. Canada and Australia retained their popularity in terms of numbers of emigrants. This is explained not just by physical size – an ability to absorb more emigrants – but also to heavy participation in the British Government's drive to supply British workers. Equally, there was a strong historical and cultural link of settlement between Britain and both Canada and Australia.

	Expenditure £	Migrants
Canada	2,233,83	186,524
Australia	3,310,977	172,735
New Zealand	477,967	44,745
South Africa (Union & Southern Rhodesia)	59,031	1,226
Miscellaneous Expenditure	17,988	
TOTAL	6,099,046	405,230

By 1937, the idea of emigration to the Dominions had lost popularity, for returning migrants outnumbered those departing (South Africa alone bucking this trend).⁸⁴

In the light of this, the concept of linking training and emigration, having lost official support, was finally abandoned. By June 1938 all use of training centres for Empire migration had ceased.⁸⁵ Government emigration policy seems to have been defeated by global economic pressures, which rendered the policy unsustainable. Insofar as the policy affected women, the narrow restriction in linking it exclusively with domestic service must also have deterred many potential emigrants. Certainly the CCWTE's short experiment in training female emigrants for domestic service would never be repeated.

⁸² 318 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 213-4, 24 November 1936. The Fairbridge organisation continued assisted emigration to Australia, but switched attention from children to single-parent families. This scheme was operating until at least 1977. (Personal communication from an assisted emigrant, April 2001)

⁸³ 318 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 213-4, 24 November 1936.

⁸⁴ 320 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1666, 22 February 1937; 326 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1085, 13 July 1937.

⁸⁵ 337 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 3-4, 14 June 1938.

Immigration into Britain

Concurrent with emigration of British workers to enter domestic service abroad was an influx of foreign workers to enter similar employment in Britain. This was not a new twentieth-century phenomenon, but gained official support under the Aliens Order 1920. This allowed aliens (as foreigners were officially designated) to take domestic jobs under a special permit scheme. This scheme, to effect a partial solution to the problem of a servant shortage, caused controversy with opinion divided on the wisdom of this action – some hailed it as a panacea for all worker shortages, others decried it as unnecessary due to rising British unemployment.

There was no shortage of applications from foreign workers. In 1929, for example, 4,151 short-term permits were issued for female servants, the majority (1,852) coming from Switzerland.⁸⁶ This willingness on the part of foreign workers to accept British domestic work contrasts with the unwillingness of many British unemployed women to enter domestic service. This suggests that foreign workers either used their short-term work permits to provide a kind of working holiday experience or, as the political situation in Europe worsened during the 1930s, saw domestic service as a means of gaining entry into Britain as refugees (discussed later). The scale of immigration also serves to demonstrate that training schemes like the CCWTE's to encourage British women to become servants were largely unsuccessful, failing to persuade enough unemployed women to take up this unpopular occupation.

MPs, fearing for British workers' jobs, continually expressed anxiety over importing foreign servants. In 1933 a tax similar to the Male Servant Licence Duty was suggested. (This unique tax is discussed in Chapter 2). But levying taxes was a Treasury matter and no Chancellor seriously considered taking this step.⁸⁷ MPs were assured that getting a work permit was no easy matter, employers needing to satisfy the MoL that no suitable British domestics were available and that the job's general wages and conditions accorded with current practice.⁸⁸

Anxiety also focused on foreigners' apparent lack of accountability to Ministry officials (concern apparently due to some MPs' xenophobic suspicion, fuelled by an increasingly volatile European political situation). In December 1933 one MP urged further restrictions on aliens working as servants, citing the ease with which they could change jobs by the simple expedient of employers notifying police. His major worry was that aliens might overstay their permitted time and remain in Britain indefinitely. But both the MoL and Home Office decided against introducing further measures on grounds of administrative cost.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ 236 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 613-4, 6 March 1930; 244 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1836-7, 13 November 1930.

⁸⁷ 274 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 336-7, 9 February 1933.

⁸⁸ 296 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 395, 12 December 1934.

⁸⁹ 283 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1805-6, 7 December 1933.

Hotel and restaurant work was popular among foreigners, especially students. Numbers of one-year permits for hotel and restaurant work issued to aliens – all men for no woman was allowed to take such employment – were 341 in 1932, 414 in 1933 and 462 in 1934.⁹⁰ Minister of Labour Ernest Brown was urged to replace foreign waiters working in Britain with British waiters. It was thought trainees would be found among the ranks of unemployed youths from Distressed (Special) Areas and unemployed men physically unsuited to heavy employment. But if hotel work appealed to foreigners it did not apparently hold the same attraction for British men. Brown declared that the waiters' course at Park Royal Government Training Centre was sufficient to cater for British trainees without the need to expand facilities.⁹¹

The political situation in Europe, dramatically worsening in the 1930s, stimulated the flow of refugees into Britain. During 1937 MPs again expressed anxiety about foreign servants. Monitoring of permit holders appears somewhat lax. For example, the Home Office was unable to state how many of the 32,090 foreigners issued with permits between 1931 and 1936 to work as servants in Britain still remained in the country, adding that many had probably already returned home.⁹²

The Government faced difficulties in trying to balance genuine concerns about British jobs with those about political refugees. Government policy maintained a strict control on immigration in view of high unemployment, although Geoffrey Mander MP asserted that 'special sympathy' was shown to 'refugees who have been driven out of their own countries'.⁹³ Not everyone was sympathetic to the plight of foreigners. In May 1938, the Home Secretary's assurance that sympathetic consideration was given to foreigners wishing to take domestic jobs in Britain brought a sharp retort from one MP – 'we believe in British girls for British homes'.⁹⁴

The increasingly unstable political situation in Europe affected applications for work permits, including those for domestic service. About 2,500 permits were issued for domestic service in 1927, this figure almost tripling by 1931. In 1936 over 8,000 such permits were issued, rising to 12,000 in 1937 and almost 14,000 in 1938.⁹⁵ The spiralling growth in numbers of foreign servants suggests demand originating from foreigners rather than demand from British employers despite Britain's perceived servant problem. It is impossible to state whether most or all of these permits were issued to political refugees.

⁹⁰ 296 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 396, 12 December 1934; 317 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 272, 5 November 1936.

⁹¹ 321 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 3072-3, 25 March 1937.

⁹² 322 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1432, 19 April 1937.

⁹³ 324 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1936-7, 10 June 1937.

⁹⁴ 335 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1419, 10 May 1938.

⁹⁵ 245 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2369-70, 4 December 1930; 276 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 5480, 23 March 1933; 296 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 395, 12 December 1934; 345 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 2788, 5 April 1939.

A comparison of nationalities of permit holders (Table 7.8) might provide an indication of whether the Home Office was operating a policy designed to aid refugees as much as to aid those merely seeking employment. In which case, the concept of aliens as a (partial) solution to the servant problem was being subsumed to the needs of the international situation.

Col 1	Col 2	Nationality	Jan-Sept 1934	April 1937- March 1938
1	3	Germany	2,747	1,267
2	24	United States of America	975	8
3	2	Switzerland	961	2,210
4	11	France	960	133
5	1	Austria	919	7,007
6	5	Denmark	403	559
7	10	Italy	391	159
8	9	Holland	271	168
9	8	Sweden	221	203
10	6	Norway	207	371
11	15	Belgium	199	31
12		Russia (now stateless)	176	
13	7	Czechoslovakia	161	354
14	4	Hungary	144	787
15	16	Finland	133	26
16	14	Poland	112	36
17	17	Spain	63	24
18	13	Estonia	61	60
19	27	Japan	50	1
	27	Egypt		1
		Iran		1
		Turkey		1
		Uruguay		1
20	26	Russia, USSR	45	2
	26	Bulgaria		2
		Iceland		2
		Palestine		2
21	18	Rumania	33	20
22	21	Greece	27	13
23	22	Latvia	21	12
24	19	Portugal	16	16
25		Other countries	180	
	12	Yugoslavia		68
	20	Stateless		15
	23	Luxemburg		10
	25	Danzig		3
		Lithuania		3
		TOTAL	9,506	13,576

⁹⁶ 293 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 324-6, 1 November 1934; 335 H.C. Deb 5 s, col 1251, 9 May 1938.

The comparison in Table 7.8 is flawed in that it compares unequal figures – 1934 is for the first nine months of that year, while 1938 is for twelve months up to 31st March. Equally, some countries are not separately listed in 1934 and may or may not appear under ‘Other countries’. Nevertheless, a comparison may provide clues. The table is arranged by country, Column 1 showing descending order of popularity at 1934 (i.e. largest category of permit holders was Germans, then Americans, then Swiss nationals). Column 2 shows the 1938 order.

Despite flaws in these comparative figures, there is evidence of a strong shift in numbers and nationalities. The French, perhaps much in demand as chefs and lady’s maids in 1934, decline from fourth place (960 permit holders) to eleventh (133). The Germans still figure strongly, although numbers are greatly reduced, while numbers of Swiss nationals have more than doubled. The greatest increase is among Austrians, with over 7,000 permit holders in 1938, compared with only 919 in 1934. But the most startling change is the drop in numbers of Americans – from 975 (second place in 1934) to a mere eight permit holders four years later. These changes cannot simply be an arbitrary preference of employers in 1938 for Austrians over Americans, for Hungarians over French. The figures suggest that permit holders were first and foremost political refugees rather than mere job seekers.

This permit scheme offered a means to gain entry to Britain for Europeans seeking to flee the Nazi regime. It is clear from the excessive numbers that not all applicants were genuine domestic servants – that is, with valid work experience – but were willing to take any route open to them. There is reason to surmise that many permit holders were Jewish. First, Austria, Germany and Hungary had large Jewish minority populations. Second, there were growing anti-Semitic measures against Jews in Germany – for example, exclusion from civil service and some professions in 1933, removal of German citizenship in 1935.⁹⁷ Third, Hitler’s expansionist plans for Lebensraum – for example, his intentions towards Austria and the Sudetenland – threatened neighbouring countries.⁹⁸ Fourth, Jewish banking and commercial interests provided a global communication network. Fifth, Switzerland was a strong financial centre, perhaps affording an escape route via Swiss Jewish connections (the reason for high numbers of Swiss nationals in Table 7.8?). Since lower-class Jews (or indeed other Europeans) could not have funded such action, we can surmise that many foreign servants were of better class, education and intellect than their British employers. Jones asserts that most refugee servants in Britain were from middle-class backgrounds, extraordinary circumstances driving them to this subterfuge.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Helen Jones *Women in British Public Life, 1914-50. Gender, Power and Social Policy* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), p.125; John Toland *Adolf Hitler* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth 1997), pp.310-1 and p.379; Alan Bullock *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (BCA/HarperCollins, 1991), p.507.

⁹⁸ Toland *Adolf Hitler* p.387 and pp.450-66.

⁹⁹ Jones *Women in Public Life* p.127.

While Table 7.8 cannot offer a definitive answer on whether immigrant domestic servants were primarily refugees, its implications are supported by Kushner's analysis of domestic service and Jewish refugees. He claims that over half the 55,000 Jewish refugees entering Britain in the 1930s were female with over one third coming as domestic servants. Since less than 9 per cent of employed Jewish women worked as servants in Germany in the 1920s, the supposition is that the MoL permit scheme was used as an escape route.¹⁰⁰ Certainly both Kushner and London assert that tighter immigration controls by British Governments during the 1930s disadvantaged refugees who therefore needed to rely on information from friends and relatives in Britain, British employment agencies operating in Europe (for example in Vienna), and on Jewish communal organisations.¹⁰¹

Therefore, it seems that by 1938 the issue of work permits to foreigners had shifted emphasis. Formerly seen by successive British Governments as a solution to the shortage of workers – especially acute in domestic service – it had become a means of allowing political refugees to find a safe haven in Britain without becoming a burden on the British taxpayer.

If care was taken to relieve British taxpayers of the financial burden of refugee servants, the Government could not always allay deep-seated fears and distrust. During the Second World War these found expression in terms of national security. For example, in May 1940 one MP, anxious that police be informed of the whereabouts of every female alien domestic worker, urged that failure to notify police be made a criminal offence. He was assured that every alien over 16 had to register with police, and that employers were already required to ensure that police were notified. The following month MPs were further assured that steps were taken to ensure that no alien domestic servant, currently working for civil servants or military personnel, should leak information. In July, the Home Secretary sought to reassure MPs that control over foreign servants was tight. Control was two-fold. First, an alien who changed her address had to inform police, as did the householder. Secondly, an alien was banned from working in a designated Alien Protected Area without the chief constable's special permission.¹⁰² (This was presumably an area of particular sensitivity – Government or military establishments, research centres, intelligence stations like Bletchley Park.)

¹⁰⁰ Tony Kushner 'An Alien Occupation – Jewish Refugees and Domestic Service in Britain, 1933-1948' in Werner E Mosse (ed) *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), p.554 and p.558.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.559; Louise London 'British Immigration Control Procedures and Jewish Refugees 1933-1939' in Mosse (ed) *Second Chance*. See also Tony Kushner 'Asylum or servitude? Refugee domestics in Britain 1933-1945' *British Society for the Study of Labour History* 5 (1988), pp.19-27.

¹⁰² 361 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 533-4, 29 May 1940 and cols 982-3, 6 June 1940; 362 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 992-3, 4 July 1940.

To judge by frequent worries expressed by MPs, the idea that spies were using domestic service as cover for their nefarious activities seems to have been rife – although almost certainly misplaced. It would seem that much anxiety about foreigners was unfounded and generated by fear or ignorance. There was apparently confusion in the public's mind about 'aliens' – spies, refugees, people from Colonies and Dominions, second-generation immigrants were all taken as one homogenous group. In the early years of the war, at least, the term 'alien' seems to have been applied indiscriminately in the sense of hostile foreigner. Yet many aliens were active in the armed forces, fighting for Britain and not against her.

Immediately post-war, the Government again considered linking the twin roles of affording asylum and filling job vacancies, specifically domestic service. In November 1945 it toyed with the idea of allowing displaced persons from Germany to work as servants in sanatoria.¹⁰³ This was partly prompted by a rapid decline among British workers in institutional domestic service which, as Chapter 6 has shown, received special promotion during the War.

There is some evidence that Britain did take displaced persons and refugees, for Canada bitterly complained of Britain's taking the best. Canada took over 165,000 displaced persons between 1947 and 1952, men being directed into lumbering and mining, women into domestic service. Unlike post-war Britain, Canada had a buoyant economy and this, coupled with a demand for workers and international pressure, may have encouraged her in this course.¹⁰⁴

Recruitment of foreign workers to fill British jobs which had come to be regarded as undesirable – for example, domestic service – continued into the post-war period. But there was one significant and far-reaching change. The targeted labour force was predominantly from former Empire countries – Africa, India, Caribbean – who were frequently drafted into low-status, low-paid, low-hierarchy jobs including domestic work as cleaners, kitchen assistants, hospital porters and auxiliaries.

By the 1960s these immigrant workers had effected a complete reversal of the old Empire Settlement Scheme in terms of composition and geographical movement of the mobile labour market, while conversely the very jobs that workers (especially women) took echoed that scheme. By 1958 there were an estimated 210,000 Blacks and Asians in Britain. While the number was relatively small, it was nonetheless a noticeable increase since the passing of the British Nationality Act 1948. This legislation reversed earlier Government policy of restrictive immigration by allowing unrestricted entry of Commonwealth citizens.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ 415 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1207-8, 6 November 1945.

¹⁰⁴ Barber *Immigrant Domestic Servants* pp.19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Briggs *A Social History of England* p.310; Simon Heffer *Like the Roman. The Life of Enoch Powell* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998. Phoenix, 1999), pp.119-120

Marwick argues that there was an element of class division inherent in such post-war immigration. The British middle- and upper-classes – perhaps influenced by echoes of the Raj – saw Commonwealth countries as a prime source of scarce labour. The lower classes (likely to become the immigrants' new neighbours and perhaps also rivals for the same jobs) experienced greater disruption to their lives with the introduction of new and 'alien' cultures.¹⁰⁶ If Commonwealth countries were seen as a good labour source, it may explain why policymakers – still predominantly middle- and upper-class – targeted their citizens (especially women) to fill domestic service vacancies.

Post-war importation of Black and Asian women to fill lowly domestic service jobs was not confined to Britain, Canada breaking its long taboo on West Indian immigration in the 1950s.¹⁰⁷ Thus, to the interwar occupational segregation of domestic service by class and gender (i.e. deemed suitable employment for working-class women), was added the new perspective of race.

The active recruitment of foreigners to fill domestic service vacancies in Britain between the 1920s and the 1960s suggests that internal schemes to address Britain's servant problem had failed. The difficulties of persuading workers to become more mobile and take up non-local jobs (particularly targeting women to fill domestic vacancies) have been discussed earlier in this Chapter. Similarly, as discussed in Chapters 3 to 6, CCWTE domestic service training schemes for unemployed women during the interwar years failed to encourage sufficient numbers to take up this occupation, while the post-war innovation of a dedicated national institute of domestic workers was also ineffectual in tackling the servant shortage.

Conclusions

Migration, particularly schemes linked with domestic work, illustrates that servant shortages varied regionally across Britain, a pattern repeated in a global context (for example, the Dominions). More importantly, the need to recruit foreign servants into Britain underlines the failure of CCWTE training schemes to solve the servant problem.

Prior to 1914 labour movement to take up domestic service jobs was largely a matter of personal choice although voluntary and charitable organisations were involved in emigration of British females taking up domestic jobs in Empire countries. After 1914 Government policy, backed by legislation, greatly boosted links between domestic service and migration, whether labour movement within the country or from/to abroad.

¹⁰⁶ Arthur Marwick *British Society since 1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, second edition), p.163.

¹⁰⁷ Barber *Immigrant Domestic Servants* p.23.

The idea of labour movement within Britain was encouraged through the authority delegated to the Transference Board from the 1920s and the Unemployment Assistance Board from the 1930s. These boards were instrumental in carrying out Government policy on internal migration, encouraging – sometimes coercing – unemployed women and girls to take domestic work in non-local regions.

The Empire Settlement Scheme of the 1920s reinforced the same message of migration and domestic service for women and girls wishing to find work in the Dominions. This reinforcement was echoed by Dominion governments in their stated desire for foreign servants, their preference being for British females. The concept of training unemployed women to become servants overseas found practical expression in the short-lived CCWTE training centre at Market Harborough, which provided young trained servants for this purpose. Despite great hope for its success, Government policy of linking unemployment, training, domestic service and emigration was defeated by the global economic situation, which effectively forced closure of the Market Harborough centre and the CCWTE scheme.

Concurrent with legislation that afforded funding for the Empire Settlement Scheme came legislation under the 1920 Aliens Act offering foreigners a British work permit scheme. The dominance of domestic work, especially for women, is clear. The importation of foreigners to fill British domestic service vacancies changed focus during the 1930s as the scheme became a lifeline to Europeans seeking to escape the threat of Nazism. Kushner asserts that the MoL was well aware that many refugees entering domestic service under the permit scheme would not wish to stay in this occupation. British policy at this time, he asserts, was driven by an uneasy dichotomy – compassion and generosity towards refugees, and ‘blatant self-interest’ in solving a perceived servant shortage.¹⁰⁸

All three types of migration were seen as a partial solution to the servant problem, which manifested itself particularly strongly in the interwar years. In the case of internal migration, the domestic worker was seen to be filling a vacancy on a local or regional level, while at the same time reducing unemployment levels. In the case of emigration or immigration, the worker was fulfilling the same function, but on a global level. But whether internal or external, the migrant domestic worker was predominantly female, thus sustaining and promoting the ideology of domestic work as woman’s work.

¹⁰⁸ Kushner ‘An Alien Occupation’ pp.562-3.

Conclusion

Overview

The concept of the servant problem

Attitudes towards domestic service gave rise to a new concept of the servant problem. A diversity of commentators and the multiplicity of causes to which they attributed the servant problem ensured that its definition was not a simple or static one. Furthermore, the status of many commentators – frequently the more articulate members of society – tended to promote a viewpoint favouring servant-employing classes. Thus definitions of the servant problem focused more on practicalities of solving worker shortages than addressing underlying causes for women's reluctance to enter service. One psychological approach from 1925 stands unique in seeking to do this – defining the crux of the servant problem as one of human relationships, specifically employers' failure to countenance lifestyle changes.

The Great War, affording increased – but temporary – employment opportunities for working women, crystallised the concept of the servant problem. First, it became gendered – a broad consensus among commentators clarified the servant problem as a shortage of female servants. Second, wartime experiences consolidated discontent among working women over conditions in domestic service. The opportunity afforded women to do jobs previously labelled men's work – plus higher wages and greater freedom which many wartime workers enjoyed – ensured that women's employment horizons were widened, in the sense of their being more aware of alternatives to domestic service. Thereby, the Great War can be said to have exacerbated the servant problem by bringing disharmony and discontent more sharply into focus. The servant problem therefore was not a simple straightforward issue but a complex and multi-faceted problem, albeit with a broad consensus as a shortage of female servants.

Solutions reflected this multi-layered complexity. Most proposals reflected mistresses' concerns – that is, they sought to maintain the status quo. Preferred solutions related to some kind of formal training. Usually this was linked with ideas of instilling pride in housework, raising the status of domestic service to improve its attractiveness as an occupation, or professionalisation. But the rationale behind training seems to have centred more on ensuring a supply of competent servants rather than seeking to ameliorate conditions for servants. Despite this emphasis on practicalities, it was acknowledged that the personal relationship between mistress and maid could not be neglected or ignored. Few went as far as the psychologist's assertion that employers' attitudes towards domestic service, housework and lifestyles held the key to the solution to the servant problem.

Significantly, the concept of a servantless society was beginning to find voice, although proponents usually advocated development of daily service to replace the unpopular live-in system. Few contemporary commentators seriously contemplated a completely servantless society. Suggestions for communal or co-operative housekeeping, although periodically made and occasionally put into practice (albeit on a small scale), found little favour among policymakers, mistresses or working women.

Servants' voices are noticeably absent from discussions on domestic service and the servant problem. Even when views were canvassed, via surveys for example, servants' concerns were frequently dismissed or trivialised. Servants' organisations, for example those in London, tended to be social or educational in nature, rarely addressing fundamental issues of employment terms and conditions. Often run by mistresses for maids, these organisations underline the class distinction between employers and workers and highlight how servants were constrained to rely on intervention by their social superiors.

Economic Context

Despite other occupations being available to women, domestic service dominated women's employment during the interwar years. Census statistics reveal a continuing pattern of domestic service as a predominantly female occupation. Male participation rates remained consistently low, being largely confined to specific areas – outdoor jobs or institutional work. By contrast, women's participation rates – private or institutional, indoor or out – remained high, albeit revealing changes in workforce composition over the period.

Women's inability to gain equality with men disadvantaged them, even with employers who preferred a female workforce, for this preference was often allied to lower wages and non-unionisation. Indeed, (male) employer and trade union hostility towards women effectively barred entry into specific jobs or occupations. Despite women's entry into professions plus work experience gained during the Great War, economic, educational and geographical barriers also closed many occupations to women. By contrast, domestic service was available nationally. Such work was underpinned by the gendered State curriculum emphasising domestic subjects for (working-class) girls, a focus bolstered by childhood 'training' at home. Legislation, notably protection of workers during sickness or unemployment, excluded domestic service, thus isolating and differentiating it from other work. A unique local government tax – the Male Servant Licence Duty – required annual payment by employers on all male servants. Despite surviving 160 years until 1937, no female equivalent was mooted or implemented. This may have been a deliberate policy decision. For if employers faced additional costs in employing

female servants, might this not lead them to question the advantages of having servants and thus exacerbate both female unemployment and the servant problem?

Government policy towards unemployed women sharply deviated from that towards unemployed men. Men were offered a variety of relief schemes and training courses, whereas women's training was firmly confined to domestic skills. Men were additionally offered 'conditioning' to combat the strains of unemployment, a facility denied women. Men's training schemes received more Government support, both financially and in terms of numbers of centres and training places. Reasons for differentiating between unemployed men and women were connected with perceptions of their needs plus prevailing attitudes towards employment. After 1918 there was a strong call for a return to the pre-war status quo, underpinned by a pre-agreed alliance between Government, employers and trade unions, which effectively reversed wartime substitution deals. Women were encouraged to leave the labour market and return to their 'natural' home sphere. Such calls were sharpened by high levels of female unemployment in the 1920s, which many – both in Parliament and the press – saw as evidence of women wilfully refusing work. Little regard was paid to the fact that many women supported themselves and/or their families.

The Government reacted to perceived abuse of the State benefit system by developing strategies that effectively discriminated against women and penalised them for refusing to enter domestic service. High levels of female unemployment meant greater numbers of benefit claimants. Wartime employment had often been in insured occupations, that is, entitling the worker to State benefits. By contrast, domestic service was an uninsurable occupation, outside State benefit schemes. Thus, whereas servants were unable to claim public assistance, women who worked in insured trades – including, for example, munitions – were eligible for State benefits. Such women registered unemployed at Employment Exchanges, thus fuelling fears of an excessive financial burden. In an effort to dissuade women from claiming – plus reduce unemployment levels and fill vacancies – the Government adopted a policy of withholding benefits from any woman deemed to have refused a suitable job. The definition of 'suitable' was made by Exchange officials and almost universally meant domestic service.

But many women were reluctant to change jobs. First, they often had skills in other trades. Second, domestic service frequently required the worker to live-in, an employment condition rarely found in alternative occupations. Third, wages and conditions were held to be poor. Fourth, service was seen as low status and inferior. Fifth, as an uninsurable occupation, domestic service negated all benefits of having paid contributions to join the State insurance schemes.

The Government, faced with this difficult situation, sought to forge a relationship between unemployment, training and the servant problem. Women would be retrained as servants, thus removing them from Exchange registers (reducing unemployment levels and benefit claims) and filling vacancies for domestic jobs (solving the shortage of female servants). This strategy was adopted and implemented throughout the 1920s and 1930s, under successive Governments, with only minor changes in its operation.

The Second World War saw a major change regarding domestic service, underpinning the difference between private and institutional service. The latter achieved greater status by its designation as essential wartime work, plus regulated wages and conditions. Conversely, private service was viewed as tantamount to sedition. However, Government was alive to the needs of necessitous private households, devising a national scheme of home helps. Likewise, female servants from such families were exempt from 'conscription' – a new departure where women were compulsorily directed into essential work.

Migration was a traditional means of filling servant shortages, both within Britain (internal) and overseas (external, rooted in voluntary schemes to send British female servants to the Dominions or encourage foreign women to become servants in Britain). Internal migration was encouraged – sometimes using coercive methods – via the Transference Board (from 1920s) and Unemployment Assistance Board (from 1930s). The 1920s Empire Settlement Scheme promoted domestic service in the Dominions, who reinforced this by a stated desire for British women. The CCWTE was involved in a short-lived training scheme to provide female servants for this purpose. Outgoing migration schemes depended on global economies, the worsening of which effectively ended the 'import' of British servants and closed the CCWTE scheme. Incoming migration changed significance in the 1930s, becoming a lifeline to European (often Jewish) women fleeing the Nazi regime. After 1945, women from the Commonwealth were sought, thus adding race to class/gender issues in domestic service.

The CCWTE

The Great War had an unprecedented effect on women's employment, many being thrown out of traditional jobs at the outbreak of war. This provided the rationale for establishing the Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment (CCWTE), whose remit was to find these women alternative work. CCWTE schemes lasted two years, until the 1916 conscription of men into the Services and the concomitant substitution of women for men in factories, shops and offices. With increased job opportunities, the need for CCWTE schemes was diminished.

Post-war unemployment rose alarmingly and remained high throughout the recessions of the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, the CCWTE – envisaged as a short-term measure to deal with a specific situation – was re-established under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour (MoL) in 1920. It was to remain in operation for a further 20 years, developing and implementing schemes to train unemployed women.

Closer ties with the MoL profoundly affected the autonomy and independence enjoyed by the CCWTE. Early training schemes dealt with both middle- and working-class women, offering a variety of courses – from group schemes for domestic and clerical work to individual funding for professional training. After 1920, the CCWTE's work became increasingly allied with Government policy on unemployed women. CCWTE funding derived annually from the Treasury and thereby gave rise to uncertainty and ambiguity over the organisation's continued existence. Thus, CCWTE dependence on and accountability to Government was affirmed.

During the 1930s the focus of CCWTE training was domestic work. The CCWTE ran training centres countrywide, offering domestic service training. Initially, trainees were obliged to agree to enter service after training, although this stipulation was later dropped (except for girls, who were accepted on the understanding that they would enter domestic service afterwards). Numbers and location of centres varied according to regional economic circumstances, often concentrating on Depressed (Special) Areas – those designated by Government as suffering extreme hardships of unemployment. The CCWTE Home Training Centres differed only in that courses were either daily or residential, the latter being deemed to simulate more closely the restrictive conditions of domestic service.

Conflict between the CCWTE and Government arose during the Second World War, not least over the CCWTE's role in wartime. Eager to serve in whatever training capacity the MoL thought fit, the CCWTE was nevertheless sidelined and ignored. Eventually, the entire Committee resigned in protest, CCWTE assets being transferred to a separate training centre at Maida Vale (which continued until the late 1940s). The tenacity of CCWTE members had ensured a long and useful life, despite much antipathy and hostility towards itself and its work. Now, facing animosity and indifference from its financial masters, the CCWTE was powerless to continue. Breakdown of the relationship is exemplified by the lack of appreciation from Ministers for the CCWTE's long work record – no mention is made in the House of Commons, the Press or directly. Thus, as the First War saw the birth of the CCWTE, so the Second War saw its death.

The War also saw the death of domestic service, for hopes of a post-war revival were unrealised. Efforts were made via the establishment of the National Institute of Houseworkers,

whose aim was to raise the status of domestic service. But, despite claims that the War had revealed the importance and value of such work, 1945 did not see a resurgence of domestic service and mistresses of households faced a servantless future.

Evaluation

How successful was the CCWTE? Success or failure can be measured both on its own terms as an organisation and within the context of Government strategy. This evaluation is according to the following criteria – solving the servant problem; stemming the decline in domestic service; ameliorating women's unemployment (as far as possible, given the nationally high levels of worker unemployment); and enhancing the status of domestic service.

I deal first with the wider context. In my first criterion of solving the servant problem, Government tactics failed because they tackled only the immediate shortage of workers rather than underlying causes of that shortage. The Government's aim of encouraging women into domestic service was basically to fill vacancies, without investigating whether such direction could realistically be achieved and maintained. To this end, the Government was increasingly forced to abandon encouragement in favour of persuasion or coercion. This move, often achieved through withholding benefits, effectively made domestic service more unpopular. It created antagonism between claimants and officials, caused resentment among genuine claimants (many with alternative work skills), and was open to abuse by unscrupulous or over-zealous staff. The withholding of benefits discriminated against women, the same procedure being less likely to be invoked with unemployed men, even those unable to find work within their chosen trade. Equally, the servant problem was tackled only from the employers' viewpoint, thus ignoring valid complaints or concerns of servants. Only in the late 1930s did policymakers acknowledge that addressing underlying causes of domestic service's unpopularity was essential to raising its status, thereby solving the servant shortage. The Minister of Labour spearheaded this campaign in 1938. But political events overtook these good intentions.

Thus the Government's linking of unemployment, training and the servant problem was unrealistic and impracticable as a solution. It categorised unemployed women as a simple statistical unit, without questioning their reasons for working. Women supporting themselves, their children or perhaps husbands disabled in the Great War, were less likely to countenance retraining, since this required a period of non-receipt of money. Similarly, such women were unlikely to migrate to areas offering domestic service jobs – particularly since residential service rarely afforded opportunity for women to have dependants live with them. The Government's approach was fundamentally flawed because it focused on correlating numbers – matching

supply and demand as represented in Employment Exchange figures. But this ignored the human element – failing to address why unemployed women were reluctant to enter service, whether women would wish to retrain, whether women were suitable for retraining, whether retraining could solve the servant problem.

On the second criterion of stemming the long-term and slow decline in domestic service, Government strategy was a failure, since it clung to the traditional view of domestic service as a ‘natural’ occupation for (working-class) women. Equally domestic service was accepted as part of normal life, perpetuated by a class system in which a leisured lifestyle required an army of menials to maintain it. Inability to countenance ways of changing or adapting to accommodate a more modern lifestyle meant that no genuine attempts were made to address the issue of servants’ working conditions. Both the 1919 Ministry of Reconstruction Report and the 1923 Ministry of Labour Inquiry into the supply of female servants failed to explore what changes in lifestyle might improve domestic service and make it more attractive. Daily work was a popular idea with servants but few mistresses favoured it, preferring to have residential maids at their beck and call. By failing to build upon this idea of daily maids, Government policy ensured that unpopularity of domestic service and its restrictive conditions were perpetuated. State-funded home help schemes instigated during the Second World War (to alleviate distress among necessitous households) proved that such an idea was workable, efficient and popular. Similarly, Government ignored repeated suggestions for communal and/or co-operative housework, failing to explore these options on a national scale.

Thus Government tactics endorsed the status quo of mistress and maid, of residential service, of class distinctions. Failure to reform the traditional view of domestic service ensured that its decline continued and that the perceived servant problem worsened.

Government strategy failed to meet my third criterion – ameliorating women’s unemployment. By not treating women’s unemployment as seriously as men’s, successive Governments failed to provide incentives and support for women wishing to fill vacancies in alternative employment sectors. Ministers remained blinkered to the possibilities of retraining women in the same way as men. Government training was almost exclusively confined to domestic service courses for women, via the CCWTE. This lack of vision may be attributed to a number of factors – all of them disadvantaging women. Thus financial restraints, industry cutbacks and layoffs, trade union and employer attitudes, lack of training both in and outside school, tradition and custom, all played a part in defining policymakers’ attitudes. Furthermore, failure to acknowledge that women’s work could be vital input into a family income negated women’s contribution and marginalised their employment status.

Thus Government strategy failed to ameliorate women's unemployment because this was marginalised within the wider context of unemployment, which gave greater precedence and priority to men's unemployment and its relief. The opportunity to utilise women's skills and abilities was – perhaps – lost.

The fourth criterion of raising the status of domestic service was a clear failure. There was widespread ignorance of servants' working conditions and concerns, with little attempt to investigate the truth of their complaints. The issue of status seems to have been conveniently sidelined when high female unemployment levels coincided with heavy demand for servants. Nonetheless, there were sporadic attempts to raise awareness of the often dire conditions under which many servants laboured. But schemes by philanthropic groups were too small to have widespread or lasting results, while repeated attempts in the House of Commons to introduce regulatory controls on domestic service inevitably met with defeat. Institutional servants were brought into the State insurance scheme in 1938, but this served only to widen the perceived gap between private and institutional service. This gap was further widened during the Second World War, as a direct consequence of Government policy. Institutional service was designated an essential wartime occupation, and given added status by State-approved regulation of wages and conditions. By contrast, private service was vilified and viewed as almost unpatriotic. Nevertheless, State schemes for home helps were introduced nationally to alleviate hardships of households unable to manage without domestic servants. (These households were defined by Government and tended to favour young mothers, infants, and the elderly/infirm.) Post-war efforts to raise the status of domestic service rested with the new National Institute of Houseworkers. Despite great optimism, this attempt could not restore the fortunes of domestic service as an employment sector for women.

Thus, Government strategy failed to raise the status of domestic service because it did not acknowledge reasons behind that low status. It treated the servant problem as a concern of mistresses, a simple shortage of servants, rather than tackling it as of concern to servants. By refusing to be drawn into issues of wages and conditions, Government ignored consequences of poor working conditions – the inferior status in which domestic service was held.

Overall, the aim to retrain unemployed women to solve the servant problem was a failure. Despite many women being directed into this work, the strategy may have exacerbated the servant problem via its uncompromising and coercive methods. The strategy was inappropriate because it defined the servant problem as an issue of numbers, seeking only to balance statistics of unemployment registrations with vacancies. The strategy was inappropriate because it approached the problem from a single viewpoint, that of the employer, rather than

seeking to obtain a rounded and complete picture. It was inappropriate because it failed to address long-term and underlying causes of the servant problem, seeking to maintain a status quo of lifestyle which was becoming increasingly out of step with modern life. Such inability to recognise the full extent of the servant problem therefore doomed the schemes to failure.

With regard to the CCWTE, this organisation – as the key administrator of Government strategy on domestic service training – must also be counted a failure on the first two criteria of solving the servant problem and stemming the decline in domestic service.

The CCWTE failed to ameliorate women's unemployment on a large scale, for it did not live up to its remit of training women, except within the confines of domestic service. Courses for alternative occupations were small-scale and short-term. Blame for this should not be laid at the door of the CCWTE, who were enthusiastic and innovative in their efforts to devise courses for unemployed women. Blame must be apportioned to Government constraints, ranging from Treasury reluctance to fund schemes, Ministry of Labour's unwillingness to expand women's training beyond domestic service, and MPs' opposition to women's training generally. The exclusion of women from national political life until 1928, when full suffrage was granted, ensured that male perceptions of and attitudes towards female employment persisted. Calls for expansion of women's training, both in the House and via the CCWTE, were not powerful enough to persuade Governments to experiment. Thus the marginalisation of women's unemployment presented barriers to exploring and expanding women's training opportunities, despite evidence that women were keen and able to develop new skills.

On a smaller scale, the CCWTE can claim success in ameliorating women's unemployment. In their localities, training schemes were well received by and popular with trainees. There is much evidence of appreciation for the training given, even from women who later reverted to their previous employment. Trainees' gratitude is reflected in narratives that reveal a wider impact of CCWTE training schemes, affecting women's health, lifestyles, ambitions and self-confidence. Equally, CCWTE centres provided jobs for women as administrators and teachers, thus removing the spectre of unemployment for such staff, because both clerical and teaching sectors were a competitive labour market. The fall in recruitment numbers to CCWTE centres reflects not so much dissatisfaction with standards of teaching as with the widespread unpopularity of course content.

On the fourth criterion of raising the status of domestic service, the CCWTE's training courses hold an ambivalent position. Overall, the schemes had little real impact on the collective status of domestic service as an employment sector – it never lost its unpopularity. Neither,

despite Margaret Bondfield's assertion to the contrary, do CCWTE courses appear to have had any significant impact on wages, conditions, hours. But individually, trainees acquired added status by attending a CCWTE course, for there is clear evidence that few had difficulty finding (apparently) good situations. Similarly, mistresses appreciated having a CCWTE-trained girl. Thus training can be said to have improved personal rather than occupational status.

Taking the CCWTE on its own merits, as a semi-autonomous organisation, there is greater room for according success to the venture. The CCWTE survived from 1914 to 1940, despite being initially conceived as a short-term measure to deal with wartime unemployment and despite great uncertainty over its continued existence due to receiving Treasury funding on an annual basis. These negotiations for Treasury funds prevented long-term plans being laid and must have seriously hampered development of schemes. Equally, the CCWTE faced much antipathy and hostility to its work – women's unemployment relief schemes and training being frequently viewed as a waste of public money. The CCWTE's longevity is the more remarkable if we remember that it was a women-dominated body exercising power at a time of male domination in public life, for partial suffrage was only granted in 1918 and full suffrage not until 1928. Therefore women had little political influence and no political voice before 1928, and were thereby effectively excluded from national policymaking decisions. Success in 'staying the course' must be attributed to the personal strengths of core members of the CCWTE, many of whom came from middle- or upper-class backgrounds. However, they used their varied talents to benefit working-class women, trading not only on social and political contacts but also on previous experience in public life. Their social position, moving at ease among policymakers (and influential female relatives of policymakers), ensured that CCWTE members knew the 'rules of the game' and were able to adopt male methods (for example, networking) when expedient to do so. They were not averse to manipulating the system to ensure their continued existence. For example, although they often disagreed with their financial masters the Ministry of Labour, they were aware of their own vulnerability as an organisation and adopted conciliatory tactics if circumstances called for such action. Thus, they sacrificed much innovation and experimentation in women's training courses to ensure that the CCWTE remained alive to help at least those unemployed women whom the Government was willing to retrain from public funds.

Thus, the women of the CCWTE exercised the limited power they possessed. They played the Government at its own game, adopting and adapting male networking techniques. They argued successfully with Ministers to ensure Treasury funding for training schemes, despite losing the argument for continuation of alternatives to domestic service courses. They

adopted a business-like manner in the day-to-day running of their organisation, instilling great loyalty among staff and trainees. Despite internal wrangling among Committee members, the CCWTE presented a united and solid public front, effectively endorsing their credentials as a quasi-Government organisation. The long life of the CCWTE is directly attributable to the strength of character and determination of the women who formed its Committee.

As an aspect of Government strategy, the CCWTE should be regarded as a failure. Although trainees were snapped up by eager mistresses who appreciated their skills, the CCWTE was too confined and constrained by its political masters to be able to tackle wider issues both of women's unemployment generally and the servant problem in particular. The CCWTE was, in effect, hampered by a male-dominated Parliament which expressed much antipathy towards women's concerns and who largely expounded the traditional view of a woman's place in the home. Lacking political influence for many years, the CCWTE was insufficiently powerful to combat such narrowly entrenched attitudes. Despite individual support from Ministers and MPs, the CCWTE was unable to develop its training provision beyond that which Government dictated.

On its own terms, the CCWTE should be regarded as a success. It earned a reputation as a well-respected and honourable training organisation, inspiring great loyalty among staff and trainees. It provided retraining for thousands of women and girls, many without recourse to alternative training options. It addressed the issue of women's unemployment with vigour and enthusiasm, showing great innovation in devising training schemes (although many got no further than the drawing-board stage). It used its administrative abilities and know-how to the fullest, adopting and adapting male rules as and when this suited its needs. In this, CCWTE members seem to have been playing off gender and class conflicts to their own advantage.

Did Treasury and Ministry officials realise how forceful the CCWTE ladies were? To survive 25 years in an often apathetic (frequently hostile) environment with severely curtailed activities and restricted resources shows an awesome tenacity. This tenacity is also evident in the continued support given by Committee members, several of whom served during the life of the CCWTE. Indeed, resignations were few and usually occasioned by demands of other public duties or commitments. The inevitable personality clashes within the CCWTE failed to break or mar the collective unity of the CCWTE, disagreements being confined to the 'hidden' side of the organisation's work and rarely clouding the CCWTE's public persona. The CCWTE's demise in 1940 may be interpreted as a defeat, brought about by a hostile – or, at least, unsympathetic – Government. The Government's refusal to involve the CCWTE in wartime training schemes offers one reason for the demise. However, I feel that the CCWTE was still

holding the reins of its destiny – although frustrated by Ministers' lack of interest, it was a CCWTE decision to cease to exist. Given that most members were then aged 60-70, it is more understandable that they felt disinclined to maintain or fight for their (now unfunded) training organisation.

Certainly Violet Markham – the long-time Chairman of the CCWTE – acknowledged in 1946 the inappropriateness of trying to solve the servant problem by means of training alone. For she recognised that young women would no longer be willing to enter an inferior occupation like domestic service. Good servants would demand too high a wage for most households to afford, while the alternative was to 'fall back on the half-wits, failures and crocks' who would thus become 'a servile class'. Recognising that neither alternative was viable, Markham concluded that, as far as domestic service was concerned:

A great change in social conditions has to be faced and the sins of bad mistresses in the past are being paid for heavily by their descendants to-day.¹

One commentator had dismissed claims in 1913 that the day would come 'when all housewives must do their own work, for there will be no servants to assist with it.'² Yet, barely 30 years later, despite all efforts to persuade and coerce women into training to become domestic servants, that day had indeed come.

¹ BLPES, Markham Papers, File 12/2, Letter Violet Markham to Mrs James, Cromwell Road, London SW7, 29 April 1946.

² Mrs W R Nicoll *Woman's Sphere or The Dignity of Domestic Work* (Charles H Kelly, 1913), p.12.

Appendices

I: Glossary and Abbreviations

BoE – Board of Education

Also responsible for juvenile training.

CCWTE – Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment

Affiliated to Local Government Board 1914-1919, Ministry of Labour 1920-1940.

Responsible for developing, monitoring and administering women's training schemes.

Domestic Servants' Insurance Society

Paid unemployment and sickness benefits to subscribers (female servants only).

Published monthly *Domestic News* 1915-1921.

Fabian Society

Founded 1889. Campaigning and investigative group promoting socialist ideals.

Published report into women's unemployment 1915.

JIC – Junior Instruction Centre

Vocational training scheme for school-leavers, successor to JUC.

JUC – Juvenile Unemployment Centre

Vocational training scheme for school-leavers, forerunner of JIC.

LEA – Local Education Authority

Responsible for implementing Government educational policies at local council level.

LCC – London County Council

LGB – Local Government Board

Responsible for CCWTE unemployment schemes 1914-1919.

MABYS – Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants

Philanthropic group, concerned primarily with welfare of female servants.

Ministry of Reconstruction

Responsible for addressing short-term post-war problems 1917-1920.

MoL – Ministry of Labour

Responsible for all aspects of employment, unemployment and training policies.

Published enquiry into domestic service 1923.

National Citizens Union

Founded 1919 as Middle-Class Union. Non-affiliated group claiming to represent views and interests of the middle classes.

National Institute of Houseworkers

Government-sponsored body to promote post-war domestic service 1945.

NSOL – New Survey of London

Investigation into employment by London School of Economics 1929/1930.

TUC – Trade Union Congress

Promoted employment rights of workers.

UAB – Unemployment Assistance Boards

Affiliated to MoL. Responsible for determining unemployed claimants' eligibility for allowances. Involved in Government's transference of workers scheme.

WIC – Women's Industrial Council

Founded 1894. Campaigning and investigative group on women's employment.
Published survey into domestic service 1916.

Women's Advisory Council

Sub-committee within Ministry of Reconstruction.
Published report into domestic service 1919.

II: Juvenile Training Schemes – grant-aided Councils, March 1931¹

Receiving 100 per cent grants:

Abertillery	Merthyr Tydfil
Carmarthenshire	Monmouthshire
Durham County	Rhondda
Gateshead	South Shields
Glamorganshire	Sunderland
Jarrow	Wigan
Lanarkshire	

Receiving 75 per cent grants:

Aberdeen	Dumbartonshire	Nottingham
Ayrshire	Dundee	Oldham
Birkenhead	Edinburgh	Plymouth
Birmingham	Essex	Preston
Blackburn	Glasgow	Renfrewshire
Blackpool	Great Yarmouth	Rochdale
Bolton	Grimsby	Salford
Bootle	Hull	Sheffield
Bradford	Kent	Stockport
Bristol	Lancashire County	Stoke-on-Trent
Burnley	Leeds	Swansea
Bury	London County Council	Walsall
Cardiff	Manchester	West Ham
Darlington	Middlesbrough	West Hartlepool
Derby	Newcastle	Wolverhampton
Derbyshire	Newport (Monmouthshire)	West Riding.
Dudley	Northumberland County	

¹ 249 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2036-7, 18 March 1931.

III: Juvenile Instruction Centres and Classes – non-participating LEAs, February 1933²

England:

Administrative Counties:	Bedfordshire	Huntingdonshire	West Suffolk
	Cambridgeshire	Norfolk	East Sussex
	Isle of Ely	Northamptonshire	West Sussex
	Isles of Scilly	Soke of Peterborough	Westmorland
	County of Southampton	Rutland	
County Boroughs:	Barrow	Dudley	Smethwick
	Bournemouth	Exeter	Wallasey
	Canterbury	Ipswich	Warrington
	Carlisle	Reading	West Hartlepool
	Coventry	Rotherham	
Boroughs:	Acton	Gravesend	Newbury
	Aldershot	Guildford	New Windsor
	Bedford	Hartlepool	Ossett
	Bexhill	Harwich	Penzance
	Boston	Hemel Hempstead	Peterborough
	Bridlington	Heston & Isleworth	Pontefract
	Brighouse	Heywood	Poole
	Bury St Edmunds	Hornsey	Pudsey
	Buxton	Hove	Salisbury
	Cambridge	Kendal	Torquay
	Chelmsford	King's Lynn	Whitehaven
	Cheltenham	Lewes	Winchester
	Chorley	Luton	Worthing
	Clitheroe	Macclesfield	Ilford
	Darwen	Maidenhead	Leyton
	Glossop	Mossley	Barking
	Gosport	Nelson	

² 274 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 2041-2, 24 February 1933.

Urban	Bilston	Hebburn	Stretford
Districts:	Coseley	Hindley	Tipton
	Enfield	Ince in Makerfield	Willesden
	Farnworth	Kettering	
	Felling	Radcliffe	

Wales:

Brecknockshire
Merionethshire
Montgomeryshire
Radnorshire

Scotland:

Berwickshire
Kincardineshire
Orkney
Ross & Cromarty
Roxburghshire
Selkirkshire
Sutherland

IV: Government-sanctioned training centres for the unemployed, March 1934³

Men:

Government Training Centres:

Birmingham – Garrison Lane
Wallsend – The Stadium
Bristol – Radnor Road, Horfield
Glasgow – Cowlairs Road, Springburn
Watford – Southwold Road, Hertfordshire
Park Royal – Gorst Road, Chase Estate, NW10
Waddon – Stafford Road, Croydon, Surrey
Letchworth – Pixmore Avenue, Hertfordshire

Instructional Centres:

*Bourne – Lincolnshire
Cranwich Heath – Mundford, Norfolk
*High Lodge – Brandon, Suffolk
Weeting – Brandon, Suffolk
*West Tofts – Mundford, Norfolk
Carshalton – Goat Road, Mitcham, Surrey
Carstairs – Lampits Farm, Lanarkshire
*Fermyn Woods – Kettering, Northants
*Shobdon – Leominster, Herefordshire
*Glenbrater – Strachur, Argyllshire
Kielder – Northumberland

To open by April:

*Allerston – Thornton-in Dale, Yorkshire
Hamsterley – Durham

Under construction:

*Kershope Foot – Newcastleton, Roxburghshire
*Brechfa – Llandilo, Carmarthenshire

(* = Summer Camps to be attached to these centres during May-September 1934)

Local Instructional Centres:

Bilston
Rheola (opening April)

³ 287 H.C. Deb 5 s, cols 1357-60, 22 March 1934.

Physical Training Centres:

North-west – Stockton-on-Tees, Wallsend & Willington Quay

Midlands – Wolverhampton

Scotland – Dundee, Paisley

Wales – Bargoed, Cardiff

Women:

Special Scheme:

Brighton & Hove School of Cookery, 59 Brunswick Road, Hove, Sussex

CCWTE non-residential centres:

Blaydon – Rydal Mount

Blyth – Beulah House, 123 Bondicar Terrace

Durham – 68 Crossgate

Jarrow – Acca House, Grant Street

Middlesbrough – The Lindens, Longlands Road

Newcastle – Orchard House, Fenwick Terrace, Jesmond

Rotherham – Elmfield House, Moorgate

Sheffield – Sharrow House, Sharrow Lane

South Shields – Stanhope House, Westhoe Village

Stockton – 6 Lorne Terrace, Yarm Road

Liverpool – 148 Bedford Street South

Preston – 60 West Cliff

Whitehaven – Corkickle House, 7 Corkickle

Burntisland – ‘Greenmount’

Glasgow – 2 Queens Gardens, Dowanhill

Greenock – 74 Finnart Street

Hamilton – Auchenraith House, Bothwell

Aberdare – 31 Whitcombe Street

Hengoed – ‘Heathfield’, Caerphilly

Maesteg – 13 Brynmawr Place

Merthyr Tydfil – The Settlement, Gwaelodygarth

Pontypool – ‘Sunnybank’, Leigh Road, Pontnewynydd

Pontypridd – ‘Jacobsdal’

Swansea – 43 Bryn Road

Ystrad – ‘Dan-y-Deri’, Rhondda

CCWTE residential centres:

'Appleton Hall', Warrington, Lancashire

'Waldernheath', Cornwall Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire

'Lapsewood', 57 Sydenham Hill, London SE26

'Newbold Beeches', Holly Walk, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

'The Elms', Leicester Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire

'Millersneuk', Lenzie, Dumbarton

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AST 12/34	Regional Reports 1937-38
AST 12/38	Regional Reports 1938

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RECO 1	Records 1915-20
RECO 1/751	Women's Advisory Committee on Domestic Service
RECO 1/881	Women's Advisory Committee on Domestic Service

Ministry of Labour

LAB 2	Correspondence
LAB 2/919/ED 1284/1922	CCWTE
LAB 5	Committee on Women in Industry (1917-1919)
LAB 11	Trade Boards
LAB 18	Training files 1922-74
LAB 18/105/ET 403/1945	Institutional Domestic Service 1943-45
LAB 18/413/ET 1306/1947	CCWTE/Maida Vale Training Centre
LAB 19	Youth training
LAB 2 2/292/DR613	Ministry of Reconstruction domestic service: appointment of sub-committees of Ministry of Labour to deal with above problem (1918)
LAB 2/9780/ED34864/1919	Ministry of Labour department committee on domestic service
LAB 29	Occupations and classifications
LAB 70	National Institute of Houseworkers

Board of Education

ED 24/1144	Notes on provision of practical instruction 1930
ED 24/1356	Provision of Juvenile Instruction Centres/Classes 1933-34
ED 24/1412	Relationship of Junior Technical and Junior Commercial schools to Central Schools 1918
ED 45	Juvenile Unemployment /Juvenile Instruction Centres 1918-46
ED 45/20	Domestic subjects teaching
ED 46/493 PART I	Domestic Service – Housewifery Schools, 1938 Exhibition
ED 58	Classes for Unemployed Adults 1931-39
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