

Women's engagement in politics and public life in the Black Country, 1914-1951

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*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

June 2021

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Abstract

This thesis is about the ways in which Black Country women engaged in and with politics, and how this changed in the years following their enfranchisement. It seeks to engage with debates surrounding the impact of the vote on women's lives, and argues that, during the period from 1914 to 1951, women in this area were able to engage politics and public life in through what is termed a 'practical politics'. Their political activity took place in the towns and communities in which they lived. Their activism was locally-focused, pragmatic, and centred around providing solutions to specific problems. This highly localised, practical form of politics enabled ordinary women from the Black Country, who were not part of national women's organisations in this period, to engage in public life there. The thesis examines four potential spheres of activity through which women were increasingly able to do so: parliamentary politics, non-partisan housewives' associations, voluntary health organisations, and local government. It argues that, although there is little suggestion from the Black Country that women were politicised by general elections, there is significant evidence that ordinary women in this area were able to engage in politics and public life through this 'practical politics' in these three other spheres of activity. The thesis draws upon archival evidence from organisations and structures which worked exclusively within the Black Country, alongside local newspapers, to argue that across the period as a whole, a greater number of women, from more socially diverse backgrounds, were able to engage in public life locally, though their engagement was generally limited to just the one sphere of activity. This thesis therefore suggests that, to fully understand the vibrance and diversity of the post-suffrage women's movement in Britain, it is necessary to refocus on the local, and the organisations working within communities and neighbourhoods, through which ordinary women were able to engage in public life.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Maggie Andrews and Dr Neil Fleming. Without their unfailing support, encouragement, and kindness, I would not have been able to complete this thesis. I am also very grateful to the University of Worcester for awarding me a doctoral research studentship which funded my studies. Other staff in the Department of History, Politics and Sociology have been incredibly supportive and I extend my sincere appreciation to them. I would particularly like to thank Dr Paddy McNally and Lesley Spiers. The Research School at the University of Worcester have been incredibly helpful, and I am very appreciative of this.

My research was also made possible by the staff of the archives across the Black Country, including Dudley Archives and Local History Centre; Sandwell Community History and Archives Service; Walsall Local History Centre, and Wolverhampton City Archives. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Black Country Living Museum and History West Midlands for promoting and supporting research into this area, including my own. I am thankful for the librarians at the University of Worcester, especially Catherine Armistead, Madalene George and Allie Taylor, who have supplied books, materials and referencing help, often at very short notice.

I count myself incredibly lucky to be a part of the Women's History Network. Regional, national, and international conferences under their auspices have enabled me to develop and grow as a scholar over the past few years, and I remain deeply grateful to participants who took the time to offer thoughtful and constructive comments on my research in progress. In recent months, the supportive initiatives the WHN has undertaken, especially the writing retreats, have been extremely beneficial.

My fellow postgraduates at the University of Worcester have been an invaluable support over the years: thank you to Hayley Carter, Lisa Cox-Davies, Becki Hines, Elspeth King and Linda Pike. Additional thanks must go to the undergraduate students I have been fortunate enough to teach, and who taught me so much themselves. Deep appreciation to Emily Bathie, for the proofread.

Before arriving at Worcester, I was fortunate to benefit from the encouragement of Dr Cathy Hunt, at Coventry University, and Dr Laura Schwartz and Professor Sarah Richardson at the

University of Warwick and I extend my thanks to them once again. I would also like to thank Dr Paula Bartley, Professor Karen Hunt and Dr Janis Lomas for their helpful and constructive feedback on early drafts and chapters of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, especially Sue, Dave and Joe Muggeridge, without whom none of this would be possible.

List of Abbreviations

AGM	Annual General Meeting
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
CO	Centre Organiser
COS	Charity Organisation Society
HIWC	Halesowen Infant Welfare Clinic
HS	Housewives' Service
HVC	Home Visiting Committee
LHS	Ladies' Health Society
MAC	Material Aid Committee
NCW	National Council of Women
NFWW	National Federation of Women Workers
NHS	National Health Service
NUSEC	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
NUWW	National Union of Women Workers
SSAFA	Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Family Association
TG	Townswomen's Guild
WBCC	Wolverhampton Birth Control Clinic
WCA	Women Citizens' Association

WCG	Women's Co-operative Guild
WCWA	Walsall Child Welfare Association
WFL	Women's Freedom League
WI	Women's Institute
WLA	Women's Liberal Association
WLL	Women's Labour League
WPC	War Pensions Committee
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service
WWUA	Walsall Women Unionists' Association

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Introduction

This thesis is about women's political activism in the Black Country¹ between 1914 and 1951. It explores Black Country women's involvement in local public life, tracing the ways in which they became politicised across this period. It also examines the different ways these women engaged with politics and the public sphere, from the First World War, when women were on the cusp of enfranchisement, through the interwar years when first some, then all, women were awarded the vote, and into the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. The thesis suggests that, during this period and in this place, there was a general movement towards the greater politicisation of women, specifically through local organisations and structures. Across this timeframe, an increasing number of women, from more socially diverse backgrounds, became active in public life through their involvement within these organisations or structures, in the towns and communities in which they lived.

Each of the thesis's four chapters explores one possible route by which Black Country women might become so engaged: parliamentary politics; non-partisan housewives' associations; voluntary health organisations; and municipal government. These all constitute a 'public sphere', as conceptualised by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas.² Women were politicised, in different ways and to differing extents, through their participation in these areas of activity. For some, particularly those who became local councillors, this was often through traditional party structures and the electoral process. However, as Ken Roberts notes, politicisation may also be defined as 'the process whereby a population or group becomes politically active by expressing views in the public sphere'.³ Some women were increasingly able to take up roles in public life through non-partisan organisations which were not part of 'formal' politics. These include housewives' associations, such as the Women's Voluntary Service or voluntary health organisations, such as the committee of an infant welfare clinic.

¹ How to define this area is a matter of some debate, which I discuss in detail in the following chapter.

² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989, first published in German 1962); see also: Kathryn Beebe, Angela Davis and Kathryn Gleadle, 'Introduction: Space, Place and Gendered Identities: feminist history and the spatial turn', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4, (2012), p. 523–532.

³ Ken Roberts, *Key Concepts in Sociology*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 201.

For the purposes of this thesis, politicisation is understood as activism and engagement within local organisations and structures, which enabled women to take on an active role in the public sphere in their town or community, and gave them a voice on issues which affected their daily lives. It is not restricted to partisan politics, but rather encompasses all the ways in which women at this time might participate in public life, as volunteers or as elected officials. The degree to which a given individual was politicised through a given organisation could vary. As is explored throughout, some women were extremely active members of many non-partisan organisations in their town, sitting on numerous executive committees while others served as local councillors for many decades. Others were more tangentially involved in organisations as ordinary members, because they either chose not to become more active, or, in some cases, because they were not permitted to sit on organising committees. Even in these cases, however, it is possible to find evidence of women becoming politicised and taking a more active role in local public life through their interactions with such associations, as they chose how and when to engage with the work of these groups.

This thesis proposes an understanding of women's politics in this period which is framed through what I term a 'practical politics': a kind of political action rooted in the local, the specific, and the pragmatic, finding realistic solutions to particular problems. The thesis uses evidence from across the Black Country to explore how women were able to engage in this 'practical politics' not just through the formal political process—that is, local and national government—but through a diverse range of organisations and groups. This evidence suggests that the issues and causes with which Black Country women were involved, through these spheres of activity, were reflective of the campaigns that the national women's movement were engaged at this time. These campaigns are explored in the following chapter, which contextualises the contemporary activism of feminist and women's organisations. However, it is apparent that, within the Black Country, women were involved with these issues at local level almost exclusively. Their politics and public activism took place within their towns and communities, through which they sought to make very practical, tangible differences to their own lives, and the lives of other women in the locale, working within a range of voluntary organisations and urban district, municipal or county borough councils. The thesis argues that Black

Country women prioritised this kind of local, pragmatic action over participation in national organisations or campaigns, and thus responds to the approach outlined by Karen Hunt and June Hannam in their call for an ‘archaeology’ of women’s politics in the interwar period. As they suggest, it is only by building up a picture of how women ‘did’ politics in towns, neighbourhoods and communities across Britain that historians can trace the ways in which the vote actually impacted on the everyday lives of ordinary women. They propose an ‘archaeological’ approach to women’s history in the interwar period—though, as is discussed shortly, this timeframe is expanded upon—in which the multiple and varied ways women engaged with politics and public life on a very local level are considered, enabling a fuller understanding of what women’s politics entailed during this time.⁴

This research, therefore, seeks to contribute to the growing historiography on the trajectories of the British women’s movement after enfranchisement, engaging with the question of what difference the vote made to women’s lives. Initially, the years following the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which gave the vote to certain women aged 30 and over, were seen by historians as a period in which women retreated ‘back to home and duty’, to use Deirdre Beddoe’s defining phrase, after the turmoil of the First World War.⁵ Many argued that, despite gaining the right to vote in parliamentary elections, this was a time in which the women’s movement as a whole was in retreat, unable to challenge the image of woman as wife and mother, whose role was confined to domestic responsibilities in the home.⁶ A perceived split within feminism was also alleged to have had a negative impact on the movement’s strength. ‘Old’ feminists—sometimes referred to as ‘equality’ feminists—were said to be focused on obtaining gender equality through issues like equal pay. ‘New’ or ‘welfare’ feminists, meanwhile, highlighted gendered differences between men and women to argue for women’s special treatment in certain areas, for example, by campaigning on

⁴ Karen Hunt and June Hannam, ‘Towards an archaeology of interwar women’s politics: the local and the everyday’, in: Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage. Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-45*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan), p.124—141.

⁵ Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918–1939* (London: Pandora, 1989).

⁶ See, for example, Harold L. Smith, ‘British Feminism in the 1920s’, in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 1990); Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914–59* (London: Macmillan, 1992); Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain since 1900*, (London: Palgrave, 1999), Chapter 3.

issues which foregrounded women's particular needs as mothers.⁷ Such perceived divides led some historians to suggest that the feminist movement weakened in the years following enfranchisement. Susan Kinsley Kent, for example, questioned why, in the interwar years, 'the ideology of motherhood and constraining ideas about gender found so ready an acceptance among women who had before the [First World War] rejected them', arguing that 'organised feminism...never regained its pre-war status as a mass movement'.⁸

However, this somewhat gloomy assessment began to be challenged by historians from the late 1990s, who instead pointed to the multiplicity of ways in which women became politically active in the years after 1918. Cheryl Law was among the first to suggest that the women's movement remained vibrant and active in the ten years preceding the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act of 1928, though her work mainly focused on parliamentary politics, candidates, and campaigns.⁹ The ways in which the women's movement diversified also began to be recognised, with greater emphasis placed on the more informal spaces in which women were able to engage with issues affecting their lives. Work by Maggie Andrews and Caitríona Beaumont highlighted the significant contribution that non-partisan housewives' associations made to the women's movement in this period, although, as the following chapter discusses, there remains significant debate as to whether such groups can be understood as feminist.¹⁰ Increasingly, too, historians began to reconsider the ways in which interwar women negotiated domesticity, and how the domestic could also be

⁷ For discussion of these splits, see for example: Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace 1914–1928*, (London: Macmillan, 1989); Chapter 7; Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997), Chapter 5.

⁸ Susan Kinsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.5; p. 2.

⁹ Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement 1918–1928*, (London, I B Tauris, 1997).

¹⁰ Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997 & 2015 revised edition); Caitríona Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organisations in England, 1928–39', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2000), p. 411–429; 'Moral Dilemmas and Women's Rights: the attitude of the Mothers' Union and Catholic Women's League to divorce, birth control and abortion in England, 1928–1939', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (2007), p. 463–485; *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the women's movement in England, 1928–64*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013); 'Where to Park the Pram? Voluntary Women's Organisations, Citizenship and the Campaign for Better Housing in England, 1928–1945', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (2013), p. 75–96.

political.¹¹ More recently, however, some of this work, particularly that by Alison Light or Judy Giles, which is based more within the literary field, has been criticised for privileging the middle-class experience. Karen Hunt, for instance, has argued that historians may have ‘too monolithic an understanding of interwar domesticity, where discourse has come to be read as experience’, indicating that there is still scope for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of women in this period.¹²

Nonetheless, these developments within the historiography of the post-enfranchisement women’s movement have led Pat Thane to argue that the plurality of women’s organisations active in the interwar years, which included party-political, ‘single issue, occupational, faith-based and others’, such as housewives’ associations, meant that ‘more women, from a wider range of backgrounds, were actively campaigning for gender equality in the nineteen-twenties and thirties than before the First World War’, a position that is now generally accepted by historians working in this field.¹³ Most recently, there has been something of a turn back towards the political in research in this area. The centenary of women’s partial enfranchisement in 2018 led to renewed interest in the impact of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, with two edited collections in particular—*The Aftermath of Suffrage*, edited by Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye, and a special edition of *Women’s History Review*, edited by Julie Gottlieb—seeking to engage with debates surrounding the trajectories of the

¹¹ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars*, (London: Routledge, 1991); Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900–50*, (London: Macmillan, 1995); Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Bingham’s review article on women and gender in interwar Britain is also very useful: Adrian Bingham, “‘An Era of Domesticity’? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain’, *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (2004), p. 225–233; Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

¹² Karen Hunt, ‘Labour Woman and the Housewife’, in: Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green and Fiona Hackney (eds.), *Women’s Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 238–251, p. 239.

¹³ Pat Thane, ‘What Difference Did the Vote Make?’ in: Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 253–288; Pat Thane, ‘What difference did the vote make? Women in public and private life in Britain since 1918’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 76, No. 192, (2003), p. 268–285, p. 271–272; Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane (eds.), *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century: What Difference Did the Vote Make?*, (London: Continuum, 2010).

women's movement post-suffrage, and particularly the impact that the enfranchisement of first some, then all, women had on the ways in which they were able to engage in and with politics.¹⁴

As well as these historiographical trends, this study is informed by developments in both the fields of women's history and gender history since the late 1960s. Women's history was influenced by the British Marxist tradition and its desire to recover history 'from below'.¹⁵ Gender history, meanwhile, came increasingly to the fore following Joan Scott's highly influential 1986 essay, in which she argued that the ways gender has been constructed and interpreted in different societies over time have been influenced by numerous other factors, such as race, class or place.¹⁶ Throughout the 1990s, there was increasing debate among historians working in both fields. Some gender historians argued that women's history would—indeed, should—'mutate' into gender history,¹⁷ while some women's historians felt that this approach would result in women once again being marginalised from the historical record.¹⁸ However, in the intervening years, this is generally accepted as not having happened and, as June Purvis has most recently argued, 'women's and gender history have ended up complementing each other more than detracting from each other'.¹⁹ Naturally, contemporary constructions of gender will have influenced the ways in which women in the Black Country might

¹⁴ Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye, *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Special Edition 'Feminism and Feminists after Suffrage', *Women's History Review*, Volume 23, No. 3, (2014), p. 325–499.

¹⁵ Much early women's history concerned the women who had been 'hidden from history', to use Shelia Rowbotham's seminal phrase, see: Shelia Rowbotham, *Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, (London: Pluto Press, 1973).

¹⁶ Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (1986), p. 1053–1075.

¹⁷ See for example: Penelope Corfield, 'History and the challenge of gender history', *Rethinking History*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1997), p. 241–258; see also: the opening editorial of *Gender & History*: 'Why Gender and History?', *Gender and History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1989), p. 1–6, p. 1.

¹⁸ June Purvis, 'From "women worthies" to poststructuralism? Debate and controversy in women's history in Britain' in: *Women's History: Britain, 1850–1945*, ed. June Purvis, (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1–22; June Purvis and Amanda Weatherill, 'Playing the gender history game: A reply to Penelope J. Corfield', *Rethinking History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (1999), p. 333–338; see also Corfield's response: Penelope Corfield, 'From women's history to gender history: A reply to "playing the gender history game"', *Rethinking History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (1999), p. 339–341.

¹⁹ June Purvis, 'A Glass Half Full? Women's history in the UK', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (2018), p. 88–108, p. 91; see also: Kathryn Gleadle, 'The Imagined Communities of Women's History: current debates and emerging themes, a rhizomatic approach', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4, (2013), p. 524–540; Chen Yan & Karen Offen, 'Women's History at the Cutting Edge: a joint paper in two voices', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (2018), p. 6–28; Joanna de Groot, 'Women's History in Many Places: reflections on plurality, diversity and polyversality', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (2018), p. 109–119.

engage in and with politics and public life in this period, but the focus of this thesis is on uncovering the experiences of these women in this area, inspired by the ‘archaeological’ approach for which Hunt and Hannam call.

In this, they acknowledge the extensive historiography on the various individual actors, organisations, and campaigns which formed part of the women’s movement after 1918 but suggest that there is still much that historians do not know about how women’s politics actually worked, on the ground in specific locations, at this time. They argue that it is only by building up a picture of how women engaged in and with politics in the towns, neighbourhoods and communities that they lived, that historians can trace the ways in which the vote actually impacted on the everyday lives of ordinary women. They call for

a new archaeology of ‘women’s politics’, which poses a challenge not only for how we explain what happened after the vote was won but also how we conceive of politics more generally. The aim is to map the effect of enfranchisement on how women understood and ‘did’ politics at a local level ... the space in which everyday politics was experienced.²⁰

Recent work by Ruth Davidson on Croydon and Maggie Andrews on Worcestershire utilises this approach, demonstrating how, in these places, women were able to enter public life through local organisations which worked within these communities.²¹ This thesis draws upon Hunt and Hannam’s proposal, seeking to undertake this approach in the Black Country to understand how women in this area were able to engage in what is termed a ‘practical politics’ through the local organisations and structures which made up the four spheres of activity outlined above, and how this developed over the period between 1914 and 1951.

As mentioned, this study expands beyond the interwar period that Hunt and Hannam delineate. There are three reasons for this extension. First, it allows for a situation of the kinds of politics women in the Black Country were already undertaking during the First World War, before

²⁰ Hunt and Hannam, ‘Archaeology’, p. 124–125; see also: Karen Hunt, ‘Rethinking Activism: Lessons from the History of Women’s Politics’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 2, (2009), p. 211–226.

²¹ Ruth Davidson, ‘A local perspective: the women’s movement and citizenship, Croydon 1890s–1939’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 29, No. 6, (2020), p. 1016–1033; Maggie Andrews, ‘Worcestershire’s Women: Local Studies and the Gender Politics of the First World War and its Legacy’, *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, Vol. 104, No. 363, (2020), p. 851–870.

any women were enfranchised. Second, it enabled an examination of the impact of war on women's engagement with politics and public life on what first became known, during the 1914-18 conflict, as the 'home front'.²² Assessing both the First and Second World Wars together enables an understanding of how the practical challenges of wartime—its upheaval, dislocation, terror, and domestic challenges—might impact on the ways in which women engaged in politics on a very local level. I draw here on the recent trend within the historiography to consider both conflicts as an interconnected series of events, in which the First World War impacted on the Second on the home front as well as the battlefield. The shadow of the First World War loomed large over the 1920s and 1930s, affecting everything from government preparations for wartime—for example, in civil defence planning, a key aspect of the work of the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), studied here in Chapter 2—to how individuals thought and felt about the threat of an approaching second conflict from the late 1930s. Accordingly, there is now a growing movement among historians of the home front to approach the period 1914 to 1945 as a whole.²³

This study extends beyond this still, concluding in 1951, to enable an understanding of the ways in which women's participation in various spheres of activity adapted and changed in the immediate post-Second World War period. Chapter 3, for example, examines the work of the Linen League associated with Dudley Guest Hospital, an organisation which was established in 1912 and remained operational until the introduction of the National Health Service on 5 July 1948, when it faded away. Chapter 4, meanwhile, assesses women's entry into local government in this post-war period, arguing that women were elected to municipal councils in the Black Country at much higher

²² Susan R. Grayzel, 'Nostalgia, Gender, and the Countryside: Placing the 'Land Girl' in First World War Britain', *Rural History*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (1999), p. 155—170, p. 156.

²³ See for example: Lucy Noakes and Susan R. Grayzel, 'Defending the home(land): gendering Civil Defence from the First World War to the 'War on Terror'', in: *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Ana Carden-Coyne, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 29—40; Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Lucy Noakes, "'Serve to Save": Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain 1937–41', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (2012), p. 734—753; Susan R. Grayzel, 'Defence Against the Indefensible: The Gas Mask, the State and British Culture during and after the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (2014), p. 418—434; Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Lucy Noakes, 'A broken silence? Mass Observation, Armistice Day and 'everyday life' in Britain 1937–1941', *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 4, (2015), p. 331-346.

rates then, than in the interwar years. 1951 was chosen specifically as an end point, as it enabled the thesis to cover the aftermath of war as experienced through the two post-war Labour governments of 1945—1950 and 1950—1951, although this is not to suggest that this should be considered an ‘end point’ of the post-war years overall. Indeed, the periodisation of the women’s movement after enfranchisement is somewhat ill-defined within the historiography.²⁴ Of the various studies cited above, various ‘end points’ are used, including: 1928, when the franchise was equalised;²⁵ the outbreak of war, in 1939;²⁶ its conclusion in 1945;²⁷ and the beginning of ‘second-wave’ feminism, generally held to be in 1964.²⁸ Still others consider women’s politics ‘since 1918’, with no formal end date.²⁹ In concluding in 1951—and, indeed, in beginning in 1914—this thesis broadens the timeframe proposed by Hunt and Hannam, but still utilises their methodological approach. As such, it offers an opportunity for understanding where and how occasions for Black Country women’s engagement with the local public sphere expanded over time.

To do so, the thesis utilises some of the extensive resources found within local archives in the Black Country: Dudley Archives and Local History Centre; Sandwell Community History and Archives Service; Walsall Local History Centre; and Wolverhampton City Archives. In addition, several digitally available sources were also used. Broadly, the thesis draws on three main sets of archival sources: organisations’ own records (such as annual reports or minutes of meetings); directorial records (the decennial census, and local town and county directories); and local newspapers. It does not, however, utilise personal sources, such as diaries, letters, memoirs, or oral histories, as such sources are not available for the persons and organisations explored in this thesis. This is not a local phenomenon: contemporaneous letters, diaries or other personal papers are rarely deposited in public archives by those outside of the ‘great and good’, while the Mass Observation project, instituted in 1937, did not involve any female diarists or respondents from the Black Country

²⁴ For commentary, see: Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye, ‘Introduction’, in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 1—18, p. 13—14.

²⁵ For example, Law’s *Suffrage and Power*.

²⁶ For example, Light’s *Forever England*.

²⁷ For example, Gottlieb and Toye’s *The Aftermath of Suffrage*.

²⁸ For example, Beaumont’s *Housewives and Citizens*.

²⁹ For example, Breitenbach and Thane’s *What Difference Did the Vote Make*.

in this period. No relevant oral histories sit within local archives, and no new oral histories were collected for this thesis, as any still living individuals who may have been active in the organisations studied here were unlikely to have been in a position to respond to a request for interview.

Such sources are extremely important in providing evidence for ‘hidden’ histories, such as those of women’s local activism: as Joanna Bornat and Hanna Diamond argue, it is no coincidence that the fields of women’s history and oral history developed concurrently.³⁰ Even without such personal sources, however, it is still possible to undertake careful examination of other kinds of sources to find snippets and traces of women’s voices, and from this, develop an understanding of their experiences. However, the limitations of these kinds of sources must be acknowledged. Organisational records, for example, are produced to act as an official record of what was agreed upon at a given meeting, but the level of detail provided often depends on the diligence of the secretary, and these records can be quite dry, resulting in something of a ‘top down’ account often more representative of an organising committee than rank-and-file members. There can also be gaps in such records, for example, if a particular set of records in a series has been lost or damaged prior to depositing. Perhaps the largest of these ‘gaps’ is in membership lists, which, for the organisations under investigation here, were frequently not kept, or at least do not appear in archival records. Minute books and annual reports give the names—sometimes only a surname—of the women who sat on executive committees or who held senior roles within a branch, but the details of ordinary members are frequently irretrievable.

These limitations, of course, all present real challenges, and cannot—especially in cases where records are missing or damaged—be overcome entirely. Nonetheless, it is possible, through careful reading of these sources, to build up a picture of how ordinary members interacted with the association in question. For example, an internal survey of West Bromwich WVS Centre in March 1943 found that the Centre had 404 volunteers working with them at that time.³¹ Three months earlier,

³⁰ Joanna Bornat & Hanna Diamond, ‘Women’s History and Oral History: developments and debates’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1, (2007), p. 19–39.

³¹ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-CB/WBW, March 1943.

a December 1942 report from the same Centre reported that because ‘the district [is] entirely industrial, many of the women are engaged, in addition to the care of their homes, on whole or part time work, yet quite a large number are willing, should the need arise, to take on the additional duties we have asked them to undertake’.³² The implication here, as I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2, is that many of the WVS volunteers in West Bromwich were working-class: their ‘whole or part time work’ was likely in industry, because of the reference to the district being ‘industrial’. While it is not possible to precisely state how many of West Bromwich’s WVS volunteers were women who were engaged in paid employment, taken together these reports suggest that several hundred likely working-class women in the town were engaged in voluntary work with the WVS, which gave them a role in the public sphere there.

Because membership lists were not contained within organisations’ records, it was challenging to find specific detail on the ‘ordinary’ members of an association, such as the 404 West Bromwich WVS members noted above. However, for the most active women—women on executive committees, for example, or those who became local councillors—full names and addresses typically were provided within other records. From this, it was possible to trace such women back through census returns (available up to 1911) and the 1939 National Register. These kinds of directorial records, alongside town and local directories, formed the second type of source used in this thesis. Such records typically provide detail on an individual’s family situation, including whether they were married or how many children they had; how large their home was, based on the number of rooms; their occupation, or, more commonly, the occupation of their husband or older children; and whether or not they employed domestic servants. This information is but a snapshot of an individual life, undertaken on one night of a given decade, but in the absence of other kinds of sources, it can provide detail an individual’s personal circumstances, from which it is possible to infer some sense of their social class.

³² WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WBW, December 1942.

Class has long been used as a category of historical analysis, with EP Thompson's work still largely considered the seminal text on the British working-class experience.³³ Feminist historians, however, critiqued Thompson's approach for its lack of focus on female experiences of class, leading to greater exploration of the intersections of class and gender.³⁴ More recently, many historians have turned their attentions to the strata within classes, for example, the notion of the 'affluent working-class'.³⁵ Both approaches inform the understanding of class as used in this thesis. As such, wherever possible, I use the information available from census returns to broadly classify an individual as 'working-class' or 'middle-class', while acknowledging that without further information from, for example, personal diaries or letters, a deeper analysis is unlikely to be forthcoming. It is also important to acknowledge that care must be taken here, particularly surrounding the available data on a woman's employment—or, very often, the lack of available data. The kinds of jobs which June Purvis identifies as 'home-based, casual and intermittent', that were typically undertaken by working-class women, such as the taking in of laundry, frequently went unrecorded on census returns.³⁶ An individual might thus *appear* not to be working, but in practice have been making a not-insignificant contribution to the family finances. That said, it is not unreasonable to assume that any woman who left the occupation box blank on a census return, and was married to a business owner, or a man employed in the professions, as many women who sat on organising committees of groups studied here were, would not be undertaking this kind of work.

Additionally, class differentials were particularly highlighted by the practice of employing live-in domestic servants. As I note throughout, many women who sat on organising committees or

³³ E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edition, (London: Penguin, 1980).

³⁴ See, for example, Anna Clarke, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press 1995); Sally Alexander, *Becoming A Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*, (New York: New York University Press, 1995); Lenore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspective on Gender and Class*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

³⁵ See, for example: Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Jon Lawrence, 'Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c. 1930–64', *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (2013), p. 273–299; Selina Todd, 'Class, experience and Britain's twentieth century', *Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 4, (2014), p. 489–508; Stefan Ramsden, 'Remaking Working-Class Community: Sociability, Belonging and 'Affluence' in a Small Town, 1930–80', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (2015), p. 1–26.

³⁶ June Purvis, 'Using Primary Sources When Researching Women's History from a Feminist Perspective', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1992), p. 273–306, p. 280.

were otherwise highly active in local public life frequently did so. This is significant, because, as several historians have argued, the employment of live-in servants was, in this period, ‘viewed as one of the distinctions between the working and middle classes’.³⁷ Quite apart from this, a woman who employed one or more domestic servants benefited from domestic support in running her household which, potentially, gave her more time to undertake activities outside of the home. Thus, in the absence of personal sources, documents like the census provide some understanding of the lived experiences of specific individuals, and how these might have informed their abilities to become involved with local organisations. Nonetheless, it is regrettable that, so far, own voice accounts from working-class women have yet to come to light in local archives. It is accepted that the lack of such voices is a limitation of this thesis, especially in cases where such women made up the membership of organisations studied here or were the recipients of the kinds of ‘practical politics’ that these organisations undertook. While their responses to the kind of actions that made up this practical politics can be surmised from the remaining evidence, such as that which is reported in minute books or newspaper articles, it is important to acknowledge that their own direct thoughts and feelings cannot be fully understood from the evidence utilised here.

When using the census, again, there were gaps: sometimes, a surname was all that was recorded, and it is patently impossible to trace someone referred to only as ‘Mrs Jones’ within an association’s records. Similarly, women whose surname changed on marriage, in which only one name (maiden or married) was provided, were also difficult to trace. Even in instances where an individual’s full name and address was recorded, she could still prove untraceable if she were not resident at that address when the census or register was taken. Yet even these absences can prove illuminating: in some circumstances, they can suggest a high level of geographic mobility indicative of the most impoverished, where families moved frequently to find cheaper lodgings, chase work, or indeed escape—or be moved on by—landlords if they fell into arrears with the rent.

³⁷ Selina Todd, ‘Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain, 1900—1950’, *Past and Present*, No. 203, (2009), p. 181—204, p. 192; Laura Schwartz, too, asserts that ‘the lower middle classes (shopkeepers, clerks, anyone not employed in manual labour) frequently employed at least one servant’ in this period. Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and domestic labour in the women’s suffrage movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 8.

The final kind of source utilised in this thesis are local newspapers, chiefly accessed through the British Library's online newspaper archive, which provides extensive access to a significant number of publications.³⁸ The thesis drew on local newspapers from the Black Country itself and those from the surrounding area, including the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, *Birmingham Daily Post*, *Birmingham Mail*, *Dudley Chronicle*, *Evening Despatch*, *Smethwick Telephone*, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, *Walsall Advertiser* and *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*. Alongside this, the journals of specific organisations were used. For example, when looking for evidence of Black Country women's suffrage activities the same database provided access to the journals of several of Britain's largest suffrage organisations, including the *Common Cause*, *Suffragette* [later *Britannia*], *Suffragist*, *Vote* and *Votes for Women*. In addition, the thesis occasionally used the *Times* digital archive, and local newspapers from other places beyond the West Midlands, if an individual had been resident there prior to moving to the Black Country.³⁹ The availability of local newspapers through this database because of the 'digital turn' has had a significant impact on the availability of such sources. As Adrian Bingham writes, 'before digitization, anything more than superficial research into newspaper content required a major investment of time and resources [...and] those seeking more than reactions to a specific dated event were forced to scan through countless newspaper pages hoping to find relevant material', but digitised newspaper archives which are keyword searchable eliminate such problems.⁴⁰

Local newspapers were here used in one of two ways. When looking for evidence of a specific person or organisation, I undertook keyword searches and filtered through the results for relevant information. For specific electoral events, I read local newspapers for the appropriate dates.

³⁸ <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> (consulted 03.06.2020). Very occasionally, a newspaper article had been pasted into other organisational records, such as a minutes book, often without identifying details; where this was the case, it is noted within the text. Unless otherwise stated, all newspapers cited within this thesis were accessed via the British Newspaper Archive.

³⁹ For example, Gertrude Cresswell, the first female Labour councillor in Walsall (Chapter 4) lived for the first 30 years of her life in rural Derbyshire. Consequently, when she was elected Mayor of Walsall in 1933, the *Belper News* ran a short biographical feature on her achievements in her new locale, which helped to further my research: 'Lady Mayor. Former Shirland Teacher Honoured at Walsall', *Belper News*, 16 November 1934, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Adrian Bingham, 'The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (2010), p. 225–231, p. 226.

For example, when researching Christabel Pankhurst's 1918 general election campaign in Smethwick, the weekly issues of the local paper, the *Smethwick Telephone* were read for the election period to identify all content in the newspaper which related to the campaign. Local elections, meanwhile, were held every November, excepting the war years, until 1947, when they began to be held in May, as of 1949. For these, I used the electoral returns printed in local newspapers to identify all women councillors in the Black Country; the year they were first elected; and their political affiliations. While, as Bingham notes, digitisation has had an overwhelmingly positive effect on the availability of such sources, their limitations must also be acknowledged. Opinions articles or editorials were avoided, as these are typically reflective of a newspaper's editorial stance, and instead I relied upon news articles. However, these are not infallible and occasional errors can sometimes appear these reports. For example, to identify the political affiliations of a particular local councillor, I confirmed their political party as it was recorded in two separate newspaper articles to avoid any misattribution, which occasionally did occur, most likely because of a typographical error.⁴¹ If there was a discrepancy, I verified which attribution was correct with an additional, third news report. Resultantly, it was possible to confirm the partisan affiliations of 87 of the 90 women councillors elected across the period under investigation.⁴² Such issues notwithstanding, local newspapers, whose journalists usually lived and worked in the towns on which they reported, proved extremely significant in undertaking this research.

These sources were used in combination to build an 'archaeology' of women's politics in the Black Country during this period. The notion of what I term a 'practical politics' is evidenced in these sources by specific events or actions undertaken by groups working within this area, in the organisations and structures investigated here. Future research, which focuses on different geographical regions, of course may find different examples of this kind of 'practical politics'.

⁴¹ For example, Chapter 4 explores Charlotte Hazel's experiences as a local councillor in West Bromwich from 1918 to her death in 1955. As the chapter explores, Hazel was an active member of the Liberal party and was re-elected as a Liberal representative many times. An error—no doubt typographical—recorded that she was an Independent candidate in 1932, but in all other instances she was referred to as a Liberal, so this report could be disregarded. 'West Bromwich', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 25 October 1932, p. 2.

⁴² See Appendix H for the full list.

However, the notion of a kind of political action rooted in the local, the specific, and the pragmatic, which I present in this thesis, arguably has much wider implications for how historians understand how ordinary women became politicised in this period. Indeed, as Hunt and Hannam suggest, without understanding how women's politics operated at local level, 'we only have a partial, patchy and even a distorted national picture' of the contemporary women's movement.⁴³ The notion of a 'practical politics' helps to overcome this, however, by focusing on the specific, pragmatic forms of political action women in a given place were able to undertake. The four spheres of activity through which women in the Black Country might engage in this—parliamentary politics, non-partisan housewives' associations, voluntary health organisations and municipal government—were in no way unique to this area, and were areas of activism in which women across Britain were involved. The thesis aims, however, to use evidence from this area to understand how women in the Black Country were able to undertake this activism within their own communities, and how this local work might contribute to shifting notions of women's roles in public life post-enfranchisement.

Structure of the thesis:

Each sphere of activity is explored in its own chapter, which examines how women might become politicised specifically through that area of activism. Chapters are sub-divided into separate parts which present case studies of specific campaigns, organisations, or time periods.

Chapter 1 is formed of four parts, each of which considers one of the four women parliamentary candidates who stood in Black Country constituencies before 1951. These were: Mary Macarthur (Labour candidate in Stourbridge in 1918); Christabel Pankhurst (Women's Party candidate in Smethwick in 1918); Lady Cooper (Unionist candidate in Walsall in 1922); and Maude Marshall (Liberal candidate in Smethwick in 1929). Each of their campaigns, all of which were ultimately unsuccessful, are considered in separate case studies. However, the chapter mainly focuses on the extent to which ordinary women voters might be politicised by the presence of a woman candidate, a rarity in this period, considering whether they were actively involved in the political

⁴³ Hunt and Hannam, 'Archaeology', p. 137—138.

process through these campaigns. It argues that there is little evidence that local women were politicised by the presence of a woman parliamentary candidate in the Black Country at this time. While parliamentary politics might be said to be at its most local during an election period, with candidates' canvassing voters in a specific constituency, these four campaigns appeared to do little to actively involve local women. The chapter therefore suggests that there was perhaps a sense among women that national, parliamentary politics had little direct relevance to their lives, and this was arguably not a vehicle for the kind of 'practical politics' undertaken within organisations and structures examined in the following three chapters.

Chapter 2 then investigates three local branches of non-partisan housewives' associations, taking a case study approach with each part focusing on, in turn: Walsall's Tipperary Rooms, a social club for the women family members of servicemen, during the First World War; Wolverhampton's branch of the National Council of Women (NCW) in the interwar period; and the thirteen local branches of the Women's Voluntary Service in the Second World War.⁴⁴ It argues that certain Black Country women were able to become actively involved in public life through their interactions with these three organisations. It further suggests that the extent to which they were able to do so increased over this period, as such organisations gradually became inclusive of more women from a wider range of social backgrounds. The chapter focuses on the practical work of each organisation in each time period, and argues that through this, there was scope for local women to become increasingly involved with public life, and in the process, become increasingly politicised.

Chapter 3, which explores women's involvement with voluntary health associations, takes a similar case study approach. Its three parts focus on: the Material Aid Committee of Walsall Child Welfare Association (WCWA) in the First World War; the voluntary committee of Halesowen Infant Welfare Clinic (HIWC) in the interwar period; and the Ladies' Linen League associated with Dudley Guest Hospital during and immediately after the Second World War. The first two parts consider the role of WCWA and HIWC within public life in both places, arguing that both organisations were able

⁴⁴ These were based in: Bilston, Brierley Hill, Darlaston, Halesowen, Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Stourbridge, Tipton, Walsall, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton.

to provide practical, tangible forms of support for mothers and infants in each locale. It further suggests that both the women who sat on the organisations' respective voluntary committees, and certain women who used the services each provided, were increasingly politicised through their interactions with these associations. The final part examines Dudley's Linen League, a charitable organisation run exclusively by local women to provide all the material goods that Dudley Guest Hospital required yearly. In so doing, the women who volunteered within the organisation were taking on a not insignificant role in the hospital's running. This part suggests that the practical work of fundraising for, and organising the purchase of, these goods enabled these women to take on a recognised role in local public life—but that this role came to an end with the introduction of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948. As such, while it is suggested throughout this chapter that this sphere of activity gradually became more inclusive of women from a wider range of backgrounds over time, the establishment of the NHS does appear to have somewhat negatively impacted on the accessibility of this sphere of influence to ordinary women after the Second World War.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the 90 women elected to the 14 county borough, municipal, and urban district councils which made up the Black Country in this period.⁴⁵ It is arranged chronologically: the first part looks at women councillors first elected up to 1918; the second, women first elected between 1919 and 1939; and third and final part, the women first elected after the Second World War, as elections were suspended for the duration of both conflicts. Across this timeframe, the number of women elected to these local councils increased, but the rate at which they were elected was higher in the interwar years than before the First World War, and higher in the years following the Second World War than in the interwar period. The expansion of women's activism in this sphere of activity came somewhat later than in both housewives' associations and voluntary health organisations, hence this being the final chapter in the thesis, but their engagement with local government across the period as a whole was extremely significant. The chapter explores what factors

⁴⁵ These were: the County Borough Councils of Dudley, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton; the Municipal Borough Councils of Smethwick, Stourbridge and Wednesbury, and the Urban District Councils of: Bilston; Brierley Hill; Darlaston; Halesowen; Oldbury; Rowley Regis and Tipton. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the smaller rural district councils were not surveyed as part of this investigation.

drove these women to seek election—that is, what might have initially politicised them. While each of the 90 women would clearly have had their own personal motivations for standing for election, several broad trends stand out. The chapter suggests that in the years to 1939, many women appear to have been politicised by their own familial connections to local government, which perhaps helped them to better understand the practical workings of municipal governance. Others appear to have been motivated by a desire to work on so-called ‘women’s issues’, typically those related to women’s or children’s welfare. It is suggested that some women councillors may have seen the legislative powers of local government as an alternative means to making practical changes to women’s lives in the area on these issues; as the chapter explores, there was very little overlap in personnel between the voluntary organisations studied in Chapters 2 and 3, and local government. In the Black Country, at least, it does not appear that women who sought election to municipal councils had become politicised through involvement with other women’s organisations. Indeed, after 1945, local evidence suggests that partisanship became increasingly important in women’s seeking election. Post-war, most women councillors had strong links to their local Labour party, reflecting the party’s electoral dominance of the Black Country in this period.

Broadly, each chapter focuses on a different type of organisation or structure: parliamentary campaigns; housewives’ associations; voluntary health organisations, and local government. Within each, the choice was made to focus specifically on organisations or areas in which all women, regardless of their partisan or religious belief, or their social class, age, or profession might participate. In the first and fourth chapters, which focus on national and local government, the emphasis is placed on ordinary women and how they could potentially become politicised through this sphere. That is, in the first part of chapter one, for example, the emphasis is on ordinary women voters in Stourbridge in 1918, and not prominent Labour women like Mary Macarthur who actually stood for election, with the same approach taken through the rest of the chapter. Similarly, Chapter Four focuses on women councillors of all political persuasions, including non-party Independent women, rather than women from just one particular party. In Chapters Two and Three, I sought to research organisations which were—in theory, if not in practice, as is discussed extensively in these

chapters—open to any woman. For example, in Chapter Two, when considering the interwar period, I utilised the archival resources of Wolverhampton’s branch of the National Council of Women rather than a branch of the Mother’s Union active in the city, although the records of the branch were equally accessible. This was because the NCW was open to all women, whereas the Mother’s Union was a naturally self-selecting group of Anglican women. This does not mean, of course, that organisations that were selective in their membership, such as a partisan organisation like the Labour party women’s section, or a religious organisation like the Mother’s Union, were *not* important sites of women’s politicisation. Similarly, professional organisations and trade unions were also extremely important in serving to politicise working women. However, the aim of this thesis was to consider how ordinary women, who may not have been part of such organisations, came to be more involved in politics and public life, and thus the four spheres of activity outlined above were chosen for greater examination.

In addition, it is worth noting that the selection of organisations studied here was in part affected by the serendipity of what material has survived to be preserved in local archives. In some cases, there was evidence that a given association had been active in a specific town, but its archival records had not been deposited. For example, as noted in Chapter Three, there was an active infant welfare organisation established in Dudley in 1916, the same year that the Walsall and Halesowen associations studied here were established. Yet unlike these groups, the Dudley association’s records do not survive and only passing mention to its activities can be found in local newspapers. This is, of course, a not uncommon problem, particularly in the field of women’s history. The very nature of some of the organisations studied here means that their records were not always perceived by members to be important enough to warrant preservation, and often what has been deposited in archives comes down to chance. It is regrettable that, thus far, evidence related to other women’s organisations active in the area in this period has not yet come to light, and it is hoped that, in the future, such documentation may be discovered and deposited in the relevant archives.

This might also have the added benefit of allowing a fuller understanding of the overlap between different organisations studied here. Each chapter focuses on an individual sphere of activity,

but the very nature of a local study reveals certain interconnections between these different spheres. For example, in First World War-era Walsall, there was some crossover between the women involved with the organisation of the Tipperary Rooms (Chapter 2) and those involved with the organisation of WCWA (Chapter 3). Such connections, where apparent, are noted throughout the thesis. However, gaps in the historical record mean it has not been possible to trace all possible connections between individuals involved with local organisations or structures. For instance, Chapter 3 considers the women who sat on Halesowen Infant Welfare Clinic's voluntary committee. Halesowen also had an active Women's Co-operative Guild, an organisation which had long been associated with the fight for maternity rights, and it is possible that some individuals in the locale were involved with both organisations.⁴⁶ As the Halesowen Guild's archives regrettably no longer exist, any connections between these two organisations cannot be corroborated, but neither is it possible to state with certainty that there were *no* connections between the two groups. While this thesis cannot, therefore, present a full and complete picture of women's activism in the Black Country in this period, its overall aim is to use the available evidence to consider where, how, and through which organisations and structures women were able to become active in local public life. To fully contextualise this, however, there follows a chapter which aims to give context to the aims and objects of the women's movement in Britain as a whole at this time, and to the political culture of the Black Country on the eve of the First World War.

⁴⁶ For the Guild's campaigning, see: Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War*, (London: UCL Press, 1998), especially Chapter 3.

Context for the thesis

As the Introduction demonstrated, there have been significant shifts in the historiography of the women's movement after 1918. Far from being a period when women's activism went into a decline only to re-emerge again with the arrival of 'second-wave' feminism in the 1960s, it is now generally accepted that 'there has always been a women's movement this century'.¹ Many historians have charted various aspects of the movement and the ways in which women engaged in political action post-suffrage, and, as I argued in the previous section, the vibrancy of the post-First World War women's movement is now widely recognised. The purpose of this chapter is therefore twofold. First, it will provide an overview of the women's movement between 1914 and 1951, charting the development of women's political activism on a national level. It examines the various campaigns in which organisations engaged during these years, which frequently informed the issues on which groups engaged on a local level. This section thus provides context for the local activism in the Black Country, which is explored throughout the rest of the thesis. In the second part, this chapter explores the specific Black Country context. The geographical area itself is defined, and the position of women here on the eve of war in 1914 is discussed, providing an overview of the specific local context at the beginning of this study.

Women, politics, and the women's movement, c. 1914—1951:

This thesis is interested in exploring women's political activism from 1914, when women were on the cusp of being enfranchised. Prior to their enfranchisement, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women had still been able to be involved with the political process.² However, by the early twentieth century, women's activism in the suffrage movement, especially, had increased enormously. On the outbreak of war, in 1914, the two largest suffrage organisations in Britain were the militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) led, increasingly autocratically, by Emmeline and

¹ Dale Spender, *There's Always Been a Women's Movement This Century*, (London: Pandora Press, 1983).

² There is too vast a historiography of women's activism in politics in the nineteenth century to discuss in detail here, but two of the best, most recent general overviews of women's politics in this period are: Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815—1867*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (London: Routledge, 2013).

Christabel Pankhurst, and the constitutionalist National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett, although there were a vast number of other, smaller organisations active in the campaign for women's enfranchisement. This fight—up to the outbreak of war—has been extensively documented by historians of the suffrage movement.³

The position of the movement in wartime is, arguably, less well understood, although more recent research has begun to change this. When war was declared, the leaders of the two largest suffrage organisations—the Pankhursts and Garrett Fawcett—immediately announced that they would channel their organisations' energy into working for the war effort. In the case of the WSPU, this 'truce' allowed suffragettes who had been imprisoned for their militancy to be released. However, though the leaders of these organisations encouraged members to set aside suffrage campaigning for the duration, as a number of historians have recently charted, individually, locally, and regionally,

³ Again, there is a vast historiography, but see for instance: Emmeline Pankhurst, *Suffragette: My Own Story*, (London: Hesperus Press Classics, 2016 (original 1914)); Ray Strachey, *The Cause: a short history of the women's movement in Great Britain*, (London: Virago, 1979 (original 1928)); Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: the rise of the women's movement*, (London: Virago, 1978); Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: women's suffrage and reform politics in Britain 1900–1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: stories from the women's suffrage movement*, (London: Routledge, 1996); Angela V. John & Clare Eustance (eds.), *The Men's Share?: Masculinities, Male Support and Women's Suffrage, 1980–1920*, (London: Routledge, 1997); Maroula Joannou & June Purvis (eds), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: new feminist perspectives*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Clare Eustance, Joan Ryan & Laura Ugolini, *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000); Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women: a revisionist analysis of the campaign for women's suffrage, 1866–1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); June Purvis & Sandra Stanley Holton (eds.), *Votes for Women*, (London: Routledge, 2000); Martin Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, (London: Allan Lane, 2001); Paula Bartley, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, (London: Routledge, 2002); June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, (London: Routledge, 2002); June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: a Biography*, (London: Routledge, 2002); Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain 1860–1930*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Krista Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother: Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations 1890–1920*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004); Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: their fight for the vote*, (London: Virago, 2006); Krista Cowman, *Women of the Right Spirit: paid organisers of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) 1904–18*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Myriam Bousshba-Bravard, (ed.), *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women's Vote in Britain, 1880–1914*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Katherine Connelly, *Sylvia Pankhurst: suffragette, socialist and scourge of empire*, (London: Pluto Press, 2013); Lyndsey Jenkins, *Lady Constance Lytton: Aristocrat, Suffragette, Martyr*, (London: Biteback, 2015); Diane Atkinson, *Rise up, women! the remarkable lives of the suffragettes*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Miranda Garrett & Zoë Thomas (eds.), *Suffrage and the Arts: Visual Culture, Politics and Enterprise*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Naomi Paxton, *Stage rights!: The Actresses' Franchise League, activism and politics 1908–58*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography*, (London: Routledge, 2018); Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and domestic labour in the women's suffrage movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

some suffragists and suffragettes continued to work towards obtaining the franchise for women.⁴ Furthermore, representatives from the NUWSS and WSPU were invited to take part in the Speakers Conference of 1917 which paved the way for the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act. After extensive discussion on precisely which women should be enfranchised—ultimately, women over 30 and those who met certain property qualifications were awarded the vote—the Act received royal assent on 6 February 1918, enfranchising about 8.4 million women, or around two-thirds of the adult female population.⁵ In November 1918, only three weeks before the first general election in which some women could vote, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act also gained royal assent, giving all women over the age of 21 the right to stand for election.⁶ Ten years later, in 1928, the Equal Franchise Act was passed, affording British women voting rights on equal terms with men—at the age of 21, and without property qualifications.⁷

The popular trope that women were ‘rewarded’ with the vote because of their exemplary war work⁸ is now largely recognised as a fallacy, not least as many of those left unenfranchised in 1918—
younger women, and those from the working classes—were precisely those who had undertaken so much of this war work. Nonetheless, as Nicoletta Gullace argues, the conflict was extremely

⁴ Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain during the First World War*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Jo Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote: The Erosion of Democratic Suffragism in Britain During the First World War*, (London: Palgrave, 2007); Alexandra Hughes Johnson, Rose Lamartine Yates and the Wimbledon WSPU: reconfiguring Suffragette history from the local to the national, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2017); Patricia Fara, *A Lab of One's Own: Science and Suffrage in the First World War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵ For the Speakers' Conference: Dawn Langam Teele, 'Ordinary Democratization: The Electoral Strategy that Won British Women the Vote', *Politics & Society*, Vol. 42, No. 4, (2014), p. 537-561; for exclusions: Anna Muggeridge, 'The Missing Two Million: The Exclusion of Working-class Women from the 1918 Representation of the People Act', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (2018), p. 1—15; for the number of women enfranchised: Mari Takayanagi, 'Women and the Vote: The Parliamentary Path to Equal Franchise, 1918–28', *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2018), p. 168—185, p. 169 & 171.

⁶ Mari Takayanagi, "'One of the most revolutionary proposals that has ever been put before the House": the passage of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918', in: Lucy Bland and Richard Carr (eds.), *Labour, British Radicalism and the First World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 56—72.

⁷ Mari Takayanagi, "'Does the right hon. Gentleman mean equal votes at 21?" Conservative women and equal franchise, 1919–1928', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (2019), p. 194—214. Certain anomalies, such as the business and university franchises were maintained but in theory women could qualify for these franchises on the same terms as men.

⁸ For this argument, see for example: Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, New Edition, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1974, original 1965); *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: a comparative study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States*, (London: Macmillan, 1974).

significant in the negotiation of women's citizenship status. Women were able to engage in various forms of patriotic war work, not limited to their paid employment, which allowed feminist activists to challenge the 'parameters of citizenship' such that it was no longer an exclusively male domain. This, suggests Gullace, contributed in part to the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act.⁹

After the war, further opportunities were opened up to women through the passage of the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act. This Act made it illegal to discriminate based on an individual's sex in professional or public settings. It allowed women access to professions from which they had previously been excluded on the basis of their gender, such as the law, where women were admitted to institutions of the profession and were able to become solicitors or barristers.¹⁰ It also enabled women to take up those public offices that had been off-limits in the past, perhaps most notably the role of magistrate, or justice of the peace. For many years, the 1919 Act tended to be viewed by historians as having a very limited impact on women's rights: while it may have opened up certain professions to women, it did not, for example, ensure women equal access to pay in these professions, and marriage bars remained in place in many professions, such as the civil service or education.¹¹ However, more recent research has challenged these interpretations. Anne Logan has pointed to the significant impact the Act had on women's experiences as magistrates: by the end of the Second World War, nearly a quarter of all magistrates were female, following extensive campaigning by women's organisations, most notably the National Council of Women (NCW).¹² Mari Takayanagi, meanwhile, has recently provided a much more positive overview of the Act as a whole, noting that it 'was a considerable achievement for the circumstances in 1919 [and] that it provided

⁹ Nicoletta F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War*, (London: Macmillan, 2002), p. 194.

¹⁰ Judith Bourne, 'Helena Normanton: legal crusader or myth Maker? '[S]urely the one thing history teaches us is that we cannot generalise, or even worse, categorise individual humans into saints and sinners, or heroes and villains'', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (2020), p. 671—695.

¹¹ For its perceived failings see for example Harold L. Smith, 'British Feminism in the 1920s', in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 1990).

¹² Anne Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: the campaign for women magistrates in England and Wales, 1910–1939', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (2007), p. 501—518.

some valuable changes in the law for women in the context of the time'.¹³ Additionally, while legislation relating to equal pay would not be passed until 1970, and even after this point, women would continue, as a gender, to be paid less than men, as work by Helen Glew has succinctly demonstrated, this issue, in addition to other gendered inequalities facing women in the professions in the interwar years frequently galvanised professional women into political activism.¹⁴

After women gained the right to vote and hold public office, a spate of legislation relating to women's and children's rights passed during the 1920s following pressure from a wide range of partisan and non-partisan women's organisations. As noted in the Introduction, Pat Thane has argued that 'more women, from a wider range of backgrounds, were actively campaigning for gender equality in the nineteen-twenties and thirties than before the First World War'.¹⁵ New legislation included laws 'relating to raising the age of consent and age of marriage, the Infanticide Act of 1922...and the New English Law of Property 1925, which allowed married and single women to hold and dispose of their real and personal property on the same terms as men'.¹⁶ Other legislation passed in this period, following pressure from a diverse range of women's organisations, included the Legitimacy Act of 1926, which legitimated babies born out of wedlock if their parents subsequently married, and reforms to the divorce laws.¹⁷ As Clare Debenham has recently demonstrated, meanwhile, the post-suffrage period also saw increased national campaigning on the right for women to access birth control.¹⁸ Although birth control and divorce reform remained a controversial—if not

¹³ Mari Takayanagi, 'Sacred year or broken reed? The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (2020), p. 563—582, p. 564; see also: Pat Thane, 'Afterword: challenging women in the British professions', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (2020), p. 748—758.

¹⁴ Helen Glew, *Gender, rhetoric and regulation: Women's work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900—55*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Pat Thane, 'What difference did the vote make? Women in public and private life in Britain since 1918', *Historical Research*, Vol. 76, No. 192, (2003), p. 268—285, p. 271—272.

¹⁶ Pat Thane, 'Women and political participation in England, 1918—1970', in: Breitenbach and Thane, *Women and Citizenship*, p. 11—28, p. 21—22.

¹⁷ Tanya Evans, 'The Other Woman and her Child: extra-marital affairs and illegitimacy in twentieth-century Britain', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (2011), p. 47—65; Ginger Frost, '“Revolting to Humanity”: oversights, limitations, and complications of the English Legitimacy Act of 1926', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (2011), p. 31—46.

¹⁸ Clare Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women: Post-Suffrage Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014). For the links between this fight and the contemporary eugenics movement, see also: Jane Carey, 'The Racial Imperatives of Sex: birth control and eugenics in Britain, the United States and Australia in the interwar years', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 21, No. 5, (2012), p. 733—752.

taboo—topic among some religious women’s organisations, such groups were still able to use such issues to highlight some of the social and welfare concerns many women faced at the time, as Caitriona Beaumont has argued, highlighting the diversity of the women’s movement in this period.¹⁹

The interwar years were therefore a period of legislative change for women, and it is notable that many of these legislative changes came about because of pressure from women’s and feminist organisations. Pat Thane estimates that ‘at least 23 pieces of legislation were passed between 1918 and 1930’ which sought to ‘promote gender equality’, following campaigning by such organisations.²⁰ While some of these groups were explicitly feminist—the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), the post-war incarnation of the NUWSS, for example—others chose not to use this label, such as the Women’s Institute (WI).²¹ Varying groups were single issue, for example the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child; occupational, such as the National Union of Women Teachers; faith-based, like the Catholic Women’s League; or class-based, such as the Women’s Co-operative Guild. Campaigning was also undertaken by women’s sections of political parties, such as the Women’s Labour League or the Conservatives’ Primrose League, and some of the women MPs who entered parliament during this period. As such, the range and diversity of both these groups, and the issues on which they campaigned, have led historians to argue that, as Thane writes, ‘[t]here was not the clear division historians once perceived between “old, equal rights” feminists...and “new, welfare” feminists. These goals could be held simultaneously and were complementary’.²² Indeed, it is perhaps notable that it was a local study—Sue Innes’, of the Women

¹⁹ Caitriona Beaumont, ‘Moral Dilemmas and Women’s Rights: the attitude of the Mothers’ Union and Catholic Women’s League to divorce, birth control and abortion in England, 1928–1939’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (2007), p. 463–485.

²⁰ Thane, ‘What difference’, p. 273.

²¹ Chapter 2 discusses the place of feminism within the Women’s Institute, but see: Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women’s Institute as a Social Movement*, 2nd Edition, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015), Chapter 1 and Caitriona Beaumont, ‘Citizens not feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women’s organisations in England, 1928–39’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2000), p. 411–429.

²² Thane, ‘Women and political participation’, p. 21; see also: Maria DiCenzo, ‘Our Freedom and Its Results’: measuring progress in the aftermath of suffrage, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2014), p. 421–440; Maria DiCenzo and Claire Eustace, ‘Many More Worlds To Conquer, The Feminist Press Beyond Suffrage’, in: *Women’s Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939 The Interwar Period*, Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green, Fiona Hackney (eds.), (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 316–332; Laurel Foster, ‘The Essay Series and Feminist Debate: Controversy and Conversation about Women and Work in *Time and Tide*’, in: Clay *et al*, p. 333–347.

Citizens' Association (WCA) in Edinburgh—that was among the first to suggest that at a local level, divisions between 'old' and 'new' feminisms were not as binary as had once been thought. Innes pointed to the ways in which Edinburgh WCA campaigned simultaneously for 'equality' rights, such as the equalisation of the franchise and equal pay, and 'welfare' rights, mostly connected with social reform. In doing so, she demonstrated the ways in which local studies which consider how organisations worked 'on the ground' can add nuance to the wider understanding of the development of feminism in Britain.²³

The changes in women's legal status, particularly their enfranchisement; their involvement in various campaigns to improve said legal status; and their participation in a variety of partisan and non-partisan organisations in the interwar period have led some historians to refer to the post-enfranchisement years as the period in which women became 'active citizens'. Indeed, Caitriona Beaumont argues that many non-partisan women's organisations found the concept of citizenship 'a more effective way to secure social and economic rights' for women than the potentially divisive notion of feminism, and actively distanced themselves from the feminist movement.²⁴ However, while women's 'most public exercise of citizenship' is generally accepted as their participation in the political process through national elections,²⁵ women's citizenship status was consistently being negotiated and renegotiated across the period under investigation in this thesis. As noted, Nicoletta Gullace argued that, during the First World War, feminist organisations used women's patriotic contributions to the war effort to claim citizenship status for women, which contributed to their partial enfranchisement in 1918.²⁶ By the time the Second World War broke out in 1939, British women had been enfranchised on equal terms with men for a little over a decade, and their citizenship status was no longer as in question as it had been in the previous conflict. However, as Sonya Rose argues, in the

²³ Sue Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship in the Interwar Period: the Edinburgh Women Citizens' Association', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4, (2004), p. 621—648.

²⁴ Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists'; Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the women's movement in England, 1928–64*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

²⁵ For an extremely useful overview of the notions of women's citizenship across Europe, including the period before enfranchisement, see: Karen Hunt, 'Women as Citizens: Changing the polity', in: Deborah Simonton (ed.), *The Routledge History of Women in Europe Since 1700*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 216—258, p. 216.

²⁶ Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*.

Second World War, 'a discourse of "rights" for women was given renewed vigour, in part because in wartime Britain, the government focused so pointedly on the various obligations that women, as well as men, owed to the nation'.²⁷ Furthermore, she suggests, 'during the war, active citizenship was linked to "social responsibility" and participation in civil society or public affairs'.²⁸ Because of the wartime situation, this meant, for example, involvement in various forms of civil defence work. As such, 'citizenship...was predominantly understood to be a moral or ethical practice that was deemed crucial for national survival',²⁹ and was a practice in which women had a significant role to play.

Indeed, there has been extensive exploration of women's lived experiences on the home front in wartime, including research into women's paid employment;³⁰ their role in civil defence;³¹ their sexuality and especially relationships with British and overseas servicemen;³² and their role in the

²⁷ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 18; see also: Sonya O. Rose, 'Women's Rights, Women's Obligations: Contradictions of Citizenship in World War II Britain', *European Review of History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (2000), p. 277—289.

²⁸ Rose, *Which People's War*, p. 19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁰ There is an extensive historiography of women's work in wartime, particularly in munitions factories, although this was not the only field in which women were employed. For a useful overview, see: Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict*, (London: Routledge, 2013, original 1984); Harold L. Smith, 'The Womanpower Problem in Britain during the Second World War', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (1984), p. 925-945; Susan L. Carruthers, 'Manning the Factories': Propaganda and Policy on the Employment of Women, 1939-1947', *History*, Vol. 75, No. 244, (1990), p. 232-256; Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Clare Wightman, *More than Munitions: Women, Work and the Engineering Industries 1900-1950*, (London: Longman, 1999); Hugh Murphy, 'From the crinoline to the boilersuit': Women workers in British shipbuilding during the Second World War', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, (1999), p. 82—104; Sue Bruley, 'A New Perspective on Women Workers in the Second World War: the Industrial Diary of Kathleen Church-Bliss and Elsie Whiteman', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 68, No. 2, (2003), p. 217-234; Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840*, (London: Routledge, 2005), Chapter 9; Ian Gazeley, 'Women's Pay in British Industry during the Second World War', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 61, No. 3, (2008), p. 652-671.

³¹ In addition Rose, *Which People's War?*, see for example: Penny Summerfield & Corinna Penniston-Bird, 'Women in the firing line: the home guard and the defence of gender boundaries in Britain in the second world war', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2000), p. 231—255; Lucy Noakes and Susan R. Grayzel, 'Defending the home(land): gendering Civil Defence from the First World War to the 'War on Terror'', in: *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Ana Carden-Coyne, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 29—40; Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Lucy Noakes, '"Serve to Save": Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain 1937-41', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (2012), p. 734—753; Susan R. Grayzel, 'Defence Against the Indefensible: The Gas Mask, the State and British Culture during and after the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (2014), p. 418—434.

³² Penny Summerfield & Nicole Crockett, 'You weren't taught that with the welding': lessons in sexuality in the Second World War', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1992), p. 435—454; Juliet Gardiner, *Over Here:*

domestic sphere.³³ However, far less work has been done on the women's movement itself in wartime, and particularly the ways in which women took political action during both wars. Housewives' associations played a key role in numerous aspects of home front life in the conflict: Maggie Andrews, for instance, has examined the WI in both the First and Second World Wars, while Caitriona Beaumont considers the role of numerous housewives' associations in the Second World War,³⁴ and there has been extensive research into the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) in this conflict, too.³⁵ Though this work is, of course, extremely important in furthering our understanding of these organisations in wartime, there has been little research into the local work of these groups and how involvement with their wartime work might serve to politicise members, actively involving them in local public life. Similarly, while there have been studies of female political actors during the Second World War, these tend to be focused on the actions and experiences of women MPs during the

The GIs in Wartime Britain, (London: Collins & Brown, 1992); David Reynolds, *Rich Relations. The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945*, (London: Harper Collins, 1995); Sonya O. Rose, 'The "Sex Question" in Anglo-American Relations in the Second World War', *The International History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (2000), p. 884—903; Rose, *Which People's War?*, Chapter Three; Philomena Goodman, *Women, Sexuality and War*, (London: Palgrave, 2002); Claire Langhamer, 'Love and courtship in mid-twentieth-century England', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 1, (2007), p. 173—196; Emma Vickers, *Queen and Country: Same-sex desire in the British Armed Forces, 1939-1945*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Lucy Bland, *Britain's 'Brown Babies': the stories of children born to black GIs and British women in the Second World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

³³ See for example: Sally Sokoloff, 'How are they at Home? Community State and Servicemen's Wives in England 1939-45', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (1999), p. 27—52; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), Chapter 4; Lucy Noakes, 'Gender, Grief, and Bereavement in Second World War Britain', *Journal of War and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (2015), p. 72—85; Maggie Andrews, 'Nationalising Hundreds and Thousands of Women': a domestic response to a national problem', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (2015), p. 112—130; Maggie Andrews, *Women and Evacuation in the Second World War: Femininity, Domesticity and Motherhood*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

³⁴ Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2015), Chapter 7; Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, Chapter 5.

³⁵ A fuller review of the literature on the WVS is given in Chapter 2, but the best overview of the organisation remains James Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War: Continuities of Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

conflict,³⁶ or of Westminster culture itself,³⁷ and there is scope for a deeper understanding of how women's politics operated at local level during the conflict.

Arguably, this lack of focus on the local is also true of the immediate post-war period. As Penny Tinkler, Stephanie Spencer and Claire Langhamer have recently argued, earlier ideas about the 1950s as 'the quiet patch when women returned to the home and domestic duty before the "problem that had no name" emerged and led to the excitement of the 1960s' have begun to be challenged.³⁸ In particular, there has been extensive research into women's experiences in the workplace in this decade,³⁹ while Alistair Thomson, Rachel Ritchie and Caitriona Beaumont have also considered the experiences of housewives and housewives' associations in this period, though much of this work focuses on the 1950s, and not the immediate post-war period.⁴⁰ There has, as yet, been limited focus on the ways in which women were politically active in this immediate aftermath of war, with the exception of James Hinton's research into the British Housewives' League, a right-wing, though non-party, organisation established in 1946 as a result of discontent over continued rationing.⁴¹ There is,

³⁶ See for example: Paula Bartley, 'Ellen Wilkinson and Home Security', in: *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, eds. Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 108–138; Madge Dresser, 'The Elusive Lady Apsley', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (2019), p. 215–235.

³⁷ Laura Beers, "'Women for Westminster'", *Feminism and the Limits of Non-Partisan Associational Culture*, in: *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, eds. Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 224–242; Mari Takayanagi, 'The Home Front in the 'Westminster Village': women staff in Parliament during the Second World War', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (2017), p. 608–620.

³⁸ Penny Tinkler, Stephanie Spencer and Claire Langhamer, 'Revisioning the History of Girls and Women in Britain in the Long 1950s', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (2017), p. 1–8, p. 1. They quote, of course: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: Norton, 1963).

³⁹ Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (2001), p. 773–795; Dolly Smith Wilson 'A New Look at the Affluent Worker: the good working mother in post-war Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 17, No. 2, (2006), p. 206–229; Helen McCarthy, 'Women, Marriage and Paid Work in Post-war Britain', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (2017), p. 46–61; Gillian Murray, 'Taking Work Home: the private secretary and domestic identities in the long 1950s', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (2017), p. 62–76; Claire Langhamer, 'Feelings, Women and Work in the Long 1950s', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (2017), p. 77–92.

⁴⁰ Alistair Thomson, 'Tied to the kitchen sink? Women's Lives and Women's History in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain and Australia', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (2013), p. 126–147; Rachel Ritchie, 'Beauty isn't all a matter of looking glamorous': attitudes to glamour and beauty in 1950s women's magazines', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 5, (2013), p. 723–743; Caitriona Beaumont, 'What Do Women Want? Housewives' Associations, Activism and Changing Representations of Women in the 1950s', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (2017), p. 147–162.

⁴¹ James Hinton, 'Militant Housewives: the British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (1994), p. 129–156.

therefore, perhaps scope for further research into this period, which takes into account the impact of the conflict on women's politics and politicisation and the ways in which this might be shaped by local factors.

Locating and contextualising women in the Black Country:

Having broadly outlined the developments in the women's movement on a national level during the period 1914—1951, the thesis will now contextualise the position of women in the Black Country on the eve of war in 1914. First, however, it is necessary to define what is meant by 'the Black Country'. The term is largely accepted to have been in use since approximately the 1840s,⁴² as various technological advances associated with the industrial revolution 'determined the Black Country's "take-off" into sustained growth in the period 1766-90'.⁴³ However, it is challenging to physically locate because, as a geographic area, 'it has no recognized boundaries [and] cannot be found on any map'.⁴⁴ Indeed, as the linguist Urszula Clark has recently suggested, the Black Country is perhaps best defined by 'what it is not', as it is constructed 'primarily...in opposition to the neighbouring large city of Birmingham'.⁴⁵ Clark finds echoes of Benedict Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities'⁴⁶ when conceptualising the Black Country: it is, she argues, 'a geographic region within [the] nation in the minds of its inhabitants'.⁴⁷

Traditionally, geographers, geologists, and historians have defined the area based on markers of its geology, and consequently its industrial heritage. Writing in 1928, GC Allen suggested that the Black Country, 'is, in fact, to be regarded as a unit solely from an industrial point of view', with no 'physical or administrative' boundaries or characteristics with which it might be delineated.⁴⁸ WVK

⁴² Peter M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, technology and culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760–1820*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 22.

⁴³ Trevor Raybould, 'Aristocratic Landowners and the Industrial Revolution: The Black Country Experience c.1760–1840', *Midland History*, Vol. 9, No.1, (1984), p. 59–86, p. 61.

⁴⁴ Harold Parsons, *Portrait of the Black Country*, (London: Robert Hale, 1986).

⁴⁵ Urszula Clark, *Language and Identity in Englishes*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 140.

⁴⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

⁴⁷ Clark, *Language and Identity*, p. 140.

⁴⁸ G C Allen, *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, 1860-1927*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018 ebook edition, (original 1929)).

Gale, an historian of the iron and steel trade, defines the area as the towns and villages ‘in which the iron trade was carried out between the years 1750 and 1900’,⁴⁹ while Edward Chitham suggests that it is the area encompassed by the South Staffordshire coalfield, and ‘places where this coal was marketed and used’.⁵⁰ Useful as these definitions undoubtedly are to geographers and geologists, they do tend to bisect the land in ways which are somewhat less useful to the historian of women’s political activism. Gale’s suggestion, for instance, that the Black Country includes ‘that part of the County Borough of Wolverhampton south-east of the main roads to Stourbridge and Cannock’, but not the whole of the borough itself, was patently not possible to map onto my own research into the Wolverhampton branch of the NCW (Chapter 2).⁵¹ Therefore, while acknowledging that the question of which villages and towns make up the Black Country will surely never be settled, for the purpose of this thesis, I have defined the Black Country as the area encompassed by what is today the four Metropolitan Boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. This is, of course, not intended as the definitive definition but it is in line with the definition used by the Black Country Living Museum, and the Black Country Studies Centre at the University of Wolverhampton, and as such is broadly in line with other researchers working on the area.

However, although this thesis is about women in the Black Country, it is worth reflecting on the extent to which the individuals studied here might have identified as Black Country women. As noted, the term ‘the Black Country’ has been in common use since the early nineteenth century. However, a Black Country identity is perhaps something that has come to the fore much more since the late 1960s, when the Black Country Society was established in 1967 to ‘support, preserve, record and celebrate’ the district.⁵² This was the same year that plans for the Black Country Living Museum began to take shape, with the museum formally opening in 1978, to celebrate the region’s industrial, social and cultural heritage.⁵³ Prior to this period, however, individuals were perhaps less likely to

⁴⁹ WVK Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*, (London: The Iron and Steel Institute, 1966), p. 1—3.

⁵⁰ Edward Chitham, *The Black Country*, (Stroud: Amberly Press, 2012 (original 1972)), p. 3—4.

⁵¹ Gale, *The Black Country Iron Industry*, p. 1.

⁵² <https://www.blackcountryociety.com/>

⁵³ Simon Briercliffe, ‘BCLM: Forging Ahead: building a new urban history of the Black Country’, *Urban History*, Vol. 48, No. 1, (2021), p. 334—350, p. 337.

identify as being from ‘the Black Country’, and would instead identify as someone from a specific town within the region. Indeed, as Simon Briercliffe has argued, although ‘modern politicians embrace the idea of a distinctive and diverse Black Country as a form of place promotion, it is important to recognize this urban differentiation in the creation of a popular memory of the region’.⁵⁴

Indeed, it is perhaps notable that, of all the sources utilised in this thesis, discussed extensively in the Introduction, I found only two explicit references to the Black Country as a whole. The first was within the archival material associated with Halesowen Infant Welfare Centre (studied in Chapter 3), which produced two scrapbook volumes for National Baby Week events in 1928 and 1930. Both open with a description of the area, which begins: ‘[Halesowen] is essentially an industrial area and although to the south there stretch the attractive pastures of Worcestershire, the northern horizon is scarred by the smoking chimneys of the Black Country and it is with these that the town has its affinity’.⁵⁵ The second explicit reference was found among a brief narrative report submitted by the Wolverhampton Centre of the Women’s Voluntary Service (WVS) in 1942 (see Chapter 2). Commenting on how WVS members here had been offering hospitality to overseas troops stationed in the area, the Centre Organiser wrote that these women had done such a good job as hostesses, the troops ‘have apparently much appreciated even our much-maligned Black Country’.⁵⁶ The lack of other references to the Black Country throughout suggests that this was a regional identity which was, perhaps at most, less impactful than a more local affiliation to a specific town.

While it is clearly impossible to ascertain from the remaining evidence whether a particular individual named in this thesis would have identified as, for example, ‘a Stourbridge woman’ over ‘a Black Country woman’, it is nonetheless very reasonable to assume that the vast majority would have gone for the former, identifying as a person from their town before identifying as someone from the region as a whole, particularly given the specific period under investigation here. Again, this serves to highlight the importance of the local – that is, the town, or even the neighbourhood or community – to

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, D13/X1/1, Halesowen Baby Week Volume, 1928.

⁵⁶ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WVH, April 1942.

an individual's understanding of her own self, and how this might, in turn, impact on the places, organisations and structures in which she sought to engage in politics and public life.

It is, however, worth returning to Urszula Clarke's assertion that the Black Country, because it has no real physical borders, is an imagined community.⁵⁷ This concept, as proposed by Benedict Anderson, suggests that nation states are imagined communities because they allow residents of an area to conceptualise themselves as part of the same socially constructed society, and is widely used to understand the spread of nationalism.⁵⁸ However, the imagined community is a concept which has been made wide use of in a variety of academic disciplines, to understand how people have constructed the ways in which they belong to certain communities, not limited to the nation state. There are echoes of this concept in Edward Chitham's assertion, from 1972, that 'the Black Country is built up almost from end to end; yet in some strange way it is still "country" and not "town", a group of villages of various sizes. In each of these, everyone knows everyone else, but beyond the borders you're a foreigner'.⁵⁹ The idea that each Black Country town was a place where 'everyone knows everyone else' arguably affected the ways in which women participated in politics in these towns. Clearly, it was not true that 'everyone' knew each other, but the towns which made up the Black Country were not, perhaps, truly anonymous in the way that a large city might be. Women who were active in local branches of organisations were themselves local. That is, they were not national organisers, parachuted into a place to which they had no connections, but were instead participating in public life in their own neighbourhoods and communities, where they were known, and where they knew local residents and conditions.

Reframing the significance of this is important. As Cathy Hunt has argued, in relation to women councillors in this period, there is a tendency to see municipal government as a 'rung on the ladder' towards participation in national government in Westminster; she points to biographies of early women MPs which discuss their experiences in municipal government essentially as preparation

⁵⁷ Clarke, *Language and Identity*, p. 140.

⁵⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁵⁹ Chitham, *The Black Country*, p. 1.

for their later parliamentary careers. Hunt argues that ‘there is little interest in considering the [political] careers of women who remained within a regional community and who had, at first glance, nothing of the “extraordinary” about them’.⁶⁰ Hunt makes her arguments in the specific context of women’s experiences in interwar local government, but I would argue that her point rings true of women’s participation in other spheres of activity, such as the non-partisan housewives’ associations or voluntary health associations studied in this thesis. While these women were arguably influenced by national discourses surrounding women’s roles in the public sphere post-enfranchisement, the Black Country women involved with the groups studied in this thesis were active in their locale only and did not ‘progress’ to, for example, the national executive committees of these organisations. Similarly, no woman councillor here ‘progressed’ to national politics by standing as a parliamentary candidate. For these women, politics happened at a local level entirely, within the communities in which they lived. As Karen Hunt and June Hannam suggest, ‘the national story of women’s politics will change when it is rebuilt out from the neighbourhood – from the local and everyday’.⁶¹ Understanding how women’s politics ‘worked’ on the ground, in specific branches of women’s organisations, or through municipal government, has scope to nuance our wider understanding of how women’s politics operated in Britain more generally during this period, by revealing what kinds of issues women prioritised, and what kind of practical work they did to improve these issues.

To understand how women’s politics developed here over the course of the period 1914—1951, it is necessary to first examine the position of women in the Black Country on the eve of the First World War, situating the research in this thesis in its local context. There has been relatively little interest in women’s politics and participation in public life in this area, with the exception of research by historians of women’s trade unionism into the Cradley Heath women chainmakers’ strike of 1910.⁶² From the mid-nineteenth century, many working-class women across the Black Country

⁶⁰ Cathy Hunt, ‘Everyone’s Poor Relation’: the poverty and isolation of a working-class woman local politician in interwar Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (2007), p. 417-430, p. 419.

⁶¹ Karen Hunt and June Hannam, ‘Towards an archaeology of interwar women’s politics: the local and the everyday’, in: Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage. Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-45*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan), p.124—141, p. 138.

⁶² Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*, (London: Davis Poynter, 1980), p. 66—68; Sheila Blackburn, ‘Employers and Social Policy: Black Country Chain-Masters, the minimum wage campaign, and the

had been employed in what were referred to as the ‘sweated trades’, making items such as chains and nails in backyard forges, paid by the ‘piece’ that they produced. Indeed, as I note in Chapter 3, evidence from Halesowen suggests that ‘many of the mothers [who attended Halesowen’s Infant Welfare Clinic were] still employed in making nails in their own back premises’ as late as 1930, suggesting this continued into the twentieth century, although the practice was, on the whole, far less common after the First World War.⁶³ This form of employment was, of course, not unique to the Black Country and occurred across Britain. However, Shelia Blackburn, who has written extensively on sweated labour, writes that the Black Country was recognised as one of the ‘most degraded’ sectors of the sweated industries, with conditions here among the worst in the country.⁶⁴

In 1910, this culminated in strike action by women chainmakers in Cradley Heath, who had been working for perilously small sums: 4 shillings a week for 12 to 14-hour days were not uncommon. An investigation by the Board of Trade mandated that, from August 1910, employers would have to pay workers two and a half pence an hour, or 11 shillings and three pence a week, but employers encouraged women to continue working at the lower rate. When this became known, they came out on strike, led by Mary Macarthur and her National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW). Macarthur drew on the imagery of the chains the women made, undertaking a hugely successful publicity campaign featuring Pathé newsreels and appeals in newspapers across the country; large sums were raised for striking workers, and, after six weeks, employers capitulated and

Cradley Heath strike of 1910’, *Midland History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (1987), p. 85-102; Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906—1921*, (London: Palgrave, 2014), p. 54—57.

⁶³ Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, D13/X1/2, *Halesowen Baby Week Volume*, 1930. Ron Moss, for instance, suggests that the number of ‘domestic’ chain shops began to decline in the early 1920s, with few left by the Second World War. Ron Moss, *Chainmaking in the Black Country*, (Brierley Hill: Blakemore Publications, 1995), p. 13.

⁶⁴ Blackburn, ‘Employers and Social Policy’, p. 88; see also: Sheila Blackburn, ‘Working-Class Attitudes to Social Reform: Black Country Chainmakers and Anti-Sweating Legislation, 1880-1930’, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 33, (1988), p. 42–69; Carol E. Morgan, ‘Gender constructions and gender relations in cotton and chain-making in England: a contested and varied terrain’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (1997), p. 367—389; Shelia Blackburn, ‘Between the Devil of Cheap Labour Competition and the Deep Sea of Family Poverty?’ Sweated Labour in Time and Place, 1840–1914’, *Labour History Review*, Vol. 71, No. 2, (2006), p. 99—119; Shelia Blackburn, *A Fair Day’s Wage for a Fair Day’s Work? Sweated Labour and the Origins of Minimum Wage Legislation in Britain*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

the women were guaranteed a wage of 10 shillings a week.⁶⁵ The strike is therefore credited as ensuring the first guaranteed minimum wage in any industry in Britain.

Its longer-term impact on women's politics locally is, however, questionable. As Cathy Hunt writes, the Cradley Heath NFWW branch 'whilst holding together well, found it difficult to maintain steady levels of membership', in large part because of the recognised difficulties of organising women in the sweated trades.⁶⁶ Following her role in the strike, Mary Macarthur continued to be held in deep affection in the area, which contributed to her seeking election to Parliament in 1918 in the constituency of Stourbridge, which then encompassed parts of Cradley Heath, as I discuss in Chapter 1. However, while the strike was extremely significant, not least for the real material benefit the wage increase brought, it does not appear to have had a long-lasting impact on the ways in which women engaged in politics here. The strikers did not, for example, take what they had learned in union organising and transform it into another kind of political activism, such as the suffrage campaign, or indeed standing for election to local councils. Cradley Heath was part of Rowley Regis Urban District Council, which did not elect a woman councillor until 1928, and there is no suggestion that she had any connection to the strike.⁶⁷

Women's role in local government in the Black Country is discussed in depth in Chapter 4, where it is argued that this was almost exclusively a phenomenon of the years after 1918. Of the 90 women councillors elected to local councils in the Black Country before 1951, 89 were elected after the First World War—this was not, it appears, a sphere of activity which had served to politicise many women pre-war. As Chapter 4 explains in detail, women's ability to stand for election to local councils had slowly evolved from the end of the nineteenth century: some were eligible to seek election to urban district councils from 1894, and some women could stand for election to the larger and more powerful county borough councils from 1907.⁶⁸ Before 1914, however, only three women

⁶⁵ Hunt, *The National Federation*, p. 55–57; see also: Blackburn, 'Employers and Social Policy'.

⁶⁶ Hunt, *The National Federation*, p. 58.

⁶⁷ Her name was Sarah Elizabeth Wesley: 'Urban District Council Elections, 1928', *The Woman's Leader*, 4 May 1928, p. 106. See Appendix H for all women councillors elected here.

⁶⁸ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, but for the best overview, see: Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865–1914*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

did so in the Black Country and only one of these was successful. Ada Newman (Unionist) won election in Walsall in 1910, and remained a councillor there until she stood down in 1922.⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Mrs Sandford (Labour) stood in Smethwick in December 1914, with appeals made—unsuccessfully—for ‘the need for the woman’s point of view’ in council work.⁷⁰ In Wolverhampton, meanwhile, Beatrice Pearson stood as a ‘suffragist and Independent’ candidate in 1912.⁷¹ Pearson was actively involved with Wolverhampton NUWSS, and, as is explored in Chapter 2, after the war went on to co-found Wolverhampton’s NCW branch. While she did not seek election on any other occasion, it is particularly notable that she did so as a ‘suffragist’ candidate in 1912, as this perhaps reflects Wolverhampton’s having one of the largest suffrage movements in the Black Country pre-war.

In general, the Black Country was not particularly known for high levels suffrage activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and no acts of suffrage militancy were undertaken in here. On the contrary, the only two local militant actions, initially attributed to suffragettes active in the WSPU, have been shown to be apocryphal. In April 1913, a cannon on display at Dudley Castle was painted with the slogan ‘votes for women’ and fired, with the subsequent flash ‘lighting up Dudley’. However, as George Barnsby notes, those responsible were ‘a group of local young men’ unconnected to the suffrage movement—essentially, it was a prank. The burning of Rowley Regis church in June 1913, meanwhile, was blamed on the suffragettes by local police but no evidence was ever found to support this, and the WSPU, not normally backward in coming forward to claim responsibility for arson, denied involvement. Barnsby suggests, instead, the church may have been attacked by locals who were ‘incensed’ by the vicar’s views.⁷² Though there were no acts of militancy undertaken locally, there were two Black Country WSPU branches: one in Wolverhampton, formed in 1906 by Emma Sproson, who is perhaps the area’s best remembered suffragette, and one in Walsall,

⁶⁹ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 416; ‘Death of Walsall Lady’, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30 November 1929, p. 5.

⁷⁰ ‘Mrs Sandford’s Candidature’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 12 December 1914, p. 5.

⁷¹ G W Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888—1964*, (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 206; ‘Lady Candidate for the Town Council’, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19 October 1912, p. 8.

⁷² George J. Barnsby, *Votes For Women: The Struggle for the Vote in the Black Country 1900-1918*, (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services Company, 1995).

established in 1911. The NUWSS fared better, with six Black Country branches in Dudley, Stourbridge, Walsall, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton. There were also three local branches of smaller suffrage organisations: Church League for Women's Suffrage in Walsall; a Women's Freedom League (WFL) in Wolverhampton, and a Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association in West Bromwich.⁷³ Wolverhampton's WFL branch was established by Emma Sproson, after she left the WSPU following differences with the increasingly autocratic Pankhursts.

Sproson was elected to Wolverhampton Borough Council in 1921 as a Labour representative, but was the only one of the Black Country's 90 women councillors who had a clear connection to the suffrage movement, as is discussed in Chapter 4.⁷⁴ Indeed, there is little suggestion that the pre-war campaign for women's enfranchisement served to politicise significant numbers of women in the Black Country, although a small number of suffrage activists from the area did go on to be involved with some of the organisations studied in this thesis. Wolverhampton NCW was co-founded by the aforementioned Beatrice Pearson, as well as several other colleagues from the town's NUWSS branch, as is discussed in Chapter 2. In Walsall, meanwhile, some women involved in local suffrage organisations went on to be involved with two organisations established there during the First World War which are studied in this thesis: the Tipperary Rooms, a social club for the women family members of servicemen (Chapter 2) and Walsall Child Welfare Association (Chapter 3), but few other connections were evident.

While Walsall Child Welfare Association was established in 1916, it was not the first organisation concerned with infant welfare active in the town. As Chapter 3 discusses, a Ladies' Health Society (LHS) had been active there for some years, largely run by middle-class women who were concerned with infant mortality rates and how these might be improved, and who organised lectures and demonstrations for working-class mothers.⁷⁵ Walsall's particularly high infant mortality rate in the pre-war period was something which also concerned the local branch of the Women's Co-

⁷³ Barnsby, *Votes for Women*; Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 123–4.

⁷⁴ 'Midland Polling Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1921, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Its records do not appear to have survived, but see for example: 'Walsall Ladies' Health Society', *Walsall Advertiser*, 10 October 1908, p. 5; 'Walsall Ladies' Health Society', *Walsall Advertiser*, 30 November 1912, p. 7.

operative Guild (WCG) which, as is discussed in Chapter 3, organised a conference on the matter in October 1914.⁷⁶ Nationally, the WCG were especially concerned with maternal and infant welfare in this period.⁷⁷ In the Black Country, and particularly through the WCG, it appears that this was an issue which might serve to politicise local women. In addition to the Walsall WCG's work, which is discussed more fully in Chapter 3, in Wolverhampton, in 1913—1914, the town's WCG worked with the local branch of the Women's Labour League to 'demand the introduction of free baby clinics and free school meals in the poorest districts...and urged the party hierarchy to be more sensitive towards, and less judgemental about, the least fortunate stratum of the working-class'.⁷⁸ Local men in the party had, according to Martin Francis, 'shown little stomach for campaigning among the slum dwellers of the "east end", regarding them as intellectually stunted and morally degraded',⁷⁹ suggesting that the women's organisations might go some way towards changing the priorities of local parties.

Despite this, it was in Wolverhampton that Labour had the most electoral success in the Black Country before the First World War. In the 1906 general election, the Labour Representation Committee, a forerunner of the Labour Party, won the constituency of Wolverhampton West. As Jon Lawrence details, the reason for the party's victory here are complicated: while it 'owed a great deal to Liberal cooperation, relations between the town's two progressive parties were anything but harmonious' in this period, and at the following election, Labour lost to the Conservatives—the area was certainly not a Labour stronghold.⁸⁰ Indeed, between 1900 and 1910, with the December 1910 election ultimately being the last in which no women could vote, the political culture of the Black Country as a whole was arguably not fixed, with constituencies flipping between the Liberals and the Conservatives with some regularity, as the following table suggests:

⁷⁶ 'Maternity Centres', *Walsall Observer*, 10 October 1914, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War*, (London: Routledge, 1997), especially Chapter 4.

⁷⁸ Martin Francis, 'Labour and Gender', in: *Labour's First Century*, eds. Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 191—220), p. 193—4.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Jon Lawrence, 'The Complexities of English Progressivism: Wolverhampton Politics in the Early Twentieth Century', *Midland History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (1999), p. 147-166, p. 148.

	1900	1906	Jan 1910	Dec 1910
Dudley				
Kingswinford				
North Worcestershire				
Walsall				
West Bromwich				
Wolverhampton East				
Wolverhampton South				
Wolverhampton West				

Table 1: General Election results in the Black Country, 1900–1910. Blue indicates a Conservative victory; yellow, Liberal; orange, Liberal Unionist and red, the Labour Representation Committee.⁸¹

The seats of North Worcestershire, which then encompassed large parts of the Black Country, and Wolverhampton East reliably voted Liberal—in 1900, the seat was won by John Wilson, who was then a Liberal Unionist but who won re-election as a Liberal in 1906 and both 1910 elections, and was described by Ian Cawood as a ‘traditional Liberal’ in his politics.⁸² Incidentally, Wilson stood in the constituency of Stourbridge against Mary Macarthur in 1918 and was victorious.⁸³ The seat of Kingswinford, as indicated, regularly returned Conservatives, but other seats ‘flip-flopped’ between the two parties in this period.

Both the Liberal and Conservative parties had well-established women’s organisations by the early twentieth century, which were able to engage women in the political process before they held the parliamentary franchise.⁸⁴ It is unclear precisely how many women were involved in such organisations locally, as most archival records are not extant but, as discussed in Chapter 4, several of

⁸¹ Data derived from: F S W Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results: 1885-1918*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1974).

⁸² Ian Cawood, ‘Life after Joe: Politics and War in the West Midlands, 1914–1918’, *Midland History*, Vol. 42, No. 1, (2017), p. 92–117, p. 93–4. For Liberal Unionism, especially in the local context, see: For the party in the local context, see: Ian Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party, 1886-1912: A History*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012); Ian Cawood, ‘The Unionist ‘Compact’ in West Midland Politics 1891-1895’, *Midland History*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (2005), p. 92-111.

⁸³ There were significant boundary changes ahead of the 1918 general election. The newly-created seat of Stourbridge contained much of what had been North Worcestershire, and Wilson was essentially an incumbent.

⁸⁴ For a good general overview, see Linda Walker, ‘Party political women: a comparative study of Liberal women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914’, in: Jane Rendall, *Equal or different: women's politics 1800-1914*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 165–191.

the earliest women councillors here had strong ties to their respective partisan women's organisations. For instance, the aforementioned Ada Newman was actively involved in Walsall's Women's Unionist Association, while Liberal councillor Charlotte Hazel, first elected in West Bromwich in November 1918, was active at local and regional level in the Women's Liberal Association.⁸⁵ However, though it was clearly possible for women to engage with the political process through such organisations before they had the vote, it was not until 1918 that some women were enfranchised as discussed earlier. It is this change, and particularly its impact on women's politicisation in the Black Country, to which the first chapter of this thesis now turns.

⁸⁵ 'Death of Walsall Lady', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30 November 1929, p. 5; 'Women Liberals. Address by Miss Hazel', *Evening Despatch*, 5 February 1914, p. 7, and extensive further discussion in Chapter 4.

Chapter One

Women and Parliamentary Politics

Introduction:

As the previous chapter outlined, two pieces of legislation were passed in 1918 which permanently altered women's ability to participate in the political process. The Representation of the People Act granted women aged over 30 who met certain property qualifications the right to vote in general elections—8.4 million women in total—while the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act permitted women aged over 21 to stand as parliamentary candidates.¹ The general election held on 14 December 1918 was therefore the first in which some, though not all, women might participate. However, nationwide, voter turnout stood at 57 per cent, suggesting significant numbers of men and women did not exercise their newfound right to vote, while only 17 women candidates stood for election.² Furthermore, the wider, longer-term impact of these two pieces of legislation—the question of what difference the vote made to women's lives—is still the subject of significant historical debate.

This chapter considers the most immediate impact of enfranchisement on women's lives in the Black Country, by focusing on their participation in four general election campaigns. Each of the four campaigns studied here were unusual in that they featured a woman parliamentary candidate, still very much a rarity in this period. The four candidates represented a range of political parties:

Candidate:	Year:	Party:	Constituency:
Mary Macarthur	1918	Labour	Stourbridge
Christabel Pankhurst	1918	Women's Party	Smethwick
Lady Alice Cooper	1922	Unionist	Walsall
Maude Marshall	1929	Liberal	Smethwick

Table 2: Women parliamentary candidates in the Black Country, 1918—1951.

¹ Mari Takayanagi, 'Women and the Vote: The Parliamentary Path to Equal Franchise, 1918–28', *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2018), p. 168—185, p. 171.

² Elise Uberoi, *Turnout at elections*, House of Commons Briefing Paper Number CBP 8060, (London: House of Commons Library, 5 July 2019).

All four were unsuccessful. However, though this chapter examines each candidate's campaign, its focus is not why these women lost. Rather, it seeks to address how ordinary women might become politicised, and how they might engage with the political process, through these four campaigns, considering whether local women voters might be politicised by the presence of a woman parliamentary candidate. It argues that there is very little evidence from the Black Country that the presence of a woman parliamentary candidate served to politicise women voters here, despite three of the four candidates making direct, though at times implicit, appeals to women. Even at election time, when parliamentary politics is arguably at its most local, as candidates arrange meetings in town halls or canvas voters in the streets in which they live, it appears that national, parliamentary politics was not something with which most ordinary women were able to engage in a particularly active way.

The chapter considers how local women might become politicised—how they might become politically active and engaged and take on greater prominence in public life—through these four parliamentary campaigns specifically. In the absence of any personal sources which might shed light on voters' intentions, the chapter largely draws on reporting in local newspapers, using news reports to provide evidence of women's participation in campaign events, such as speaking in support of the candidate, or participating in campaign meetings. The chapter also considers how participation in candidates' adoption and nomination events; interaction with candidates while they were canvassing; and women's own personal friendship and neighbourhood networks could all act as sites of politicisation. While there is evidence that local women were politically engaged through these methods, there is, however, minimal evidence that it was the presence of a woman parliamentary candidate which served to politicised them. Many other factors, often specific and local in nature, affected the degree to which women engaged with or supported these women candidates, as the chapter will demonstrate. It is divided into four parts, each of which consider one specific campaign, and begins with an overview of the historiography of women and parliamentary politics post-1918.

Women and Parliament:

There is an extensive literature on the experiences of women with and in the House of Commons after 1918, as well as several biographies of some early women MPs.³ However, far less attention has been paid to the general election campaigns of early women parliamentary candidates, and particularly those who failed to secure election.⁴ One notable exception to this is Christabel Pankhurst's 1918 campaign in Smethwick, but this has largely drawn historians' attention because of her prior involvement in the suffrage movement. Accordingly, this research has focused on either Pankhurst

³ For work on early women MPs, particularly that which examines their small numbers but significant impact, see: Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament, 1918–1966*, (London: Peter Davies, 1967); Jorgen S. Rasmussen, 'The Role of Women in British Parliamentary Elections', *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 4, (1977), p. 1044–1054; Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House: A Study of Women MPs* (London: Continuum, 1979); Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House: the Women MPs, 1919–1945', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 29, (1986), p. 623–654; Pippa Norris, 'Women Politicians: Transforming Westminster?', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 1, (1996), p. 89–102; Krista Cowman, *Women in British Politics, 1689–1979*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), especially Chapter 7; Richard Toye, 'The House of Commons in the Aftermath of Suffrage', in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics 1918–1945*, Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 70–86; Mari Takayanagi, '"They have made their mark entirely out of proportion to their numbers": Women and Parliamentary Committees, c. 1918–1945', in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 181–202; Laura Beers, '"Women for Westminster," Feminism, and the Limits of Non-Partisan Associational Culture', in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 224–243; Mari Takayanagi, 'The Home Front in the "Westminster Village": women staff in Parliament during the Second World War', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (2017), p. 608–620. For biographies of specific individuals: Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Karen J. Musolf, *From Plymouth to Parliament: a rhetorical history of Nancy Astor's 1919 campaign*, (London: Macmillan, 1999); Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 2004); Krista Cowman, 'The Political Autobiographies of Early Women MPs, c. 1918–1964', in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 203–223; Paula Bartley, *Ellen Wilkinson: From Red Suffragist to Government Minister*, (Chicago: Pluto Press, 2014); Matt Perry, *'Red Ellen' Wilkinson: Her ideas, movement and world*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: The Life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Madge Dresser, 'The Elusive Lady Apsley', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (2019), p. 215–235; Paula Bartley, *Labour Women in Power: Cabinet Ministers in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) for Margaret Bondfield and Ellen Wilkinson; Jacqui Turner, 'Keeping up the legacy of Nancy Astor: 100 years since the first woman took her seat in parliament', *Conservative History Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 7, (2019).

⁴ See: Lisa Berry-Waite, 'The "Woman's Point of View": Women Parliamentary Candidates, 1918–1919', in: *Electoral Pledges in Britain since 1918: The Politics of Promises*, David Thackeray and Richard Toye (eds.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 47–69 for a rare exception.

herself, or the Women's Party as a political entity, and there has been little attempt to examine the role of the local in her campaign, something this chapter seeks to redress.⁵

There is also a significant body of research which considers the newly enfranchised woman voter. Much of this literature concerns political parties' appeals to women, both in the national press, and in media produced by political parties.⁶ These appeals were generally mediated through the domestic and the home, with most parties addressing all women voters as housewives. This was despite, as Karen Hunt argues, 'the housewife' herself still lacking 'a settled identity'; politicians and journalists generally ignored how women's views might be shaped by 'place...generation and social class', instead focusing on a homogenous 'housewifely' identity.⁷ Furthermore, this research tends to focus on women who were already reading party magazines and engaging with party politics in this way, with less work focusing on engagement with 'ordinary' women who were not so engaged.⁸

There is also surprisingly little work which focuses on the impact of gender in specific elections or locales. A notable exception is Mary Hilson's examination of Plymouth in 1918, in which she suggests that the coalition Conservative candidates were able to use patriotic language and

⁵ Nicoletta Gullace, 'Christabel Pankhurst and the Smethwick Election: right-wing feminism, the Great War and the ideology of consumption', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2014), p. 330—346; Purvis, 'The Women's Party'; June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography*, (London: Routledge, 2018), chapters 18 and 19.

⁶ For appeals in the national press, see: Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), especially Chapter 4; Adrian Bingham, 'Enfranchisement, Feminism and the Modern Woman: Debates in the British Popular Press, 1918—1939', in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 87—104. For party appeals: David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: the Conservative appeal to women voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 5, (1994), p. 129—152; Pamela Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class politics, 1918—1939*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); David Thackeray, 'From Prudent Housewife to Empire Shopper: Party Appeals to the Female Voter, 1918—1928', in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 37—53, p. 38; Alice Wood, 'Housekeeping, Citizenship and Nationhood', in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918—1939*, Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green, Fiona Hackney (eds.), (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 210—224; June Hannam, 'Debating Feminism in the Socialist Press: Women and the *New Leader*', in: Clay *et al*, p. 374—387; Caitriona Beaumont, 'Housewives and Citizens: Encouraging Active Citizenship in the Print Media of Housewives' Associations in the Interwar Years', in: Clay *et al*, p. 408—420; Natalie Bradbury, 'Woman's Outlook 1919—1939: An Educational Space for Co-operative Women', in: Clay *et al*, p. 421—434; Julie Gottlieb, 'Women's Print Media, Fascism, and the Far Right in Britain between the Wars', in: Clay *et al*, p. 450—462; David Thackeray, 'At the heart of the party? The women's Conservative organisation in the age of partial suffrage, 1914—28', in: Clarisse Berthenzène and Julie V. Gottlieb, *Rethinking right-wing women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the present*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 46—65.

⁷ Karen Hunt, 'Labour Woman and the Housewife', in: Clay *et al*, p. 238—251, p. 239.

⁸ David Thackeray's work does go some way towards filling this gap: see, Thackeray, 'Party Appeals'.

appeals to women voters to great success.⁹ More recently, some historians have begun to consider the impact and activism of newly enfranchised women voters on specific political cultures or party structures in certain areas of Britain.¹⁰ Within this, however, there has been little examination of the impact of enfranchising women on political cultures in the West Midlands, and specifically the Black Country, with the exception of recent work by Ian Cawood.¹¹ Cawood argues that the 1918 Act failed to bring about significant change to the political culture of the region, with the Unionist party still dominating local politics. However, he suggests that the Black Country was exceptional: here, he argues, ‘the Labour Party broke through after 1918’ and retained political control, except in 1931 when the Conservatives ‘made inroads into the only Labour area in the region’.¹² Similarly, Chris Wrigley suggests that, post-1918, the Labour Party’s ‘efforts to maximise the votes of women’ were concentrated in three regions, one of which was the Black Country, as these were ‘the areas which had proved to be the most promising’.¹³

Arguably, however, the extent to which the Labour Party truly ‘broke through’ in the Black Country in the interwar period is debatable. In 1918, 1922 and 1923 Labour won only three of the nine Black Country constituencies (Kingswinford, Smethwick, and West Bromwich) and in 1924, they only added one extra seat (Bilston) to their total. It is inarguable that the Party dominated in 1929, when eight of the nine constituencies went Labour, but these gains were entirely undone in 1931, which Cawood acknowledges, when Labour did not win a single local constituency. They fared little better in 1935, winning only Kingswinford and West Bromwich with even the Labour stronghold

⁹ Mary Hilson, ‘Women voters and the rhetoric of patriotism in the British general election of 1918’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 325–347, p. 326.

¹⁰ See, for example, June Hannam on women Labour Party organisers: June Hannam, ‘Women as Paid Organizers and Propagandists for the British Labour Party Between the Wars’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 77, (2010), p. 69–88; Kenneth Baxter on early women MPs in Scotland: Kenneth Baxter, ‘“The advent of a woman candidate was seen...as outrageous”: Women, Party Politics and Elections in Interwar Scotland and England’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No.2, (2013), p. 260–283; Neil Fleming on women Conservatives in Lancashire: N.C. Fleming, ‘Women and Lancashire Conservatism between the Wars’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 26, No.3, (2017), p. 329–349.

¹¹ Ian Cawood, ‘Life after Joe: Politics and War in the West Midlands, 1914–1918’, *Midland History*, Vol. 42, No. 1, (2017), p. 92–117 and ‘The Impact of the 1918 Reform Act on the Politics of the West Midlands’, *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2018), p. 81–100.

¹² Cawood, ‘The Impact’, p. 82 for breakthrough, p. 99 for 1931 general election.

¹³ The other two areas were the West Riding of Yorkshire, and Lancashire and Cheshire. Chris Wrigley, ‘The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2018), p. 64–80, p. 75.

of Smethwick remaining Conservative. It was not, perhaps, until 1945, when Labour won every local constituency, that the party began to truly dominate the area, as the following table demonstrates:

National result:	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929	1931	1935	1945	1950
	C								
Bilston	C								
Dudley	C								
Kingswinford									
Smethwick									
Stourbridge									
Walsall	Nat. Party						Lib. Nat.		
West Bromwich									
Wolverhampton East									
Wolverhampton West	C								

Table 3:¹⁴ results of general elections held in the Black Country, 1918—1950.

Additionally, Cawood's work on the political culture of the area in this period has a limited focus on gender, and thus there is scope for a more nuanced understanding of Black Country political culture after 1918 which places women at its centre. Excepting Nicoletta Gullace and June Purvis's work on Pankhurst's 1918 campaign,¹⁵ there has been very little research into gendered politics in the Black Country in this period. This is perhaps somewhat surprising, as the area in some ways inverted national trends regarding women candidates. Rather than a slow but generally steady increase in the number of women candidates and MPs, as happened nationwide, the Black Country instead saw the

¹⁴ Data derived from: David Butler and Gareth Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts*, 10th edition, (London: Palgrave, 2010). Each coloured square indicates the party of the victorious MP at election; Labour is red, the Liberals yellow and the Conservatives blue. C indicates a candidate endorsed by the coalition government. Nat Party indicates The National Party, a right-wing breakaway group formed in 1917 by, among others, Walsall MP Richard Cooper, (discussed below). Lib Nat indicates the Liberal National Party, formed by a split in the Liberal Party in 1931. Because the thesis concludes with the end of the second post-war Labour government, as I outline in the Introduction, I do not include the 1951 general election here.

¹⁵ Gullace, 'Christabel Pankhurst', Purvis, 'The Women's Party', Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*.

two best-known and most highly regarded women candidates stand here in 1918, but after their failure, to secure election this initial interest was not maintained.

The years 1918 to 1951 saw nine general elections, as well as nine by-elections in the Black Country.¹⁶ In the same period, the Black Country encompassed nine parliamentary constituencies. Ahead of the 1950 general election, although minor changes involved some reworking of local boundaries, the overall number of constituencies remained the same; for ease of reading, I preserve the 1918 constituency names in Table 1.2.¹⁷ This meant that, during this period, there were 90 potential opportunities for a woman to stand as a parliamentary candidate.¹⁸ As, in total, there were 4 women candidates in this period, they therefore made up 4.4 per cent of parliamentary candidates in the Black Country before 1951. This figure is low, but not atypical, as it was still extremely rare for women to stand for parliament at this time. Before the Second World War, a high—of sorts—was reached in 1931, when women were 5 per cent of candidates.¹⁹ The situation did not improve much after the Second World War, as the following table indicates:

Year:	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929	1931	1935	1945	1950
Total women candidates nationwide:	17	33	34	41	69	62	67	87	127
Black Country women candidates:	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Table 4.²⁰ women candidates and MPs in Britain, 1918—1950.

¹⁶ These were in: Dudley in 1921; Wolverhampton West in 1922; Walsall in 1925; Smethwick in 1926; Stourbridge in 1927; Walsall in 1938; West Bromwich in 1941 (which went uncontested); Dudley in 1941 and Bilston in 1944. These by-elections preserved the status quo, with two exceptions. In Dudley in 1921 sitting MP Arthur Griffin-Boscawen (Unionist) was made Minister of Agriculture, causing the by-election, but was narrowly defeated by Labour's James Wilson. In Stourbridge, the sitting Unionist MP died in 1927, necessitating a by-election which Labour's Wilfred Wellock won. Information derived from: Butler and Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts*.

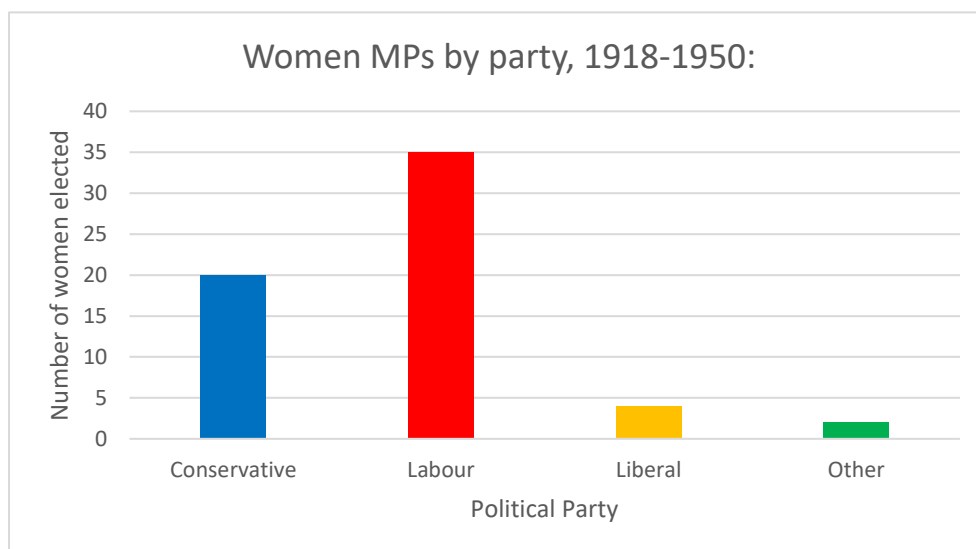
¹⁷ Stourbridge was abolished and replaced with Oldbury and Halesowen; Kingswinford became Brierley Hill, and the two Wolverhampton constituencies became Wolverhampton North East and Wolverhampton South West.

¹⁸ Nine general elections multiplied by the number of constituencies gives 81. Adding the above nine by-elections totals 90.

¹⁹ Pat Thane, 'The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture, 1918—1939', in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 54—69, p. 56.

²⁰ Data via: Butler and Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts* and Cowman, *Women in British Politics*.

In total, between 1918 and 1950, 60 women were elected to Parliament in this same period, of which the majority were Labour representatives:



Graph 1:²¹ Women MPs by party before 1951.

The relatively low numbers of Conservative women elected masks the fact that, prior to the Second World War, Conservative women candidates were more likely to be electorally successful than Labour women. Although fewer Conservative women stood than Labour women, they were more likely to be given winnable seats.²² The dearth of Liberal women elected is explained by the party's general decline in this period, discussed in Part IV. These 60 women MPs represented a total of 73 constituencies. This figure is higher than the number of women MPs as some women were elected twice, in different constituencies.²³ Most were English constituencies:

²¹ Data derived from: Richard Kelly, *Women Members of Parliament*, Parliamentary Briefing Paper, Number 06652, 16 June 2017. Other includes: Constance Markiewicz (Sinn Féin) and Eleanor Rathbone (Independent).

²² Rasmussen, 'The Role of Women', p. 1049.

²³ For example, Jennie Lee represented Lanarkshire Northern from 1929 to 1931, then Cannock from 1945 to 1970.

Country:	Constituencies with female MPs, 1918—1950:
England	59
Wales	3
Scotland	11
Northern Ireland	0
Ireland (to 1922)	1

Table 5.²⁴ Constituencies with women MPs before 1951.

Discounting the Combined English Universities seat, represented by Eleanor Rathbone from 1929 to 1946, the remaining 58 English constituencies represented by women before 1951 saw wide variation by region. Certain regions of England, notably London and the North East, saw much higher numbers of women elected:

Region of England:	Constituencies with female MPs, 1918—1950:
North West	7
West Midlands	7
South West	6
South East	4
London	14
East of England	6
East Midlands	3
Yorkshire and the Humber	2
North East	9

Table 6.²⁵ English constituencies with women MPs before 1951.

The West Midlands, with seven constituencies being represented by a woman at one time, was about average. Here, the constituencies of Stoke on Trent and Cannock were both twice represented by women, and Shropshire the Wrekin once. Perhaps most notably the two largest cities in the region, Birmingham and Coventry, each made up of multiple constituencies, only elected one woman apiece,

²⁴ Data via Kelly, *Women Members of Parliament*.

²⁵ Data via Kelly, *Women Members of Parliament*.

both after 1945.²⁶ The Black Country would not elect its first woman until 1964, when Renée Short (Labour) won Wolverhampton North East.

Indeed, what is unusual about the Black Country is the degree to which, over the period 1918—1951, women parliamentary candidates in this area went from being exceptionally well-known women who held significant amounts of institutional power, to women who were far less well-known and did not hold such power, before disappearing entirely for several decades. In 1918, the very first general election in which women could stand, two of the then most famous and powerful women in Britain stood here: Mary Macarthur and Christabel Pankhurst. Although both were ultimately unsuccessful, both contemporary journalists and later historians have recognised that, of the 17 women candidates who stood in 1918, only they, and Constance Markievicz, were contesting ‘winnable’ constituencies, and stood any real chance of success.²⁷ Ultimately, only Markievicz would be successful, but at the next general election in 1922, the Black Country again saw a woman candidate: Alice Cooper, the wife of the sitting MP, who had announced his intention to retire from politics. Between 1918 and 1922, two women had won by-election victories: Nancy Astor (Conservative) in 1919 and Margaret Wintringham (Liberal) in 1921. Both were felt to have ‘inherited’ their seats from their husbands: Astor won her husband’s constituency when he was elevated to the peerage and Wintringham won her husband’s seat after his death caused the by-election. As Part III discusses, there may have been a sense that Cooper might similarly ‘inherit’ her husband’s constituency of Walsall.²⁸ While Cooper did not hold the institutional power or wider

²⁶ The following West Midlands constituencies were represented by women: Lady Cynthia Mosley (Lab), Stoke on Trent, 1929—1931; Edith Picton-Tuberville (Lab), Shropshire, the Wrekin, 1929—1931; Ida Copeland (Con), Stoke on Trent, 1931—1935; Sarah Ward (Con), Staffordshire Cannock, 1931—1935; Jennie Lee (Lab), Staffordshire Cannock, 1945—1970; Edith Wills (Lab), Birmingham Duddeston, 1945—1950; Elaine Burton (Lab), Coventry South, 1950—1959. Kelly, *Women Members of Parliament*.

²⁷ For instance, a column in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* from December 1918 notes that Pankhurst and Macarthur were the two most favourably rated women candidates: ‘Notes for women electors’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 9 December 1918, p. 2. Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye recently wrote that, of the 17 women who stood in 1918, ‘only Christabel Pankhurst and Mary Macarthur among them had any real prospect of success’, Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye, ‘Introduction’, in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 1—18, p. 7.

²⁸ Nancy Astor won a by-election caused by her husband being elevated to the House of Lords; Margaret Wintringham (Liberal) won her husband’s seat when he died. Through 1935, 7 Conservative women MPs held seats previously occupied by their husbands. This ‘inheritance’ of husbands’ seats is discussed more fully below. Cowman, *Women in British Politics*, p. 120—121.

recognition that Macarthur or Pankhurst had, she was well-known locally—her husband was not only the sitting MP, but a member of the local gentry. However, after her defeat, the Black Country did not see another woman candidate until Maude Marshall stood in Smethwick in 1929. Marshall was entirely unknown in this area, and hardly better known within the Liberal party. As a candidate, she enjoyed virtually no institutional power or recognition, and the decline from 1918 is clear. Furthermore, after 1929, no woman candidate stood here until the general election of 1951—not included in this survey—when Barbara Lewis Shenfield (Liberal) stood in Walsall and Annie Patricia Llewellyn-Davis (Labour) in Wolverhampton South-West. Both, again, were unsuccessful.

The ways in which the Black Country inverted the national trend for women parliamentary candidates somewhat is important to understanding the area's wider political culture, especially in 1918, and the impact this may have had on its women voters. As the previous chapter outlined, the Black Country was not a place that was particularly associated with the women's suffrage campaign, and it had only elected one woman to a municipal council before the First World War. Neither Macarthur nor Pankhurst were local women. Pankhurst had no prior connection to the area, and although Macarthur had been associated with the chainmakers' strike here in 1910, as the previous section noted, this had lasted all of six weeks. Given the Black Country's lack of pre-war connection to the women's movement, and these women's limited connections to the area, why did they choose to stand in the Black Country? Was there something about the area's voters—particularly its women voters—which was perceived as being particularly favourable to women candidates? As Parts I and II discuss, there were specific local factors which affected both Macarthur and Pankhurst's decisions to stand here, and it does appear that Macarthur made a far more active choice to stand in the Black Country specifically. It further appears that the area's industrial links were particularly important in their decisions. However, this does not appear to have been the case for Cooper and Marshall, later in the decade. Such differences necessitate each campaign begin considered in turn, beginning with Macarthur in Stourbridge in 1918. Each campaign is briefly summarised, before its impact on the politicisation of local women is analysed.

Part I: Mary Macarthur:

Mary Macarthur was born into a middle-class Glaswegian household in 1880. After a comfortable upbringing, she became involved in the trade union movement and moved to London in her early twenties.²⁹ She worked for the Women's Trade Union League, then established the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) in 1906, designed to support women workers in a range of industries which were not typically unionised, in particular those working in the sweated trades.³⁰ One of the union's greatest successes before the First World War was the Cradley Heath women chainmakers strike of 1910. 'Our Mary', as she became known in the town, was held in huge esteem and affection locally following her role in this victory, as discussed in the previous chapter.³¹

Alongside her trade union work, Macarthur was active in the burgeoning Labour Party, and she married Will Anderson, Labour MP for Sheffield Attercliffe from 1914, in 1911. In May 1918, she became the first woman selected by a political party as a parliamentary candidate, when she was made Stourbridge's Labour candidate for the expected election.³² The constituency then encompassed parts of Cradley Heath, and included 'a large number of poorly-paid women workers, for whom Miss Macarthur [had] done good work in the past', wrote a contemporary journalist.³³ Her platform, discussed below, was typical of most Labour candidates in this election, and emphasised the class struggle, with less attention paid to her gender. She faced a three-way fight between the incumbent Liberal, John Wilson, and National Democratic and Labour Party (NDLP) candidate, Victor Fisher. The NDLP was formed during the conflict as a small breakaway group within the Labour Party, on the right of the party, and retained the support of the coalition government, who permitted members to stand as the coalition-approved candidate in a small number of constituencies, including Stourbridge,

²⁹ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Mary Macarthur: A Biographical Sketch*, (London: L Parsons, 1925); Cathy Hunt, *Righting the Wrong: Mary Macarthur, 1880—1921*, (Alcester: West Midlands History, 2019). Much of the following two paragraphs is derived from Hunt's biography.

³⁰ Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906—1921*, (London: Palgrave, 2014).

³¹ Hunt, *The National Federation*, p. 54—57; see also discussion in previous section.

³² Cowman, *Women in British Politics*, p. 116.

³³ 'Miss Mary Macarthur', *Liverpool Echo*, 14 May 1918, p. 2.

in this election.³⁴ However, Fisher's presence likely harmed Macarthur, as he received 6,690 votes to Macarthur's 7,587, effectively splitting the Labour vote, leaving Wilson, with 8,920 votes, ultimately victorious.³⁵ Following her defeat, Macarthur remained active in the Labour party and the NFWW until her untimely death in 1921.

Her defeat, however, should not overshadow the significance of her being the first woman to be adopted as a parliamentary candidate by a political party, some months before the passage of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act. Macarthur was not the first woman to stand for election: the suffragette Nina Boyle had tried to stand in a by-election earlier in 1918. She was disqualified because of 'irregularities in her nomination papers', but not because of her gender. This was enough for the Labour Party to endorse several women as candidates, including the well-known figures Margaret Bondfield and Ethel Snowden, but only Macarthur was officially adopted by the party.³⁶ After the election was called, three women, all with significant connections to the suffrage movement, were also endorsed by Labour: Charlotte Despard, Millicent Hughes-Mackenzie and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence.³⁷ However, only Macarthur's election expenses were funded by a trade union, the NFWW. This is significant, as money had a big impact on women's ability to stand as parliamentary candidates—Despard and Hughes-Mackenzie were both from middle-class backgrounds and Pethick-Lawrence was the daughter of an aristocrat. Many male trade unions were reluctant to sponsor women candidates, and Macarthur was one of only two Labour women candidates in the interwar years to secure this financial support.³⁸

Significantly, her support came from the NFWW, a women's trade union, which had also acted to secure Macarthur's adoption. Black Country NFWW branches, along with a number of male trade unions in Stourbridge, sought her selection here.³⁹ As noted, her celebrity in this area was a

³⁴ Roy Douglas, 'The National Democratic Party and the British Workers' League', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1972), p. 533–552; J.O. Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914–1918', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 87, No. 345 (1972), p. 717–754.

³⁵ 'Worcestershire. Stourbridge', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 December 1918, p. 1.

³⁶ Cowman, *Women in British Politics*, p. 116.

³⁷ Wrigley, 'The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act', p. 75.

³⁸ Bartley, *Labour Women in Power*, p. 4–5.

³⁹ Women's Trade Union League Committee minutes of 9th May 1918, cited in Hunt, *Righting the Wrong*, p. 138.

legacy of the chainmakers' strike and she enjoyed a significant, recognised connection to the Black Country and specifically Cradley Heath. As a well-known figure within both the Labour party and the trade union movement, it is reasonable to assume that she might have had her pick of potentially winnable seats. That she elected to accept the local NFWW branches selecting her for Stourbridge suggests that she thought that her celebrity in the Black Country might help to secure her a victory. Macarthur was clearly supported by the women in these local union branches who sought her selection for Stourbridge. However, such women were arguably *already* politically active and engaged, because of their involvement with the strike. Furthermore, as the previous chapter discussed, even in Cradley Heath, the NFWW branch 'found it difficult to maintain steady levels of members' after 1910,⁴⁰ suggesting that those who were still active in the branch in 1918 were among its most committed members, and not representative of most local women. The extent to which Macarthur was able to actively engage the ordinary woman voter in Stourbridge, who might not have a connection to the union, is, perhaps, questionable.

She appears to have positioned her campaign as part of the class struggle, and, to an extent, played down the extent to which she might be viewed as a 'woman candidate', which may in turn have impacted on the extent local women might be politicised by her presence. Her decision reflects her longstanding commitment to workers' rights over feminism. She did not define herself as a feminist, seeing the movement as synonymous with middle-class women, and declined to work with women's suffrage organisations that would accept partial enfranchisement of wealthy women at the expense of working-class men and women.⁴¹ In 1918, she opened her election manifesto by announcing, in large, capital letters, 'I do not apologise for my sex', and promised, if elected, that she would try to 'voice...the aspirations of the women workers' and 'speak for the woman whose work never ends—the woman in the home'.⁴² However, as Deborah Thom writes, Macarthur 'mentioned

⁴⁰ Hunt, *The National Federation*, p. 57.

⁴¹ Kathryn Gleadle & Zoë Thomas, 'Global feminisms, c. 1870–1930: vocabularies and concepts—a comparative approach', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 7, (2018), p. 1209–1224, p. 1217. For discussion of Macarthur's suffrage work, see: Hunt, *The National Federation*, p. 40–42.

⁴² 'Public Notice to the Electors of Stourbridge by Miss Mary Macarthur (Mrs William C Anderson)', *Smethwick Telephone*, 30 November 1918, p. 2. Her manifesto can be viewed in full at

“the people” several times...but not female specific interests’ within the fourteen points she laid out in the manifesto itself.⁴³ These were the specific areas for which she planned to work if elected; it appears that she may well have been influenced by the American President Woodrow Wilson’s fourteen points—an address outlining fourteen principles for peace and the end of war—as Macarthur’s first point was ‘a permanent peace...[following] the policy laid down by President Wilson’. Her other fourteen points were: an end to conscription; justice, ‘not charity’, for servicemen; the return of servicemen; an end to the Defence of the Realm Act; a living wage and no unemployment; equal pay; ‘redemption of pledges [that the government should keep its promises]’; a million new homes; security for allotment holders; ‘The Golden Key [access to education]’; fair taxation; ‘public good before private profit’; and ‘the dignity of labour’.⁴⁴

While her promise to fight for equal pay was clearly a direct appeal to women voters, most of her other appeals to women were implicit. For instance, in point five she specifically singled out Clause 40D of the Defence of the Realm Act for swift repeal but offered no further detail on its contents nor why it specifically related to women. Clause 40D essentially allowed the government to inspect and even imprison a woman for the transmission of a sexually transmitted disease to a serviceman. It was a highly controversial regulation and one against which many in the women’s movement campaigned.⁴⁵ However, it is unclear how relevant revoking this legislation was to ordinary women voters in Stourbridge. Even her call for equal pay was phrased such that it was more aimed at the working classes, rather than women working in the professions. Framed as ‘a man’s pay for a man’s work’, she added—in capitals—‘this is in the highest interests of both the men and the women’.⁴⁶

<<http://www.unionhistory.info/equalpay/display.php?irn=3000043&QueryPage=advsearch.php>>, consulted 11.01.2019.

⁴³ Deborah Thom, ‘Living through war, waging peace: comparing Mary Macarthur and Sylvia Pankhurst’, in *Labour, British radicalism and the First World War*, eds. Lucy Bland and Richard Carr, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 108—125, p. 115.

⁴⁴ All quoted or summarised from Macarthur’s manifesto, per the above.

⁴⁵ Laura Lammasniemi, ‘Regulation 40D: punishing promiscuity on the home front during the First World War’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (2017), p. 584—596.

⁴⁶ Mary Macarthur’s Manifesto, as above.

Macarthur's manifesto was printed in local newspapers in the run up to the election, though how closely it was read by the newly enfranchised women in Stourbridge is unclear. It does appear that these women were in regular attendance at campaign events she held throughout the constituency from reports in the local press, although most articles focused on the content of Macarthur's addresses, rather than reactions to these by women in the audience. These suggest that Labour and trade union issues were the dominant theme of her meetings. While domestic matters were at times referenced, again no explicit appeal was made to women voters on these lines. For instance, on 7 December Macarthur held a meeting with JH Thomas, secretary of the local Railwaymen's Union. Reporting from the *Smethwick Telephone* suggests that their discussion centred almost exclusively around trade unionism. The closest Macarthur came to discussing domestic matters or making an appeal to women voters at this meeting was when she suggested voters reject her Liberal opponent John Wilson. She considered Wilson a 'personal friend' and 'would not hear a word against him', but cited several examples of what she considered his poor voting record, including an occasion when he had not voted for Labour's proposed reductions in the duty on tea or sugar.⁴⁷

Many historians have noted how, in the interwar years, parliamentary candidates would target women voters with suggestions that their party would lower food prices.⁴⁸ In using this trope—suggesting that she belonged to the party that would lower tea and sugar prices—Macarthur was perhaps an early adopter of this sort of approach. However, her comment appears to have been made in passing; it was clearly not a central tenet of her platform, and even here, she did not make an explicit appeal to women. Indeed, this was only directly addressed by Mrs Woodward, who presided over the event, who remarked in her introduction, 'that they were looking to the women voters to

⁴⁷ 'Miss Macarthur at Warley Woods', *Smethwick Telephone*, 14 December 1918, p. 4.

⁴⁸ See, for instance: Thackeray, 'Party Appeals'; Alice Wood, 'Housekeeping, Citizenship and Nationhood', in: Clay *et al*, p. 210—224; Adrian Bingham, 'Modern Housecraft? Women's Pages in the National Daily Press', in: Clay *et al*, p. 225—237; Karen Hunt, 'Labour Woman and the Housewife', in: Clay *et al*, p. 238—251; Lisa Sheppard, 'Y Cymraes (The Welshwoman): Ambivalent Domesticity in Women's Welsh-Language Interwar Print Media', in: Clay *et al*, p. 281—293; Caitriona Beaumont, 'Housewives and Citizens: Encouraging Active Citizenship in the Print Media of Housewives' Associations in the Interwar Years', in: Clay *et al*, p. 408—420; Natalie Bradbury, 'Woman's Outlook 1919—1939: An Educational Space for Co-operative Women', in: Clay *et al*, p. 421—434.

support a woman'.⁴⁹ No further information is available about Mrs Woodward, though she was likely asked to preside because she was active within the local Labour party, or perhaps the NFWW. However, it is perhaps significant that it was she, not Macarthur, who made this explicit statement.

Woodward's comments suggest women were in good attendance at this particular meeting, but what had driven them to be present, at this meeting and others, is less clear. Macarthur's local celebrity may have been a factor, as might the relative novelty of her being a female candidate, which may have encouraged more women to attend her meetings than might ordinarily. It is challenging, however, to provide specific evidence of this. Even comparing attendance at her campaign events to those held by her opponents reveals little. Ian Cawood writes that Victor Fisher, the NDLP candidate, had 'very poorly attended' meetings, but suggests this was because of the NDLP's lack of popularity here; the coalition was perceived to have treated the constituency in a 'high-handed' manner in essentially parachuting Fisher into Stourbridge, but these factors had little, if anything, to do with his gender.⁵⁰ John Wilson, the Liberal, 'organised women-only meetings', but is unclear how well attended these were.⁵¹ Macarthur, significantly, did not hold women-only meetings, but this may have been because of her desire to be seen as a Labour candidate, and not simply a 'women candidate', as discussed above.

Attending campaign events was certainly one way by which local voters might become involved with the political process. Some women went further, actively participating in these meetings by asking questions of Macarthur and reporting in local newspapers provides evidence of some of the issues which may have particularly concerned the newly-enfranchised voter in Stourbridge at this time. For example, a female audience member at a meeting in Oldbury Town Hall asked if Macarthur supported excluding Germans from Britain, and an economic boycott of German goods in the wake of the armistice. Macarthur responded by explaining that 'she stood by President Wilson's 14 points and would rather lose a thousand seats than [support] a settlement which contained

⁴⁹ 'Miss Macarthur at Warley Woods'.

⁵⁰ Cawood, 'Life After Joe', p. 97; see also Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour', p. 747.

⁵¹ Cawood, 'The Impact of the 1918 Act', p. 88.

the seeds of any future war'.⁵² She had long been a committed pacifist, and was linked to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).⁵³ Founded in 1915, WILPF was very active in certain areas, particularly the north west.⁵⁴ Elsewhere, however, robust anti-German sentiments prevailed at the end of the war,⁵⁵ and such sentiments were especially strong in the Black Country, 'a region which had struggled with European imports before the war and feared the consequences of a lenient peace with Germany'.⁵⁶ This unnamed woman's question perhaps reflects this strength of feeling locally, and further suggests that, while this individual was participating in the political process, actively questioning candidates on their policies, it appears that policies, not the candidate's gender, were of greater concern.

Outside of constituency meetings, there is further evidence that local women were engaging with Macarthur's campaign but again, the extent to which they were doing so because they had been politicised by her being a woman candidate is questionable. The *Evening Despatch*, for instance, reported two 'amusing incidents' in which women were persuaded to vote for Macarthur. The first involved one 'aged voter' refusing to vote for a woman until her granddaughter, a 'young factory worker', told her that Macarthur 'just the previous week' had 'got me a raise', presumably in reference to Macarthur's union work. 'Granny', the *Despatch* reported, then declared that, in that case, she 'would have to vote for Mary'.⁵⁷ In the second, a woman was overheard telling a canvasser that she intended to vote Liberal, when the postwoman brought a letter from her soldier husband, saying he would vote for Macarthur. 'What's good enough for him out there is good enough for me,' his wife was reported to announce, and switched her allegiance to Macarthur.⁵⁸ The veracity of such 'amusing incidents' is, naturally, impossible to confirm, but these do suggest that there was certainly a

⁵² 'Miss Macarthur and Peace', *Birmingham Gazette*, 27 November 1918, p. 3.

⁵³ Sarah Hellawell, 'Antimilitarism, Citizenship and Motherhood: the formation and early years of the Women's International League (WIL), 1915–1919', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (2018), p. 551–564.

⁵⁴ Alison Ronan, *The Women's Peace Crusade 1917-1918: Crusading Women in Manchester and East Lancashire*, (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2017).

⁵⁵ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 2008), p. 235–248.

⁵⁶ Cawood, 'Life After Joe', p. 96.

⁵⁷ 'Stourbridge Incidents', *Evening Despatch*, 9 December 1918, p. 2.

⁵⁸ 'Stourbridge Incidents'.

feeling that Macarthur benefited from support from women in the constituency, but it was not her being a female candidate which had engendered this support. In neither case did the voter indicate that her support had switched because Macarthur was female. Of course, Macarthur's trade union work was implicitly tied up with her gender: she was so notable because she was a *woman* trade unionist, campaigning for *women's* workplace rights. It is impossible to fully disentangle these two aspects of her identity—her gender and her work—because her very work was gendered. Nonetheless, it is notable that 'Granny' did not want to vote for a woman, but was persuaded by her granddaughter's comment that Macarthur had 'got me a raise'.⁵⁹ 'Granny' may well have been aware of Macarthur and the NFWW's work for women's rights, but this made little difference to her own views—until the wage packet her granddaughter brought home increased.

Come polling day, newspaper reports suggest Macarthur retained a good level of support in Stourbridge, but that this would not be enough to secure her election, as eventually proved the case. In an article on how women voted, the *Birmingham Mail* reported that Macarthur 'had most of the enthusiasm' in Stourbridge, but cautioned that the Liberals appeared better organised, with more motorcars to transport voters to the polls.⁶⁰ It did not elucidate why she had 'most of' this enthusiasm, but at least some of it might be attributed to her pre-existing local celebrity. Indeed, one Stourbridge woman purportedly looked after sixty babies—presumably not all at once—while their mothers voted, and the implication was that they were voting for Macarthur.⁶¹ Even beyond the election, she retained her local celebrity. In 1920, when she was diagnosed with cancer, press reports referred to this causing 'anxious hearts among the women industrial workers of England, especially the women chainmakers of Cradley Heath',⁶² and a delegation of women from Cradley Heath and Stourbridge later attended her funeral.⁶³ That her local celebrity should remain strong beyond her defeat suggests that it was this—her celebrity—and perhaps not her presence as a woman candidate which had so politicised voters here.

⁵⁹ 'Stourbridge Incidents'.

⁶⁰ 'Women's Vote. Predominant Feature of Election', *Birmingham Mail*, 16 December 1918, p. 4.

⁶¹ 'Election Incidents', *Sunday Pictorial*, 15 December 1918, p. 3.

⁶² 'Miss Mary Macarthur', *Nottingham Journal*, 28 October 1920, p. 4.

⁶³ 'Miss Mary Macarthur', *Sheffield Independent*, 4 January 1921, p. 3.

Her defeat, as noted earlier, was likely influenced by Fisher's presence as effectively a second Labour candidate, splitting the vote. The fact that Macarthur was (incorrectly) made to use her less well-known married name on ballot papers may also have impacted on her loss; though as Krista Cowman notes, Stourbridge was not overrun with women candidates in 1918 and many voters were likely to connect 'Mrs William Anderson' with Mary Macarthur.⁶⁴ Either way, her local celebrity did not translate into enough votes to see her enter parliament. It also does not seem to have increased voter turnout in this election. Nationwide, turnout was exceptionally low in 1918, at only 57 per cent.⁶⁵ It is unclear why this was, but it is reasonable to assume that the timing of the election—held on 14 December, only 31 days after the armistice had been signed—and the raging influenza pandemic had an impact. Significantly, however, it is possible to calculate the local turnout in Stourbridge using the number of eligible voters there, and the total number of votes cast for all candidates. This reveals that voter turnout in Stourbridge was 54 per cent.⁶⁶ This was marginally lower than the national turnout per centage. It appears therefore that neither Macarthur's celebrity, nor indeed her presence as a woman candidate were not enough to turn out voters at a rate higher than elsewhere. Overall, then, there is little to suggest that Macarthur's being a female candidate served to politicise women in Stourbridge in 1918. While she did make some implicit appeals to women voters, much of her manifesto was framed around appealing to the working classes as a Labour candidate. Only a few miles away in Smethwick, however, Christabel Pankhurst's candidature was very much framed around her gender, perhaps most obviously in the name of her party.

Part II: Christabel Pankhurst:

Like Macarthur, Christabel Pankhurst was born in 1880, the eldest daughter of Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst. She grew up in a household immersed in Manchester politics, attending school and university there. In 1905, she co-founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) with her mother; its motto, 'Deeds Not Words' inspiring increasingly violent, militant action from members in

⁶⁴ Cowman, *Women in British Politics*, p. 119.

⁶⁵ Uberoi, *Turnout at elections*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ 'Worcestershire. Stourbridge', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 December 1918, p. 1.

the fight for women's suffrage. Both the Pankhurst family⁶⁷ and the WSPU⁶⁸ have been the subject of intense historical study. However, Christabel's 1918 parliamentary campaign has been afforded much less attention.⁶⁹ She stood as the Women's Party candidate, and was the only one of the 17 women candidates in 1918 to be awarded the coalition 'coupon' of approval, which indicated that she had the support of the leaders of the coalition government.⁷⁰ The Women's Party was a new political party, formed out of the remnants of the WSPU in 1917. By then, it was clear that women would be enfranchised before the next election. However, Christabel and Emmeline both felt that no existing political party would adequately represent newly enfranchised women, so established the Women's Party to do just this. A combination of factors—not least the Pankhursts' increasingly autocratic control of the WSPU in the years leading up to war, and their unilateral decision to suspend suffrage militancy on the outbreak of war in 1914—meant that the Women's Party did not have the support that the WSPU had enjoyed among its members.⁷¹ Christabel contested Smethwick on an election platform which was, as is shortly discussed, overtly feminist, extremely nationalistic, and 'rabidly anti-Bolshevik'.⁷² She faced one opponent, Labour's John Davison, who was victorious, but the contest was close: he won by only 775 votes.⁷³ After her defeat, there was some suggestion that Christabel might stand in a Westminster by-election in 1919. This did not come to pass, and the Women's Party folded shortly afterwards.⁷⁴ Christabel then moved to America, where she lived until

⁶⁷ For a good general overview, see: Martin Pugh, *The Pankhursts*, (London: Penguin, 2001); Paula Bartley, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, (London: Routledge, 2002); June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography*, (London: Routledge, 2002); June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography*, (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁶⁸ An extensive overview of the historiography of the suffrage movement can be found in the Introductory chapters, but for the WSPU in particular, see for example: Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement*, (London: Routledge, 1996); Krista Cowman, *Women of the Right Spirit: Paid Organisers of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), 1904-18*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Diane Atkinson, *Rise Up, Women! The Remarkable Lives of the Suffragettes*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

⁶⁹ The only in depth analysis of the election is found in: Gullace, 'Christabel Pankhurst'; Purvis, 'The Women's Party'; and Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, Chapters 18 and 19.

⁷⁰ Roy Douglas, 'The Background to the 'Coupon' Election Arrangements', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 86, No. 339, (1971), p. 318—336.

⁷¹ Purvis, 'The Women's Party'.

⁷² Gullace, 'Christabel Pankhurst', p. 331.

⁷³ 'Smethwick', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 December 1918, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Purvis, 'The Women's Party', p. 646.

her death in 1955. Emmeline remained in England, and in 1927 was adopted as a Conservative parliamentary candidate, but died before she could contest the next election.⁷⁵

Neither Christabel nor Emmeline had any connection to Smethwick prior to the election, and it is unclear why she chose to fight here—indeed, initially, she contested Devizes in rural Wiltshire, before switching to Smethwick.⁷⁶ Smethwick was a new constituency in 1918, carved out of a portion of what had been Birmingham Handsworth. It was this newness which Emmeline used to justify the decision to change, stating that ‘they were not interfering with anyone who had any right or interest in the place [...] there was no sitting member who could be aggrieved’.⁷⁷ This was not entirely true: a locally well-regarded member of the Unionist party, Samuel Thompson, had been selected and given coalition endorsement, but was forced to step aside for Pankhurst when she switched.⁷⁸ Quite why she did so remains a mystery; there is nothing in the Women’s Party’s archives or its organ, *Britannia*, to explain the decision. June Purvis suggests that the Pankhursts may have seen Smethwick, with its high proportion of ‘industrial women’, perceived as Christabel’s greatest supporters, a better bet than Devizes.⁷⁹ Just as the Pankhursts had no connection to Smethwick, so the Black Country was not particularly associated with suffragism. Having examined the local evidence—there is nothing in the local press to explain the decision—I would suggest that an additional contributing factor may have been some confusion by the Pankhursts over local geography. It is possible that they mistakenly understood Smethwick to be part of more Unionist Birmingham, a city which had also had an active suffrage movement, and which may have been understood as producing a more favourable result.⁸⁰ This, along with Purvis’s point about Smethwick’s industrial character, perhaps explains their choice.

Arguably, by re-framing Pankhurst’s campaign through the local, a very different picture of the contest emerges. Of the four campaigns studied in this chapter, Pankhurst’s is the only one to have

⁷⁵ June Purvis, ‘Emmeline Pankhurst in the Aftermath of Suffrage, 1918–1928’, in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 19–36, p. 31–32.

⁷⁶ Purvis, ‘The Women’s Party’, p. 645.

⁷⁷ ‘Why Miss Pankhurst Selected Smethwick’, *Birmingham Post*, 27 November 1918, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Cawood, ‘Life After Joe’, p. 98.

⁷⁹ Purvis, ‘The Women’s Party’, p. 645.

⁸⁰ For Birmingham and the Unionist party, see: Cawood, ‘The Impact’; for its suffrage movement: Nicola Gauld, *Words and Deeds: Birmingham Suffragists and Suffragettes, 1832–1918*, (Alcester: West Midlands History, 2018).

been the subject of detailed research to date, by Nicoletta Gullace and June Purvis. However, both concentrate on the Women's Party platform, and Pankhurst herself, with little attention paid to voters in Smethwick. Both Purvis and Gullace, drawing largely on evidence from *Britannia*, the Women's Party's organ,⁸¹ suggest that Pankhurst benefited most from the support of young, working-class 'munitionettes'—that is, women who had undertaken war work in factories during the conflict.⁸² Gullace, for instance, cites a report in *Britannia* that 'the Women's Party enjoyed generous financial contributions from small groups of 'munitionettes' representing working girls from all parts of the country'; Pankhurst was, she asserts, 'wildly popular among a set of patriotic...munitions girls'.⁸³ Pankhurst cultivated this support, writes Purvis, by 'champion[ing] their cause, demanding equal pay for equal work and for equal treatment of demobilised men and women'.⁸⁴ As Purvis and Gullace acknowledge, few of these 'munitionettes' were likely eligible voters, as they did not meet the age or property restrictions in the 1918 Act.⁸⁵ However, by reframing her campaign through the local, a different picture emerges of which Smethwick women were her greatest supporters. It is clear, from evidence in local newspapers, that a small number of these were significantly politicised by Pankhurst's campaign, although it is somewhat less clear whether they were politicised by her being a woman candidate. However, these women were generally older, and, as is discussed, not from the industrial working classes—many, in fact, appear to have lived much more middle-class lives, and may have been attracted by the Women's Party's platform.

Much has been made of this, particularly the Party's stance on foreign policy. As Gullace and Purvis have demonstrated, the Women's Party was radically nationalistic and favoured a vindictive peace with Germany. Indeed, Purvis suggests that one of the reasons Pankhurst was awarded the

⁸¹ For *Britannia*, see: Angela K Smith, 'The Pankhursts and the war: suffrage magazines and First World War propaganda', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (2003), p. 103—118.

⁸² For work on the 'munitionettes' in wartime, see: Gail Braybon, *Women workers in the First World War*, (London: Routledge, 1981); Angela Woollacott, *On her their lives depend: Munitions workers in the Great War*, (London: University of California Press, 1994), and Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I*, (London: I B Tauris, 1998).

⁸³ Gullace, 'Christabel Pankhurst', p. 340.

⁸⁴ Purvis, 'The Women's Party', p. 646—647.

⁸⁵ Women had to be over 30, and meet certain property qualifications. Anna Muggeridge, 'The Missing Two Million: The Exclusion of Working-class Women from the 1918 Representation of the People Act', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (2018).

‘coupon’ of endorsement was because the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, approved of her right-wing, anti-Bolshevist rhetoric during the war.⁸⁶ Yet its platform was also, as Gullace writes, ‘strikingly feminist’.⁸⁷ The Women’s Party made direct appeals to women voters, its very name being perhaps the most obvious, and its platform was filled with policies designed with women at its centre. It stood for various equality measures, including ‘equal pay for equal work, equal marriage and divorce laws, equality of parental rights, [and] equal opportunity of employment’, while seeking to appeal on what might be termed welfare issues, too.⁸⁸ These included a system of co-operative housekeeping and housing schemes, where people could take advantage of ‘central heating, a hot water supply, a central kitchen and laundry, medical services and, if desired, a crèche, nursery school, gymnasium and reading room’.⁸⁹ This aimed to reduce the burden of the second shift on women—that is, the unpaid domestic workload incumbent upon women in paid employment—although it was silent on who, exactly, would be doing the domestic work in these communal homes. Everywhere, the female influence was highlighted. At its first campaign event held in Smethwick, for instance, voters were informed that the Party’s ‘scheme for housing reform was the most up-to-date and the best, because a woman architect had designed the plans’.⁹⁰

Although both Purvis and Gullace highlight the support Pankhurst received from ‘munitionettes’, many of the Party’s policies seem designed to appeal to housewives: married women with responsibilities for domestic work in the home, who were perhaps a little older than the typical ‘munitionette’. Interestingly, this largely fits the profile of the small number of Smethwick women who appear to have been most active within Pankhurst’s campaign. I draw here on evidence from the *Smethwick Telephone*, the town’s weekly local newspaper, and especially its reporting on the nomination of the constituency’s two candidates.⁹¹ The nomination process was largely a formality; then, as now, it was designed to ensure that only the official candidate bore the party label on ballot

⁸⁶ Purvis, ‘The Women’s Party’, p. 645.

⁸⁷ Gullace, ‘Christabel Pankhurst’, p. 331.

⁸⁸ Purvis, ‘The Women’s Party’, p. 641.

⁸⁹ Purvis, ‘The Women’s Party’, p. 641.

⁹⁰ ‘Miss C Pankhurst. Start of her campaign for Smethwick’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 26 November 1918, p. 6.

⁹¹ ‘Nomination Day’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 7 December 1918, p. 3.

papers. The candidate's intention to stand as their party's representative was announced, then any eligible voter in the constituency could sign her or his nomination papers. The process, which, in Smethwick took place about a week before the election, formalised Pankhurst as the Women's Party candidate, and Davison as Labour's.

The reporting on the event in the *Telephone* is so significant, however, because it includes a list of those who nominated both Pankhurst and Davison. These local men and women were presumably among their respective candidates' most committed supporters, those willing to go to the Town Hall to publicly sign their name against their nomination papers and have this endorsement printed in the local newspaper. For reasons unclear, the nominator's full name and address was printed for Pankhurst's nominators (such as, 'Clara Williams, 72 Lewisham Road') whereas for Davison, only their surname was included ('Mrs Perry' or 'Mrs Parsons'). In total, Davison was nominated by 72 Smethwick residents, of whom 25, or 35 per cent, were female.⁹² Because so little information is provided about his nominators, it is not possible to offer any further analysis here—although one nominator, 'Mrs Sands', may well have been the same Edith Sands who became Smethwick's first woman councillor in 1921 (see Chapter 4).⁹³

This is not the case for Christabel Pankhurst's nominators. In total, she was nominated by 61 Smethwick residents, of whom 24, or 39 per cent, were female.⁹⁴ Because their full names and addresses were provided, 21 of these 24 women could be traced back through census returns. They appear below in the order in which they are listed in the *Telephone* article. Names of those who proved untraceable are included in italics. A fuller biographical overview, with references, is provided in Appendix A:

⁹² 'Nomination Day'.

⁹³ 'Municipal Elections', *Smethwick Telephone*, 5 November 1921, p. 3. Mrs Edith Sands was a Labour representative.

⁹⁴ 'Nomination Day'.

Name:	Age in 1918:	Occupation: <i>Blank if none stated</i>	Husband's occupation:
Clara Williams	60		Blacksmith
Janette Theresa Hill	43	Assistant School Medical Officer of Health.	Single
Elizabeth Cox	75		Engine and machine fitter
Mary Bertha Westwood	46		Engineering fitter
Alice M Bartlett	41	Schoolteacher	Single
<i>Elizabeth Smith</i>			
Helen Crisp	31		Unknown – husband untraceable
Rose R A Cornforth	51		Electrical engineer
Jane Evans	47		Builder
Margaret J Kay	54	Blank 1911; Milliner, 1901	Draper's Buyer
Mary Winefred Fletcher	50		Commercial clerk
Ada Louise Hill	40		Surveyor
Emily Bowden	64		Architect and Surveyor (partner)
Edith Maria Bowden	30		Architect and Surveyor (partner)
Louisa Atkinson	49		Surgeon
Mary Gertrude Edinborough	43		Commercial clerk
Eva Whitehouse	40	Schoolteacher	Single
Fanny Whitehouse	37	Schoolteacher	Single
<i>Annie Bentham</i>			
Rose Shotton	45	'At home' (no occupation stated)	Pawnbroker
Mary Ellen Shepherd	47		Vanman for Co-operative Society
Eliza Florence Price	47	Boot dealer (at home)	Blacksmith, (out of work)
Elizabeth Sidwell	45	'Assisting in business'	Fruiteer and fishmonger (shop owner)
<i>Sarah Roberts</i>			

Table 7: Smethwick women who nominated Christabel Pankhurst in 1918.⁹⁵

These women were likely among Pankhurst's most ardent supporters, because of their willingness to publicly identify themselves with her. This evidence, however, suggests that they fit a very different profile to that which has previously been understood: they were not the young, working-class munitionettes both Purvis and Gullace suggest were Pankhurst's strongest supporters.

⁹⁵ Information was gathered via the 1911 Census or other census returns, available at <www.ancestry.co.uk>. Specific references for each individual are provided in full in Appendix A.

Instead, most were older. Although women had to be at least 30 to be eligible to vote, and thus nominate a candidate, only three of the 21 were in their thirties and their average age was 47. They also do not fit the class background of the typical ‘munitionette’, based on their or their husbands’ occupations; in that some employed servants, and in their relative geographical stability.

While certain kinds of paid work undertaken by women has generally been excluded from the census, such as taking in laundry or minding of children, that many of these women’s husbands were employed in skilled or semi-skilled manual work or the professions indicates that this was unlikely in these cases.⁹⁶ Their husbands likely brought home a regular, reliable income and in several cases, as outlined in Appendix A, this income was supplemented by the earnings of older children, which eased financial burdens on households. Of the seven women who gave an occupation, four were single, making work more of a necessity, but none were engaged in industrial work. Three (Bartlett, and the Whitehouse sisters) were schoolteachers—indeed Bartlett was Headmistress of Brasshouse Lane Girls’ School.⁹⁷ Notably, at one ‘crowded’ meeting in Smethwick, Pankhurst addressed the issue of equal pay and specifically singled out teachers, who were ‘far too cheap’, promising that the Women’s Party would address this, which may well have appealed and persuaded the three to support her.⁹⁸ More unusually, Janette Hill was a doctor, employed since 1914 as Smethwick’s Assistant School Medical Officer of Health, and presumably very busy in December 1918, with the influenza pandemic raging.⁹⁹

The three married women who gave occupations similarly seem unlikely candidates for munitions work in factories. Elizabeth Sidwell assisted in her husband’s shop, and the couple also employed a live-in shop assistant. Margaret Kay, in 1901, had given her occupation as ‘milliner’ but gave no occupation in 1911, perhaps because the family no longer needed this income. Eliza Price

⁹⁶ June Purvis, ‘Using Primary Sources When Researching Women’s History from a Feminist Perspective’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1992), p. 273-306, p. 280.

⁹⁷ Bartlett was appointed to the post in 1912; Fanny Whitehouse taught the school at the same time. ‘Borough Police Court. A Scholar’s Charge of Assault’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 26 January 1907, p. 3 (Whitehouse); ‘Smethwick Education Committee’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 20 January 1912, p. 3 (Bartlett).

⁹⁸ ‘Miss Pankhurst’s candidature’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 7 December 1918, p. 3.

⁹⁹ ‘The New School Doctor’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 21 March 1914, p. 2, see also Appendix A. For the pandemic locally: Maggie Andrews and Emma Edwards, *Bovril, Whisky and Gravediggers: The Spanish Flu Pandemic comes to the West Midlands (1918-1920)*, (Alcester: West Midlands History, 2019).

was one of the few women who may potentially have been struggling financially in 1911: though her husband was a blacksmith, he was then out of work, and the couple had two children under four. The family likely subsisted entirely on the money Eliza was able to bring in as a ‘boot dealer from home’.¹⁰⁰ However, high demand for boots in wartime may have helped ease any financial strain, and her husband may have been able to find work in the interim.

In addition to this evidence, it is further notable that around a third of these women had some experience of employing live-in domestic servants. Five employed a servant in 1911 (Fletcher, Hill, both Bowdens and Shotton); two (Kay and Atkinson) did not in 1911 but had in 1901, and the Sidwells employed a live-in shop assistant, Samuel Whittle.¹⁰¹ At this time, domestic service was the most common female employment sector: ‘most British women were either domestic servants, or employers of servants’.¹⁰² Evidence suggests that around a third women who nominated Pankhurst fell into the latter category, with little to suggest that any had themselves been servants. Indeed, more of these women may have employed servants without this being recorded on the census—the servant may have been absent from census night, or been a ‘daily’ or charwoman.¹⁰³ Furthermore, even those who did not employ servants appear to have enjoyed a degree of domestic stability available only to the relatively financially secure. One of the reasons that the women were easily traceable was that most—19 of the 24—were still resident at the same address in 1918 as they had been in 1911. All likely lived in rented accommodation, as around 90 per cent of homes were rented in 1914.¹⁰⁴ Yet the fact that the majority were still resident in the same place in 1918 suggests that they were not moving frequently to chase work or find cheaper accommodation, as could be the case for poorer families.

This evidence suggests that these 24 women, Pankhurst’s most ardent local supporters, were not, as previously thought, young, working-class munitionettes. Instead, they were generally older,

¹⁰⁰ All references in Appendix A.

¹⁰¹ Whittle still lived with them in 1918; he was among the men who nominated Pankhurst. ‘Nomination Day’.

¹⁰² Laura Schwartz, ‘A Job Like Any Other? Feminist Responses and Challenges to Domestic Worker Organising in Edwardian Britain’, *International Labour and Working Class History*, Vol. 88, (2015), p. 30—48, p. 30.

¹⁰³ For charring, see: Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 35—41.

¹⁰⁴ Although the ‘manufacturing Midlands’ was one of the few areas where working-class owner-occupation was not entirely unknown. Peter Scott, ‘Marketing mass home ownership and the creation of the modern working-class consumer in inter-war Britain’, *Business History*, Vol. 50, No. 1, (2008), p. 4—25, p. 6.

from more prosperous working-class, if not lower-middle class, backgrounds. Admittedly, this sample is small: the constituency had 12,726 female registered electors in 1918.¹⁰⁵ Statistically, 24 out of nearly 13,000 is an almost negligible number. Nonetheless, their involvement in the nomination process is extremely significant, as it demonstrates these women were very actively engaged in the political process—as were, of course, the 25 women who nominated Labour’s John Davison.¹⁰⁶ But while it is clear that these women were politicised, what is less clear is what had politicised them: was it Pankhurst’s being a woman candidate, or something else? The lack of available personal sources which might give an insight to these women’s thoughts and feelings means that this is a question which cannot be conclusively answered. Nonetheless, a few general trends do stand out from the available evidence. There is little indication that any of these women had been involved with the suffrage movement suggesting that, instead, their interest seems to have come from the Women’s Party platform and Pankhurst herself. Perhaps most significant, however, was these women’s own personal networks acting as a conduit for political activism.

As noted in the previous chapter, Smethwick was one of the few areas of the Black Country which did not see any suffrage organisation before the First World War, although it is very close to Birmingham, which had a host of suffrage groups, including an active branch of the WSPU.¹⁰⁷ However, there is little suggestion that any of these 24 women had been actively involved in any suffrage societies. A keyword analysis of the suffrage press with each of their names revealed no matches, suggesting that they were not among those who were most active in the movement.¹⁰⁸ Of course, this does not mean that these women were not aware of, or indeed tacit supporters of, women’s enfranchisement. Indeed, two (Atkinson and Edinborough) had lived in London in the first decade of the twentieth century, and may have witnessed suffrage activism there.¹⁰⁹ However, there is

¹⁰⁵ ‘Notes in brief’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 14 December 1918, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Nomination Day’.

¹⁰⁷ Gauld, *Words and Deeds*.

¹⁰⁸ This was undertaken using the British Library’s Online Database of newspapers <www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>, as outlined in the Introduction.

¹⁰⁹ Louisa Atkinson was living in Notting Hill in 1901 but had moved to Smethwick by 1911, while Mary Gertrude Edinborough was originally from the capital. It is unclear when she moved to Smethwick, but she had only been married to her (Smethwick-born) husband for four years by 1911. All references in Appendix A.

no evidence that any of the 24 had taken active roles in local branches of suffrage organisations. Tellingly, the Smethwick campaign was co-ordinated by stalwarts of the WSPU's executive who had remained loyal to the Pankhursts, including sisters Annie and Jessie Kenney, 'General' Flora Drummond, and Phyllis Ayrton, the WSPU organiser for Birmingham.¹¹⁰ The *Birmingham Gazette* informed readers that 'there are no local women among the speakers' at campaign events, while the *Birmingham Mail* reported that 'within a day of [Pankhurst] deciding to contest the seat, the town was flooded with lady workers', the implication being that these were suffrage activists.¹¹¹ However, while none of the 24 nominators appear to have been previously politicised through involvement with the suffrage campaign, it is possible that Pankhurst's own celebrity, as a militant suffragette, may have enticed some into supporting her. Indeed, having one of the best-known candidates, male or female, in the locale may have been a draw in the way that Macarthur's celebrity helped her in Stourbridge. On election day, the *Birmingham Mail* remarked that the Women's Party had 'worked wonders in arousing public interest', at least some of which might be attributed to Pankhurst's celebrity.¹¹²

Perhaps most notably, these women's own personal networks may have acted as a conduit of politicisation. Many lived near each other, and their own personal community, friendship and, in some cases, kinship, networks may have served as vehicles of politicisation.¹¹³ For example, Cox, Westwood, and Hill lived at numbers 66, 68 and 70 Vicarage Road respectively. A few streets away were Kay, Fletcher, and Evans, at 135, 141 and 143 Bearwood Road. The Whitehouse sisters lived at 36, Little Moor Hill, next door to Bentham (37) and close to Edinborough (17) and Crisp (40). Crisp was the stepdaughter of Shotton, while Emily and Edith Bowden were in-laws (Edith husband's was Emily's son). Fanny Whitehouse taught at Brasshouse Lane Girls' School, of which Bartlett was headmistress.¹¹⁴ These myriad connections suggest that a significant number of these women were

¹¹⁰ Purvis, 'The Women's Party'; Lyndsey Jenkins, 'It wasn't like that at all': memory, identity and legacy in Jessie Kenney's *The Flame and The Flood*', *Women's History Review*, (2020, advanced access online), p. 4.

¹¹¹ 'Smethwick Change', *Birmingham Gazette*, 6 December 1918, p. 5; 'Midland Polls. Interesting contests round Birmingham', *Birmingham Mail*, 7 December 1918, p. 5.

¹¹² 'Birmingham Scenes. Many Women Among the Voters', *Birmingham Mail*, 14 December 1918, p. 5.

¹¹³ For the importance of such networks in earlier periods, see for example: Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 12.

¹¹⁴ All references in Appendix A.

perhaps actively politicised through their own personal and neighbourly networks.¹¹⁵ It is easy to imagine them discussing Pankhurst's campaign in each other's homes, as they likely discussed many other topics over the years. Additionally, suffrage organisations had long recognised the value of 'at homes' in building up support for their cause, and potentially politicising women.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, while only 24 women took part in the nomination process, they may well have discussed the campaign with other local women in turn. Such activities—through informal chats over cups of tea in friends' kitchens—are impossible to measure and often go unrecorded, but certainly served to engage women in the general political process.

The 24 are the only supporters of Pankhurst named within the local press. While this is a small sample, it does suggest that her support was much wider and more middle-class than previous work has suggested. Although other newspaper articles reference the enthusiasm of locals for her campaign—for example, the suggestion that the Women's Party had 'worked wonders in arousing public interest' at their 'scores' of public meetings¹¹⁷—there is little direct, specific evidence within these reports of women participating in her campaign in other ways. Locally, too, there is little reference to the support she supposedly received from 'munitionettes'. Come election day, polling was reported to be 'very satisfactory from an early hour, and at one large central station, it was stated that more than a sixth of the electors had voted before noon', which certainly indicates that enthusiasm levels were perceived to be high.¹¹⁸ However, unlike with Mary Macarthur in Stourbridge, the behaviour of women voters specifically was not commented on, and this perceived enthusiasm did not, in the event, translate to a particularly high voter turnout. Indeed, the turnout figure was almost

¹¹⁵ There have been several significant studies of women's 'neighbourly' networks, although it should be noted that these tend to focus on some of the poorest neighbourhoods, in which these women, as demonstrated, were not generally living. For a good overview, see: Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940*, (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 1995); Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's talk?: a social history of "gossip" in working-class neighbourhoods, 1880-1960*, (London: Scholar Press, 1995).

¹¹⁶ The importance of the 'tea party meeting' to the suffrage movement is discussed in: Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women; the story of a struggle*, (Newton Abbot, 1958), see also: 'Taking Tea and Talking Politics: The Role of Tearooms', via <<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/womens-history/suffrage/taking-tea-and-talking-politics/>>, consulted 29.07.2020.

¹¹⁷ 'Birmingham Scenes. Many Women Among the Voters'.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

identical to Stourbridge: at 55 per cent, it was again marginally lower than the 57 per cent national average.¹¹⁹ It does not appear, then, that the presence of an overtly feminist candidate had much impact on encouraging women voters turn out come election day. Arguably, it is perhaps most notable that in an area of such strong Labour support—the *Birmingham Mail* reported that ‘it is said that there are 20,000 trades unionists in the borough, and 5,000 co-operative society members’—Pankhurst was able to secure 8,614 votes, only 775 less than her opponent.¹²⁰

Her overtly feminist platform perhaps appealed to a reasonable number of women, and indeed men, in Smethwick, although some may have viewed her simply as the preferable choice over Davison, which does not necessarily suggest pronounced enthusiasm for her campaign. While the involvement of these 24 local women in the nomination process is significant, as it suggests that the profile of her local supporters was somewhat different to that which has previously been understood, there is still little evidence that large numbers of women in Smethwick were actively involved with her campaign. Finally, it is worth noting that none of these 24 went on to become involved in local politics after this campaign. As suggested above, it is likely that the Mrs Sands who nominated Davison was the same Edith Sands who became a Labour councillor in 1921—as Chapter 4 demonstrates, Smethwick did elect several women into municipal politics after 1918. None of these women councillors, however, were drawn from these 24, suggesting their activism in the political process in this election was not sustained.¹²¹

Part III: Alice Cooper:

Of the seventeen women candidates nationwide in 1918, only Constance Markievicz was successful, but as a Sinn Féin representative, she did not take her seat in the House of Commons. However, as noted, before the next general election two women entered Parliament following by-elections. The 1922 general election then saw an increase in women candidates nationwide, with 33 standing, including another in the Black Country: Lady Alice Cooper, in Walsall. Born Alice Priestland, she

¹¹⁹ There were 18,003 votes cast in Smethwick, and 32,980 eligible voters, hence 55 percent of voters turned out. ‘How the Midlands Polled’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 30 December 1918, p. 5; Uberoi, *Turnout at elections*.

¹²⁰ ‘Birmingham Scenes. Many Women Among the Voters’.

¹²¹ See Appendix H for a full list.

was the daughter of a clergyman and grew up in Derbyshire, marrying Richard Cooper, heir to both the Shenstone Baronetcy (near Walsall) and a chemical manufacturing company, in 1900, aged 20.¹²² In January 1910, Richard was elected Unionist MP for Walsall, but during the First World War, he broke away from his party and co-founded the National Party with Henry Page Croft.¹²³ Although the National Party proved ‘an unmitigated failure’ in 1918, Richard was one of its two elected members.¹²⁴ He was not endorsed by the coalition, but he had the tacit support of Walsall’s Unionist Party, who did not stand a candidate, and won a majority of over 6,000—an enormous increase on his pre-war majority of about 700.¹²⁵ He later re-joined the Unionist party but in December 1921, announced he would step down from politics at the next election, ‘for business reasons’, and recommended that Walsall Unionists adopt his wife, Alice.¹²⁶

Prior to this, Alice had had little involvement with politics, and it is unclear how seriously she took this contest. Her platform appears typical of the Conservative party in this election, but she made no direct appeals to women voters in Walsall. She faced a three-way contest between the Liberal Pat Collins, a popular local showman, and Labour’s Robert Dennison. Collins was victorious, with 14,647 votes, though Alice, with 14,349, came within 325 votes of winning.¹²⁷ Despite both the narrowness of her defeat, and the frequency of parliamentary elections in subsequent years—there were general elections in 1923 and 1924, and a local by-election in 1925—Alice did not stand again, appearing to recede from politics entirely. As a candidate in 1922, she did not enjoy the kind of ‘celebrity status’ of either Macarthur or Pankhurst, though she was reasonably well-known in the constituency as Richard was both the sitting MP and a member of the local gentry. However there is scant evidence that her

¹²² Her father was also Headmaster of Spondon House School, and Richard and Alice were reported to have met when he was a pupil of the school. ‘Alice Priestland’, (1881), *Census return for Church Street, Spondon, Derbyshire, Subdistrict: Shardlow*, Public Record Office, Piece No. 3393, Folio 9, p. 11; ‘Marriage of Mr R. A. Cooper and Miss Priestland’, *Lichfield Mercury*, 20 April 1900, p. 5. ‘Town and Country Gossip’, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 24 October 1922, p. 2.

¹²³ Larry L. Witherell, ‘Sir Henry Page Croft and Conservative Backbench Campaigns for Empire, 1903-1932’, *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (2006), p. 357-381.

¹²⁴ N. C. Fleming, *Britannia’s Zealots, Volume I: Tradition, Empire and the Forging of the Conservative Right* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

¹²⁵ Ian Cawood, ‘Life After Joe’, p. 96.

¹²⁶ ‘Lady Cooper and the Walsall Division’, *Lichfield Mercury*, 9 December 1921, p. 3.

¹²⁷ ‘Lichfield Election Results’, *Lichfield Mercury*, 17 November 1922, p. 5. Dennison managed 8,946 votes.

campaign—which, as will be explored, was rather lacklustre—politicised many women in Walsall. Local newspaper reporting provides scant evidence of local women’s activism in this election, while her own minimal involvement with politics before or after this election suggests that she herself was not terribly committed to politics, perhaps explaining the rather half-hearted campaign she conducted. This, in turn, may thus go some way towards explaining a lack of evidence for women voters in Walsall women becoming politicised by her presence as a woman candidate.

Notwithstanding her ultimately underwhelming campaign, Cooper was considered by the press to be one of the few women candidates with a chance of success in this election. A March 1922 article in the *Yorkshire Post* reported that, of the women candidates who had been selected to that point, ‘it is said that only three have a good chance of being returned—the two sitting Members and Lady Cooper’.¹²⁸ In early November, closer to the election, the *Woman’s Leader*, the organ of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), even wrote that, ‘Lady Cooper has...the unique position of not having to win a seat, as she is standing for that of her husband, and...there seems every reason to anticipate with confidence that she will be returned’.¹²⁹ Certainly, she went into the contest with several advantages. First, she was selected early, almost a full year before the election took place giving her ample time, if she chose, to actively campaign. Second, she was in a sense ‘inheriting’ her seat from her husband, following a newly established pattern which then appeared to give women candidates an advantage.¹³⁰ Finally, Cooper also benefitted from the prospect of contesting a seat which her party held with a substantial majority, and one which was considered winnable. While not enjoying the notoriety of Macarthur or Pankhurst, like them she was considered one of the few women candidates likely to be successful. Though ultimately defeated, her loss was not a foregone conclusion.

Cooper’s defeat may be attributed in part to her somewhat half-hearted campaign, although there is some suggestion that she became a stronger supporter of women’s role in politics over the

¹²⁸ ‘A London Letter: The Aftermath’, *Yorkshire Post*, 3 March 1922, p. 5

¹²⁹ ‘Prospects of Women Candidates’, *The Woman’s Leader*, 3 November 1922, p. 313—314.

¹³⁰ By 1935, seven Conservative women had been elected to seats previously occupied by their husbands. Cowman, *Women in British Politics*, p. 120—121; Vallance, *Women in the House*, p. 110—111.

course of 1922. On first being selected, her views on the matter appear, at best, cautious. She told the local Unionist Association, which had gathered to officially select her as their candidate in December 1921, that she ‘believed that under the present system of democratic government, a substantial representation—though I trust it may never be a majority—of women in Parliament is imperative’, carefully adding that, if elected, she would be ‘guided, as I should be, by my husband’s advice and help’.¹³¹ However, she slowly became somewhat bolder: in January 1922, for instance, she took part in a debate at Walsall Debating Society on ‘why women are necessary in Parliament’ where she argued that ‘the entry of women into politics...was one of the greatest strides forward which had been made’, adding that ‘people were apt to remember more the militant tactics of the Suffragettes than the worthy object for which they fought’.¹³² In February, she ‘pointed out that other parties were putting forward women candidates, and she urged that if they were going to have women in Parliament, they wanted women of all shades of opinion there’.¹³³ At the West Midlands Women Unionists’ conference in April, she declared that ‘women...were now looking forward to taking their part in the government of the country’, and she ‘believed that women could bring into [government] qualities that were badly needed’.¹³⁴ However, these remarks were all delivered before the election was called, and there is little evidence that she made similar comments once campaigning began, in the autumn of 1922. Furthermore, many of her remarks were centred around women’s presence in parliament. Her reference to women ‘looking forward to taking their part in the government of the country’¹³⁵ did acknowledge ordinary women’s new role in the voting process, but this was hardly framed as an explicit appeal to women voters in Walsall.

Indeed, her few appeals to women voters were fairly indirect and it is unclear how well-received these were locally. In common with other Conservative women candidates in this period, she ‘did little to challenge the status quo, chiefly presenting [herself] as the guardian of the interests of the

¹³¹ ‘Lady Cooper and the Walsall Division’, *Lichfield Mercury*, 9 December 1921, p. 3.

¹³² ‘Lady Cooper and the Politics of Women’, *The Staffordshire Advertiser*, 28 January 1922, p. 5.

¹³³ The newspaper which reported her speech does not say where she gave it, however it is implied that it was at a local Unionist event. ‘Lady Cooper and Women’s Influence’, *Lichfield Mercury*, 24 February 1922, p. 6.

¹³⁴ ‘Women’s Unionist Conference at Stafford’, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 1 April 1922, p. 9.

¹³⁵ ‘Women Unionist Conference at Stafford’.

home and family welfare'.¹³⁶ In January 1922, she claimed 'there was a great need for women's influence, for democratic government was a gigantic form of housekeeping' and mentioned women's special concerns over, and aptitude for, issues related to child welfare, maternal guardianship, education, and housing.¹³⁷ More notably, at the same event she acknowledged that 'many women had to earn their own bread, and sometimes even support a family, and there was much to be done to raise women's status to the level of men'.¹³⁸ This stopped short of an explicit call for equal pay, as both Macarthur and Pankhurst had platformed, but nonetheless went some way towards acknowledging that women were not just housewives and mothers. Meanwhile, in a March 1922 profile in *Vote* (the organ of the Women's Freedom League) she promised that, if elected, she would try to represent 'the women of all classes with their political, social and economic problems', though she also pledged to speak for 'employers of labour', 'workers' and 'helpless little children'.¹³⁹ Again, however, it is notable that her comments came before the election was called, and it is perhaps questionable how many Walsall voters would have read this profile. As such, it appears that she did not make explicit appeals to women voters based around specific policies.

Perhaps for this reason, there is very little evidence that her candidature led to an increase in women's political activity or engagement in Walsall in this election. Despite Richard's twelve years as the local MP, there is little suggestion that Alice herself was particularly politically active before 1922, which may have contributed to the somewhat limited campaign she conducted. Her lack of previous political experience is most evident in a November 1922 edition of the *Woman's Leader*

¹³⁶ David Thackeray, 'At the heart of the party? the women's Conservative organisation in the age of partial suffrage, 1914-1928', in: Clarisse Berthezène and Julie V. Gottlieb (eds.), *Rethinking right-wing women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the present*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 46—65, p. 47. For Conservative appeals to women voters specifically, see: Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?* (London: Virago, 1987); Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty'; David Jarvis, 'The Conservative Party and the politics of gender, 1900—1939', in: Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), p. 172—193; David Jarvis, "'Behind Every Great Party": Women and Conservatism in Twentieth-Century Britain', in Amanda Vickery, (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power. British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 289—314; David Thackeray, 'Home and Politics: Women and Conservative Activism in Early Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4, (2010), p. 826—848; Thackeray, 'Party Appeals'.

¹³⁷ 'Lady Cooper and the Politics of Women'.

¹³⁸ 'Lady Cooper and the Politics of Women'.

¹³⁹ 'When I am MP. Alice Cooper', *The Vote*, 17 March 1922, p. 1.

which featured short profiles of each of the women parliamentary candidates in the forthcoming election. As well as their occupation and education—Alice gave hers as a director of Richard’s chemical company, and Derby High School, an independent girls’ day school, respectively—the candidates were asked to provide information on their previous ‘political, local government or social work’. To this, she responded that she was ‘always a Conservative, then joined the Unionist Party; worked on Unionist and various political organisations; also on Ivory Cross during the war’.¹⁴⁰

This rather vague response was significantly at odds with the other candidates profiled in the *Woman’s Leader*, all of whom were able to point to specific work they had done within named organisations. For example, the two candidates listed above and below her were Margaret Bondfield (Labour candidate for Northampton) and Lady Currie (Independent Liberal for Devizes). Bondfield wrote that she was ‘secretary of the Women’s Section of the National Union of General Workers; worked in connection with the National Union of Shop Assistants; [and was] closely connected to the ILP [Independent Labour Party]’, as well as noting that she was a magistrate. Currie noted that she had lived in Italy through 1913, where she was ‘closely identified with the training of nurses there’ and in Wiltshire, she undertook ‘much local work nursing, welfare of the blind etc; member of the Executive Committee of Women’s National Liberal Committee; at present Treasurer’.¹⁴¹ Though of different political persuasions, it is clear that Bondfield and Currie—and the 33 other women candidates profiled—were activist women, enmeshed within their particular party circles, and with significant interests in other organisations or professions. Cooper, with her somewhat ambiguous response, was very much the exception. Her ‘work on Unionist and various political organisations’ may have been an oblique reference to her role as parliamentary spouse; the only specific organisation with which she appears to have been involved local was Walsall Women Unionists’ Association (WWUA). Even here, however, her involvement was likely a result of her husband being MP: Alice was President of WWUA, typically an honorary role. Although WWUA’s records no longer remain in existence, there is no evidence from newspaper reporting that her involvement with the organisation

¹⁴⁰ ‘Records of Some Women Candidates’, *The Woman’s Leader*, 3 November 1922, p. 316.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

went any deeper. Furthermore, although she spoke at the West Midlands Women Unionists' conference in April 1922, she does not appear to have attended the event in other years.¹⁴²

More significantly, there is scant evidence from newspaper reporting that WWUA members were actively involved with Cooper's campaign, nor indeed were any other women who had not previously been active in local party organisations. At her official adoption meeting, for instance, no women participated, as they had at campaign meetings for Macarthur or Pankhurst. She was introduced by Sydney Wheway, a prominent Walsall industrialist who was active in local politics, and Richard also gave a speech.¹⁴³ The event was held at Walsall Girls' Recreation Club, which was perhaps a token nod to her gender—but equally may just have been coincidence—and newspapers did not record the presence of any women in the audience. While women may, of course, have attended, they do not appear to have been taking an active role in questioning the candidate.¹⁴⁴ In contrast, by November, the Liberals were noted to be giving 'special attention to the women voters' in Walsall, with 'arrangements for meetings of women to be held, and for a systematic canvassing'.¹⁴⁵ Similar events appear not to have been held by the Unionists, however. While it is possible that such events escaped the notice of the local press, newspapers appear to have reported on most election events in the area. It seems unlikely that any special attentions paid to, or events held for, Walsall's women voters by the Unionist party would have gone unreported, especially given Alice's position as one of the few female candidates nationwide that year.

Newspaper reports also do not provide any detail on the response of the electorate in Walsall in 1922, so it is unclear if there was particular enthusiasm for her come election day. However, voter turnout was substantially higher in Walsall than the national average. 84 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot in Walsall,¹⁴⁶ while the overall turnout stood at 73 per cent in this election.¹⁴⁷ This is a

¹⁴² 'Women's Unionist Conference at Stafford' for 1922, but a keyword search of local newspapers for her name and this event in other years does not provide any matches.

¹⁴³ For the adoption events: 'Walsall,' *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4 November 1922, p. 10; for Wheway, 'Late Mr S B Wheway', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 4 November 1944, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ 'Walsall,' *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4 November 1922, p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ 'Walsall Busy With Rumours', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 November 1922, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ There were 45,009 eligible voters, and 37,969 votes cast. 'The General Election. Walsall', *Times*, 16 November 1922, p. 6 via <<https://www.gale.com/intl/c/the-times-digital-archive>>.

¹⁴⁷ Uberoi, *Turnout at elections*, p. 4.

substantial difference, and it is unclear why this should be. Given the lack of evidence from earlier in her campaign that local women had been actively politicised by her presence as a woman candidate, it does not seem very plausible that Walsall's turnout should be higher because women voters here—who were only 41 per cent of the local electorate anyway—were excited at the prospect of voting for a woman.¹⁴⁸ Cooper did receive over 14,000 votes, but so too did the Liberal, Pat Collins, whose narrow majority of 325 ensured him victory. While it is notable that turnout should be so high, there is little to suggest that this was in any way connected to women voters being excited by the prospect of a woman candidate. The closeness of the race perhaps suggests that voters were more motivated by partisan issues, particularly given that there is little evidence that Cooper made any attempt to specifically engage with women voters in Walsall or make direct appeals to them on gendered issues. Though she did make some appeals for the need for greater female representation in Parliament, this was largely centred around the need for more women MPs and perhaps had limited real impact on local voters' enthusiasm. As such, when considering Cooper's campaign as a whole, there is little to suggest that Walsall women were politicised by her presence as a woman candidate, and they were not actively engaged with her campaign.

Part IV: Maude Marshall:

As noted, Cooper did not seek election in future years, and neither the 1923 nor 1924 general elections, nor any local by-elections, saw a woman candidate in the Black Country. Thus it was not until women had achieved electoral equality with men that the area saw its next woman parliamentary candidate, when Maude Marshall stood in Smethwick in 1929. Marshall was born in Romford, Essex in 1872; at 57, she was the oldest, at the time of contesting an election, of all the candidates considered here. She was also the least well-known, and her background has been hardest to trace. Census returns reveal she was the sixth of ten children born to William and Fanny Marshall. Her father gave his occupation, in 1881, as 'Colonel in the West Suffolk Militia'.¹⁴⁹ Marshall attended the

¹⁴⁸ 18,567 of eligible voters were female. 'The General Election. Walsall'.

¹⁴⁹ Maude E. Marshall, (1881), *1881 Census return for Gainsborough Road, Essex*, Piece: 1726, Folio: 37, p. 33.

University of London in the late 1890s,¹⁵⁰ then worked for the Board of Trade in London.¹⁵¹ By the time she contested this election, Marshall, who never married, was living in Cardiff. She was an active member of Cardiff Liberal Party and indeed only ‘made the acquaintance of a Smethwick audience for the first time’ in March 1929, once the election had been called.¹⁵²

She associated herself with Lloyd George’s faction of the party, but was not expected to do well. Smethwick was a very safe Labour seat, and the current incumbent, Oswald Mosley, was then very popular.¹⁵³ Marshall managed about 11 per cent of the vote, significantly behind Mosley, whose majority was over 7,000, and the Conservatives’ Roy Wise.¹⁵⁴ This was the only election which she contested; after her defeat, she returned to Cardiff where she maintained her activism in the Liberal party there until her death in 1941.¹⁵⁵ Marshall lost by the widest margin of all the candidates studied here, with several factors contributing to her defeat. Foremost was her being given an essentially unwinnable seat, though the Liberals’ general decline, discussed shortly, probably also contributed. That she was unknown to local voters may also have been a factor. As previous sections have explored, both Macarthur and Pankhurst were widely known at the time of seeking election, while Cooper benefited from local connections. Marshall had neither.

Nonetheless, her campaign has significant implications for understanding how women might—or might not—become politicised by the presence of a woman candidate. This was the first election after the passage of the 1928 Equal Franchise Act, which increased the female electorate by 5.2 million.¹⁵⁶ Although about a third of these new voters were actually women over 30, who

¹⁵⁰ University of London General Register of Students, 1899, p. 105. Part of: University of London Student Records 1836-1936, Senate House Library, accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk, consulted 17.06.2020.

¹⁵¹ Maude E. Marshall, (1911), *1911 Census return for Westbourne Grove, Paddington, London*, Schedule Number: 1, Piece: 48.

¹⁵² ‘The Campaign’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 16 March 1929, p. 2

¹⁵³ Smethwick was held by Christabel Pankhurst’s opponent John Davison, until 1926 when stood down due to ill-health and died shortly after, necessitating a by-election won by Mosley, then a prominent Labour politician. By the 1931 election, Mosley had founded the New Party, but stood (unsuccessfully) in Stoke, not Smethwick, that year. David Howell, *Mosley and British Politics 1918–32: Oswald’s Odyssey*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹⁵⁴ Mosley had 19,950 votes; Wise 12,210 and Marshall 3,909. ‘General Election. Smethwick’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 1 June 1929, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Liberal Worker’s Will’, *Evening Despatch*, 14 January 1941, p. 6.

¹⁵⁶ Mari Takayanagi, “Does the right hon. Gentleman mean equal votes at 21?” Conservative women and equal franchise, 1919–1928’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (2019), p. 194-214, p. 195.

benefitted from the removal of the property qualifications for female voters,¹⁵⁷ the Act became synonymous with the young ‘flapper’ voter.¹⁵⁸ Nationwide, women were now a small majority of the electorate; in Smethwick, there were 23,634 women voters to 21,588 men.¹⁵⁹ Despite this, however, it does not appear that Marshall made implicit or explicit appeals to women voters in the constituency. Instead, and perhaps somewhat unusually, she appears to have made an attempt to appeal to voters based on her own professional expertise as a career civil servant. However, there is little evidence to suggest that local women were politicised by this approach.

It is unclear why Marshall contested Smethwick as opposed to another essentially unwinnable constituency. It was, however, common practise for unknown candidates to be given unwinnable seats. This was especially true of women candidates, and Liberal women in particular. Jorgen Rasmussen argues that the Liberals frequently had a higher proportion of women candidates in elections than either the Conservatives or Labour, but suggests that this was most likely because the Liberals’ general electoral weakness meant that securing adoption as a candidate was more straightforward. As he writes, ‘it is much easier to make a “concession” when it appears that little of significance is being conceded’.¹⁶⁰ The Liberals’ general decline, stemming from the acrimonious splits within the party during the First World War, continued during the 1920s.¹⁶¹ Although the party showed a slight recovery in its fortunes in 1929, its women candidates fared particularly badly.¹⁶² Of

¹⁵⁷ Of the 5.2 million enfranchised, approximately 1.8 million or 34 percent were aged 30 and above. Takayanagi, ‘Women and the Vote’, p. 184.

¹⁵⁸ The *Daily Mail* launched an unsuccessful campaign to ‘stop the flapper vote folly’, fearing these newly-enfranchised young women would elect a socialist government Adrian Bingham, “‘Stop the Flapper Vote Folly’: Lord Rothermere, the Daily Mail, and the Equalization of the Franchise 1927–28”, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (2002), p. 17–37; Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910–2010*, (London: John Murray, 2014), p. 64.

¹⁵⁹ ‘General Election’.

¹⁶⁰ Rasmussen, ‘The Role of Women’, p. 1046.

¹⁶¹ For the party in this period, see: David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Edition, (London: Macmillan, 2013), especially chapter 2; David Dutton, ‘Liberal Nationalism and the Decline of the British Liberal Party: Three Case Studies’, *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 42, No. 3, (2007), p. 439–461, which contains an examination of Liberal politics in Walsall in this period; Chris Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party*, 7th edition, (London: Macmillan, 2010), especially chapters 7 through 9; Gavin Freeman, ‘The decline of the Liberal party in the heart of England: the Liberals in Leicestershire, 1914–24’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 89, No. 245, (2016), p. 531–549; Gavin Freeman, ‘The Liberal Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2018), p. 47–63.

¹⁶² The Liberals’ share of the vote increased by 5.8 percent and their number of seats increased by 19 on the 1924 general election. David Redvaldsen, “‘Today is the Dawn’: The Labour Party and the 1929 General Election”, *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2010), p. 395–415, p. 410.

their 25 women candidates, 24 lost. Only Megan Lloyd George, whose surname held particular sway in her constituency of Anglesey, was elected.¹⁶³ Locally, Marshall was commended for her ‘courage in coming to face the difficulties which Smethwick presented’, with the constituency regarded as ‘an uphill fight’.¹⁶⁴ While it is unclear why Smethwick in particular was chosen for her to contest, it was almost certainly selected from a list of similarly ‘uphill fights’.

No copy of Marshall’s manifesto survives. However, the *Smethwick Telephone* reported many of her speeches at meetings near verbatim, and in these she positioned herself as supporting in full the Liberals’ 1929 manifesto.¹⁶⁵ From the *Telephone*’s reporting, it appears that unemployment was the issue she foregrounded most, leading on the issue, such as in her first campaign speech where she promised that ‘we can conquer unemployment’, the Liberals’ leading pledge, before going on to talk at length about the problem, and the Liberals’ plans to ‘conquer’ it.¹⁶⁶ This was a national issue, but it appears from the *Telephone* article that she focused specifically on the situation in the South Wales mining industry, drawing on several speeches given by David Lloyd George, rather than speaking to the issue in Smethwick, whose industries was naturally very different.¹⁶⁷ More significantly, however, in these speeches she appears to have made no implicit or explicit appeals to women voters. She did not even attempt to highlight her relative exceptionality as a female candidate, as Alice Cooper had.

Instead, Marshall took the rather unique approach of presenting herself as a candidate with professional expertise in politics and the civil service. For instance, she spoke to voters at length about ‘the question of Peace...upon which she felt very strongly and held decided opinions’, detailing her work as Chairman of Cardiff’s League of Nations Union and her ‘several visits’ to Geneva, the League of Nations’ headquarters.¹⁶⁸ As Helen McCarthy has demonstrated, the League of Nations Union played a significant role in the ‘democratisation of Britain’s political culture between the wars’,

¹⁶³ Kelly, *Women Members*.

¹⁶⁴ ‘The Liberals’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 30 March 1929, p. 5; ‘The Liberal Candidate for Smethwick’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 20 April 1929, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ A full version of the Liberals’ manifesto in this election can be viewed here: ‘1929 Liberal Party General Election manifesto’, (1929), via <<http://www.libdemmanifesto.com/1929/1929-liberal-manifesto.shtml>>, consulted 08.01.2019.

¹⁶⁶ ‘The Liberals’, 30 March.

¹⁶⁷ ‘The Liberals’, 30 March.

¹⁶⁸ ‘The Liberals’, 16 March, *Smethwick Telephone*, 16 March 1929, p. 2.

pointing to the immersion of British Liberal values and personnel within its organisational structures, and a wider feminisation of foreign policy, particularly during the Peace Ballot initiative of 1934—35.¹⁶⁹ Marshall's strong feelings on question of peace are perhaps reflective of this wider gendered pacifism of the interwar years, but it is notable that she pointed to her *work* with the League of Nations Union. She appears to have drawn on her professional involvement here, presenting herself as an 'expert' on the League of Nations, rather than drawing on gendered ideas about women's supposed innate pacifism. Similarly, at another meeting, she emphasised her experience as a civil servant in Whitehall.¹⁷⁰ This, she argued, had 'taught her the way about Government offices' and she felt that if a constituent had a problem 'it would not be necessary to ask a question in the House of Commons [because] she could find her way to the right Department and probably be able to put the matter in the right way to the right man'.¹⁷¹ Here, she positioned herself as a professional with prior experience navigating government departments and working with other members of parliament, a relatively unusual position in 1929.

It is possible that her near-inevitable defeat gave her a kind of freedom to attempt a different method of appealing to voters of both genders. She could not compete with Mosley's personal popularity, so used her experiences as a career civil servant to bolster her meagre chances. How enthusiastically this expertise was received is hard to measure, although perhaps tellingly, at the close of the meeting at which she detailed her professional experience, 'there were no questions of the Candidate', suggesting voters were either less than enthused, or in sparse attendance.¹⁷² Equally, it is possible that she may have felt being a female candidate was something of a disadvantage, and consequently chose not to draw any overt attention to her gender. Indeed, she may have been aware of Christabel Pankhurst's unsuccessful campaign here just over ten years earlier, attributed to

¹⁶⁹ Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations; Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918-45*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 2; Helen McCarthy, "'Shut Against the Woman and Workman Alike": Democratising Foreign Policy Between the Wars', in: Gottlieb and Toye, p. 142—158. 21 of the 38 associations in England and Scotland which participated in organisation efforts were women's organisations (p. 149).

¹⁷⁰ For women in the civil service, see: Helen Glew, *Gender, rhetoric and regulation: Women's work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900–55*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

¹⁷¹ 'The Liberals', 27 April 1929, *Smethwick Telephone*, p. 1.

¹⁷² 'The Liberals', 27 April.

Pankhurst's loss to her overtly feminist campaign, and accordingly chosen to emphasise her own professional expertise over her gender.

However, it is notable that, in an election where the 'women's vote' was of great interest because of the franchise extension, Marshall made no explicit or implicit appeals to women voters. Domestic issues were only very briefly referenced: 'each of the great national schemes—housing, telephones, electricity and so on—was dealt with in relation to the Liberal policy', per the record of one meeting, but from the cursory reference in the *Telephone*, it appears Marshall neither offered further details on these policies, nor aimed these remarks at women voters in particular.¹⁷³ It is possible that Marshall made appeals to women voters specifically elsewhere, outside of campaign meetings, which were not reported, but this seems unlikely. Indeed, the *Telephone* reported extensively on a meeting for women voters held by Cynthia Mosley in March 1929; had Marshall, or the Conservative candidate Roy Wise, held similar events, it is doubtful that they would have gone unreported.¹⁷⁴ Her lack of direct appeals to women voters in the constituency may well have contributed to the lack of enthusiasm local women appear to have shown for her campaign.

It does appear, however, that at least some Smethwick women were interested in hearing from Marshall on her policies regarding unemployment. In the week of the election, the *Birmingham Gazette* reported on her 'interesting experience' when:

She was specially invited by the women in one of the poor streets to give them an educational talk. They did not want a political speech, they said, but a simple statement on unemployment without political rancour. So the Liberal candidate told them of her experiences as a social worker in London and illustrated her points with details of her services at the Ministry of Labour. The incident has led to invitations from other parts of the town.¹⁷⁵

Once again, Marshall drew on her professional expertise, but what is most notable here is that these women asked for an 'educational talk' given 'without political rancour'. Arguably, this perhaps indicates that they were politically engaged enough to be frustrated with the contemporary political

¹⁷³ 'The Liberals', 30 March.

¹⁷⁴ 'Lady Cynthia as the Trouble Mender', *Smethwick Telephone*, 9 March 1929, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ 'Round the Midlands. Smethwick', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 25 May 1929, p. 4.

discourse on unemployment, hence seeking a *depoliticised* statement from Marshall. This would, of course, indicate that these women voters were engaged with politics, but not that they had become so by her campaign. Furthermore, like the Stourbridge voter in 1918 who wanted to know about Mary Macarthur's views on what reparations should be undertaken against Germany, these women were seeking her views on policy matters which were not tied to gender. Certainly, women were affected by issues of unemployment like men, but this report contains no suggestion that they were particularly interested in Marshall's views because she was a woman candidate. Any further invitations she received after this were not reported on, though a photograph in the *Birmingham Gazette*, featuring Marshall talking with a mother and her young child was captioned with a note that 'by personally canvassing women voters [...she was] gaining ground for Liberalism'.¹⁷⁶ Here again, however, reporting suggests that she was seeking out women voters to canvas, rather than local women actively looking to participate in her campaign.

Indeed, few local people, save those already associated with the Liberal party here, did so. At meetings, she was frequently introduced by either Joseph Lones, the President of Smethwick's Liberal Association or Mrs Logan, President of Smethwick's Women's Liberal Association (WLA). Records of both organisations do not survive for this period, so it is unclear how many active members either included. A very brief news report in the *Smethwick Telephone* from February 1928, about a year before the election, referred to '130 names' having been 'added to the membership' of the WLA following 'successful organising work', but how active any of these women were—in general, and in this election specifically—is unclear.¹⁷⁷ A *Telephone* article from 1927 notes that Mrs Logan was President of Smethwick's WLA, and a Miss Swinnerton was its secretary, but no further information is available about either woman, and only Logan, and not Swinnerton, appears in reporting detailing Marshall's campaign in 1929.¹⁷⁸ Most of those named in newspaper articles as working on the campaign, aside from Lones and Logan, were party figures from elsewhere, or Marshall's associates

¹⁷⁶ 'Liberal work at Smethwick', *Birmingham Gazette*, 29 May 1929, p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ 'Midland and District', *Smethwick Telephone*, 11 February 1928, p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ 'The Moral Leadership of Nations', *Smethwick Telephone*, 26 November 1927, p. 5. Without further information about these women—a forename, or their address for example—it is impossible to trace them through census returns.

in Cardiff. A week before the election, for example, a campaign meeting was held at which the speakers were Lones, Logan, and Reginald Young, the Liberal candidate for nearby Birmingham Edgbaston.¹⁷⁹ On election day, meanwhile, Marshall toured the constituency, ‘accompanied by Miss Howell, who has been associated with her at Cardiff’.¹⁸⁰ There is, consequently, no evidence that any local women, aside from Mrs Logan who was *already* politically active through Smethwick WLA, were involved with the campaign in any way.

Election day passed relatively quietly, perhaps because, as the *Telephone* conceded, ‘in Smethwick the result...was a foregone conclusion’.¹⁸¹ The newspaper noted that, ‘at one [polling station], a dozen folk were lined up before 7 am [but] at nine o’clock there were few such scenes’, though there was a ‘hectic last hour rush’.¹⁸² Reporters made no reference to the behaviour or enthusiasm of women voters, although they did note that the suggestion of a fashion commentator that ‘flapper’ voters ‘should choose their lipstick to match their Party colours’ would give a distinct ‘advantage’ to the ‘Red Flag Party’.¹⁸³ Marshall was reported to have polled ‘one third more votes’ than the Liberal candidate in Smethwick’s 1926 by-election, but she still only managed 11 per cent of the overall vote and there is a lack of evidence which suggests that this small increase on 1926 was due to her gender.¹⁸⁴ Turnout in Smethwick was marginally higher than the national average—79 per cent of eligible voters in the constituency voted, with the national figure hovering around 76 per cent.¹⁸⁵ However, this difference is almost negligible, and is probably attributable to the popularity of Oswald Mosley. Whether Marshall would have enjoyed more enthusiasm among women voters if she had made more direct appeals to them is doubtful. As the other parts of this chapter have suggested, it is unclear whether such appeals made by other women candidates impacted on the extent to which women in these constituencies might become politically active and engaged. Certainly, however, there

¹⁷⁹ ‘The Liberals’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 18 May 1929, p. 5.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Polling Incidents’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 1 June 1929, p. 2.

¹⁸¹ ‘The Result’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 1 June 1929, p. 2.

¹⁸² ‘Polling Incidents’, *Smethwick Telephone*, 1 June 1929, p. 2.

¹⁸³ ‘Polling Incidents’.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Polling Incidents’.

¹⁸⁵ Local turnout via: ‘General Election’; national figure from, Uberoi, *Turnout at elections*, p. 2.

is very little evidence that local women were actively politicised by Marshall's campaign, or her presence as a female candidate.

Conclusion:

Women parliamentary candidates in the Black Country declined in both prominence and number between 1918 and 1951. As Parts I and II demonstrated, the 1918 general election saw two of the best-known women candidates stand here, Mary Macarthur and Christabel Pankhurst, both of whom were felt to have a genuine chance of success. At the very next election, the Black Country again saw a woman candidate. Though Alice Cooper did not hold the kind of institutional power of Macarthur or Pankhurst, she was, as Part III indicated, known within her constituency, and again felt to have a good chance of winning. After her defeat, however, the decline began: there were no women candidates in 1923 or 1924, and while, as Part IV discussed, the Black Country once again saw a woman candidate in 1929, Maude Marshall was essentially an unknown. After this, the elections of 1931, 1935, 1945 and 1950, not to mention by-elections across this period, did not see any women candidates standing locally despite, as Table 1.3 indicates, the number of women candidates nationwide generally increasing.

Quite why the Black Country became less amenable to women parliamentary candidates over this period is unclear. It is possible that the failure of two such 'big names' as Macarthur and Pankhurst in 1918 may have served to put off later women candidates from standing here. Another explanation might lie in the way certain constituencies became known as relatively safe seats for specific parties. Before 1945, as Table 1.2 indicates, Dudley, for example, was a safe Conservative seat; Wolverhampton East reliably voted Liberal at a time when the party's fortunes were on the decline; and Smethwick was generally a safe Labour seat. After 1945, the entire Black Country became a reliably Labour-voting area. As parties were reluctant to give winnable seats to women candidates, the relative safety of specific constituencies may have discouraged parties from allowing women candidates a chance.¹⁸⁶ That there were not, therefore, more instances of candidates like

¹⁸⁶ For the unwillingness of parties to give women 'winnable' seats, see: Gottlieb and Toye, 'Introduction', p. 9–10; Rasmussen, 'The Role of Women', p. 1046.

Maude Marshall—unknown candidates being assigned unwinnable seats—is perhaps explained by the financial cost of campaigns: electioneering was expensive, and parties might have been unable or unwilling to plough money into a campaign which was inevitably going to end in failure.

Regardless, it is unlikely that any increase in the number or notoriety of women parliamentary candidates standing in the Black Country would have had an impact on the extent to which ordinary local women became actively engaged in the political process through their campaigns. There appears, from the evidence presented in this chapter, little suggestion that local women were politicised by the mere presence of a woman candidate. This is not to say that women here did not participate in the electoral process more generally. Newspaper reports suggest that women, for example, generally attended campaign events such as town hall meetings in these four campaigns, but there is little to suggest that they did so because they had been politicised by the presence of a woman candidate. Meanwhile, local women who took leading roles in campaigns by speaking at meetings, for example, appear to have been *already* politically active and engaged, through the NFWW, in the case of Macarthur, or in Smethwick WLA, in the case of Marshall. Only with Pankhurst's candidature is there clear evidence that ordinary women, with no prior experience of activism, were drawn into her campaign, through their participation in the nomination process. However, as Part II acknowledged, though this is undoubtedly significant, the number of women who participated in this event—24, out of nearly 13,000 eligible women voters—is extremely small. Furthermore, it is unclear what, precisely, about Pankhurst or her campaign had so interested them. While some may have been politicised by the prospect of a woman candidate, there is little concrete evidence to suggest that this was the case.

As suggested earlier, even during an election period, a time when parliamentary politics is arguably at its most local, it does not appear that many ordinary women were able to engage with politics in a particularly active way. Certainly, women voted in these elections, but there is little evidence that many women participated in other ways. There were numerous reasons for this, not least the remoteness of Westminster—both figuratively and literally—for most Black Country women at this time, and arguably today, too: at the 2017 general election, the latest for which figures are

available, two of the ten constituencies with the lowest voter turnout were in the Black Country: Walsall North and West Bromwich West.¹⁸⁷ In subsequent chapters, I suggest that politics was much more accessible when it happened locally, around a specific issue with which individuals might become more directly involved: the ‘practical politics’ thesis, articulated in the Introduction. Rather than this happening through parliamentary politics or general elections, this happened, it is argued, on a far more local level, often within women’s organisations. The following three chapters therefore investigate the extent to which women were able to participate in the political process through such organisations and structures in the Black Country beginning, in the next chapter, with an examination of women’s politicisation through non-partisan housewives’ associations.

¹⁸⁷ The figures were 56.6 per cent and 54.7 per cent respectively, with the national turnout figure 68.8 per cent. Uberoi, *Turnout at Elections*, p. 6.

Chapter Two

Housewives' associations and women's activism

Introduction:

This chapter uses archival evidence from three Black Country housewives' associations—that is, groups that were non-partisan and non-sectarian, and open to all women regardless of their age, professional, or marital status—to consider the ways in which these organisations acted as spaces in which women might become politically active by increasing their involvement in local public life. It suggests that these organisations were most effective in doing so through what might be understood as a 'practical politics': political action rooted in the local, the specific and the pragmatic. Often single-issue and practical in nature, this kind of work enabled women to become active in the public sphere by taking specific action on a particular issue. The chapter takes a case study approach, considering one organisation during a certain time, and is formed of three parts. Part I examines Walsall's Tipperary Rooms, a social club for the women family members of servicemen during the First World War; Part II, Wolverhampton's branch of the National Council of Women (NCW) in the 1920s; and Part III, the thirteen Black Country Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) Centres during the Second World War. While the previous chapter suggested that there was little evidence that the presence of a woman parliamentary candidate served to politicise local women, this was not true of these three associations. Over this period, there is evidence that women became increasingly active in the public sphere within their communities, through their involvement with these organisations, and specifically through the practical work these groups undertook.

In Part I, it is suggested that the Tipperary Rooms in First World War-era Walsall were a space in which local power structures might be contested. Several Tipperary Rooms clubs were established across Britain during the conflict, growing out of fears surrounding so-called 'khaki fever'.¹ The Tipperary Rooms in Walsall were initially established by a group of middle-class women

¹ Its origins, and these wider concerns, are discussed more fully below but for a useful overview of 'khaki fever', see Angela Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 29, (1994), p. 325—347.

from the town, who were keen to ensure working-class women had a quasi-domestic, supervised space in which to socialise. These women, members of the club, were actively excluded from its organisation. However, members were nonetheless able to affect the running of the organisation by choosing how, and when, to interact with it, as evidenced by the club's internal records: annual reports and minutes of meetings.² Initially run as intended—as a supervised social club, with educational lectures—the Tipperary Rooms appear not to have been hugely popular and were not well-used. However, after members who worked in the war industries in Walsall asked to use the club's dining facilities, as they had none at the factory at which they worked, the purpose and function of the organisation changed, and its popularity increased. A Tipperary Rooms canteen was established, serving women war workers in Walsall, making hundreds of meals each day, but as the conflict came to an end and workers were made redundant, the need for the canteen fell away, and so did the usage of the Rooms. The organising committee attempted to reinstate the supervised social club approach from its initial establishment, but this again did not prove popular with members and the Rooms closed in early 1920. Thus, Part I argues that while the generally working-class members of the club were not formally permitted a say in how the Tipperary Rooms were run, they were able to affect this by choosing how, and when, to interact with its services. Furthermore, it took a practical issue—specifically, the provision of meals—to effect this change.

Part II then examines Wolverhampton NCW in the interwar period. The NCW was designed as an umbrella organisation to which other women's groups could affiliate to work together to 'improve the legal, social and economic status of women'.³ It had been established in 1895 as the National Union of Women Workers, but Wolverhampton's branch was inaugurated in late 1918, shortly after the national executive had voted to rename the organisation the National Council of Women. The NCW was strictly non-partisan, but was the most overtly political of the three associations studied here, as it actively campaigned on a number of issues affecting women. For

² The archival records of this organisation are housed at: Walsall Archives and Local History Centre, Ref: 335, Tipperary Rooms Collection. Henceforth 'TR Collection'.

³ Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-64*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 19–23.

example, after women became eligible for the role in 1919, the NCW made working to increase the number of women magistrates a priority.⁴ In Wolverhampton, NCW meetings were held monthly, with each meeting focusing on a specific issue or topic. Part II uses evidence from this branch's minutes to argue that women in Wolverhampton were increasingly engaged in local public life through the campaigns that the NCW waged in the town. It draws on three specific campaigns central to the interwar women's movement—for women magistrates, women police, and increased access to birth control—to consider how the approximately two hundred members of Wolverhampton NCW became politically active through the local work done on these three issues. It uses evidence from the minutes of the branch's meetings to argue that members of Wolverhampton NCW could be effectively taught how they might engage in the political process, and be encouraged into increased participation in local public life, through the organisation's work in Wolverhampton. Furthermore, although the branch's executive committee was made up largely of middle-class women, a small number of working-class women also took on leading roles, indicating that there were perhaps more opportunities for women from different social backgrounds to mix within this organisation than in the Tipperary Rooms.

Finally, Part III assesses the thirteen Black Country WVS Centres during the Second World War.⁵ The WVS was established by Lady Stella Reading in 1938, at the behest of the Home Office, to encourage women into participation in civil defence work. Unlike either the Tipperary Rooms or NCW, the WVS received some government funding, used to employ organisers on a regional and national level, but at local level, all members were unpaid volunteers.⁶ Unlike the NCW, the WVS did not hold monthly meetings to discuss particular topics, but instead encouraged women to take an active role in whatever civil defence work was required, whenever it was required. In practice, as Part III demonstrates, this meant anything from preparing a short notice sandwich lunch for Eleanor

⁴ Anne Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: the campaign for women magistrates in England and Wales, 1910–1939', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (2007), p. 501–518.

⁵ The thirteen Centres were in: Bilston, Darlaston, Dudley, Halesowen, Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Stourbridge, Tipton, Walsall, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton.

⁶ Reading employed women to act as Regional Organisers, each of whom managed the WVS Centre in a given region (using the same regions as the government's civil defence planners). The Black Country was part of Region 9. However, below this level, no women were paid for their work.

Roosevelt when she visited the area as part of a 1942 tour of Britain,⁷ to providing bathing facilities to any neighbours who might require decontamination after being caught up in a gas attack.⁸ Part III draws on the records of Black Country WVS Centres—the monthly narrative reports written by the Centre Organiser—to argue that, while the leadership of the Black Country WVS Centres tended to remain the preserve of middle-class women, as James Hinton has argued was the case nationwide,⁹ many working-class members of the WVS in the Black Country were able to engage in meaningful ways with local public life through the organisation's work. The WVS, this section argues, went some way towards recognising the value of women's domestic labour, particularly through the Housewives' Service. This was a sub-section of the WVS, designed to enable women whose caring responsibilities tied them to their homes to undertake voluntary war work in their very immediate communities: their street or neighbourhood, for example. In the Black Country, it was frequently the largest section of a WVS Centre. Participation in the WVS here, it is suggested, gave members a recognised role in the local—often *very* local—public sphere, encouraging and enabling them to take an active role in their communities.

The chapter examines only the work done by Black Country branches of these three organisations, although all had national reach. This is significant, as close examination of how local branches operated can complicate existing narratives, providing a more nuanced explanation of how these organisations actually worked on the ground, and how they contribute to the 'archaeology' of women's politics in a specific place.¹⁰ There is, for example, a general acceptance that these three organisations—the Tipperary Rooms, the NCW and the WVS—were dominated by middle-class women.¹¹ This chapter does not dispute that such women generally dominated in *leadership* roles in

⁷ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WVH, November 1942.

⁸ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WSL, May 1942.

⁹ James Hinton, *Women, social leadership, and the Second World War: Continuities of Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Hinton's arguments are discussed much more fully in Part III below.

¹⁰ Karen Hunt and June Hannam, 'Towards an archaeology of interwar women's politics: the local and the everyday', in: Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage. Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-45*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan), p.124—141.

¹¹ A fuller review of the existing literature on these organisations appears below. The Tipperary Rooms are almost entirely absent from the historiography, but the work of Woollacott on 'khaki fever' suggests that social clubs to 'control' this phenomenon were generally organised by middle-class women who had particular concerns over the sexuality of young, working-class women (Woollacott, 'Khaki Fever'). Beaumont

local branches, with only a few, relatively unique, exceptions within the NCW. However, it does suggest that working-class members of these associations had a significant impact on their day-to-day running, which has to some extent been underestimated. In turn, these organisations were increasingly able to draw these women into public life over the period considered here. Thus, despite its local focus, the chapter has wider implications for a more nuanced understanding how ordinary women might become politicised in the period under investigation, which moves away from more ‘top down’ narratives of these organisations’ national policies, and instead focuses on the practical work they did in the towns in which they operated. Before examining each organisation in turn, however, the chapter first contextualises these narratives in a survey of the wider historiography of housewives’ associations in this period.

The role of housewives’ associations within the women’s movement:

As the Introduction explored, the interwar years were initially understood as a time in which women retreated ‘back to home and duty’, following the disruption and upheaval of the First World War, leading some historians to suggest that the emancipatory effect of the franchise was not as liberating as suffrage campaigners had hoped.¹² This idea has now been challenged, in no small part because research into housewives’ associations has provided evidence for the ways in which the post-suffrage women’s movement diversified, with ‘voluntary organisations, religious groups, service clubs and professional societies seeking to bring women together over a variety of issues’ and enabling them to play an increased role in public life.¹³ However, while it is now generally accepted that these groups contributed to the vibrancy of the post-1918 women’s movement in Britain, a significant debate is still ongoing regarding whether housewives’ associations can be understood as feminist.

acknowledges the dominance of middle-class women in the NCW, pointing out that although it was designed as an organisation to which all women’s groups might affiliate, few working-class women’s organisations did so (Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 19–23). Hinton’s central thesis, meanwhile, is that the WVS enabled middle-class women to retain control over the local public sphere (Hinton, *Women, social leadership*).

¹² See for example: Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918–1939*, (London: Pandora, 1989); Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914–59* (London: Macmillan, 1992); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-war Britain*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780–1980*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997); Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain since 1900*, (London: Macmillan, 1999).

¹³ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 1.

Maggie Andrews, in her study of the Women's Institute (WI), argues 'for a broader perception of feminism and the Women's Institute Movement within it'.¹⁴ Established in Britain during the First World War, in part because of the need to increase the nation's homegrown food supply, Andrews charts the way the WI went on to become an important campaigner on women's issues, especially those affecting rural women. It was not solely a campaigning organisation: it also placed great emphasis on developing skills in arts, crafts, and domestic tasks, as well as acting as a place where women could go to make friends and relax, particularly significant at a time when women's leisure time was very limited.¹⁵ However, because the campaigns with which the WI were involved were concerned with the struggle to 'improve ordinary women's lives', Andrews argues that it can be understood as a feminist organisation.¹⁶ As she acknowledges, however, the WI did not outwardly identify as such. This was because the WI, like other contemporary housewives' associations, such as the Townswomen's Guilds (TG), the equivalent organisation established for urban women, sought to ensure it would welcome women of all backgrounds, including those who did not consider themselves feminist. Nonetheless, Andrews suggests that 'semantic differences' are less important than 'how these organisations operated at a day-to-day level in ordinary people's lives'.¹⁷ The campaigns in which the WI engaged to improve women's lives—for instance, to improve rural housing and sanitation—can be construed as feminist, despite the fact that individual members of the organisation may not have identified themselves as feminists.¹⁸

In contrast, Cairtriona Beaumont, whose work considers a number of housewives' associations including the WI, TG, NCW, Mother's Union and Catholic Women's League, suggests that these organisations should not be considered feminist, despite their extremely significant contribution to the post-suffrage women's movement, because such groups, 'embraced domesticity, never challenged

¹⁴ Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (New and revised edition), (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015, originally 1997), p. 19.

¹⁵ For women's leisure in this period, see: Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Andrews, *Acceptable Face*, p. 28.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Andrews, *Acceptable Face*, Chapter 6 for campaigns.

traditional gender roles, and were reluctant to be associated with feminist beliefs'.¹⁹ Rather than using feminism in campaigns to improve women's legislative rights and status, Beaumont argues that they instead embraced the concept of citizenship.²⁰ As a result, she argues that 'it would be wrong to attempt to reconceptualise these groups so that they take on a more recognisable feminist identity', disputing Andrews' assertions.²¹ Beaumont is correct in stating that these organisations veered away from the 'feminist' label, although, as noted, this was at least in part a decision taken to ensure women who did not identify as feminist might feel as welcome as those who did. Whether they cannot be viewed as feminist because they did not seek to challenge traditional gender roles is arguably less clear. Indeed, as Andrews argues with reference to the WI, such organisations could play an important role in recognising the value of women's domestic labour, in turn raising its status.²² While both agree that housewives' associations played a significant role in the wider women's movement in this period, significant debate is still ongoing as to whether such organisations can be understood as feminist.

The introductory chapters discuss contemporary ideas and understandings of feminism in this period.²³ Certainly, it is important to state that none of the three associations in this chapter—the Tipperary Rooms, the NCW or the WVS—labelled themselves as feminist organisations, although, of course, individual members of these organisations, may have identified as such. Nonetheless, some of the practical work a given association did on a specific issue could be categorised as feminist, because of the impact it had on breaking down gendered barriers for women, even if the organisation itself did not use this term. For example, as I argue in Part II, Wolverhampton NCW actively campaigned for

¹⁹ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 2.

²⁰ Caitriona Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organisations in England, 1928-39', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2000), p. 411—429.

²¹ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 2.

²² Andrews, *Acceptable Face*, p. 112—120.

²³ For an overview of feminist theory, I have drawn on: Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Specific texts on the history of feminism in Britain which I have found useful include: Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: a study of feminism as a social movement* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981); Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Barbara Caine, *English feminism, 1780-1980*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); June Hannam, *Feminism (Seminar Studies) 2nd edition*, (London: Routledge, 2012); Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

women in the town to become magistrates after this office was opened to all genders. This was undoubtedly a feminist cause, although neither the Wolverhampton branch nor the wider NCW labelled itself as a feminist organisation. This is not to suggest that all the work these three groups undertook might be understood as feminist. At times, their work arguably reinforced gender barriers, even acting in an anti-feminist way. As Part I argues, for instance, Walsall's Tipperary Rooms were originally established because of fears surrounding so-called 'khaki fever', with the organisation established to provide a space in which women who were perceived as being at risk from 'khaki fever' might socialise under the watchful eye of middle-class women on the organising committee.²⁴

Therefore, given the differences between and within these associations and their relationship with feminism, I have found it most helpful to move away somewhat from considering whether their work could or could not be categorised as feminist, and instead have focused more on understanding the practical ways in which these organisations allowed women to engage with local public life. This allows for the contributions that the three groups made to the contemporary women's movement to be understood in terms of the actual work they did on the ground, in the Black Country, and how this encouraged ordinary women to become engaged in public life and in some instances the political process. Research centred around the day-to-day work of local branches of housewives' associations also reveals how these associations' national policies were enacted 'on the ground', in specific places, broadening our understanding of how ordinary women actually engaged in politics within their communities in this period. This is significant, as some of the most recent research into housewives' associations largely utilises these groups' magazines and internal publications, such as the WI's *Home and Country*.²⁵ These periodicals, as Maria DiCenzo writes, 'were instrumental in communicating the

²⁴ The 'khaki fever' epidemic is discussed much more fully in Part I. See: Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever" and its Control'.

²⁵ Lorna Gibson, 'The Women's Institute and Jerusalem's Suffrage Past', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (2006), p. 323—335; Rachel Ritchie, "'Beauty isn't all a matter of looking glamorous": attitudes to glamour and beauty in 1950s women's magazines', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 5, (2014), p. 723—743; Caitriona Beaumont, 'Housewives and Citizens: Encouraging Active Citizenship in the Print Media of Housewives' Associations during the interwar years', in: *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918—1939*, ed. Catherine Clay *et al*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 408—420.

values, activities and goals of a range of women-only groups'.²⁶ But, as Karen Hunt argues, there is a danger that the discourse located within these kinds of sources might come to be read as experience, which was not necessarily the case, particularly on a local level.²⁷ Focusing on organisations' internal records, and specifically minutes and reports from specific branches, enables a deeper understanding of how national policy was enacted—or sometimes, was not enacted—in local branches. Research into other geographical areas has already highlighted the importance of this approach. For example, in their study of housewives' associations in Edinburgh and Glasgow, Esther Breitenbach and Valerie Wright have pointed to the construction of temporary alliances between various such groups in these cities when working on specific issues, such as housing—alliances which were not always endorsed by the national executive of these same organisations.²⁸ Recent work by Sarah Hellawell on the internationalism of the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG) in the interwar years, meanwhile, utilises minutes from Darlington WCG to understand how this internationalism 'played out on a day-to-day basis' in the town, as well as through the WCG's national and international policies.²⁹

This chapter uses similar local records of Walsall's Tipperary Rooms; Wolverhampton's NCW, and the 13 Black Country WVS Centres to understand how these organisations enabled ordinary women to take on an increasingly active role in local public life across this period. These records include minutes of meetings and annual reports for the Tipperary Rooms³⁰; minutes of Wolverhampton NCW meetings,³¹ and monthly narrative reports for each WVS Centre³². To an

²⁶ Maria DiCenzo, 'Women's Organisations and Communities of Interest: Introduction', in Clay *et al*, p. 405—407, p. 405.

²⁷ Karen Hunt, 'Labour Woman and the Housewife', in Clay *et al*, p. 238—251, p. 239.

²⁸ Esther Breitenbach and Valerie Wright, 'Women as Active Citizens: Glasgow and Edinburgh c.1918–1939', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2014), p. 401—420.

²⁹ Sarah Hellawell, 'A Strong International Spirit': The Influence of Internationalism on the Women's Co-operative Guild', *Twentieth Century British History*, (2020 advanced access online).

³⁰ Walsall Local History Centre, Accession Number: 335 Tipperary Rooms Collection (1915—1920). 335/1, *Tipperary Rooms Minutes Book (1915—1920)*. Henceforth: 'TR Minutes, [date of meeting]'. 335/2, *Tipperary Rooms Ephemera*. This collection includes a small number of documents, including annual reports.

³¹ Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies, D-SO-8: National Council of Women, Wolverhampton Branch (1918 - 1992). D-SO-8/3/1, *Minute Book (April 1919—March 1924)*, D-SO-8/3/1, *Minute Book (April 1924—December 1931)*. Henceforward: 'NCW Minutes, [date of meeting]'.

³² Royal Voluntary Service Archives and Heritage Collection includes monthly narrative reports for most WVS Centres in Britain between 1938 and 1945, digitally accessible at: <<http://catalogue.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/calmview/>> Monthly narrative reports are collated into PDFs, for each year, and were consulted for all Black Country branches. Each has its own unique identifier, provided in full below, for example: WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1939-WORC/SBG B for narrative reports from

extent, even at local level this presents a ‘top down’ view of each group, in which the voices of ordinary members can remain silent. This can be exacerbated by the varying degrees of visibility of leaders and members within these branches. Women on executive committees—the chairman or secretary, for example—are frequently named, but ordinary rank-and-file members’ details were not recorded. Thus, while it is possible to trace senior figures within local branches back through census returns and similar data, which allows for some understanding of their social background, it is not possible to do so with these unnamed ordinary members. This is significant, as within the organisations studied, leadership roles were generally the preserve of middle-class women, with a few exceptions, as discussed, while members were more likely to be working-class. Nonetheless, it is still possible to examine how, when, and where such members chose to interact and engage with these organisations. In turn, this allows for an understanding of precisely how such women engaged with local public life, and became politicised, even, as Part I discusses, in a relatively undemocratic organisation like the Tipperary Rooms.

Part I: the Tipperary Rooms, c.1915—c. 1920:

During the First World War, many middle- and upper-class women took up voluntary work within various philanthropic organisations established to aid what was broadly termed ‘the war effort’.³³

Peter Grant estimates that over 18,000 new charities were created during the conflict, a proportion of which were focused on undertaking social welfare work with women and children left behind on the home front.³⁴ Walsall’s Tipperary Rooms, a social club for the wives and women family members of servicemen, established in the spring of 1915, can broadly be understood within this wider culture.³⁵

The club was run relatively autonomously in Walsall by a small group of around twenty middle-class women, some of whom were involved in a range of other voluntary and philanthropic organisations

Stourbridge in 1939. Where referring to a specific event, I include this identifier and the date of the monthly report, such as WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1939-WORC/SBG B, December 1939.

³³ Paul Ward, ‘Women of Britain say go: women’s patriotism in the First World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 12, No 1, (2001), p. 23—45; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 95—100.

³⁴ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, (London: Routledge, 2014).

³⁵ The Minutes Book dates from March 1915 but notice of its establishment appears in local newspapers from February 1915.

locally, including Walsall's Child Welfare Association, examined in Chapter 3. Its members were generally working-class women, and the Tipperary Rooms were run *by* the middle-class women on the organising committee, *for* these members, who were prohibited from joining the committee.

Nonetheless, the club's members were still able to affect its running by choosing how and when to interact with and use its facilities. As is shortly explored, the Rooms were established to provide a supervised, quasi-domestic space for members but were initially little used. However, once the Tipperary Rooms' canteen was launched—at the behest of some local women workers, who found they had no dining facilities at their munitions factory—they became genuinely popular, and, as the club met a real, practical need in these women's lives, it was well used. When the war industries began to wind down and the need for a canteen lessened, however, attendance once again fell, and the Rooms failed to sustain their popularity. As such, although members were not permitted to join the Rooms' organising committee and were not allowed a formal say in how the club was run, they had some agency over how and when they used the facilities provided, and thus were able to affect its running. Arguably, therefore, the Tipperary Rooms can be understood as a space where local power and influence were contested and challenged by women of different social classes during the First World War.³⁶

Tipperary Rooms clubs were established across Britain and Ireland during the conflict, though they have been little studied.³⁷ The concept grew out of wartime concerns over so-called 'khaki fever', understood by contemporaries as a kind of moral disease characterised by the sexualised excitement which gripped young, working-class women and girls at the sight of men in military uniform. 'Khaki fever' was perceived as particularly prevalent in the early months of the conflict, and,

³⁶ I draw here to an extent on the work of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who argues that culture and media can have different—even opposing—meanings ascribed to them by their producers and their consumers. Contesting these meanings can expose and contest the political and power structures on which they are based. The 'meaning' (or usage) of the Tipperary Rooms depended on whether an individual was involved in its running or its usage, and thus contesting the way in which the Rooms were used, arguably contested the local power structures in the town. Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (Milton Keynes: SAGE Publications, 1997).

³⁷ One exception is: Jack Southern, 'A stronghold of Liberalism? The north-east Lancashire cotton weaving districts and the First World War', in: Lucy Bland and Richard Carr (eds.), *Labour, British Radicalism and the First World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 91—107.

while historians have questioned the veracity of the supposed epidemic, they acknowledge that the intense discourse surrounding it—almost a moral panic—led to numerous attempts to try to control it. Essentially, while the extent to which working-class women were genuinely affected by ‘khaki fever’ may have been exaggerated, the attempts of many middle-class women to police their behaviour in response to the ‘outbreak’ were very real.³⁸ Alongside these anxieties, wartime also saw increased concern over working-class women’s drinking habits, and especially their presence in public houses.³⁹

Such anxieties informed the suffragist Emily Juson Kerr’s letter to the *Times* in October 1914, in which she highlighted the ‘increasing numbers of our poorer sisters in...the gin palaces’, attributing this to their increased earning power, and the absence of men at home. She proposed that ‘we [presumably addressing female *Times* readers] take rooms in the most congested parts of our cities, encourage our women to meet there’, where they would be provided with ‘the latest war news’, ‘paper and ink free of charge’, and cheap, non-alcoholic refreshments.⁴⁰ Her idea proved enormously popular, at least among those with the means to establish such clubs: the first opened in Hammersmith in October 1914, christened the ‘Tipperary Rooms’ in reference to the popular military song.⁴¹ By November, five more ‘recreation rooms’, given the same name, had been established across London,

³⁸ For Khaki Fever and the attendant moral panic, see: Woollacott, ‘“Khaki Fever” and its Control’; Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1992); Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998); Anne Spurgeon, ‘Mortality or Morality? Keeping Workers Safe in the First World War’, in Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (eds.), *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, (London: Palgrave, 2014), p. 57–72; Laura Lammasniemi, ‘Regulation 40D: punishing promiscuity on the home front during the First World War’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (2017), p. 584–596; Catherine Lee, ‘Giddy Girls’, ‘Scandalous Statements’ and a ‘Burst Bubble’: the war babies panic of 1914–1915, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (2018), p. 565–578; Leanne McCormick, ‘The Dangers and Temptations of the Street: managing female behaviour in Belfast during the First World War’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (2018), p. 414–431. ‘Khaki fever’ was not a new phenomenon, earlier iterations of the disease sometimes being referred to as ‘scarlet fever’, after British soldiers’ redcoats: Louise Carter, ‘Scarlet Fever: Female Enthusiasm for Men in Uniform, 1780–1815’, in: Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack (eds.), *Britain’s Soldiers: Rethinking War and Society, 1715–1815*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014).

³⁹ David Gutzke, ‘Gender, Class, and Public Drinking in Britain During the First World War’, *Social History*, Vol. 27, (1994), p. 367–391; Holly Dunbar, ‘Women and Alcohol During the First World War in Ireland’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (2018), p. 379–396.

⁴⁰ ‘Temperance Among Women’ [Letter to the Editor], *Times*, 6 October 1914, p. 9, via *Times Digital Archive*, via <<http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/B9k3k6>>, consulted 9 July 2019. Emily Juson Kerr was a leading member of the Women’s Freedom League (WFL), see: Anne Logan, ‘Emily Juson Kerr’, *Women’s History Kent*, via <<https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/womenshistorykent/2018/10/02/emily-juson-kerr-1857-1928/>> consulted 9 July 2019.

⁴¹ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860–1930*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 232.

with clubs also opening in ‘Norwich, Birmingham, Ireland [its location was not stated] and Bristol’.⁴²

Jack Southern writes that the movement ‘gained particular traction among the female industrial populations’, with two Tipperary Rooms established in north east Lancashire by early 1915.⁴³

Plans were underway for Walsall’s Tipperary Rooms by February 1915, with many of the local great and good, including Richard and Alice Cooper, donating money or furniture.⁴⁴ It opened in a house rented on Bridge Street, in the town centre, in March.⁴⁵ Membership cost one penny, with an additional, optional subscription fund. By 1916, members’ subscriptions had raised £1 11s 2d, compared with the £14 18s donated by the organising committee, suggestive of a not insignificant difference in the relative affluence of members and organisers.⁴⁶ Membership allowed women to attend the Rooms during their opening hours, initially 2pm to 9pm daily. The Rooms’ day-to-day running was undertaken by caretakers Mr and Mrs Carroll; light refreshments were available to purchase at cost price, and a nursery was established, although as ‘so few children used it’, possibly because the Rooms did not open until 2pm—not a terribly useful time for most working mothers, this was closed in September 1916.⁴⁷ Letter writing facilities were provided, and weekly entertainments planned. ‘The Rooms’, wrote the organising secretary Dorothea Layton, in the *Walsall Observer*, ‘[are] supplying an answer to a very frequent and very urgent question—“Where can I forget my worries and have a bit of a talk and a laugh?”’.⁴⁸ A 1916 appeal in the *Walsall Observer* for additional funding noted that entertainments were usually ‘educational lectures’, and there were ‘weekly working [knitting] parties’, with the Rooms functioning as a place where members could ‘get

⁴² The other London rooms were in North Kensington, St Pancras, Chelsea, Marylebone, and Shepherd’s Bush. ‘Recreation Rooms For Women’ [Letter to the Editor], *Western Daily Press*, 13 November 1914, p. 6.

⁴³ These were in Padiham in January 1915 and Burnley in February. Southern, ‘A stronghold of Liberalism?’, p. 95—6.

⁴⁴ ‘Tipperary Club for Walsall’, *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 27 February 1915, p. 7.

⁴⁵ ‘Tipperary Rooms’, *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 13 March 1915, p. 7.

⁴⁶ 335/2, *Tipperary Rooms Ephemera*. ‘Statement of Accounts’, 1916.

⁴⁷ TR Minutes, 26 September 1916. The minutes record the room being ‘given over to Mr and Mrs Carroll’, implying they lived on site.

⁴⁸ ‘Correspondence’, *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 4 December 1915, p. 6.

instruction'.⁴⁹ This was all done under the watchful eye of Mrs Carroll, and at least one member of the organising committee, acting as chaperones.

The committee consisted of seventeen women from Walsall, at least some of whom came were involved in other local; a full list can be found in Appendix B. There was significant overlap with Walsall Child Welfare Association (WCWA)'s voluntary committee (see Chapter 3). Six members of the Tipperary Rooms committee, including Dorothea Layton (secretary) and Margaret Negus (chair from 1916) were also active in WCWA.⁵⁰ Many members of the committee were also involved in other local voluntary and philanthropic organisations. For example, Negus ran Walsall's Girls' Friendly Society and was Commandant of Lichfield Volunteer Aid Detachment Hospital during the war.⁵¹ Pre-war, Layton, along with fellow committee members, Amy Lowry and Mrs Jesson, had been active within Walsall's suffrage movement.⁵² Lowry and Ellen Windle, another committee member, were both involved with Walsall's Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association (SSAFA).⁵³ As Appendix B also demonstrates, the committee members who could be traced back through the 1911 census appear to have been middle-class women who were the wives or daughters of men working in business or the professions, and all employed at least one live-in domestic servant in 1911.⁵⁴ The only exceptions to this were Margaret Negus, who was from a family of local gentry, and Mrs Dix, President of Walsall Women's Co-operative Guild. Dix, however, only appears from the minutes to

⁴⁹ 'The Tipperary Rooms: Letter to the Editor', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 1 April 1916, p. 6.

⁵⁰ The other four were: Amy Lowry; Mabel Paice; Mrs Jesson and Ellen Windle. See Appendix B.

⁵¹ 'Death of Miss M J Negus', *Lichfield Mercury*, 13 May 1927, p. 5. 'Freeford VAD Hospital. Fourth Anniversary', *Lichfield Mercury*, 1 November 1918, p. 3.

⁵² 'Open Letter to Mr Cooper. Votes for Women', *Walsall Advertiser*, 30 March 1912, p. 9. All three were among the signatories. Layton helped establish Walsall WSPU; Cottrell later acted as its secretary, and Lowry was NUWSS secretary. Lowry and Jesson were on the committee of Walsall Church League for Women's Suffrage. See Appendix B for further references.

⁵³ Walsall's Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association (SSAFA) records are no longer in existence, but WCWA held a joint meeting with SSAFA in January 1917, and the names of SSAFA representatives, including Lowry and Windle, were noted. See: Walsall Local History Centre, Accession Number: 360, *Walsall Child Welfare Association Minutes Book*, meeting of 31 January 1917.

⁵⁴ See Appendix B for all references.

have attended the first committee meeting and there is no record of her taking an active role within the organisation, and so she may reasonably be discounted.⁵⁵

While not all members of the committee could be traced back through the census, it does appear that the Rooms were run exclusively by a network of middle-class women who were actively involved in several similar organisations in Walsall. These groups, including WCWA and SSAFA, generally focused on improving the social and moral welfare of children or working-class women, and allowed the middle-class women involved in their running to carve out a role in local public life through what Eileen Yeo terms ‘social motherhood’: a kind of voluntary social work in which they might educate, inform or otherwise supervise working-class women.⁵⁶ As Yeo notes, this ‘social motherhood’, while important for allowing middle-class women some roles within the local public sphere, ‘created particularly unfavourable conditions for [...] sisterhood among women of different social classes’.⁵⁷ Involvement with the organising of the Tipperary Rooms enabled these women to increase their visibility in Walsall’s public sphere, and this activism may have served to politicise them. However, as noted, these women retained formal control over the club and as such the number of women who were able to become active in public life through volunteering on its organising committee was limited.

Certainly, no working-class members were able to do so—at least formally. No full list of members was kept, so it has not been possible to trace these women as it has those on the committee. However, as the clubs were designed as spaces for women who might have fallen victim to ‘khaki fever’, and because the committee took steps to keep all costs associated with joining the club low—membership, as noted above, cost only one penny—this suggests that many members were drawn from the working classes. These members were deliberately excluded from the organising committee. While initially this was not made explicit within minutes, there is no evidence that members joined

⁵⁵ TR Minutes, 16 March 1915, the first minuted meeting lists her among those present, but she appears not to have attended future meetings.

⁵⁶ Eileen Janes Yeo ‘Social motherhood and the sexual communion of labour in British Social Science, 1850–1950’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1992), p. 63–87; ‘The creation of ‘motherhood’ and Women’s responses in Britain and France, 1750–1914’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (1999), p. 201–218.

⁵⁷ Yeo, ‘Social motherhood’, p. 80.

the committee in its first year. Then, in January 1916, ‘after hearing the experiences at Wolverhampton’ a decision was taken that ‘members should not be asked to be on the committee’.⁵⁸ Unlike in the NCW and WVS, where it was, in theory if not always in practice, possible for members to take on leadership roles, in the Tipperary Rooms a strict delineation clearly existed between committee women and ordinary members of the Rooms.

This did not mean, however, that these members had no say over how the Rooms were run. Instead, there is strong evidence that these women contested control of the Rooms by choosing when, and why, to use their facilities. Initially, it appears from minutes that Walsall’s Rooms were run as intended by Emily Juson Kerr in her original proposal in the *Times*—as a social club for the wives and women family members of servicemen. In Walsall, organisers envisioned the Rooms as a kind of supervised social club, where members could, according to the Rooms’ secretary Dorothea Layton, enjoy ‘entertainments’, ‘get instruction’, and partake in ‘working parties’.⁵⁹ The first ‘entertainment’, held the week the Rooms opened, seems to have set the tone: a ‘lecture on the progress of the war’ delivered by Julia Slater, wife of the Mayor of Walsall.⁶⁰ Though precise figures were not recorded, it does not appear that this approach proved terribly popular among members, who do not seem to have attended such talks in huge numbers—minutes note that, almost immediately, the planned weekly ‘entertainments’ were scaled back to monthly, as ‘so few women come’.⁶¹ While the organisers might have envisaged the Rooms as a quasi-domestic space in which working-class women at risk of ‘khaki fever’ might be suitably supervised as they attended educational talks or were instructed into various working parties, members appear less than enthused by this approach, and simply chose not to attend such events.

However, it did not take long for the initial purpose and function of the Rooms to change, a change driven by the desires of the members, and which rapidly improved attendance. In June 1915,

⁵⁸ TR Minutes, 11 January 1916. No further detail is provided, so it is not possible to know what ‘the experiences’ were at Wolverhampton, but this is suggestive of a similar club in the town.

⁵⁹ ‘The Tipperary Rooms: Letter to the Editor’.

⁶⁰ TR Minutes, 16 March 1915. Mrs Slater was one of two victims of an air raid which hit Walsall in January 1916, see: Paul Fantom, ‘Zeppelins over the Black Country: The Midlands’ First Blitz’, *Midland History*, Vol. 39, No. 2, (2014), p. 236—254.

⁶¹ TR Minutes, 13 April 1915.

women employed at a local factory asked to use the Rooms' shop, which sold light refreshments, during their dinner hour; it appears limited canteen facilities were available at their workplace. The committee agreed to open the Rooms at 12pm to allow this.⁶² As Anne Spurgeon has demonstrated, many factories employing women in war work had limited facilities, such as canteens or bathrooms, for their female employees, a situation which did not begin to change until after the passage of the Factory Act in 1916.⁶³ Until such facilities could be provided at this particular Walsall factory, women workers there needed a quick solution to a pressing problem: where were they going to eat? In asking the Tipperary Rooms committee if their facilities might be used, the women found an answer to their problem—but they were also subtly exerting some control over the purpose and function of the club, contributing to a shift in its very nature, and consequent increase in its membership.

By 1916, the Rooms' Annual Report noted that 'the character of the Club has somewhat changed...the Rooms are now used more as a canteen as nearly all the members are doing munitions work', adding that 'the need for a canteen in Walsall is so great that the Rooms have been opened by request from 6 to 8am each week day [to serve breakfast] as well as from 3pm to 9pm'.⁶⁴ The shop, which had supplied cheap refreshments, transformed into a canteen serving hot meals, and was popular among those employed in war related industries in Walsall, including 'munitions workers...Post Office girls, bus and tram girls',⁶⁵ and 'boys from an electrical works' who were permitted to use the facilities 'as long as they continued to behave properly'.⁶⁶ By 1917, the canteen was serving, on average, 1000 people each week, and by early 1918, it claimed to be feeding several thousand people a day, serving breakfast and dinner, and averaging monthly profits of about £8,

⁶² TR Minutes, 1 June 1915. Minutes do not record precisely where these women worked.

⁶³ Anne Spurgeon, 'Mortality or Morality? Keeping Workers Safe in First World War', in: *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (eds.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 57—72, p. 61.

⁶⁴ 335/2, *Tipperary Rooms Ephemera*. 'Annual Report', 1916.

⁶⁵ Annual Report, 1916.

⁶⁶ TR Minutes, 25 January 1916.

despite food being sold as close to cost price as possible.⁶⁷ In contrast, before the canteen was established, it was noted that only ‘about 270 [people] have used the Rooms’.⁶⁸

The canteen’s popularity was arguably due to two factors: little competition, and the fact that it met a real, practical need in women’s lives. As Bryce Evans has demonstrated, the conflict saw rising food poverty resulting from food shortages, price rises, and women’s increased working hours, and so demand for canteens was high.⁶⁹ Recognising this, in May 1917 the government launched the National Kitchen scheme—locally administered canteens that were ‘part of a major nationwide government-sponsored programme to alleviate food poverty and its effects’, with significant Treasury funding.⁷⁰ In Walsall, however, the Rooms’ canteen appears to have been one of, if not the only, canteen providing low-cost meals to the working populace. Notably, no National Kitchen opened there. Indeed, as late as September 1918, Walsall council approved a motion *not* to open one, as most councillors felt one was not needed.⁷¹ Although this was never explicitly acknowledged, it is possible that the Rooms’ canteen was fulfilling this need locally. There was perhaps some implicit acknowledgement of the importance of the Rooms’ canteen made by the Mayor of Walsall in January 1918, when he assured the organising committee that ‘if food [supply] becomes a difficulty, the head of the local Food Control Committee would help to procure the necessary food’ to keep the canteen running.⁷²

The canteen also appears to have met a real need in the lives of working women in Walsall. An April 1916 appeal for further funding for the Rooms’—that is, one which came after the canteen

⁶⁷ 335/2, *Tipperary Rooms Ephemera*. ‘Annual Report’ 1917. Minutes do not mention if or how the Rooms’ canteen was affected by food rationing, in effect from January 1918.

⁶⁸ This figure comes from a form detailing the particulars of Walsall’s Tipperary Club, when it sought to affiliate to the League of the Women’s United Service Clubs. It is undated apart from the year (1915) and appears to have been written before the switch to the canteen, as no mention of this is made. In response to question 8 (‘how many members have you?’) the response ‘about 270 have used the Rooms’. 335/2, *Tipperary Rooms Ephemera*, ‘Particulars of the Walsall Tipperary Rooms Club’, circa. 1915.

⁶⁹ Bryce Evans ‘The National Kitchen in Britain, 1917–1919’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 2017, Vol 10, No. 2, p. 115–129, p. 117.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115, p. 121.

⁷¹ The Mayor of Walsall felt that this was the wrong decision, fearing fuel shortages over the winter would exacerbate food shortages, leaving the town in need of ‘two or three National Kitchens’, but his objections were overruled. ‘Ready for Emergencies: Mayor Advocates National Kitchens for Walsall’, *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 14 September 1918, p. 3.

⁷² TR Minutes, March 1918.

had been established—explicitly highlighted the importance of the facilities for ‘those who, owing to the distance of their homes, have not time to go home for dinner’.⁷³ This perhaps reflected a change in working patterns for women in Walsall, away from traditional home working practices and towards factory work. Across Britain, working hours in war industries were long: twelve-hour shifts were not uncommon, excluding travelling time.⁷⁴ Increasing food shortages, and corresponding long hours in food queues, proved extremely challenging to fit around paid employment, compounding these problems.⁷⁵ It is hard to know what proportion of Walsall’s munitions workers had *not* worked in factories pre-war, and thus not been faced with this problem. However, the Black Country as a whole was particularly associated with home-working in the sweated industries.⁷⁶ One of the very few—perhaps only—advantages of this was an ability to fit certain domestic tasks, such as preparing a meal, around paid employment. A shift in working culture towards long hours spent in factories where women had ‘not time to go home for dinner’ meant that this meagre advantage was lost, but the Tipperary Rooms’ canteen provided a simple solution.⁷⁷ It met a real need in these women’s lives; resultantly, increasing numbers used it, and the Rooms’ popularity soared. Members, essentially, picked and chose where and when to engage with the facilities offered. Educational lectures were of little practical use to their daily lives, but a canteen was.

The organising committee, it must be acknowledged, embraced this change. Recognising the need the canteen met, they worked to ensure it was accessible to as many women as possible. They extended the Rooms’ opening times to allow for breakfast to be served,⁷⁸ and, in July 1917, moved to a larger premises—the reason for this went unstated in the minutes, but was almost certainly down to increased demand on the Rooms’ services and consequent need for additional space.⁷⁹ Indeed, in

⁷³ ‘Correspondence: The Tipperary Rooms’, *The Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 1 April 1916.

⁷⁴ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, New Edition, (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 113.

⁷⁵ Karen Hunt, ‘The Politics of Food and Women’s Neighborhood Activism in First World War Britain’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 77, (2010), p. 8—26.

⁷⁶ Shelia Blackburn, ‘Between the Devil of Cheap Labour Competition and the Deep Sea of Family Poverty?’ Sweated Labour in Time and Place, 1840–1914’, *Labour History Review*, Vol. 71 (2), (2006), p. 99—191; further discussion in the Introduction.

⁷⁷ ‘Correspondence: The Tipperary Rooms’.

⁷⁸ TR Minutes, 29 February 1916.

⁷⁹ TR Minutes, 11 July 1917.

facilitating access to the Rooms' canteen, the organising committee were themselves undertaking a kind of practical politics, taking dining out, which had been a private activity for the working-classes, into the public sphere. As Bryce Evans argues, National Kitchens had to find a place within working-class food culture which, on the one hand, saw dining at restaurants as 'upmarket and snobby', but viewed anything which might be understood in the vein of 'soup kitchens' presided over by 'Lady Bountifuls' with equal suspicion.⁸⁰ While this canteen did not affiliate with the National Kitchens scheme, it was nonetheless successfully able to negotiate these two extremes, with the organising committee working to provide practical support for working women in Walsall.

They were not, however, able to sustain this as munitions production wound down at the end of the conflict, and many women became unemployed.⁸¹ Precise figures, regrettably, were not recorded, but it is clear from local minutes that attendance at the canteen dramatically decreased over the summer and early autumn of 1918. Perhaps as a result, shortly before the armistice, several rather disorganised attempts were made to again promote the Rooms as a social club. These included an attempt at organising more educational lectures and demonstrations, but members' lack of engagement with these events—probably because they were of little practical use or interest—meant they were quickly dropped. In October 1918, for instance, the committee organised a cobbler to give a demonstration on 'how to mend boots' but attendance was extremely poor; it is unclear if any members attended at all.⁸² Future demonstrations were not arranged. The Rooms' appear to have struggled on into 1919: committee meetings continued that year, and mostly seem to have involved attempts to decide whether the Rooms' should be 'kept on'.⁸³ Attendance figures were not recorded, but in June 1919, the committee agreed to a dressmaker renting a room within the premises for her business, suggesting there was less need for the space.⁸⁴ Eventually, the committee decided to hold a

⁸⁰ Evans, 'The National Kitchen in Britain', p. 116.

⁸¹ Jobs in munitions factories simply disappeared when there was no longer need of these industries, while women who had filled men's jobs in other industries (often, it must be noted, indirectly, through practises of dilution and substitution) were forced out through the Restoration of Pre-War Practises Act. Braybon, *Women Workers*, Chapter 5.

⁸² TR Minutes, 29 October 1918.

⁸³ TR Minutes, 21 February 1919.

⁸⁴ TR Minutes, 24 June 1919.

‘final meeting’ in February 1920, to decide whether the Rooms should continue.⁸⁵ This meeting was not minuted, but the very fact the club disappears from the archival record after this point suggests that a decision to close was taken. Once again, it appears, members were affecting the Rooms’ function by choosing how and when to interact with the services it provided: the social club aspect of the Rooms did not meet any need in their lives, and so the club closed.

During the First World War, the practical work of organising and running Walsall’s Tipperary Rooms allowed middle-class women to take up an active role in local public life, at a time when they were still formally excluded from the political process. However, despite being excluded from the club’s organisation, working-class members were still able to affect how it was run. As such, the Rooms were a space in which women from different social backgrounds were able to contest how an association which made up part of local public life should be managed. Had members been allowed a more formal say in the Rooms’ organisation and running, the club may have enjoyed a greater longevity. Instead, it faded away and did not survive the wartime period. In contrast, the two other housewives’ associations studied here—the NCW and WVS—enjoyed much greater longevity. Both are still active today, perhaps in part because their members were encouraged to take a more active role in their organisation.

Part II: Wolverhampton’s National Council of Women, c.1918—1939:

Both the Tipperary Rooms and the WVS were associations established to some extent because of war: the Tipperary Rooms as a social club for servicemen’s wives, and the WVS to provide a space for women to volunteer for civil defence work. The NCW, in contrast, operated differently, seeking to act as a kind of umbrella group for women’s organisations in a locale. This section considers how Wolverhampton NCW acted as a space in which women might come together to learn how to participate in the political process, through three specific campaigns: for women magistrates, women police, and access to birth control. It draws on local records—specifically minutes of Wolverhampton

⁸⁵ TR Collection, Minutes Book, 27 January 1920.

NCW's monthly meetings—to consider women's engagement in the political process through these campaigns.

Wolverhampton NCW was, of course, actively involved in much more than just these three issues. Each monthly meeting centred around a different topic, and these are but three examples of the myriad subjects the branch discussed. They were chosen, however, as these were all causes which were at the forefront of the interwar women's movement in Britain. This section, however, is concerned less with the campaigns themselves, and more their local impact. It argues that involvement with these issues enabled members of Wolverhampton NCW to learn the political process, demonstrating to them the ways in which they might become increasingly active in politics and public life in the town. Furthermore, while many of the branch's most engaged women were drawn from the middle-classes—as was typical of the NCW, which had garnered a reputation as a middle-class organisation—there is nonetheless evidence that, in Wolverhampton, there was still scope for some working-class women to be actively involved in its organisation.

The NCW's reputation as a middle-class association had developed in the nineteenth century, when it was known as the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW). From its inception in 1895, the NUWW was designed as a kind of umbrella organisation to which other women's groups could affiliate, to work together to 'improve the legal, social and economic status of women'.⁸⁶ It worked on a number of issues related to women's welfare and legislative rights in the years prior to the First World War, most notably the suffrage, the implementation of women police, and prostitution reform.⁸⁷ Despite its name, the NUWW was not a trade union and should not be confused with Mary Macarthur's National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW), established in 1906.⁸⁸ NUWW

⁸⁶ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 19—23.

⁸⁷ Alison Woodeson, 'The first women police: a force for equality or infringement?', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (1993), p. 217—232, p. 219; Paula Bartley, 'Preventing Prostitution: the Ladies' Association for the Care and Protection of Young Girls in Birmingham, 1887-1914', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (1998), p. 37—60; Julia Bush, 'The National Union of Women Workers and Women's Suffrage', in: Myriam Bousshba-Bravard, *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women's Vote in Britain, 1880—1914*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 105—131; Moira Martin, 'Single Women and Philanthropy: a case study of women's associational life in Bristol, 1880—1914', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (2008), p. 395-417.

⁸⁸ For the NFWW, see Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906—1921*, (London, Palgrave, 2013) and discussion in the previous chapter.

branches were typically dominated by ‘solidly middle or upper-class’ women.⁸⁹ This remained so after 1918, when the organisation changed its name to the National Council of Women (NCW). Indeed, Caitriona Beaumont writes that, while the NCW continued to act as an umbrella body, some working-class women’s organisations, including the Women’s Co-operative Guild (WCG), chose not to affiliate to it because of its perceived middle-class reputation.⁹⁰ Perhaps because of its position as an umbrella organisation, its post-war incarnation, the NCW, has received limited attention from historians. Martin Pugh even goes so far as to state that the NCW was ‘too widely drawn to be really coherent’.⁹¹ Only Caitriona Beaumont has given serious consideration to its place within the interwar women’s movement.⁹² Examining the way Wolverhampton NCW worked on the local level, however, disputes Pugh’s assertion, and complicates some of what Beaumont suggests is true of the organisation’s national policy. For instance, while the WCG’s policy was to not affiliate with the NCW, locally, one of Wolverhampton WCG’s most active members, Mabel Dale, played a significant role in the NCW here from the mid-1920s, as is shortly discussed.

Dale, however, was not among the founding members of Wolverhampton NCW. An inaugural meeting was held in May 1918, though archival records date from April 1919.⁹³ Its establishment locally appears to have been driven by several women who had been active in Wolverhampton’s branch of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). As discussed in the introductory chapters, the suffrage movement was never huge in the Black Country, but Wolverhampton did see a relatively large and active NUWSS—by 1911, it had 127 members.⁹⁴ Some of the leading members of Wolverhampton NUWSS helped to establish its NCW, most

⁸⁹ Martin, ‘Single Women and Philanthropy’, p. 408.

⁹⁰ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 19–23.

⁹¹ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914–1999*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 76.

⁹² Beaumont discusses the role of the NCW, along with multiple other organisations, throughout *Housewives and Citizens*.

⁹³ The inaugural meeting was held just before the organisation changed its name to the National Council of Women. ‘Women Workers Union’, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 25 May 1918, p. 7.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 123.

prominently the suffragist Beatrice Pearson, who initially chaired the branch.⁹⁵ Alongside her suffrage activism, Pearson had previously stood unsuccessfully as a ‘suffragist and Independent’ candidate in local elections in 1912.⁹⁶ She was the unmarried daughter of a pawnbroker, and in 1911 was living off ‘private means’ which were substantial enough to ensure the employment of a live-in domestic servant.⁹⁷ She was joined in establishing the NCW by Mrs Highfield-Jones, another NUWSS alumna, who was the wife of a well-to-do hollowware manufacturer from a locally prominent family.⁹⁸ Many other women who were involved with the NCW from its inception, or who went on to take on roles on its executive committee, came from similar backgrounds. As Appendix C details, most were middle-class women whose husbands or fathers worked in the professions or owned businesses, and most employed live-in domestic servants. Indeed, there are parallels here with the women involved with organising Walsall’s Tipperary Rooms.

However, while such women were in the majority, even from its inception a small number of women from less affluent backgrounds were active in the local branch. Among Wolverhampton’s suffragists who helped to establish the NCW was Caroline Callear, whose background was less typically middle-class. By 1911, her husband Samuel was an ‘insurance clerk’, and three of her adult daughters were working as teachers in local schools, indicating perhaps a lower-middle class background. However, on all previous censuses, Samuel had given his occupation as ‘journeyman baker’, and their daughters had qualified as teachers through the ‘pupil teacher’ route—less prestigious than attending a teacher training college, but one more accessible to the working-classes.⁹⁹ Even by 1911, when the family finances had likely improved, the Callears did not employ a live-in servant like many other leading NCW members.

⁹⁵ George Barnsby, *Votes for Women: The Struggle for the Vote in the Black Country, 1900-1918*, (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1995); further discussion in contextualising chapter.

⁹⁶ G W Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888—1964*, (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 206; ‘Lady Candidate for the Town Council’, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19 October 1912, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Evidence is drawn from decennial census returns; for full references see Appendix C.

⁹⁸ Full references provided in Appendix C.

⁹⁹ Full references provided in Appendix C. For pupil-teachers, see: Susan Trouvé-Finding, ‘Unionised Women Teachers and Women’s Suffrage’, in: Myriam Bousshba-Bravard, *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women’s Vote in Britain, 1880—1914*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 205—230, p. 206.

Despite this, Caroline Callear was actively involved in many facets of local life and politics. As well as the NUWSS and NCW, she was a member of Wolverhampton Labour party, serving as President of its Women's Section; was involved with the British Women's Total Abstinence Union, and sat on the board of management of Wolverhampton's Royal Hospital.¹⁰⁰ Significantly, in August 1920 Callear became Wolverhampton's first female magistrate. On being elected, it was reported in the local press that the Chairman of the Bench welcomed the presence of a woman, but remarked that 'there were cases heard in that Court of such a character that he had no doubt Mrs Callear would prefer not to sit'. She denied this, acknowledging that she 'did not expect to find the work very pleasant; she expected it to be very painful; but it was work that had to be done', and even the journalist covering the Court reported that, given that the first case that day was of a wife deserted by her husband, 'a woman's presence on the Bench is evidently of great value'.¹⁰¹

The value of women magistrates was something with which Wolverhampton NCW was deeply concerned and it appears that, both formally and informally, the organisation acted as a space in which its members might learn about the process of becoming a magistrate. Though Callear was Wolverhampton's first woman magistrate, she was shortly joined by two other women: Beatrice Pearson and Mrs Highfield-Jones, both of whom had helped establish the NCW.¹⁰² This is likely to be no coincidence—all three women were already actively engaged in local public life, and were clearly part of a network of politically active women in the town. However, it appears that the three used Wolverhampton's NCW branch both formally and informally as a vehicle to politicise other women, and encourage them to consider taking on the role, with some success. As Anne Logan has demonstrated, 'by far the most important and sustained campaign to raise the number of women magistrates was waged by the [NCW]'s Public Service and Magistrates' Committee', the NCW's executive's 'largest committee' in the 1920s, which had 'over four hundred members'.¹⁰³ Thus, when

¹⁰⁰ 'Wolverhampton's First Woman JP', *Birmingham Gazette*, 23 May 1939, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ 'Woman JP', *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 1 September 1920. My thanks to Heidi McIntosh at Wolverhampton City Archives, and the University of Warwick's Mapping Women's Suffrage project <<https://www.mappingwomenssuffrage.org.uk/suffrage-map>> for this reference.

¹⁰² Both are listed as Magistrates in Wolverhampton's entry in the Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire, 1921.

¹⁰³ Anne Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: the campaign for women magistrates in England and Wales, 1910–1939', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (2007), p. 501–518, p. 509.

the topic of Wolverhampton NCW's January 1922 meeting was 'women magistrates', the local branch was, on one level, merely reflecting the organisation's national policy.¹⁰⁴

Yet it is worth considering more fully how the implementation of this policy worked on a local level. Addressing the assembled NCW members at the January 1922 meeting on 'women magistrates' were Callear, Pearson, and Highfield-Jones. All had experience of the role in Wolverhampton, but, perhaps more significantly, all were known to some degree by fellow NCW members. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. Although there was no longer any *legal* impediment to women becoming magistrates, this did not necessarily mean that there were not any social or cultural barriers. Until as recently as the late nineteenth century, as David Cannadine demonstrates, magistrates had largely been drawn from the local gentry. This slowly began to change, with the middle classes making inroads, assisted by the Liberal government's reforms to the system of appointment in the years leading up to the First World War which meant that magistrates 'were gradually recruited from a much broader spectrum of society'.¹⁰⁵ These changes aside, the role was likely still one with which few women were familiar before 1919. The practicalities of what was involved—that is, what a magistrate actually did—was something which was likely not fully understood by ordinary women.

However, the presence of a fellow NCW member explaining what duties were required perhaps led other women to begin to imagine how they, too, might occupy this role. The NCW, therefore, provided a forum in which the practicalities involved could be discussed. There is archival evidence of this happening at the January 1922 meeting, when this was the 'formal' topic of discussion. However, it is highly likely that NCW meetings also acted as spaces in which informal, undocumented conversations could take place between members who were magistrates, and those interested in taking up this office. While explicit evidence of such conversations does not, of course, exist, there is *implicit* evidence that this kind of networking worked in Wolverhampton. By 1939, the

¹⁰⁴ NCW Minutes, 4 January 1922.

¹⁰⁵ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 153—156.

town had had eleven women magistrates, of whom over half (Pearson, Highfield-Jones, Callear, and Lilian Bryne-Quinn, Margaret Brown Mackay and Agnes Tomlins) were NCW members.¹⁰⁶

Agnes Tomlins was among those involved with Wolverhampton NCW from its inception, though she does not appear to have been active in the suffrage movement. After attending Royal Holloway, University of London in the late 1890s, she married Wolverhampton-born Archibald Tomlins, an auctioneer and surveyor, with whom she had at least four children during the 1910s, and the family employed two live-in domestic servants in both 1911 and 1939.¹⁰⁷ Agnes was actively involved in many Wolverhampton organisations broadly concerned with women's or children's welfare. As well as the NCW, she was a member of Wolverhampton Boot Fund; Wolverhampton Children's Holiday Camp Committee; Wolverhampton Women's Luncheon Club and the Staffordshire Women's Welfare Centre. She was also a co-opted member of Wolverhampton council's Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, although she never sought election herself.¹⁰⁸ As this suggests, Tomlins was actively engaged with local public life, both within voluntary organisations and the more formal politics of local government.

Again, however, it is possible to see the NCW as a space for bringing together women like Tomlins, who were so active, and women who were less engaged, allowing the latter to effectively 'learn' the political process from such activist women. For example, in January 1924, the topic of the monthly meeting was the necessity of women police, something the NCW national executive were keen to promote.¹⁰⁹ At this meeting, Tomlins reported that a 'deputation' of NCW members, which she appears to have led, had recently 'waited upon [Wolverhampton's] Chief Constable' who had

¹⁰⁶ The other five were: Evelyn Fisher Cridland (a neighbour of Beatrice Pearson; both lived on Tettenhall Road); Morfa Newydd; Caroline Lewis; Elsie Whitlock and Lucy Smith. All are listed in the Wolverhampton's entry in the Kelly's Directories of Staffordshire between 1921 and 1940. It is possible that some of these five women were also NCW members as a full membership list was not kept. Tomlin, Bryne-Quinn and Brown MacKay were involved at organisational level with the NCW, see Appendix C.

¹⁰⁷ The 1911 census return states that she had 3 children, all of whom survived, and the 1939 national register suggests a fourth was born in 1915. All references in Appendix C.

¹⁰⁸ 'Obituary. Mrs A. N. Tomlins', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 February 1940, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ See: Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 153–158. For the wider history of women police: Alison Woodeson, 'The first women police: a force for equality or infringement?', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (1993), p. 217–232; Louise A. Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

‘expressed himself in favour’ of women police. To capitalise on his enthusiasm, Tomlins proposed that the NCW encourage ‘all women’s organisations in the town to send in resolutions to the Watch Committee’ on the matter, a motion which passed.¹¹⁰ The NCW’s records do not indicate which other women’s organisations participated in this endeavour, and it is worth noting that Wolverhampton did not get its first woman police officer until 1937, thirteen years later.¹¹¹ The immediate impact of their efforts is perhaps questionable.

However, the local significance of this meeting is better understood when considering how it might have contributed to the politicisation of ordinary members of the NCW. Tomlins, as noted, was clearly used to participating in public life through a variety of groups and structures, but this was likely not true of all NCW members. In recognising a problem which affected women—a lack of representation in the city’s police force—Wolverhampton NCW found two practical steps which its members could take to attempt to effect change: an organised deputation, and a co-ordinated letter-writing effort. This kind of campaigning may have contributed towards shifting ordinary women’s social consciousness about the process of political activism and their place within it. Clearly, Wolverhampton NCW was run by women who had extensive experience in local politics and public life—women like Tomlins, Callear, Pearson or Highfield-Jones, who had been involved with many local groups, alongside the NCW. But by 1924, it comprised 222 members.¹¹² A full membership list was not kept, so only the names of the most active women, typically committee members, are recorded in local minutes. Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable to assume that some of these 222 members were likely far less active than someone like Agnes Tomlins. For some, NCW meetings might have served as an introduction to the political process. While this specific campaign, for women police, may not have had much *direct* success in that it did not lead to the employment of a woman

¹¹⁰ NCW Minutes Book, 31 January 1924.

¹¹¹ Corrine Brazier and Steve Rice, *A Fair Cop: 1917-2017 Celebrating 100 Years of Female Police Officers in the West Midlands*, (Tamworth: West Midlands Police, 2017), p. 67. Lisa Cox Davies, whose doctoral thesis examines women police in the West Midlands, reports that while Wolverhampton did employ women police officers temporarily in the First World War, it is unclear what happened to women in the force after the conflict. She also notes that the female officer employed in 1937 was unlikely to have been an attested officer, as she was referred to as a ‘lady enquiry officer’.

¹¹² NCW Minutes, April 1924 note that the NCW membership numbered 222 by this time.

police officer, it might still have served as a means by which activist women might demonstrate to those less familiar with the political process how this might ‘work’ on a very practical level, in turn drawing more women into local public life.

As noted, Agnes Tomlins’ activism was enabled, at least in part, by her social background: her family were wealthy enough that she did not have to work, and she could employ domestic servants. Certainly, such middle-class women were in the majority in leadership roles in Wolverhampton NCW. However, working-class women, though in the minority, were not totally excluded, and were also able to demonstrate to members a path to activism. This is best exemplified in the case of Mabel Dale, a working-class woman who came to the fore within the organisation following an April 1925 meeting debating the availability of birth control, and who then went on to take a leading role within it. Mindful of the fact that birth control was a topic which was particularly contentious for many religious groups affiliated to the NCW, which were allowed to abstain from campaigning on such matters,¹¹³ Beatrice Pearson, chairing the meeting, proposed an extremely carefully-worded resolution: ‘that this meeting, while in no way criticising the view of those who for scientific or moral reasons, are opposed to the practise of birth control, expresses its opinion that the Ministry of Health should permit Health Authorities to provide, for those who desire it, information on the subject’.¹¹⁴ The 130 members present listened to arguments presented by both sides. Speaking in support of the resolution were Ella Gordon and Mabel Dale, both of whom, in addition to being NCW members, were founding members of Wolverhampton Birth Control Clinic (WBCC);¹¹⁵ those who opposed included the President of Wolverhampton’s Catholic Women’s League. The debate seems to have been particularly lively—unusually, the speakers’ arguments were transcribed into the

¹¹³ Organisations like the Mother’s Union or Catholic Women’s League (CWL) were permitted to ‘disassociate’ from debates on contentious topics but remain affiliated to the NCW overall. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 81; see also: Caitriona Beaumont, ‘Moral Dilemmas and Women’s Rights: the attitude of the Mothers’ Union and Catholic Women’s League to divorce, birth control and abortion in England, 1928–1939’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (2007), p. 463–485.

¹¹⁴ NCW Minutes, 30 April 1925.

¹¹⁵ Clare Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women: Post-suffrage feminism in the early twentieth century*, (London: I B Tauris, 2014), p. 180 & 189.

minutes in detail. At its conclusion, the members present voted to support the resolution, which carried by ‘an overwhelming majority, only 22 [of 130] voting against’.¹¹⁶

The timing of this meeting is particularly notable. WBCC opened a month after this debate, initially operating in two rented rooms in ‘a railwayman’s home’, although, ‘because of demand’, it soon moved to larger premises.¹¹⁷ Though clearly providing a useful service, birth control was still a controversial issue: both the wording of the resolution, and the debate result indicate it was not universally supported. Wolverhampton NCW, however, do not appear to have shied away from the topic because of this, encouraging members to participate in the debate. Most notably, Wolverhampton appears to be several years *ahead* of the NCW’s national policy on this issue. In 1929, the NCW’s national committee formally passed a resolution calling on the Ministry of Health to provide information on birth control to women.¹¹⁸ The Wolverhampton meeting had happened in April 1925—four years before the change in the national policy.

This specific debate is further significant as it allowed Mabel Dale, a working-class woman from a different social background to most other leading members of Wolverhampton NCW, space to come to the fore within the organisation. In this, Dale was somewhat exceptional. There is little other evidence that working-class women, excepting Caroline Callear, discussed above, were elected to Wolverhampton NCW executive committee, as Dale was in April 1926.¹¹⁹ Originally from Derby, she worked as a domestic servant until her marriage to Walter Dale. In 1911, the couple still lived in Derby, Walter working as a ‘cycle gear case-maker’, and Mabel describing herself on the census return, somewhat unusually, as a ‘housewife’.¹²⁰ It is unclear precisely when the couple moved to Wolverhampton, but Mabel’s name begins to appear in connection with many local organisations from the early 1920s, and it is possible that she was the same ‘Mrs Dale’ who unsuccessfully stood for

¹¹⁶ NCW Minutes, 30 April 1925.

¹¹⁷ Debenham, *Birth Control*, p. 189.

¹¹⁸ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 81.

¹¹⁹ NCW Minutes, April 1926. She was re-elected to the committee many times.

¹²⁰ It is estimated that there were around 10.62 million ‘housewives’ in Britain in 1911, but most did not describe themselves as such on the census; women who did not undertake paid work usually left the occupation box blank. Karen Hunt, ‘A Heroine at Home: The Housewife on the First World War Home Front’, in: Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (eds.), *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, (London: Palgrave, 2014), p. 73—91, p. 76.

election to Wolverhampton council as a Labour representative in 1920.¹²¹ She appears to have been involved with several local organisations during this decade, many of which were left-leaning. As well as being a founding member of WBCC, there is some suggestion that she was involved with a Tenants' Association on the council estate on which she lived.¹²² She was an active member of Wolverhampton Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG), and was elected President of the WCG for a yearly term in 1938, addressing its annual congress.¹²³ She was also a member of Wolverhampton Labour Party, and won elected office as a Poor Law Guardian in 1928, and as a municipal councillor in 1945 (see Chapter 4).¹²⁴ Rather like Agnes Tomlins, she was clearly an experienced activist, involved in a number of voluntary organisations and elected roles within Wolverhampton.

It is therefore especially notable that Dale sought involvement with Wolverhampton NCW. Rather than seeing this as an association solely for middle-class women, she may have felt it represented an *additional* space in which women might come together to campaign. While she did not appear to have sought a formal alliance between Wolverhampton NCW and some of the other organisations with which she was involved—the WCG, as noted above, refused to affiliate to the NCW—she nonetheless took the perhaps pragmatic decision to work within both. Even before she was elected to the NCW executive committee, she campaigned for practical changes to make the association more democratic. In June 1925, she proposed a resolution that the branch should pay the expenses of local members who wished to attend the NCW annual national conference—it passed.¹²⁵ This was a simple suggestion, but it arguably made some difference to widening the pool of potential

¹²¹ 'Progressives Sweep the Midlands', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 November 1920, p. 5.

¹²² John Boughton asserts that Dale was among the founding members of the Low Hill Estate Tenants' Association, see: John Boughton, 'Wolverhampton's Interwar Council Estates: 'tenanted by respectable residents'', (2014), <<https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2014/12/02/interwar-council-in-wolverhampton/>>, consulted 20.08.2020. However, Dale is not among those named in council records of the Tenants' Association so I have been unable to corroborate this. See: Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies, WOL-D-CE/4/1/118, 'Correspondence regarding lease to Low Hill Tenants Association of a sports and recreation ground at Low Hill', 11 Jul 1927 - 4 Feb 1929.

¹²³ Bishopsgate Institute Special Collections and Archives, WCG/3/3, *Congress Material and Circulars, 1930—1939*. Text of the Presidential Address by Mabel Dale to the Women's Co-operative Guild Annual Congress, Southampton, 20—23 June 1938.

¹²⁴ *The Wolverhampton Red Book and Directory of 1928*, (Wolverhampton: Alfred Hinde, Printer and Publisher, 1928), p. 29; 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands', *Evening Dispatch*, 2 November 1945, p. 3.

¹²⁵ NCW Minutes, 10 June 1925.

participants at the conference. Barriers to attendance remained: not all members would have had the confidence to attend such events, and even those employing live-in servants may have struggled to take time away from their domestic duties. It was, nonetheless, one step to making the organisation somewhat more egalitarian, and it is notable that it took Dale, and not one of the more middle-class committee members, to propose it.

Dale was also able to work within the NCW's own structures to oppose other members' actions. In May 1926, for example, she was furious with Wolverhampton NCW's response to the General Strike.¹²⁶ A 'hurried meeting' was called by Beatrice Pearson, 'to organise means whereby various women and girls may be conveyed to and from work during the strike'. Exact dates were not recorded, but it seems that this meeting was held on what proved to be the strike's final day, as the minutes note that, 'had the strike been prolonged [the transport system] would have been a great convenience', implying that the system was not implemented.¹²⁷ Arguably, what was proposed, and what many members evidently voted for, was again a form of 'practical politics': the aim appears to have been to involve NCW members in the provision of practical support to local women affected by strike action. While many industries did come out on strike in May 1926, including transport workers, women and girls were perhaps more likely to be employed in non-unionised industries, chiefly domestic service.¹²⁸ In proposing this transport system, Pearson may have been seeking to provide a practical solution to help these non-striking workers retain their jobs and keep earning, as they would not have been able to draw on financial support from a union had they been unable to get to work.

However, to a woman enmeshed in left-wing politics like Mabel Dale, this was unlikely to have been understood as a simple, practical solution to a temporary problem. Instead, she may well have seen it as undermining the labour movement's strength through strike-breaking. Immediately the

¹²⁶ Two histories of the General Strike drawn on for the purposes of this section are: Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike Day by Day*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1996) and Sue Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926: A Gender and Social History of the General Strike and Miners' Lockout in South Wales*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010).

¹²⁷ NCW Minutes, May 1926.

¹²⁸ Despite attempts, unionising the profession proved challenging. See: Laura Schwartz, "'What We Feel is Needed is a Union for Domestic Workers Such as the Miners Have': The Domestic Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1908-1914", *Twentieth-Century British History* Vol. 25, No. 2 (2014), p. 173-192.

resolution had been called, she stood up in opposition to it, significantly by ‘mov[ing] that the meeting was unconstitutional’, attempting to use the NCW’s own rules against it.¹²⁹ Because this was a ‘hurried’ and ‘extra-ordinary’ meeting, it seems not all members had been notified or were able to attend and it was perhaps on these grounds that Dale sought to oppose the resolution.¹³⁰ She may well have tacitly understood that the membership of a largely middle-class organisation was unlikely to be sympathetic to arguments against strike-breaking or undermining the strength of collective action, but cannily hoped that by claiming the meeting was ‘unconstitutional’, no proposal could be implemented. Ultimately, she was unsuccessful in her attempt to overturn the resolution, as ‘all present’ voted in favour, except for ‘Mrs Dale, Mrs Gordon and Mrs Fellows’, though as noted, the timing meant that in the event, action was not taken.¹³¹ Nonetheless, the incident is still of significance as it enabled Mabel Dale—a woman actively involved in local public life—to demonstrate to other NCW members another means by which women might engage with the political process. Clearly, she disagreed with Pearson’s proposal, but notably, she sought to work within the organisation’s own structures to oppose it. Her activism in other associations perhaps gave her experience with these kinds of due processes, but it is not unreasonable to assume that less active members of the NCW would have been less familiar with such procedures. Although her fight was ultimately unsuccessful, she was able to demonstrate to such women another way in which they might become politically active, and helped to shape the NCW from the inside.

The specific events discussed here are but a sample of Wolverhampton NCW’s activities from its inception. While those named within minutes tend to be members of the executive committee, not ordinary members, it is nonetheless possible to get a sense of the ways in which these specific campaigns enabled the branch’s couple of hundred ordinary members, who were perhaps far less enmeshed in local politics and public life than some of the women discussed here, to effectively learn the how to become involved in the political process. This could be through more formal means,

¹²⁹ NCW Minutes, May 1926.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid. Mrs Gordon was her colleague from WBCC; no further information is available about Mrs Fellows.

through due processes at meetings, but the NCW perhaps also served as a space in which ordinary members might learn more informally, through networking with locally active women.

This branch appears to have survived for many years; its archival records, currently held at Wolverhampton City Archives, date to the late 1980s. In the late 1930s, however, it may have also played a role in the swift establishment of a WVS Centre in the town. Wolverhampton WVS was established in September 1938, almost a full year before war was declared, and the earliest of any Black Country Centre—an initial meeting, ‘attended by around 250 women’, was held that month.¹³² It seems that there was some crossover between WVS leadership here, and that of the NCW. The Centre Organiser for Wolverhampton from its inception through to March 1940 was Eileen Patrick, and although it is unclear whether she was connected to the NCW, her successor Beatrice Handcock, who took over as WVS Centre Organiser in April 1940 and continued in post to the war’s end, had been Secretary of Wolverhampton NCW since 1937.¹³³ As both James Hinton and Caitriona Beaumont note, members of pre-war housewives’ associations often joined the WVS in wartime, seeking to undertake additional responsibilities in an organisation designed engage women in voluntary war work.¹³⁴ It does not seem improbable that other senior members of Wolverhampton NCW might have been involved with the WVS here, nor indeed that some of the 250-odd women who attended this initial meeting and continued to be involved with the organisation up to and beyond the outbreak of war were members of the NCW, and saw the WVS as an additional space in which they might contribute to local public life.

Part III: the Women’s Voluntary Service in the Black Country 1939—1945:

Nationwide, the WVS was established by Lady Stella Reading in May 1938 designed to engage women in voluntary civil defence work, but Wolverhampton WVS Centre was unusual in the Black Country in being established so early. 13 Centres were opened in towns across the area, but most were not formed until the spring or summer of 1939 and did not become operational until after war broke

¹³² WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1938-CB/WVH, October 1938.

¹³³ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1940-CB/WVH, April 1940; No author, *Wolverhampton Red Book, 1937*, (Wolverhampton: Alfred Hinde Ltd, 1937), p. 131.

¹³⁴ Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership*, p. 39; Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 137.

out in September.¹³⁵ Like the NCW, the WVS has a reputation as being something of a middle-class organisation. Indeed, James Hinton argues that the WVS played a significant role in the maintenance of middle-class hegemony in Britain throughout the Second World War: by placing middle-class women in control of local WVS Centres, the sections of society which had dominated civic and associational life in the interwar period maintained their place in, and control over, the local public sphere in wartime. Local leaders, known as Centre Organisers (CO), were generally appointed from ‘a shortlist of middle-class women with the organisational skills and recognised place in local public life’ required for the role.¹³⁶ Typically, these were women who were already established in voluntary organisations, associational life, or council work, who were asked to take on the running of a town’s WVS Centre by a Regional WVS Organiser.¹³⁷

As is shortly discussed, this broadly held true in the Black Country, where most COs had such pre-war experiences. However, this section seeks to complicate Hinton’s narrative somewhat by considering the ways in which the WVS simultaneously served as a space in which working-class WVS members could actively participate in local public life through its work. The WVS, it is suggested, went some way towards recognising the value of women’s domestic labour, particularly through the Housewives’ Service, established to enable those whose domestic responsibilities tied them to the home to contribute to the so-called ‘people’s war’.¹³⁸ While working-class members were not present in leadership roles locally, the practical, voluntary war work they undertook nonetheless allowed them to make a significant, and recognised, contribution to local public life. By shifting the focus away from WVS leaders to its members who, in the Black Country, tended to be working-class, there is scope for a more nuanced understanding of how the organisation fits within the wider understanding of women’s political activism during the Second World War.

¹³⁵ The 13 Centres were established in: Bilston, Darlaston, Dudley, Halesowen, Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Stourbridge, Tipton, Walsall, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton.

¹³⁶ Hinton, *Women, social leadership*, p. 39.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ This phenomenon is discussed in more detail shortly.

Although the subject of several popular histories, the WVS has until lately received little attention from academic historians.¹³⁹ Hinton's work remains the most comprehensive overview of the organisation,¹⁴⁰ and his view that it was dominated by middle-class, Conservative women continues to hold sway, with Clarisse Berthenzène recently arguing that '[a]lthough officially non-political, the WVS was very much a Conservative organisation, with much overlap in personnel'.¹⁴¹ While there was perhaps some overlap on the WVS national executive—Hinton, for example, points to the ways in which women from the Labour party at times refused to work with the organisation¹⁴²—to suggest it was a 'Conservative' organisation does not necessarily hold true locally. Four of the WVS COs in the Black Country were local councillors, but only two, Dora Wesson (Wednesbury) and Lilian Lench, (Rowley Regis) were Conservative councillors. In West Bromwich, CO Charlotte Hazel had been a Liberal councillor since 1918 (see Chapter 4), and Vera Rose, CO for Oldbury, had been an Independent councillor there since 1938.¹⁴³ Other local COs do not appear to have been formally involved with Conservative organisations, either, so the extent to which the WVS was a Conservative organisation in the Black Country is perhaps questionable. Additionally, recent studies of the WVS's involvement with Air Raid Precautions (ARP) and civil defence work,¹⁴⁴ evacuation,¹⁴⁵ and salvage schemes¹⁴⁶ have all highlighted the need for a deeper understanding of the day-to-day activities of WVS members, many of whom were working class. Even Berthenzène acknowledges the importance

¹³⁹ These tend to focus on the WVS in a specific locale, but none have been written about the Black Country, 'Books and published sources on WVS and WRVS', (2013) via https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/About%20us/Books%20on%20WVS_2013.pdf, accessed 25.09.2018.

¹⁴⁰ James Hinton, 'Voluntarism and the Welfare/Warfare State. Women's Voluntary Services in the 1940s', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (1998), p. 274–305; *Women, social leadership*.

¹⁴¹ Clarisse Berthenzène, 'The middlebrow and the making of 'a new common sense': women's voluntarism, Conservative politics and representations of womanhood', in: Clarisse Berthenzène and Julie V. Gottlieb (eds.), *Rethinking right-wing women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the present*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 104–121, p. 113.

¹⁴² There were particular troubles in County Durham, detailed extensively in Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership*, p. 106–132.

¹⁴³ For references, see Appendix D for details of WVS Centre Organisers, and Appendix H for local councillors.

¹⁴⁴ Lucy Noakes, "'Serve to Save": Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain 1937–41', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (2012), p. 734–753.

¹⁴⁵ Maggie Andrews, *Women and Evacuation in the Second World War: Femininity, Domesticity and Motherhood*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

¹⁴⁶ Henry Irving, "'We want everybody's salvage!": Recycling, Voluntarism and the People's War', *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 16, No. 2., (2019), p. 165–184.

of the WVS's 'outreach to working-class women via the Housewives' Service',¹⁴⁷ a sub-section of the WVS which, as is shortly considered, was central to allowing such women to actively participate in public life.

While working-class women were undoubtedly active within the WVS in the Black Country, leadership roles do seem to have remained within the hands of middle-class women. A full list of local COs can be found in Appendix D, and most appear to have been from relatively affluent backgrounds, with many being the wives or daughters of businessmen or men working in the professions—for example, Kathleen Somers, Halesowen CO, was the wife of a prominent local industrialist, while Walsall's Marguerite Drabble was married to a medical practitioner. Only one gave an occupation on the 1939 National Register: Bilston's Alice Dawson, who was a headmistress. Of the 15 women¹⁴⁸ who acted as CO of one of the Black Country's WVS Centres during the war, nine employed live-in servants in 1939, and it is possible that others enjoyed support from a daily maid; as Hinton notes, the role of CO was essentially equivalent to a full-time job, while being voluntary and unpaid, and those without such domestic support may have struggled to undertake it.¹⁴⁹ It appears that many of these women were already enmeshed in local public life in their respective towns. In addition to the aforementioned local councillors and the connection between Wolverhampton NCW and its WVS Centre, in Dudley, the WVS leadership was all but identical to that of Dudley Townswomen's Guild.¹⁵⁰

There is some suggestion that, locally, the class differences between leaders and ordinary members could lead to some difficulties, especially initially. For instance, in June 1939, Rowley Regis's WVS CO lamented the difficulties in getting women to enrol with WVS there. She blamed this in part on women there having 'a great suspicion about signing more than one form'—they had already been asked to sign up with the council for ARP work, and viewed the new voluntary

¹⁴⁷ Berthenzène, 'The middlebrow', p. 116.

¹⁴⁸ Two Centres had more than one CO during the period 1939–45.

¹⁴⁹ Hinton, *Women, social leadership*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁰ See Appendix D for all references.

organisation with evident scepticism.¹⁵¹ Such bureaucratic difficulties were not uncommon. Lucy Noakes writes that, before war broke out, there was some sense that the creation of yet another organisation for civil defence ‘would add to the confusion that already existed around ARP’ work.¹⁵² Indeed, this confusion also affected the Rowley Regis Centre: difficulties there were compounded by the fact that the CO was determined to recruit large numbers of women for volunteer ambulance driving to assist in the aftermath of the expected intense bombardments but ‘in a working-class district such as this, it is very difficult to find women who are able to drive cars’.¹⁵³

However, once war had been declared, Rowley Regis WVS, as elsewhere, quickly became ‘a maid-of-all-work’, and there was less confusion over the organisation’s role.¹⁵⁴ Rather than holding monthly meetings, like the NCW, WVS Centres essentially pitched in with whatever was needed to support the war effort in a locale. In the Black Country, WVS volunteers staffed Rest Centres where basic first aid, meals, and information could be obtained following air raids;¹⁵⁵ organised billeting of evacuees, when they arrived in certain areas during the second ‘wave’ of evacuation in 1940, following the start of the Blitz;¹⁵⁶ made jam;¹⁵⁷ ran mobile canteens;¹⁵⁸ volunteered at British Restaurants;¹⁵⁹ made ‘camouflage nets’ for the army;¹⁶⁰ and ran hostels for servicemen and women on

¹⁵¹ She noted that the council were ‘for one reason or another’ reluctant to hand over their forms to the WVS, highlighting the fact that, although in theory the WVS was supposed to work hand-in-glove with local authorities, in practise this was not always successful. WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1939-STAF/RRS B, June 1939.

¹⁵² Noakes, ‘Serve to Save’, p. 747.

¹⁵³ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1939-STAF/RRS B, June 1939.

¹⁵⁴ Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁵ When Darlaston was struck by an air raid in 1941, for instance, the WVS rest centre was called into action at 2:30am on 5th June—forty-five minutes after the first bombs had fallen—and remained open continuously staffed by volunteers, until 6:30pm on 7th June. WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1941-STAF/DLN UD, June 1941.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Titmuss identifies three ‘waves’ of evacuation: the first, just before the outbreak of war in 1939; the second once the blitz began in August 1940, and the third when the V2 ‘doodlebug’ raids began in summer 1944. The Black Country saw no evacuees in the first wave; about half of the Centres saw evacuees in the second wave; and almost all received evacuees in the third and final wave. Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950); WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1940-WORC/HSO B, November 1940.

¹⁵⁷ This was essentially confined to areas of the Black Country which were still largely rural, notably Halesowen: WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-WORC/HSO B, September and October 1942.

¹⁵⁸ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1940-STAF/TPN B, November 1940.

¹⁵⁹ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1944-STAF/RRS B, March 1944.

¹⁶⁰ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/SMW, January 1942.

leave.¹⁶¹ WVS Centres formed relationships with armed forces stationed nearby and took in soldiers' laundry and mending,¹⁶² and made items for troops stationed overseas, such as the 'Jungle Jerseys' for servicemen in the Far East.¹⁶³ The WVS was called upon to fill local gaps in state provision where and whenever they appeared, often at short notice. For instance, in December 1943, Stourbridge WVS helped with 'domestic work' at Old Swinford Maternity Hospital when staff there 'all went down with flu'.¹⁶⁴ A more permanent situation seems to have existed at a Walsall hospital, where volunteers helped out with 'sewing, dusting and vegetable preparing' on a regular rota.¹⁶⁵ In Wednesbury, the WVS even undertook some training with the local Home Guard, although this was unusual.¹⁶⁶ More typical was Wolverhampton WVS, which provided hot dinners to the town's Home Guard members when they were on duty.¹⁶⁷ Wolverhampton WVS were also called upon to cater for Eleanor Roosevelt, in her whistle-stop tour of the United Kingdom in November 1942.¹⁶⁸

While the excitement surrounding this 'distinguished visitor' is palpable in the monthly narrative report,¹⁶⁹ in general much of the voluntary work done by WVS was mundane, domestic, and ordinary. It was the practical, often literal bread-and-butter work of making umpteen sandwiches, day in and out; work which broadly centred around cooking, cleaning, and caring. Sandwiches might be needed for the bombed out; the evacuated; the serviceman or woman on leave, or for the First Lady of the United States, but regardless of their eventual recipient, they still had to be made. This work was not glamorous, or even particularly challenging, but it nonetheless was one small means by which

¹⁶¹ WVS-run hostels for servicewomen were established in Walsall and Wolverhampton. See for example WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1944-CB/WSL, January 1944 or WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1944-CB/WVH, May 1944.

¹⁶² WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1940-WORC/SBG B, November 1940.

¹⁶³ Almost every Narrative Report details the number of items made or mended by members that month; while some were for servicemen, others were for evacuees or the bombed out or for clothing exchanges. For Jungle Jerseys, see for example: WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1945-CB/WVH, February 1945.

¹⁶⁴ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-WORC/SBG B, December 1943.

¹⁶⁵ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1941-CB/WSL, October 1941.

¹⁶⁶ Whilst the Narrative Reports are slightly unclear, it seems that some WVS members took 'signalling classes' with the Home Guard. WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-STAF/WNB UD, September 1943. For women's contested role within the Home Guard, see: Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

¹⁶⁷ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-CB/WVH, January 1943.

¹⁶⁸ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WVH, November 1942.

¹⁶⁹ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WVH, November 1942.

WVS volunteers might take on an increased role in local public life, finding a role within their communities. Although leadership remained in the hands of middle-class women in the Black Country as elsewhere, it was through such practical contributions that WVS members, many of whom were ordinary housewives, became more visible in their local communities, playing their part in the ‘war effort’ of this ‘people’s war’.

This concept—the idea of a unified populace coming together to meet the challenges of war—was the subject of much contemporary propaganda, but has since been problematised by many historians, who rightly assert that such rhetoric cannot be read as the lived experience of all British people. At times during the conflict, class, gender, racial and other divisions in fact became more entrenched, belying this propaganda.¹⁷⁰ Nonetheless, it is possible that ordinary WVS members identified with this rhetoric, and felt that volunteering with the organisation might enable them to become part of ‘the people’ of the so-called ‘people’s war’. For others, the WVS enabled them to find some practical way of contributing to local life, for a range of reasons. As Maggie Andrews writes, ‘whilst some [WVS members] were full of public spiritedness and patriotic fervour, others needed to feel useful [or] find an activity that would divert their thoughts from worrying about their own loved ones’.¹⁷¹ Indeed, there is some evidence in Black Country narrative reports to suggest that women were more inclined to volunteer following an incident locally which brought home, often literally, the realities of war. For instance, following an air raid on Oldbury in late July 1942, 102 new members signed up to volunteer with the WVS there in August, compared with 64 in June and 46 in September.¹⁷² Whether because individuals genuinely wanted to ‘do their bit’, or perhaps to be *seen* to be ‘doing their bit’, an air raid on one’s town could impact on willingness to volunteer. There is perhaps also some suggestion from this that, just as with the Tipperary Rooms in the First World War,

¹⁷⁰ For an overview of the historiography of the ‘people’s war’, see: Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939–1945* (New Edition), (London: Pimlico, 1992 (1969)); Sonya O. Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939–1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*, (London: Routledge, 2004); Geoffrey Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Daniel Todman, *Britain’s War I: Into Battle, 1937–1941*, (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

¹⁷¹ Andrews, *Women and Evacuation*, p. 264.

¹⁷² WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-WORC/OBRY, June–September 1942.

members were choosing how, and when, to engage with the organisation. When they felt they might be of most use, or at least be seen to be being useful, they were more willing to volunteer.

Similarly, as 'war-weariness' began to set in and the end of the conflict was felt to be in sight,¹⁷³ activity levels dwindled. In Oldbury in September 1943, 'the good news from the War Front' had 'a rather bad effect on [...] attendance. Many women seem to think it is now quite unnecessary to hear how to deal with firebombs'.¹⁷⁴ By October 1944, Wolverhampton's CO found that 'persuading people to Knit for Liberated Countries', a nationwide WVS scheme, was 'hard work'¹⁷⁵ while in May 1945, Smethwick members questioned why 'mothers in liberated countries cannot knit up the wool for their own children' instead of local members doing so.¹⁷⁶ Again, there is a suggestion in these reports that members were choosing how and when to interact with the organisation. When the sense of danger was more removed, individuals were less willing to undertake voluntary war work. Nonetheless, it does appear that until the very final months of the conflict, WVS Centres were able to rely on a steady flow of volunteers. In March 1945, West Bromwich members were reported to be 'very little occupied with no call on their services' but despite this, there had been 'no resignations'.¹⁷⁷

As narrative reports only record the number of newly enrolled members each month, with no further detail provided, it is again challenging to profile the 'typical' WVS member. However, it appears that, in the Black Country, a significant proportion of members were working-class women, many of whom held part- or full-time jobs alongside domestic responsibilities. By 1943, conscription of women, first introduced in 1941, had been extended to include women up to the age of 50. Although those who had children under 14 or older male relatives to care for could be exempted, many housewives involved with the WVS may have been compelled to work.¹⁷⁸ Penny Summerfield estimates that, nationwide, around 7.5 million women were in paid work by 1943, of which about 43

¹⁷³ Angus Calder discusses how the public's morale and support for the war fluctuated at different points throughout the conflict, see: Calder, *The People's War*, especially Chapter 6.

¹⁷⁴ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-WORC/OBRY, September 1943.

¹⁷⁵ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1944-CB/WVH, October 1944.

¹⁷⁶ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1945-CB/SMW, May 1945.

¹⁷⁷ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1945-CB/WBW, March 1945.

¹⁷⁸ For an overview of the National Service (No. 2) Act, see: Susan L. Carruthers, "'Manning the Factories": Propaganda and Policy on the Employment of Women, 1939-1947', *History*, Vol. 75, No. 244, (1990), p. 232—256.

per cent were married women.¹⁷⁹ It is unclear how many WVS volunteers were in paid employment in the Black Country, but as the area had a significant industrial, working-class population, and many factories and foundries producing for the war industries, this surely suggests that many of the rank-and-file WVS members were engaged in such work. Careful reading of local WVS narrative reports supports this assertion, with many COs commenting on their members' paid employment. West Bromwich's CO wrote that 'the district being entirely industrial, many of the women are engaged, in addition to the care of their homes, in whole or part time work' but noted that despite this 'a large number' were willing 'to take on extra [voluntary] duties'.¹⁸⁰ Wolverhampton WVS tried to establish a home help scheme, providing assistance with everyday tasks like shopping for the elderly or infirm, but as Wolverhampton was 'a highly industrialised town', many 'WVS members [were] working during the daytime', which limited the scheme's success.¹⁸¹ By June 1943, Rowley Regis's CO was 'finding it more and more difficult to find volunteers for daytime work', again suggesting that many members were employed,¹⁸² while a few months later, in Darlaston, members were informed they could be 'justly proud' of their work, 'considering that Darlaston is...an industrial area with practically all its women working'.¹⁸³

Evidence from the Black Country thus seems to support Lucy Noakes' argument that 'the success of the [WVS] in recruiting widely from the working-class should not be underestimated', given the extent to which both employment and domestic responsibilities limited the time such women had for voluntary work.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, in Oldbury, members had a novel suggestion for helping working women make time for WVS duties, suggesting that 'Basic Training [a short course of lectures required for new members] be done via the wireless for those who are too tired from work to come in [to the Centre] in the evening'.¹⁸⁵ This highly practical suggestion, which it is worth noting

¹⁷⁹ Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict*, (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 29—31.

¹⁸⁰ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WBW, November/December 1942.

¹⁸¹ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1944-CB/WVH, January 1944.

¹⁸² WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-STAF/RRS B, June 1943.

¹⁸³ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-STAF/DLN UD, September 1943.

¹⁸⁴ Noakes, 'Serve to Save', p. 747.

¹⁸⁵ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1944-WORC/OBRY, February 1944.

came directly from members themselves, appears not to have been acted upon, but perhaps took inspiration from the significant number of broadcasts and radio shows aimed at housewives during wartime.¹⁸⁶ Such evidence all supports the assertion that, while leadership positions within the WVS in the Black Country remained firmly in the hands of middle-class women, rank-and-file members were drawn from a more socially diverse base, with a significant proportion of Black Country members being working-class. Through their work in the WVS—mundane and domestic though it often could be—such women were able to take an active role in local public life.

Most significant in enabling such women to become so active was the Housewives' Service (HS). The HS was a sub-section of the WVS, designed to allow women who were tied to the home through domestic responsibilities and paid work the opportunity to partake in voluntary work. It was, writes Hinton, 'the most effective way in which WVS brought working-class wives into the WVS'. To join, a woman had to attend four ARP lectures, after which she qualified for WVS membership, and from there, could pick and choose what voluntary work she felt able to undertake.¹⁸⁷ Women whose other responsibilities meant that they could not commit to time-consuming aspects of voluntary work—such as whole day shifts at a British Restaurant—could volunteer with the HS instead.

The HS quickly became the largest subsection of the WVS in the Black Country, likely because of the area's large working-class population, though it appears to have been popular across Britain. A 1942 internal history of the HS noted that it then numbered over 321,000 members nationwide.¹⁸⁸ Hinton, meanwhile, calculates that the HS 'accounted for up to 30 per cent' of WVS membership by 1943.¹⁸⁹ Exact numbers of women in each sub-section of voluntary work were rarely recorded in local narrative reports, but where they were, they support the assertion that this was the most popular section of the WVS. Indeed, in general, the HS appears to have been *more* popular in the

¹⁸⁶ Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), Chapter 4.

¹⁸⁷ Hinton, *Continuities of Class*, p. 79—85. The labels HS and WVS were often, somewhat confusingly, used interchangeably.

¹⁸⁸ Mrs Atkinson, 'Story of the Housewives' Service', WVS Internal Publication, 1942, p. 8. Information available at <<https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/about-us/our-history/fact-sheets>>, factsheet via <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/About%20us/WVS_housewives_service_2013.pdf>, consulted 28.09.2018.

¹⁸⁹ Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership*, p. 80.

Black Country than Hinton's nationwide average would suggest. In Dudley in July 1941, it was estimated that 1,800 of the Centre's roughly 2,100 members—about 85 per cent—were *only* members of the HS, and did not undertake other duties.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, a Rowley Regis internal census of June 1942 revealed 400 'live' WVS members, of which 291 (73 per cent) were only involved with the HS.¹⁹¹ A West Bromwich survey in 1943 suggested almost identical figures: 404 members, of which 298 (74 per cent) were 'HS only'.¹⁹² Such figures suggest that the clear majority of WVS members in the Black Country were *only* active within the HS, and that locally, Hinton's estimate of 30 per cent seems to be somewhat conservative. Even in towns where the proportion of women in the HS was not given, it seems clear that it was still very popular. Stourbridge began 1942 with 362 HS members,¹⁹³ a 'big drive' for the HS in Tipton in February 1941 produced 355 enrolments,¹⁹⁴ and Walsall hit 1,000 HS members in October 1942.¹⁹⁵ Locally, only Smethwick appears to have bucked this trend: the HS there, for reasons unclear, appears to have never really taken off despite numerous attempts to ensure its establishment.¹⁹⁶

Despite such exceptions, it was the HS which most effectively enabled working-class women to contribute to local—often *very* local—public life, as its members provided practical support and a semi-official presence in streets, neighbourhoods, and communities. HS members' homes effectively became highly localised versions of WVS Centres. For example, a HS member might volunteer her home as the salvage depot for her street, then organising for the collection to be transported to a central location, or for her home to be the neighbourhood's 'decontamination station' in the event of gas attacks.¹⁹⁷ Mass casualties from such attacks did not, in the event, occur, but had been widely

¹⁹⁰ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1941-CB/DDI, July 1941.

¹⁹¹ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-STAF/RRS B, June 1942. 'Live' presumably meant currently active, rather than deceased since enrolling.

¹⁹² WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-CB/WBW, March 1943.

¹⁹³ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-WORC/SBG B, January 1942.

¹⁹⁴ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1941-STAF/TPN B, February 1941.

¹⁹⁵ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WSL, October 1942.

¹⁹⁶ In March 1942, Smethwick WVS was given a talk by a representative from Dudley on the success of the HS there, but it appears to have been of no avail. WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/SMW, March 1942.

¹⁹⁷ In Walsall in May 1942, for example, an internal survey found 27 HS members 'willing for their homes to be waste paper depots' while a 'list was being compiled of those willing to take into their homes minor gas casualties and allow them to have a bath'. WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WSL, May 1942.

expected.¹⁹⁸ In preparation, some HS members agreed to open their homes—specifically their bathtubs—to anyone in the neighbourhood who was gassed and required decontamination. HS members were also given first aid training and their homes stocked with basic medical supplies and blankets, so that, in the event of an air raid on her street, HS members were equipped to assist ARP officers until help arrived. The bombed out could be taken to an HS member's home until they could be taken to an official shelter, and HS members would cater for ARP workers and the bombed out. In Dudley, for instance, by July 1941, 775 first aid boxes had been distributed to the homes of HS members, which were made identifiable to the community by the placing of a red WVS card in the window.¹⁹⁹

HS members were also expected—indeed, encouraged—to care for more temporary members of the local community, specifically service personnel stationed nearby. Also in Dudley, ‘one group of Housewives have “adopted” 80 ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Service] members stationed in the vicinity, offering hospitality’,²⁰⁰ while in Halesowen, members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force stationed on a nearby barrage balloon site were ‘provided with regular hot baths in HS members' homes’.²⁰¹ Despite increasing concerns over women's sexuality in wartime,²⁰² which included some

¹⁹⁸ Susan Grayzel has written extensively about these fears and preparations, which resulted in what she terms the ‘militarised domestic sphere’ by late 1939. See for instance: Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire. Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), especially chapters 8, 9 and 10; ‘The Baby in the Gas Mask: Motherhood, Wartime Technology, and the Gendered Division Between the Fronts During and After the First World War’, in: Hämmerle C., Überegger O., Zaar B.B. (eds) *Gender and the First World War*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 127-143; ‘Defence Against the Indefensible: The Gas Mask, the State and British Culture during and after the First World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (2014), p. 418-434.

¹⁹⁹ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1941-CB/DDL, July 1941.

²⁰⁰ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1941-CB/DDL, September/October 1941.

²⁰¹ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-WORC/HSO B, March 1943.

²⁰² There is an extensive literature on women's sexuality in the Second World War, particularly their relationships with servicemen, but for a good overview, see: Penny Summerfield & Nicole Crockett, ‘You weren't taught that with the welding’: lessons in sexuality in the Second World War’, *Women's History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1992), p. 435—454; Juliet Gardiner, *Over Here: The GIs in Wartime Britain*, (London: Collins & Brown, 1992); David Reynolds, *Rich Relations. The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945*, (London: Harper Collins, 1995); Sonya O. Rose, ‘The “Sex Question” in Anglo-American Relations in the Second World War’, *The International History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (2000), p. 884—903; Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939—1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), especially Chapter Three ‘Good-time girls’, p. 71—92; Philomena Goodman, *Women, Sexuality and War*, (London: Palgrave, 2002); Claire Langhamer, ‘Love and courtship in mid-twentieth-century England’, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 1, (2007), p. 173—196; Sabine Lee, ‘A Forgotten Legacy of the Second World War: G.I. children in post-war Britain and Germany’, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (2011), p. 157—181 and Emma

consternation over ‘the behaviour of married women’,²⁰³ HS members were also encouraged to offer this kind of hospitality to servicemen. In Halesowen, HS members were busy ‘entertaining lonely soldiers’ stationed in the vicinity,²⁰⁴ while in nearby Stourbridge, members also ‘entertain[ed] soldiers at their own homes’.²⁰⁵ In Wolverhampton, the hostesses of overseas troops did such a good job that they ‘have apparently much appreciated even our much-maligned Black Country’.²⁰⁶

While much of the HS’s work involved providing forms of domestic support within local communities, this kind of ‘social and material support’ was something that had long been part of working-class female solidarity.²⁰⁷ Sue Bruley, for instance, describes how this kind of ‘neighbourliness’ operated in working-class communities in South Wales mining villages during the General Strike of 1926.²⁰⁸ Locally, this precedent was sometimes recognised: at a January 1944 meeting in Walsall, called to discuss how the WVS might provide practical assistance to local residents in the event of an influenza epidemic, such as by shopping for the unwell, it was noted rather tartly that ‘some housewives have been doing this for a long time in their own areas’ without requiring a formal rota.²⁰⁹ Arguably, however, it was through the WVS and the HS that this previously informal process became more official. The WVS sought to build on, and perhaps formalise, the forms of neighbourly support women had been giving one another for decades within their local communities. Significantly, as Maggie Andrews writes, within the organisation, ‘the geographical and class proximity between helper and those they were helping suggests neighbourliness and sisterhood, not hierarchy and social control’.²¹⁰ Rather than being somewhat

Vickers, *Queen and Country: Same-sex desire in the British Armed Forces, 1939-1945*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

²⁰³ Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 81.

²⁰⁴ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1940-WORC/HSO B, October 1940.

²⁰⁵ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1941-WORC/SBG B, January 1941.

²⁰⁶ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1942-CB/WVH, April 1942.

²⁰⁷ Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman’s Place: An oral history of working-class women, 1890–1940*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 169; Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor, 1880-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Melanie Tebbutt, *Women’s Talk? A Social History of “Gossip” in Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880–1960*, (London: Scholar Press, 1997).

²⁰⁸ Sue Bruley, ‘The Politics of Food: Gender, Family, Community and Collective Feeding in South Wales in the General Strike and Miners’ Lockout of 1926’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (2007), p. 54–77.

²⁰⁹ WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1944-CB/WSL, January 1944

²¹⁰ Andrews, *Women and Evacuation*, p. 148.

‘done unto’, as, for example, in Walsall’s Tipperary Rooms in the First World War, WVS members were encouraged and enabled to take an active role in their communities, through their voluntary work within the organisation.

Of course, such voluntary work might be understood as yet more unpaid labour for working-class women, at a time when the privations of war made daily life particularly challenging.²¹¹ The additional demands on an individual’s time that HS or other WVS duties brought must be acknowledged. However, it is equally important to note that joining the WVS was a personal choice, and not compulsory. Furthermore, the organisation arguably went some way towards recognising the value of women’s domestic labour. Some of the voluntary work done by the WVS—manning a canteen for several hours, for instance—was simply not realistic for a working-class woman holding down a part- or full-time job alongside her own domestic responsibilities. The HS, therefore, was particularly significant in enabling those women who wanted to, to participate in local public life, through a manageable form of voluntary war work which recognised the other demands on their time. The practicalities of being the person responsible for first aid on a street; being the community’s ‘decontamination station’ in the event of a gas attack; or acting as a highly localised salvage depot effectively drew these women into the public sphere. It gave them a role in local—often *very* local—public life. The HS and the WVS did not seek to challenging existing gender roles, with work in both generally focused around the domestic. Significantly, however, the WVS both recognised the importance of this work, and, through the HS, provided a means for women who wanted to contribute to the war effort, but who were constrained by their other responsibilities, the ability to do so. Leadership roles within local branches in the Black Country were certainly the preserve of middle-class women, as Hinton suggests was the case across Britain. Nonetheless, in this very working-class, industrialised area, the organisation enabled working-class women to take on a larger, recognised role in local public life during the conflict.

²¹¹ For discussion of these privations, see: Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially Chapter 3.

Conclusion:

The evidence from the three organisations studied in this chapter—the Tipperary Rooms, the NCW and the WVS—suggests that, across this period, there was a gradual increase in Black Country women's engagement with local public life, and thus their politicisation, through these associations. The local leadership of these groups was generally drawn from the middle classes, with relatively few exceptions. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, ordinary working-class women were increasingly able to become actively engaged in local public life through these organisations. In Walsall's Tipperary Rooms, while such women were deliberately excluded from organising roles, they were still able to affect how the Rooms were run by choosing how, and when, to use them. The Rooms effectively became a space in which women from different social backgrounds were able to contest control over a specific aspect of public life in Walsall. The crisis of war meant that there was demand for the Rooms' services as a canteen, as it met a practical need in the lives of women working in Walsall's war industries, and the organising committee worked to facilitate this. Once this need vanished, however, the Rooms' facilities were no longer of use to local women, who simply stopped accessing their facilities, causing the organisation to close.

Wolverhampton NCW operated very differently. From its inception in 1919, it held monthly meetings, each of which were centred around a specific issue or topic, which were generally connected to the campaigns in which the wider women's movement was engaged at this time. Locally, however, its significance came in the way that the organisation acted as a space in which its members might learn the political process through these campaigns and be encouraged and enabled to take on increasingly active roles in public life in the town through involvement in these issues. Finally, within the WVS, women across the Black Country were afforded increased responsibilities within the often very local public sphere, taking on a recognised role in public life through their voluntary civil defence work within their communities, neighbourhoods and even, in the case of the Housewives Service, their streets. Certainly, the immediate need for this civil defence work, in the WVS, did fade away once the conflict ended. But the organisation itself—like the NCW—did not: both remain active in the twenty first century. Indeed, while this chapter concludes with the Second

World War's end, in May 1945, it is important to recognise that housewives' organisations remained an important site of women's political engagement throughout the 1950s.²¹² As Caitríona Beaumont has recently demonstrated, housewives' associations represented the interests of well over a million women across Britain during the 1950s.²¹³

In examining the work of these three organisations on a local level, this chapter has suggested that these groups could enable members to undertake a 'practical politics': a kind of political action rooted in the local, the specific and the pragmatic, which could serve to draw women into local public life across and between the two world wars. This kind of activism was not limited, however, to housewives' associations like the Tipperary Rooms, the NCW and the WVS. It was equally present in many other contemporary voluntary organisations. In the years before the arrival of the National Health Service, many organisations associated with health and welfare work had a voluntary component through which some women were able to engage in practical work, which drew them into the local public sphere in a similar way. The next chapter, therefore, examines three such groups in the Black Country.

²¹² See, for instance: Andrews, *Acceptable Face*, Chapters 8 and 9; Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership*, Part II; Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, Chapters 6 and 7.

²¹³ Caitriona Beaumont, 'What Do Women Want? Housewives' Associations, Activism and Changing Representations of Women in the 1950s', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (2017), p. 147—162.

Chapter Three

Women and voluntary health organisations

Introduction:

This chapter explores the ways in which voluntary work within health and welfare organisations could politicise women in the Black Country. It uses evidence from the organisational records, minutes of meetings and annual reports, of three groups: the Material Aid Committee of Walsall Child Welfare Association (WCWA) during the First World War;¹ Halesowen Infant Welfare Centre (HIWC) from 1928 to 1939;² and the Ladies' Linen League affiliated to Dudley Guest Hospital, between 1940 and 1948,³ each of which are examined as discreet case studies in Parts I, II, and III of the chapter respectively. Unlike the housewives' associations studied in the previous chapter, which were entirely voluntary, these organisations all involved medical professionals in some capacity. This chapter, however, is focused only on women's voluntary involvement with the three groups, largely—though not exclusively—through their roles on their organising committees. It argues that, in common with the housewives' associations studied in the previous chapter, Black Country women were increasingly able to become politically active and engaged with local public life through their roles within, and interactions with, these three organisations.

It is suggested that, over this period, these organisations became somewhat more democratic and socially diverse in their makeup. While the organising committees of the groups were generally dominated by middle-class women—as in the previous chapter, such women tended to have more time and financial resources for voluntary work—over time, there appears to have been greater scope

¹ Walsall Local History Centre, Ref: 360, *Walsall Child Welfare Voluntary Association General Minutes Book 1916—1924*. Hereafter 'WCWA Minutes [date of meeting]'. As noted below, the Material Aid Committee minutes are contained within this volume.

² The HIWC records consist of a minutes' book dating from 1931, and two scrapbook volumes detailing the organisation's involvement in Baby Week in 1928 and 1930. Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, D13/A1/1, *Halesowen Infant Welfare Centre minute book, 1931—1973*, [hereafter 'HIWC minutes, [date of meeting]']; D13/X1/1, *Halesowen Baby Week Volume, 1928*, [hereafter 'Baby Week, 1928']; D13/X1/2, *Halesowen Baby Week Volume, 1930* [hereafter 'Baby Week, 1930'].

³ Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, DGU/3/10, *Dudley Ladies' Linen League Collection, 29th Annual Report, 1940* [henceforward AR 1940]; 33rd Annual Report, 1944 [henceforward AR 1944] and 36th Annual Report, 1947 [henceforward AR 1947].

for some women from more socially diverse backgrounds to take on roles on these committees. This is especially evident in Part II, which considers HIWC's work in the interwar period, and Part III, which examines Dudley's Linen League during and immediately after the Second World War. This diversification was far less evident in records pertaining to WCWA's Material Aid Committee during the First World War, which are explored in Part I. This committee was exclusively dominated by middle-class women, some of whom were also involved with running the town's Tipperary Rooms, discussed in the previous chapter.

As is shortly explored, women's participation in voluntary health organisations, especially those connected to the infant welfare movement, has a long history. From the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class women especially were able to 'move parts of the private and the feminine world into the masculine and public domain', through a kind of voluntary social work among the working classes which did not challenge the professional dominance of this field by men, a phenomenon Eileen Yeo terms 'social motherhood'.⁴ This was maintained through the First World War, interwar, and Second World War years, but the arrival of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948 appears to have limited, to some degree, the extent to which women were able to become active in public life through these kinds of organisations. As Part III discusses, the Linen League in Dudley appears to have maintained its place in local public life through the Second World War and beyond, until the establishment of the NHS meant that its work appears to have ceased.

Until this time, this chapter argues that these three organisations were able to politicise local women through the very practical nature of the work they undertook. This, it is suggested, was a 'practical politics', one rooted in the local and the pragmatic and which was frequently focussed on a single issue. Part I, for example, uses the minutes of WCWA's Material Aid Committee to argue that the middle-class women on the committee became increasingly active in local public life through the work of providing 'material aid' to impoverished mothers who applied for assistance. The aid—

⁴ Yeo's ideas are discussed more fully below, but see: Eileen Janes Yeo, 'Social motherhood and the sexual communion of labour in British Social Science, 1850-1950', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1992), p. 63—87, p. 66; 'The creation of 'motherhood' and Women's responses in Britain and France, 1750–1914', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (1999), p. 201—218.

temporary grants, usually of food, milk, coal or occasionally money—was very pragmatic in nature; the committee very rarely pushed for any kind of systemic legislative change, but instead worked to provide individuals with temporary, tangible support to meet their most immediate and pressing needs. This section explores the inherent class tensions in this kind of activism, but also suggests that there is evidence that many applicants to the committee sought assistance from multiple Walsall sources, indicating a degree of engagement with organisations in the local public sphere, either borne of their own agency, in using these groups to their advantage, or, in some cases, from sheer desperation.

Part II, meanwhile, uses records from HIWC: its minute book, which dates from February 1931, and two scrapbooks made for Halesowen's National Baby Week celebrations in 1928 and 1930. It suggests that HIWC's voluntary committee were increasingly concerned with providing useful, practical forms of assistance for local mothers who used the clinic, most notably in financing the provision of 'home helps' for postpartum mothers. Furthermore, in encouraging clinic mothers to participate in its writing competitions, which involved producing essays on topics typically related to motherhood and domesticity HIWC afforded these women—many of whom were drawn from the working classes—the opportunity to express their views to a public audience, something which may have served to politicise them and build their confidence. There is some suggestion here that HIWC became a more inclusive organisation than WCWA had been in the earlier period.

Finally, Part III uses evidence from the Ladies' Linen League associated with Dudley Guest Hospital to suggest that, until 1948, the League enabled some local women to participate in the management of the hospital. It afforded its committee members a recognised role in the public sphere through the very practical work it undertook: the League fundraised for, then purchased, all the material goods the hospital needed each year, liaising with hospital staff on what was required—a very different kind of voluntary health work to that undertaken in infant welfare organisations. It is argued that the League formed a significant part of civic and associational life in Second World War-era Dudley, until the arrival of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948 meant that its services were no longer required. Until then, it is suggested, the League afforded Dudley women the opportunity to

bring a form of gendered expertise to local public life. Before the introduction of the NHS, many hospitals across Britain had Linen Leagues, which formed part of the wider community fundraising around voluntary hospitals. The historiography of this kind of hospital fundraising is examined in Part III. As this suggests, the role of women, and especially gendered organisations like Linen Leagues, have been relatively little studied within wider research into hospital funding and fundraising. This is not true, however, of infant welfare organisations like WCWA and HIWC, on which there exists an extensive historiography.

Women and the infant welfare movement:

There is substantial debate among historians about the impact of women's voluntary involvement with infant welfare, and particularly the class tensions between middle-class voluntary workers within this movement, and the invariably working-class mothers with whom they interacted. Early feminist historians were particularly concerned with the ways in which, from the mid-nineteenth century, many middle-class volunteers sought to impose their cultural values on working-class families through infant welfare organisations. Anna Davin, for example, argues that the promotion of infant and maternal welfare among the working-class was frequently informed by an imperialist agenda which sought to ensure that healthy babies were produced who could maintain the British Empire.⁵ Other historians, including Carol Dyhouse, Jane Lewis, and Ellen Ross, argue that even where women voluntary workers within infant welfare organisations were genuinely well-meaning, they lacked an understanding of the reality of working-class mothers' lived experiences, and their advice was consequently of little use to these mothers.⁶ As noted, Eileen Yeo terms this kind of activism 'social motherhood', arguing that though this, middle-class ideologies were forced upon working-class women who were often 'presented as powerless victims or defenceless children', preventing 'the growth of another kind of family: a sisterhood among women of different social classes'.⁷ Other

⁵ Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 5, (1978), p. 9—65

⁶ Carol Dyhouse, 'Working-class mothers and infant mortality in England, 1895-1914', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (1978), p. 248—267; Jane Lewis, *The Politics of motherhood: child and maternal welfare in England, 1900—1939*, (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Jane Lewis, *Women in England, 1870-1950: sexual divisions and social change*, (London: Prentice-Hall, 1984), p. 38—40; Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 207—209.

⁷ Yeo, 'Social motherhood', p. 78—80.

historians, meanwhile, argued that the infant welfare movement brought about significant improvements to child and maternal health, reducing mortality rates for both mothers and their babies. Deborah Dwork most strongly critiqued these earlier interpretations, focusing on developments in, and consequent improvement to, infant welfare during wartime, arguing that conflict stimulated the implementation of such services, and consequently improved infant mortality rates.⁸ Notably, both WCWA and HIWC were established in 1916, at least in part because of wartime concerns over infant mortality rates. Further research, meanwhile, charted the improvements in health, particularly falling infant mortality rates, which followed the establishment of infant welfare centres in specific locales.⁹

More recent scholarship, as Pamela Dale argues, has been ‘less pre-occupied with the care and control paradox’, and instead considers the ways ‘that the same services could serve a variety of agendas for their providers and clients’, as in her own research into an infant welfare clinic in Bridgewater, Somerset, in the interwar period.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Marjaana Niemi has suggested that part of the reason for the success of the infant welfare movement in Birmingham was that women here were able to negotiate the terms of its use.¹¹ Lara Marks, too, argues that in the interwar years especially, the infant welfare movement became ‘more democratic and inclusive of the mothers that they were intended to serve’, a view echoed by Ruth Davidson in her study of the Croydon Infant Welfare Association in this period.¹² Furthermore, as Katharina Rowold demonstrates, the interwar years ‘saw a new focus on middle-class mothers’ alongside those from the working-classes.¹³

⁸ Deborah Dwork, *War is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1898-1918*, (London: Tavistock Routledge, 1986).

⁹ See, for instance: Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880—1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 136—37, for the remarkable fall in Birmingham’s infant mortality rate following various reforms; Hilary Marland, ‘A Pioneer in Infant Welfare: the Huddersfield Scheme, 1903-1920’, *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (1993), p. 25—50, p. 47.

¹⁰ Pamela Dale, ‘The Bridgewater Infant Welfare Clinic 1922—1939: From an authoritarian concern with ‘Welfare Mothers’ to a more inclusive community health centre?’, *Family & Community History*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (2008), p. 69—83, p. 70.

¹¹ Marjaana Niemi, *Public Health and Municipal Policy Making: Britain and Sweden, 1900—1940*, (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹² Lara Marks, *Metropolitan Maternity: maternal and infant welfare services in early twentieth century London*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1996), p. 8; Ruth Davidson, ‘Dreams of Utopia’: the infant welfare movement in interwar Croydon, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 23, No.2, (2014), p. 239—255.

¹³ Katharina Rowold, ‘Modern mothers, modern babies: breastfeeding and mother’s milk in interwar Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 7, (2019), p. 1157—1176.

Arguably, the years following the First World War saw less of a divide between ‘helper’ and ‘helped’; as was the case, I argue in Part II, in Halesowen.

In addition to research into the work of the infant welfare movement, historians have also been concerned with the ways in which it formed part of the politics of the women’s movement in the early twentieth century. As Seth Koven and Sonya Michel argue, ‘maternalism extolled the virtues of domesticity while simultaneously legitimating women’s public relationships to politics and the state’.¹⁴ Koven suggests that women involved with developing infant welfare policy in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain operated at the ‘borderlands’ of politics, able to claim a degree of political power through their work in these kinds of organisations at a time when all women were still unenfranchised.¹⁵ Pat Thane, meanwhile, explores how the women’s groups within the Labour Party, the Women’s Labour League (WLL) and later the Women’s Sections, pressed the party to incorporate maternalist social policy measures in the years to 1939.¹⁶ Elsewhere, she has shown how many leading women activists within the Labour party before the First World War took an active interest in infant welfare. In London’s Notting Hill, it was the WLL which established a mother and baby clinic in 1911, and in Wolverhampton, ‘the women of the WLL and Women’s Co-operative Guild were willing to work among the ‘slum dwellers’ [...], demanding the introduction of free maternity and child welfare clinics and free school meals’. As Thane argues, ‘one role of voluntary action was to expose need and show the way forward for state action’, and working-class organisations were able to affect change in this way.¹⁷ The left-wing Women’s Co-operative Guild campaigned especially

¹⁴ Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, ‘Introduction’, in: Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (eds.), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 1—42.

¹⁵ Seth Koven, ‘Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840 to 1914’, in: Koven and Michel, *Mothers of a New World*, p. 94—135.

¹⁶ Pat Thane, ‘Women in the British Labour Party and the Construction of State Welfare, 1906—1939’, in Koven and Michel, *Mothers of a New World*, p. 343—377.

¹⁷ Pat Thane, ‘Women in the Labour Party and Women’s Suffrage’, In: Myriam Bousshba-Bravard, *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women’s Vote in Britain, 1880—1914*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 35—51, p. 43—44.

vociferously for improvements to maternity care, and most significantly gave voice to working-class mothers by collating their experiences in *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, published 1915.¹⁸

More recent work has noted the connections between the suffrage movement and the infant welfare campaigns, recognising the multiple spaces in which women were able to become politically active during this period. Especially during the First World War, when the direction and focus of the suffrage movement shifted as a result of the conflict, some women who had been active suffrage campaigners, including leading figures such as Sylvia Pankhurst, undertook work in infant welfare campaigns.¹⁹ Linda Bryder, meanwhile, argues that 1917's National Baby Week, an event first held that year, but which became a feature of the interwar period, was 'a moment of politicisation of women arguing for cross-class social reform targeted at mothers'.²⁰ Generally, then, it has come to be accepted that women from a broad cross-spectrum of society were able to engage with politics through the infant welfare movement. While there were often significant class tensions between activists and those they sought to assist, these did not preclude women from diverse political and social backgrounds becoming involved in the movement, especially into the interwar years.

This chapter is therefore informed by these complex and nuanced approaches to the history of infant welfare in Britain, and women's roles within the movement. It draws upon Pamela Dale's assertion that 'the same services could serve a variety of agendas for their providers and clients', to understand how women could become politically active and engaged with local public life through their interactions with the two infant welfare organisations examined here, in Walsall and

¹⁸ Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War*, (London: Routledge, 1997), especially Chapter 4; Margaret Llewelyn Davis (ed.), *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, (London: Virago reprint edition, 1978; originally London: G Bell and Sons, 1915).

¹⁹ Pankhurst's own account of the war contains details of her welfare work during the conflict, see: E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England During the First World War*, (London: Ebury, 1987 (1932)). For more recent scholarship, see: Katherine Connelly, Sylvia Pankhurst, the First World War and the struggle for democracy, *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (2015); Berry Mayall, *Visionary Women and Visible Children: England 1900—1920*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Alison Ronan, 'The radical responses made by women in Manchester, during the First World War, to the 'special problems of child life accentuated by the war'', in Maggie Andrews, Neil Fleming and Marcus Morris (eds.), *Histories, Memories and Representations of Being Young in the First World War*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2020), p. 31—52.

²⁰ Linda Bryder, 'Mobilising Mothers: The 1917 National Baby Week', *Medical History*, Vol. 63, No. 1, (2019), p. 2—23.

Halesowen.²¹ It should be noted that the chapter does not focus on specific campaigns with which the wider movement was concerned, for example campaigns for family allowances,²² or indeed the stream of legislation passed between 1914 and 1939 connected with infant and maternal welfare,²³ because, as far as the archival evidence drawn upon here suggests, neither WCWA or HIWC were active in these campaigns. That is to say, while the women active in these organisations may have broadly supported such campaigns, or welcomed changes in legislation that they brought, they did not use either organisation as vehicles for working for these changes.

Instead, the chapter uses the notion of a ‘practical politics’ to consider how women’s involvement with the two organisations in Walsall and Halesowen contributed to their activism in local public life. As Karen Hunt and June Hannam suggest, ‘the national story of women’s politics will change when it is rebuilt out from the neighbourhood – from the local and the everyday’.²⁴ Consideration of the practical, day-to-day work of WCWA and HIWC contributes to a wider understanding of how women might become politicised through their involvement with the infant welfare movement in their locale. The pragmatic support that both organisations provided to mothers was focused within these towns: the Material Aid Committee of First World War era Walsall provided specific grants such as two weeks’ supply of milk, or five shillings’ of groceries, to mothers from Walsall in need, for instance, while HIWC organised the provision of home helps to postpartum mothers in Halesowen. Neither forms of assistance were part of a wider campaign for increased support elsewhere. In Halesowen, for example, the voluntary committee fundraised for the employment of the home helps and sent them to local mothers’ homes as and when they were needed; their goal was not a wider changer in legislation relating to the provision of home helps for postpartum mothers, and thus they did not engage in any campaigning on this matter. This was, therefore, not a politics which made newspaper headlines, which drew together feminist and women’s

²¹ Dale, ‘The Bridgewater infant welfare clinic’, p. 70.

²² For a useful overview of the campaign for family allowances in the interwar period, the passage of the Family Allowance Act, and the role of women’s organisations in the campaign, see: Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women’s Movement in England, 1928–1964*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 124–129.

²³ For example, the 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act or the 1936 Midwives’ Act.

²⁴ Hunt and Hannam, ‘Archaeology’, p. 138.

organisations in petitions or other forms of activism, or which impacted on women up and down the country. It was, however, a politics which quietly helped to make the lives of women attending the clinic a little bit easier. Understanding such small-scale, local actions develops a wider understanding of how women's politics operated in this period, through the local, and how women might become politicised through the interactions with such organisations. Parts I and II now explore this in the context of the Walsall and Halesowen groups.

Part I: Walsall Child Welfare Association's Material Aid Committee, c.1916—1918:

This section utilises the records of the Material Aid Committee (MAC), a sub-committee of Walsall Child Welfare Association (WCWA) in the First World War to understand how interactions with and in this organisation might have served to politicise local women during this period. The MAC provided aid, generally in the form of monetary grants or 'in kind' grants of food, milk or coal, to impoverished mothers, usually temporarily, to help them through a particularly challenging event—their confinement, or a husband's illness, for example. The money to provide this appears to have come from WCWA, itself funded by a grant from the Local Government Board Scheme, with some contributions from local rates and donations from the town's great and good.²⁵ While WCWA had a substantial organising committee which included many local officials such as town councillors and medical practitioners as well as volunteers, the MAC was much smaller. It was comprised of volunteers, who appear to have been local middle-class women with little formal training in social or medical work. This section suggests that the MAC provided a space for both providers and clients of its services to engage in a form of 'practical politics' in contemporary Walsall. Committee members were able to carve out a role in local public life by using the organisation to provide practical, pragmatic support to mothers in need. Furthermore, though applicants to the MAC were invariably some of Walsall's poorest residents, there is nonetheless some evidence that some applied to multiple organisations in Walsall to secure the maximum possible aid for their children. While, for some, this might have been borne of sheer desperation, for others, it perhaps suggests some degree of

²⁵ 'To Save Child Life', *Walsall Observer*, 22 July 1916, p. 4.

understanding of the contemporary power structures in Walsall, and a degree of political engagement inherent in the navigation of these bodies.

Both WCWA and the MAC were established in 1916, but many in the town had long been concerned with infant welfare. Walsall's infant mortality rate was particularly high: in 1907, 154 in every 1,000 babies born there had tragically died, compared with a national average of 127 in 1,000, a statistic which troubled the town council so much that in 1908 they employed a 'lady health visitor' to advise mothers, who would be assisted by 'voluntary lady visitors'.²⁶ These volunteers appear to have been drawn from Walsall's Ladies Health Society (LHS). The LHS was a voluntary organisation which, in addition to supporting the recently-appointed health visitor, also delivered lectures on topics such as 'home life and the care of the children', 'cookery', and 'general subjects of health'.²⁷ Regrettably, its records do not survive, but references in local newspapers suggest that its membership was representative of what Anna Davin terms the 'socially conscious gentry of a neighbourhood'.²⁸ members appear to have been the middle-class wives of local councillors, businessmen and clergymen, with lectures addressed to working-class mothers.²⁹

However, the local situation did not improve and in October 1914, Walsall Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG) organised a conference to address the still 'very high' infant mortality rate, drawing together local women's organisations, including the LHS, Walsall National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Walsall Labour Association, and various WCG branches from Staffordshire to discuss the problem.³⁰ Delegates passed several resolutions, including one which called for the council to use the 'Local Government Board Scheme' to fund a weekly baby clinic and decided that a 'deputation of ladies concerned with this work' would ask to address the council.³¹ The appointment of a health visitor in 1908 suggests that town officials had already begun to address the

²⁶ 'Walsall Town Council', *Walsall Advertiser*, 18 July 1908, p. 2.

²⁷ 'Walsall Ladies Health Society', *Walsall Advertiser*, 10 October 1908, p. 5.

²⁸ Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', 12.

²⁹ For example, in 'Walsall Ladies Health Society' (1908), a list of attendees at the inaugural meeting was given: these included several contemporary Walsall councillors, two local GPs and a Reverend, and many of their wives, see also: 'Walsall Ladies Health Society', *Walsall Advertiser*, 30 November 1912, p. 7.

³⁰ 'The Care of Motherhood', *Common Cause*, 30 October 1914, p. 511; 'Maternity Centres', *Walsall Observer*, 10 October 1914, p. 9.

³¹ 'Maternity Centres'.

problem of infant welfare here. However, both this deputation, and the wider discourse surrounding infant welfare in wartime, contributed to the establishment of WCWA in early 1916. Nationwide, the number of infant welfare centres ‘more than doubled’ during the war as increasing concern over the health of the future population led, as many historians have demonstrated, to greater state involvement with infant welfare.³² The first WCWA clinic opened in Walsall in April 1916, and two more followed in July 1916 and July 1917, in different parts of town.³³ Archival records date from June 1916, when the first minuted meetings took place, but from 1917, its annual general meetings (AGM) were held in February, suggesting that a committee had been in place since February 1916.³⁴

This committee was comprised both of town officials, including councillors and medical professionals, and women volunteers, who also supported medical staff at clinics by providing lectures and demonstrations such as the LHS had organised. The MAC, however, was something of a departure from this kind of lecture and demonstration approach. Unlike the LHS, it provided direct, practical aid to mothers in need. Some of the MAC’s work involved providing low-cost items for mothers who attended the weekly clinics. For example, it organised the production of baby garments, made by volunteers and sold at cost price to attending mothers, who ‘express[ed] great satisfaction at their prices and quality’.³⁵ WCWA’s 1917 annual report recorded that ‘714’ garments had been made during the year, and sought more ‘helpers’ for their production, as ‘the request for garments by mothers is very great’.³⁶ This section, however, considers their work in providing applicants with

³² Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, 43–44. For more on the war’s influence on the infant welfare movement, see: Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, (London: Palgrave, 1985), p. 141–153; Dwork, *War is good for babies and other young children*; Gerald DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, (London: Longman, 1996), p. 214–222; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society And The First World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 278–279, 285–286; Ronan, ‘The radical responses made by women in Manchester’. Relatedly, Susan Grayzel considers the extent to which motherhood became central to women’s identities during the conflict: Susan R. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

³³ WCWA Minutes, 30 June 1916 refers to a new centre opening 17 July 1916; WCWA Minutes 1 August 1917 refer to arranging a voluntary committee for the ‘new centre’, though it is unclear precisely when this opened. The February 1918 AGM refers to three Centres: Abelwell Street (in the town centre); Milton Street (on the south of Walsall, in the Palfrey area); and Stafford Street (on the north side of Walsall).

³⁴ WCWA Minutes, 13 February 1917. It is possible that earlier meetings were minuted, but that these records have subsequently been lost.

³⁵ MAC Minutes, 22 January 1917.

³⁶ Second Annual Report (1917) of the General Committee of WCWA, p. 10, pasted into WCWA Minutes, 6 February 1918.

emergency grants, as it was this work which perhaps more actively politicised both committee members and, in some cases, applicants.

The MAC first appears within WCWA minutes in September 1916, as a separate sub-committee.³⁷ It met somewhat sporadically, and its minutes, which provide detail on the cases with which the MAC dealt, were kept on loose sheets of paper and pasted into the WCWA minute book.³⁸ Regrettably, over time, some of these papers have become melded together, and for this reason, not all the MAC's records remain legible. Consequently, it is impossible to ascertain precisely how many applications the MAC received, or how many were awarded aid. 41 of the cases assessed between September 1916 and November 1918 remain legible within the records today. Of these, 28—about 70 per cent—were provided with some form of aid by the MAC. This statistic must be treated with caution as it does not include all the cases with which the MAC dealt; the extent to which it is indicative is unclear. Nonetheless, it does suggest that committee members showed significant willingness to provide support to local mothers who applied for help.

Applicants were visited by a member of the Home Visiting Committee (HVC), a separate sub-committee, which sent a report to the MAC Secretary. It is assumed that this report contained details on the applicant's current living conditions. If there was some sort of standard form which contained a set of specific questions applicants were asked, this has not survived.³⁹ The MAC assessed this information at its meetings, decided whether help should be given and what form it should take, and distributed any aid agreed upon. MAC minutes consist of a few lines of detail on the circumstances of a case and any support that was arranged. As discussed shortly, aid could be provided in addition to more 'official' forms of support, such as from the Board of Guardians. The MAC also made a conscious effort, from January 1917, to work with Walsall's branch of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association (SSAFA), and the War Pensions Committee (WPC), to co-ordinate

³⁷ WCWA Minutes, 20 September 1916.

³⁸ For clarity, I refer to 'WCWA Minutes' in relation to the overall committee and 'MAC Minutes' in reference to this sub-committee, however these minutes were not kept separately and can be found within the original collection.

³⁹ WCWA Minutes, 11 January 1917 refers to this procedure, though it was likely in place since September 1916.

their efforts in visiting servicemen's children.⁴⁰ The Charity Organisation Society (COS) had urged local charities to share regular lists of their cases since 1910, 'to make their work more effectual',⁴¹ and it is possible that the MAC had come to realise that they might work more effectively to support local families if they co-ordinated efforts with these other Walsall organisations, or possibly to stop cases from overlapping.

Archival records which remain legible do not give a complete list of every member of the MAC and HVC. The WCWA 1917 Annual Report notes that, over six months, '427 visits' had been made to Walsall's mothers by 42 'Voluntary Visitors'.⁴² Not all of these visits were made in connection with the MAC—WCWA aimed to visit newly-delivered mothers regularly to monitor a baby's progress.⁴³ The figure of '42 Voluntary Visitors' suggests that at least this many women were involved with the HVC in some capacity. MAC records, however, name only 14 individuals as being part of either the HVC or MAC. It is clear from the figure of 42 visitors that these were only a small proportion of the HVC, with the size of the MAC unclear. Nonetheless, these named individuals provide a good starting point for researching at least the most active members of both committees, and Appendix E contains biographical details of these 14 women. All came from middle- and upper-middle class families; several were wives or daughters of men working in business or the professions. Those who were single gave their occupation on the census as 'private means', indicating a degree of wealth, and all but one employed a live-in domestic servant, with several employing multiple servants.⁴⁴ Home visitors received 'a short course of instructional lectures' from local GP Dr Shore but there is no indication that, beyond this, they had any formal training in social work.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ WCWA Minutes, 31 January 1917. The Walsall SSAFA branch does appear to have been in existence before the First World War, but it does not appear in local archival records.

⁴¹ Magali Gente, 'Family Ideology and the Charity Organisation Society in Great Britain during the First World War', *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 27 No. 3, (2002), p. 255—272, p. 258.

⁴² It is unclear to which six months these records refer.

⁴³ WCWA Minutes, 30 June 1916. When establishing the HVC, it was asked that prospective members be able to give enough time that babies could be visited once every 10 days up to the age of 6 months, and once every 21 days 'after that'.

⁴⁴ All references provided in Appendix E.

⁴⁵ WCWA Minutes, 7 August 1916. The content of these lectures was unrecorded.

Nonetheless, these affluent, middle-class women could wield a substantial amount of power over applicants. For example, in one case, ‘Mrs L.’, a mother of five children, four of whom were under school age, applied for assistance from the MAC because her husband was ‘delicate and unable to work regularly’ and was ‘suffering through a period of ill health’; the family income had consequently reduced from £1 10 shillings per week to only 10 shillings per week, from National Insurance contributions. The MAC agreed to award ‘a grant of £1 during his absence from work’. This money, however, was ‘to be disbursed...at the discretion of the visitor, Mrs Layton’ (emphasis mine).⁴⁶ Dorothea Layton, as Appendix E details, was typical of the women involved with the MAC or HVC. Her husband, Frank, was a local GP and Liberal town councillor and in 1911, the family employed three live-in servants, including a children’s nurse. These women presumably enabled Dorothea to take such an active role in local public life: though she had five young children, she was involved with a number of organisations including the Tipperary Rooms (see Chapter 2) and the pre-war suffrage movement.⁴⁷ There is nothing to suggest she was anything but genuinely well-intentioned towards applicants like Mrs L., but, apart from the ‘short course of lectures’ delivered by Dr Shore, she had had no formal training.⁴⁸ Though her husband was a GP, perhaps making her marginally more knowledgeable than other voluntary visitors, she was still unqualified.

This lack of formal training meant that, as Eileen Yeo argues, class barriers could stand in the way of ‘building a common sisterhood’ between middle-class voluntary visitors and the women they sought to assist.⁴⁹ Locally, such class and cultural barriers could at times result in an applicant not being awarded aid, and there is some suggestion that the committee members’ decisions were framed by their own contemporary cultural understandings of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor.⁵⁰ For example, one case report asserted ‘the account from all sources is that the woman is deserving’ and

⁴⁶ MAC Minutes, 22 January 1917. At this time, the MAC did not record the names or addresses of applicants, so this woman is known only as ‘Mrs L’. After April 1917, the practise was to provide names and addresses.

⁴⁷ See Appendix E for all references.

⁴⁸ WCWA Minutes, 7 August 1916.

⁴⁹ Yeo, ‘Social Motherhood’, p. 81.

⁵⁰ For notions of the ‘deserving’ or ‘underserving’ poor, see for example: Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society*, (London: Verso Books, 2013 (original Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971)); Pat Thane, ‘Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England’, *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (1978), p. 29–51.

this applicant was awarded aid, but another report described a different applicant and her husband as ‘very unsatisfactory people to deal with’, and assistance was not provided.⁵¹ On other occasions, evidence suggests that committee members did not supply aid in part because of their own cultural values surrounding child-rearing. For instance, when ‘Mrs Clark, a decent, hard-working woman’ applied for assistance with nursery fees, the MAC expressed sympathy, acknowledging that her income, ‘14 shillings a week’, was ‘a small amount for a woman to raise her children on’, but regretted that they could not help as they had ‘cases much worse off to deal with’.⁵² However, this decision was also taken because the HVC investigation revealed that ‘the children were being well looked after by their grandmother’ which suggested to the committee that, ‘it was perhaps not necessary to send [them] to nursery’.⁵³ The grandmother may not have felt able to continue looking after rambunctious young children, or she may have wanted to go out to work herself, hence the application, but there is perhaps some sense that the MAC were imposing their own cultural values—specifically about the need to keep children, wherever possible, at home with relatives and not in nursery—on this family.

Despite such examples, however, the MAC do appear to have been more likely than not to award aid than to not. As noted above, of the 41 legible applications received between September 1916 and November 1918, about 70 per cent were given help. Applications from unmarried mothers appear extremely rare, but the single legible application from such a mother was awarded assistance without comment on her circumstances, indicating a degree of acceptance that support should be given in these cases.⁵⁴ It is also notable that, where aid was awarded, the MAC operated on what might be described as a ‘no strings attached’ basis. Beyond the initial home visit, applicants were not required to submit to regular checks on their behaviour, circumstances, or how they were spending

⁵¹ MAC Minutes, 22 January 1917 and 27 April 1917.

⁵² In addition, Mrs Clark 10 shillings and 4 loaves from the Board of Guardians. MAC Minutes, 27 April 1917.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ MAC Minutes, 15 April 1918 refer to a ‘Miss Bottley’, with all other cases being referred to with the honorific ‘Mrs’. Coincidentally, this was the same month the National Council of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child was established, see: Tanya Evans and Pat Thane, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially Chapter 1 for the First World War.

any money awarded. Essentially, they were not ‘policed’ unlike, for example, those granted a war widows’ pension, who had to continually demonstrate ‘respectable’ behaviour to remain in receipt of the pension.⁵⁵ While it is not unreasonable to assume that the home visitor encouraged an applicant to regularly attend a WCWA clinic, this was not—as far as surviving records suggest—mandatory.

This might be explained by the support provided usually being small-scale, temporary, and above all practical. Grants of money were not enormous sums. The case of Mrs L., above, who was awarded £1 per week, essentially the difference between her husband’s usual wage, and what the family received through National Insurance, seems typical.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, such amounts may well have made the difference in assisting families through a period of hardship, however temporary. Grants of food, meanwhile, appear to have been delivered directly. This may, in some circumstances, have been a way for the MAC to ensure that only the pre-approved groceries were being purchased. In many cases, however, it was arguably another means by which the MAC provided pragmatic support to local mothers. Often, food and milk were supplied to women who were approaching birth, such as ‘Mrs Aston and Mrs Dutton’, who were given milk ‘to strengthen [them] for confinement, and in the latter case [was] continued as the woman has been seriously ill and is still in need of extra nourishment’.⁵⁷ Food grants were also given to the newly-delivered. Mrs Bradford, for instance, ‘had an infant 5 days old when the application was received’ and although she was already receiving food and milk ‘on a fairly generous scale’ from the Board of Guardians, the MAC decided to supplement this with ‘5 shillings worth of milk and groceries...for two weeks’ because she ‘was not getting sufficient nourishment and the extra food and milk was considered necessary if [she] was to continue feeding the child herself’.⁵⁸ Bradford’s case was considered in July 1917, when severe food shortages

⁵⁵ As Janis Lomas writes, war widows could be visited regularly by members of local voluntary committees and sometimes police officers, with reports made on their behaviour. Janis Lomas, “‘Delicate duties’: issues of class and respectability in government policy towards the wives and widows of British soldiers in the era of the great war”, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (2009), p. 123–147, p. 129. See also, ‘Soldiering On: War Widows in First World War Britain’, in: Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (eds.), *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and forgotten experiences 1914–2014*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 39–56; “‘So I married again’: Letters from British Widows of the First and Second World Wars”, *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (1994), p. 218–227.

⁵⁶ MAC Minutes, 22 January 1917.

⁵⁷ MAC Minutes, 8 October 1917.

⁵⁸ MAC Minutes 18 July 1917.

were gripping the nation resulting in lengthy queues at shops.⁵⁹ It was far more practical for supplies to be taken directly to heavily-pregnant or newly-delivered mothers, as in the above cases, than to award a monetary grant and expect them to queue for hours for whatever supplies were available.

Such cases are arguably the epitome of a local, single-issue, pragmatic ‘practical politics’, practised by the committee. Almost without exception, the MAC provided successful applicants with tangible, practical support—making up an out-of-work husband’s wages, or ensuring a fortnight’s supply of milk—without seeking wider systemic change. On one occasion, having reviewed a case where the support given to a mother by Walsall’s Board of Guardians was felt to be ‘totally inadequate’, the MAC wrote to the Guardians, arguing that they needed to increase their support to ‘women with young children’ such that it was ‘sufficient to keep the family, without necessitating the mother going out to work’, again perhaps revealing their cultural values surrounding women and work.⁶⁰ In writing to these elected officials, the committee members were perhaps most obviously and directly engaging with the political process, but it must be stressed that this was an isolated incident, and not standard practice. In every other legible case, the MAC assessed the applicant’s situation, decided if support should be given, and organised the provision of any aid agreed upon. This work allowed committee members to engage with public life, by carving out a semi-formal role within the local public sphere, through very practical actions.

Arguably, however, the process of applying for aid was also something which might serve to politicise some local mothers, who appear—although evidence is very patchy—to have been drawn from some of the most impoverished sections of society in contemporary Walsall. The patchiness of the archival record is itself evidence of their poverty. From April 1917, MAC minutes record the name and address of applicants; while 26 such records remain legible, only three could be traced using census records. In comparison, 21 of the 24 contemporaneous women who nominated

⁵⁹ Karen Hunt, ‘The Politics of Food and Women’s Neighbourhood Activism in First World War Britain’, *International Labour and Working-Class History*, No. 77 (2010), p. 8-26; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.191—199.

⁶⁰ MAC Minutes, 22 January 1917. This letter was read at the Guardians’ next meeting; it caused extensive debate, but it was at least resolved that the Guardians’ would form a committee to review the amount of support given to widows with young children. ‘Inadequate Out-relief’, *Walsall Observer*, 3 February 1917.

Christabel Pankhurst in Smethwick (see Chapter 1) could be identified through these records because, unlike those who applied to the MAC, they were still resident at the same address, in 1918 as in 1911. As Chapter 1 argued, this very stability is indicative of a degree of affluence. Of course, the very fact that these women were applying for aid suggests that they were living in, at the very least, straitened circumstances. Evidence from census returns for the three women who could be traced indicates that they were living in some degree of poverty, even before war broke out, as the following table demonstrates:

Name:	No. Rooms:	Age:	Husband's Occupation:	Children:	Other family resident:
Betsy Aston ⁶¹	4	28	Carter	3, all surviving, (7, 5 and 10 months)	Brother, sister-in-law, 3 children
Elizabeth Dutton ⁶²	3	28	Bricklayer	4, 3 surviving, (3, 2 and 9 months)	
Eliza Newell ⁶³	4	34	Carter, Timber Yard	8, 4 surviving (10, 6, 4 and 1)	Mother-in-law

Table 8: Some applicants to the MAC in 1911.

All three lived in small houses—examining census returns for the addresses of other applicants to the MAC suggests this was typical—and two of these three women shared their home with other family members, probably to assist with rent.⁶⁴ All three had had frequent pregnancies, while Aston and Newell were the women referred to above who were given extra milk to strengthen them for confinement, indicating that these frequent pregnancies continued after 1911.⁶⁵ Their husbands were employed in what appears to be seasonal work, so the family income was likely low,

⁶¹ 'Betsy Aston', (1911), *Census return for Hill Street, Walsall, Staffordshire*, Piece: 17167; Schedule Number: 98. It is worth noting that there is a slight discrepancy in the addresses here: the MAC minutes record the Astons as living at 19, Hill Street and the census at 17, Hill Street. It is possible that the Astons moved, or that the '7' was misread for a '9' by the MAC secretary; either way, there is a high degree of certainty that this is the same family.

⁶² 'Elizabeth Dutton', (1911), *Census return for Birchills Street, Walsall, Staffordshire*, Piece: 17161; Schedule Number: 226.

⁶³ 'Eliza Newell', (1911), *Census return for Port Street, Walsall, Staffordshire*, Piece: 17179; Schedule Number: 330.

⁶⁴ Although the MAC applicant was not yet resident at that address, it was possible to identify the house through census returns, and all were houses with similarly small numbers of rooms.

⁶⁵ MAC Minutes, 8 October 1917.

and possibly irregular. It is possible that some of these women supplemented this income through the kinds of work which typically went unrecorded on the census such as taking in laundry, but none gave a formal occupation, and any additional income this brought in was again likely to be low and irregular. From this evidence, it is possible to deduce that the typical applicant to the MAC was likely impoverished, resident in cramped conditions, and experienced multiple pregnancies. Into this, war brought a significant increase in the cost of living, food shortages, and possibly a conscripted husband.⁶⁶ It is unsurprising, then, that these women sought help where they could.

Nonetheless, many applicants seem to have sought assistance from multiple sources. As noted, in January 1917, a joint meeting was held with members of Walsall's SSAFA branch to better co-ordinate local charitable efforts, suggesting perhaps that some individuals were known to be applying to both organisations for support.⁶⁷ It also appears that some women applied to the MAC for emergency, stop-gap aid until this could be supplied from a more official, state-run source. The War Pensions Committee (WPC) supplied payments to some mothers who had previously been assisted by the MAC. In April 1917, for instance, the widowed Mrs Hall was supplied with milk by the MAC until she remarried a soldier, whereupon 'her case [was] now in the hands of the [WPC]'.⁶⁸ In 1918, MAC minutes record that three women were dealt with similarly: help was given until their cases were 'handed over' to the WPC.⁶⁹

For others, the Board of Guardians stepped in: minutes from the MAC's meeting of 8 February 1918 record that 'milk and other food has been supplied to thirteen cases. Seven of these were assisted temporarily until an application could be made to the Guardians',⁷⁰ while later that year, it was noted that 'we have supplied milk and other goods to 10 cases since our last report. Of these, two...were assisted pending an application to the Guardians'.⁷¹ The particulars of these cases were not

⁶⁶ This was no guarantee of an income increase. Separation allowances were low, and the state machinery necessary to administer these loans was 'almost non-existent', resulting in many servicemen's wives 'apply[ing] to the Poor Law in the first months of war'. Lomas, 'Delicate duties', p. 127.

⁶⁷ WCWA Minutes, 31 January 1917.

⁶⁸ MAC Minutes, 27 April 1917.

⁶⁹ MAC Minutes, 15 April 1918.

⁷⁰ MAC Minutes 8 February 1918.

⁷¹ MAC Minutes 13 September 1918.

recorded, but this wording does suggest that mothers had applied to more official sources of relief but, to effectively tide them over until this was provided, also sought assistance from the MAC. This speaks, perhaps in part, to the comparative speed at which the MAC and the Guardians were able to provide aid, but also suggests that a number of MAC applicants were able to negotiate these systems of support. In addition, in eight legible cases, a MAC applicant was already in receipt of support from the Board of Guardians but was provided with additional support by the MAC, usually because of some additional crisis. For instance, the MAC supported Mrs Dewson, ‘a widow in receipt of 12/6 and 4 loaves per week from the Guardians’, who had applied for help ‘to meet unusual expenses during the serious illness of her child’.⁷² The case of Mrs Bradford, discussed above, was similar: though in receipt of support from the Guardians, the MAC provided ‘extra food and milk’, which was ‘considered necessary’ to enable her to ‘continue feeding the child herself’.⁷³ In such cases, the additional aid was usually temporary, and resulted from a sudden crisis such as illness.

These cases are significant, however, as they suggest that at least some applicants were able to negotiate local power structures by working their way around both state-administered sources of support, like the Poor Law, and charitable organisations, like the MAC. For these women, a ‘practical politics’ involved identifying and applying to various local bodies, negotiating their complex rules, and, in the case of the MAC, accepting probing inspection from middle-class home visitors. No surviving evidence points to these Walsall mothers’ feelings on this inspection, but as Ellen Ross argues in her work on mothers from similar backgrounds in London, their responses to these kinds of visitors was probably a mixture of resigned acceptance, resistance, and negotiation.⁷⁴ Regardless of their own personal feelings about the visitors, women like Mrs Dewson or Mrs Bradford were perhaps willing to put up with their inspections, to secure the maximum possible aid for their children. For others, making several applications to different sources make speak to their desperation, and a hope

⁷² MAC Minutes 27 April 1917.

⁷³ MAC Minutes 18 July 1917.

⁷⁴ Ross, *Love and Toil*, p. 196.

that at least one organisation would agree to provide support. Both scenarios, however, suggest a degree of understanding of Walsall's contemporary public sphere.

Clearly, this system was no substitute for a system of guaranteed support provided by the state. Many of the very poorest local mothers may have lacked the confidence, ability, or time to navigate these bodies, and even those who did manage to work their way around these systems were not guaranteed support. Nonetheless, these were the systems within which local mothers were working in contemporary Walsall. Those who navigated and negotiated these local organisations were working their way around various organisations which made up the local public sphere, and the experience—though undoubtedly challenging—was something which may have politicised some of these women, making them more aware of how these different institutions operated, and how they themselves might operate within and between them, to secure the maximum possible support for their families.

The MAC, in First World War-era Walsall, was an organisation with which women from different social backgrounds were able to interact in various ways. The experience of both applying for, and providing, practical aid might have served to politicise both applicants and providers in different ways. The MAC was not, however, a particularly democratic institution. Mothers whose applications were unsuccessful were unable to challenge these decisions and, more significantly, the women who sat on the MAC or HVC appear to have been drawn almost exclusively from the middle-classes. At this time, this was not at all unusual. In the interwar years, however, it is generally accepted that the infant welfare movement became 'more democratic and inclusive of the mothers it was intended to serve'.⁷⁵ This, it is suggested, appears to have become the case in Halesowen, to which this chapter now turns.

⁷⁵ Marks, *Metropolitan Maternity*, p. 8.

Part II: Halesowen Infant Welfare Clinic, c. 1928—1939:

Although Halesowen Infant Welfare Clinic (HIWC) was established in 1916 like WCWA,⁷⁶ its records date from 1928.⁷⁷ Between then and the outbreak of war in 1939, HIWC appears to have undertaken a more inclusive form of ‘practical politics’, which was, to some extent, able to cross class divisions, and this contributed to some clinic mothers being invited to join its organising committee, marking a significant departure from WCWA in the earlier period. HIWC was a much smaller organisation than WCWA, having only 15 women on its organising committee in 1931, 12 volunteers from the local community, who were joined by the clinic’s female doctor and two nurses, a number deemed ‘sufficient’.⁷⁸ However, later in the decade, four more women were invited to join the committee, taking the total to 19 by 1939. Significantly, at least two of these women had been service users, providing evidence for the shift towards a more inclusive organisation as the period progressed.

In Halesowen, there was a much clearer distinction between the supportive, largely administrative, role of the voluntary committee, and the role of medical professionals. HIWC formally came under the control of Worcestershire County Council. It held weekly clinics in the Congregational Hall in the town centre and, from 1926, monthly ante-natal clinics. These were staffed by Dr Eileen Bulmer and two nurses, who gave medical attention to mothers and babies, and a weekly ‘health talk’ was given by a nurse.⁷⁹ Such lectures were a common feature of the infant welfare movement, with some clinics taking a fairly authoritarian approach to attendance: Pamela Dale notes that in Bridgewater, ‘mothers need[ed] permission from either the superintendent or health visitor to miss a lecture’.⁸⁰ There is no suggestion that this approach was taken in Halesowen; consequently, it is unclear how well-attended these talks were. Nonetheless, it is apparent that they were always

⁷⁶ Per Baby Week, 1928: ‘this centre is under the control of the Public Health Department of the Worcestershire County Council and it was opened in 1916’.

⁷⁷ As indicated above, its records today consist of two National Baby Week scrapbooks from 1928 and 1930, and a minutes book dating from February 1931.

⁷⁸ At the first meeting for which archival records survive, when a member of the voluntary committee resigned owing to ill health, ‘as it was thought that the present number of committee members (15) was sufficient’ and she was not replaced. This first entry is preceded by a list of committee members. HIWC Minutes, February 1931.

⁷⁹ Dr Bulmer saw a baby on its first visit; any infant which was being artificially fed; and any case requiring medical attention. The nurses weighed and measured all children each week. Baby Week, 1928 and 1930.

⁸⁰ Dale, ‘Bridgewater Infant Welfare Clinic’, p. 75.

delivered by qualified medical professionals, not volunteers. Similarly, any visiting of mothers was only undertaken by qualified medical professionals—Dr Bulmer, or a nurse. There was no equivalent of the MAC. Medical staff had discretion in ‘the use of the money [in] needy cases’, although it is unclear how, if indeed at all, any money was distributed as this was not recorded in the minutes of meetings.⁸¹ While HIWC voluntary committee members attended the weekly clinics, their role was purely administrative, limited to, ‘keeping the register of attendances, [and organising] the sale of foodstuffs, the sale of wools and the serving of tea’.⁸² The committee also took responsibility for organising National Baby Week events in Halesowen, and yearly outings for mothers.⁸³ It is clear, then, that from the late 1920s, a distinction had developed between professional and voluntary roles within HIWC.

However, the voluntary committee appears to have been relatively more socially diverse than the MAC in Walsall. It was made up of a mix of those who might be classed as upper-middle class, as well as women of more modest backgrounds: biographical details of all committee members can be found in Appendix F.⁸⁴ The organising committee of 1931 consisted of women like Margaret Brett Young, whose husband was a doctor and whose stepson was the famed novelist, Francis, and Effie Moore, a broker’s wife, both of whom employed three live-in domestic servants in 1911 and would likely have been at home on Walsall’s MAC. Alongside them, however, were women like Laurretta Searancke, the wife of a shop manager or Ada Heague, who worked as a newsagent.⁸⁵ Furthermore, as is shortly discussed, the committee became still more diverse later in the decade, once some clinic mothers joined.

There were also some differences between mothers attending HIWC, compared with those served by WCWA. While Walsall was an industrial town, HIWC served both Halesowen and the

⁸¹ HIWC Minutes, March 1933.

⁸² Baby Week, 1928 and 1930.

⁸³ It is unclear how often Halesowen participated in National Baby Week events. Reference is made in some years in the minutes. In 1928 and 1930, the voluntary committee produced scrapbook style volumes detailing the work of HIWC and the programme for the event (‘Baby Week 1928’ and ‘Baby Week 1930’) which have survived; for other years, these volumes either do not survive or were not produced.

⁸⁴ Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, p. 12.

⁸⁵ All references can be found in Appendix F.

surrounding rural districts.⁸⁶ Both the 1928 and 1930 National Baby Week scrapbooks open with a general report on the area, which indicates that many mothers who attended clinics were from impoverished backgrounds:

[Halesowen] is essentially an industrial area and although to the south there stretch the attractive pastures of Worcestershire, the northern horizon is scarred by the smoking chimneys of the Black Country and it is with these that the town has its affinity. On the whole the public health conditions are comparable those of the slum districts of a large city. [...] Unemployment is widely felt as a result of the general depression in the iron and steel trade and there is a good deal of poverty.⁸⁷

Infant mortality rates were close to the national average,⁸⁸ and housing was a significant issue. In 1928, Halesowen had a 'shortage of houses...and a number where there are two or more families residing', although by 1930, 'with the erection of new estates overcrowding is slowly but surely being reduced'.⁸⁹ This report also noted that '[m]any of the women [in Halesowen] are still employed making nails in their own back premises'.⁹⁰ Issues surrounding homeworking in the sweated trades are discussed in the Introductory chapters; though the practise was on the decline by this time, its problems—hard, physical work for irregular, low pay—remained. Women employed in the sweated trades frequently worked until giving birth, and Shelia Blackburn notes that 'the nature of the work was such that the women needed long periods of rest and proper food for the maintenance of the body' after childbirth, but, 'because they were low paid, they had neither'.⁹¹ The clinic also served the 'agricultural districts' of Illey, Lutley and Lapal.⁹² While it is unclear how many mothers living in these areas worked, it was then common for rural women to undertake work on farms or smallholdings, which was hard, physical, and often seasonal and thus low paid.⁹³ Thus, shortages of

⁸⁶ Per the Baby Week reports, these were: Hasbury, Lutley, Hawne, Illey and Lapal.

⁸⁷ Baby Week, 1928 and 1930.

⁸⁸ The infant mortality rate is simply given as 67 for Halesowen and 69 for England and Wales, presumably referring to the number of deaths for every 1,000 babies born. The statistics refer to the previous year, 1927. Baby Week, 1928.

⁸⁹ Baby Week, 1928 and 1930.

⁹⁰ Baby Week, 1930.

⁹¹ Shelia Blackburn, 'Working Class Attitudes to Social Reform: Black Country Chainmakers and Anti-Sweating Legislation, 1880-1930', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 33, (1988), p. 42—69, p. 61.

⁹² Baby Week, 1928.

⁹³ Nicola Verdon, "'The Modern Countrywoman": Farm Women, Domesticity and Social Change in Interwar Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 1, (2010), p. 86–107.

housing, poor living conditions, the continued prevalence of the sweated trades, and general unemployment in trades in which many local men were employed, all suggest that a fair proportion of HIWC mothers were impoverished. The new housing estates which were noted to be reducing overcrowding by 1930 may have gone some way towards improving basic living standards over the decade, but rents on such new estates could be high, and they may have been out of financial range of some of the poorest mothers.⁹⁴

HIWC seems to have grown in popularity among the mothers it served during the 1930s. Average attendance at the weekly clinics was 90 in 1928, but had risen to 118 by 1939.⁹⁵ One reason for the rise in average attendance at clinics may have been the extent to which the voluntary committee began to implement measures that went some way towards meeting the real, rather than assumed, needs of local mothers. The clearest example of this is the measures HIWC put in place to provide ‘home helps’ for clinic mothers from the mid-1930s. ‘Home helps’ were distinct from ‘home visitors’: the latter were concerned with inspecting and monitoring mothers and, as the previous section outlined, had frequently been the source of significant tensions between voluntary, middle-class visitors and working-class mothers, although the sector became increasingly professionalised in the interwar period.⁹⁶ Home helps, meanwhile, were employed to assist mothers in the immediate postnatal period, providing practical support with domestic work like cooking, cleaning and caring for older children, while they recovered from childbirth. Prior to the 1902 Midwives’ Act, such work was typically done by unlicensed midwives operating in working-class communities, but the increasing

⁹⁴ For work on working-class women and housing in this period, see for instance: Catherine Hall, ‘Married Women at Home in Birmingham in the 1920s and 1930s’, *Oral History*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (1977) p. 62–83; Ann Hughes and Karen Hunt, ‘A culture transformed? Women’s Lives in Wythenshawe in the 1930s’, in A. Davies and S. Fielding (eds), *Workers’ worlds: Cultures and communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880–1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 74–101; Mark Clapson, ‘Working-class Women’s Experiences of Moving to New Housing Estates in England since 1919’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (1999), p. 345–365. Discussion of class and home ownership in this period is also found in: Deborah Sugg Ryan, *Ideal Homes, 1918–39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), chapter 2.

⁹⁵ Baby Week, 1928 and HIWC Minutes, 14 March 1939. Figures refer to the numbers of mothers attending; the increase was therefore not attributable to a rise in birth rates.

⁹⁶ Pamela Dale, ‘Health visiting between the wars: using fragmentary biographical data to explore attempts to resolve a developing recruitment and retention crisis’, *UK Association for the History of Nursing Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (2020).

professionalisation of the sector meant that this was no longer considered part of the midwife's duties.⁹⁷ Wealthier women might rely on domestic servants or employ a temporary nurse to help out with such tasks, so this gap in services was felt most keenly by working-class women, particularly those who, in moving to new housing estates lost the access to informal 'neighbourly' networks which provided such support.⁹⁸

HIWC voluntary committee sought to implement the home help scheme specifically 'to assist our poorer mothers', and evidence from the minutes suggests that it was genuinely welcomed by these women.⁹⁹ The scheme was established in March 1933, when a donation of nearly £35 from Halesowen Operatic Society was directed into its financing.¹⁰⁰ The following year, the committee reported that 'much help had been given [...] to the mothers by the Home Helps' adding that more were 'booked in for the near future'—they appear to have been offered to mothers who attended the antenatal clinic.¹⁰¹ At the September 1934 committee meeting, a letter was read 'from one of the centre mothers thanking the centre and stating her great appreciation of the benefits and assistance received by having a Home Help'.¹⁰² Although a copy of her letter does not survive, that this mother to the time to write to thank the committee suggests the scheme was of genuine assistance, and demand for the service appears to have increased in the years following its implementation. In May 1935, the committee sought to employ additional home helps, to support more local mothers.¹⁰³

The scheme clearly provided support for newly delivered mothers which was greatly appreciated. Significantly, HIWC's organisation of the scheme points to a more egalitarian,

⁹⁷ For the 1902 Midwives' Act: Enid Fox, 'Powers of life and death: Aspects of maternal welfare in England and Wales between the wars', *Medical History*, Vol. 35, (1991), p. 328—352, p. 338; Pamela Dale and Kate Fisher, 'Implementing the 1902 Midwives Act: assessing problems, developing services and creating a new role for a variety of female practitioners', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, (2009), p. 427—452.

⁹⁸ For working-class 'neighbourly' support see for instance: Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women, 1890-1940*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) or Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

⁹⁹ HIWC Minutes, 30 April 1935.

¹⁰⁰ HIWC Minutes, 14 March 1933.

¹⁰¹ HIWC Minutes, 13 February 1934.

¹⁰² HIWC Minutes, 11 September 1934.

¹⁰³ HIWC Minutes, 26 May 1935. Precise numbers (of home helps employed, and families assisted) were not recorded.

democratic form of ‘practical politics’ than that practised by members of the MAC in Walsall. Though specifically designed ‘to assist our poorer mothers’,¹⁰⁴ there is no suggestion that mothers had to demonstrate that they were in some way deserving, as in Walsall. Similarly, mothers did not have to be ‘visited’ or otherwise inspected by committee members before the support was provided. The women employed as home helps were local, and likely working-class themselves, which may also have contributed to the success of the scheme, as mothers perhaps felt that they were being supported by their peers.¹⁰⁵ Arguably, there are some similarities here to the WVS’s Housewives’ Service, as discussed in the previous chapter. Although the WVS was a voluntary organisation, and home helps were paid, the support was provided by a peer, and not an officious, middle-class volunteer.

This was not the only example of HIWC voluntary committee’s more inclusive, egalitarian approach. As noted, committee members chose not to demand attendance at the clinic’s talks or educational events, although this was the case in other places: as Pamela Dale’s research into Bridgewater’s infant welfare clinic reveals, mothers there were required to obtain permission from medical staff to miss equivalent lectures.¹⁰⁶ HIWC voluntary committee may have tacitly understood that this kind of approach may have put mothers off attending the clinic, and instead opted to reward attendance. From 1933, prizes for best attendance were awarded to mothers at the annual Christmas party, suggesting that, locally, the approach taken was more carrot than stick.¹⁰⁷ More prosaically, while the committee generally organised an educational outing for mothers each year, in 1935, ‘as very few mothers seemed anxious to join an outing, it was decided not to have one this year’.¹⁰⁸ Such decisions are relatively minor, but they are indicative of a general culture of listening to what mothers genuinely wanted, and not forcing them to participate in events which were deemed to be in some way ‘improving’.

¹⁰⁴ HIWC Minutes, 30 April 1935.

¹⁰⁵ No specific detail was provided on the women who were employed as home helps, however they were unlikely to have commuted long distances to undertake the work. This kind of casual work was commonly undertaken by working-class women as it could be fitted around their own domestic responsibilities.

¹⁰⁶ Dale, ‘Bridgewater Infant Welfare Clinic’, p. 75.

¹⁰⁷ HIWC Minutes, 17 October 1933.

¹⁰⁸ HIWC Minutes, 30 April 1935.

However, although the yearly outing was cancelled in 1935, in other years these outings, or activities planned for National Baby Week, offered a relatively unusual opportunity for some clinic mothers to engage in the political process through the essay-writing competitions HIWC arranged following such excursions. As Robert Snape has argued, in the interwar years ‘leisure became associated with the idea of the common good’ and with ensuring a ‘more harmonious and democratic society’, particularly by those active in voluntary action societies.¹⁰⁹ When HIWC organised days out for its mothers to attend, for example, Birmingham’s Centenary Pageant (July 1938)¹¹⁰ or a play about Charles I at Malvern Festival (August 1939),¹¹¹ they were perhaps seeking to do just this, broadening the cultural horizons of HIWC attendees. Outings were usually educational or improving in some way, though it is worth noting that for some of the working-class mothers who attended the clinic, whose leisure time was severely limited and often spent in service to others,¹¹² a trip to the theatre or an afternoon out watching a pageant may simply have been an enjoyable day off from the usual round of daily chores.

Given this, it is arguably even more notable that some clinic mothers used their limited leisure time to write essays reflecting on these outings, in competitions organised by HIWC. Examples of these essays survive in the Baby Week scrapbooks produced in 1928 and 1930, in which the prize-winning essays were reproduced. Other essays written in these years, which did not win, and essays written in later years, do not survive. However, these sample essays give a relatively unique insight into HIWC from service users themselves. In 1928, Mrs E J Jones won first prize for her ‘Essay on Lecture by Miss Shufflebotham on “Motherhood”’—Shufflebotham was a highly respected surgeon at

¹⁰⁹ Robert Snape, *Leisure, Voluntary Action and Social Change in Britain, 1880–1939*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 1.

¹¹⁰ The pageant, designed to celebrate the city’s history, was a year in the making and included over 6,000 performers, the majority of whom were women. See ‘Birmingham Pageant a Triumph for Women’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 July 1938, p. 7; HIWC Minutes, 17 May 1938. For the significance of historical pageants in this era, see: Zoë Thomas, ‘Historical Pageants, Citizenship, and the Performance of Women’s History before Second-Wave Feminism’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (2017), p. 319–343; Amy Binns, ‘New Heroines for New Causes: how provincial women promoted a revisionist history through post-suffrage pageants’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (2018), p. 221–246.

¹¹¹ HIWC Minutes, 10 November 1939

¹¹² Claire Langhamer, *Women’s leisure in England 1920–1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

Birmingham Maternity Hospital, and her lecture was delivered as part of the 1928 Baby Week programme.¹¹³ In 1930, an unnamed woman won first prize for her essay ‘My Impressions of Our Visit to Studley Agricultural College’, to which HIWC had organised a daytrip as part of Baby Week events.¹¹⁴ The essays are descriptive in nature, but nonetheless are notable as they reflect contemporary discourses surrounding maternity and domesticity. Mrs Jones, for instance, informed readers that, when pregnant, ‘it is necessary to have constant baths’ to prevent toxins seeping inside the body and causing harm to mother or unborn child, but, ‘if not convenient, regular sponging of the whole body,’ would suffice.¹¹⁵ The author of the Studley College essay, meanwhile, reflected that at the College, ‘one could not help but notice the absence of dirt...an essential, especially where food is concerned. All the floors were quite wet, and I should imagine they are frequently washed down to keep them fresh and cool’.¹¹⁶ Such observations suggest that mothers were encouraged to report very literally on what they had learnt from experts in the field, rather than, perhaps, reflecting on their own lived experiences of maternity or domesticity.

The essays, however, represent much more than simple reporting. They were an opportunity for women who attended the clinic to find a voice in the public sphere by writing for a wider audience, something which might serve to politicise them. Here, it is worth reiterating Claire Langhamer’s point that for many working-class women at this time, leisure time was still incredibly limited. A time-poor, working-class mother might have enjoyed the ‘holiday’ of a daytrip out with friends, but the idea of spending her limited leisure time at home writing an essay was likely less appealing—yet some women appear to have actively engaged in this process. In 1930, for example, alongside essays on the Studley College trip, mothers were encouraged to respond to the topic ‘The

¹¹³ ‘Hilda Shufflebotham, FRCS, Surgeon to the Maternity Hospital, Birmingham, gave an address on Motherhood’ to ‘over 200 mothers’, which was ‘well summarised’ in Mrs Jones’s essay (Baby Week, 1928). Shufflebotham, later Dame Hilda Rose, became the first woman President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, see: Clare Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women: Post-Suffrage Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), p. 209—210.

¹¹⁴ Baby Week, 1930. Studley Agricultural College was approximately 20 miles from Halesowen, educating many women in agriculture in this period. For more on women in gardening schools and agricultural colleges in this period, see: Anne Meredith, ‘Horticultural Education in England, 1900-40: Middle-Class Women and Private Gardening Schools’, *Garden History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2003), p. 67-79.

¹¹⁵ Baby Week, 1928.

¹¹⁶ Baby Week, 1930.

First Law of Health Is Cleanliness’, and the Baby Week scrapbook notes that ‘six of these essays are being judged at Head Quarters, London’; whether these were the six which, locally, had been judged best, or HIWC had only received six entries, is unclear.¹¹⁷ Certainly, the titles of these essays, and the surviving examples, suggest that mothers largely emulated contemporary discourses surrounding domesticity, as noted. The essays are not comparable to the moving personal experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, written by members of the Women’s Co-operative Guild (WCG) and published as *Maternity* (1915).¹¹⁸ They are not autobiographical, although there are nonetheless perhaps echoes of what Carolyn Tilghman suggests is ‘a distinct and quite specific form of political dissidence based on women’s personal experiences as wives and mothers [in *Maternity*],’ in their production.¹¹⁹

For, in writing these essays for HIWC, local women were engaging with these contemporary discourses—albeit in a largely uncritical manner—and actively taking the time to compose their own thoughts for public consumption. At a time when working-class women had little opportunity to write for a wider audience, their work was recognised through local and national competitions, as they were judged internally, and some, at least, appear to have been sent further afield.¹²⁰ The women were giving public voice to a private issue, placing themselves within contemporary debates, a potentially politicising act. Furthermore, while the Guildswomen’s letters in *Maternity* are remarkable documents in their own right, those who contributed to this collection were arguably *already* politicised through their activism within the WCG, an organisation which actively campaigned on many issues. This was not true of HIWC, a non-partisan organisation which was not ‘activist’ in the same way as the WCG.

HIWC’s essay competitions appear to have been held either as part of National Baby Week events, or, in years in which it does not seem to have participated in Baby Week, were part of its annual summer garden party, hosted by the committee for clinic mothers. Alongside these writing competitions, other handicraft competitions were held. In 1928, the categories in the ‘mothercraft’

¹¹⁷ Baby Week, 1930. ‘Head Quarters’ likely referred to the National Baby Week Council.

¹¹⁸ Llewelyn Davis (ed.), *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*.

¹¹⁹ Carolyn Tilghman, ‘Autobiography as Dissidence: Subjectivity, Sexuality and the Women’s Co-operative Guild’, *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (2003), p. 583—606, p. 585.

¹²⁰ See the above note about the essays being judged at ‘Head Quarters’ in London.

competition were, ‘knitting and crocheting; outer garments; reconstructed garments; and cakes’ as well as, notably, ‘written examination papers’.¹²¹ In 1931, the garden party saw prizes awarded in the following handicraft categories: knitting, sewing, and ‘patching and darning’. These handicraft competitions went some way towards recognising women’s domestic labour—especially the prizes in categories like ‘reconstructed garments’ or ‘patching and darning’, which perhaps particularly reflected lived experiences of local mothers, who were no doubt familiar with the process of repairing hand-me-downs.¹²² In 1931, prizes were also awarded to mothers for the best essays on ‘mothercraft’ and to fathers for essays on ‘fathercraft’.¹²³ The fathercraft movement, which emerged in the late 1920s as ‘part of wider attempts to disseminate a particular middle-class version of domestic ideology’, aimed to include men in the childrearing process in ways circumscribed by contemporary understandings of gender.¹²⁴ Its impact was limited, not least locally in Halesowen, with HIWC making very few attempts to engage fathers. Apart from a brief mention of a ‘special lecture for Fathers’ in the 1930 Baby Week events, this is the only documented evidence of the inclusion of men in HIWC’s work locally.¹²⁵

Notably, these competitions also contributed to some clinic mothers being invited to join the HIWC voluntary committee, widening still further the social background of the overall committee. In 1937, a decision was taken to ask ‘more Ladies...to join us’ as plans were afoot to open a playroom for toddlers at the clinic and would require additional help on clinic days.¹²⁶ The playroom itself—

¹²¹ Baby Week, 1928. Regrettably, no further information survives about this examination paper.

¹²² There are perhaps some parallels here with the ways in which the Women’s Institute awarded prizes in handicraft competitions centred around ‘saving money or materially improving the welfare of the family’, as Maggie Andrews argues, see: Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women’s Institute as a Social Movement (New and revised edition)*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015), p. 116.

¹²³ Information derived from a newspaper article headlined ‘Infant Welfare Centre’ (no further detail provided), pasted into the HIWC Minutes book following the AGM in February 1931.

¹²⁴ Tim Fisher, ‘Fatherhood and the British Fathercraft Movement, 1919–39’, *Gender & History*, Vol.17 No.2 (2005), p. 441–462, p. 441–442. Laura King has also written extensively on fatherhood in the twentieth century, see: Laura King, ‘Hidden Fathers? The Significance of Fatherhood in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (2012), p. 25–46; *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c.1914–1960*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹²⁵ Baby Week, 1930.

¹²⁶ HIWC Minutes, 16 February 1937. The need to create a dedicated play area for children may also have reflected contemporary concerns over safe spaces for children to play, as discussed in: Krista Cowman, ‘Play streets: women, children and the problem of urban traffic, 1930 – 1970’, *Social History*, Vol. 42, No. 2, (2017), p. 233–256.

essentially a childminding service, so mothers with older children could ensure they were looked after while they saw medical staff with younger children—was perhaps a further step towards the committee providing mothers with genuinely useful, practical support. Most significant, however, is that at least two of the four women invited to join the committee when they decided to expand at this time either were, or had recently been, attendees of the clinic. Although the original impetus for increasing increase numbers was ensuring that the playroom was well-staffed, these women did become full committee members, regularly attending meetings, and playing a wider role in the functioning of the voluntary committee.¹²⁷

The four who were invited to join the committee were Mary Coley, Mrs Corbett, Beatrice Jones and Mrs Warmington. Warmington was a retired maternity nurse and was probably invited to join because of her professional expertise.¹²⁸ However, both Coley and Jones had attended the clinic themselves and, significantly, had actively engaged with some of the competitions HIWC ran, likely coming to the attentions of the committee through this. In 1931, Mary Coley had won first prize for both her essay on ‘mothercraft’ and the knitting competition, with her husband Horace taking second prize for his essay on ‘fathercraft’; first prize had gone to Benjamin Jones, Beatrice’s husband. Beatrice is not named among the first prize winners in any competition, but, excepting the fathercraft competition, only those who won first prize were named. However, it seems probable that, if her husband was actively participating in various categories, she would have, too.¹²⁹ While Mrs Corbett proved untraceable, it is possible that she, too, came to the committee’s attention in a similar fashion. Not only were Coley and Jones clearly women who had attended the clinic, their presence arguably served to diversify the social background of HIWC committee further. Though neither woman undertook paid employment, their husbands were both manual workers: Horace Coley was a ‘spade maker’ and Benjamin Jones a ‘road curber’.¹³⁰ It is important to note that all four new members were *invited* to join the committee in 1937 by existing members; clinic mothers had no say in its

¹²⁷ They began attending full committee meetings from 9 March 1937, the next meeting.

¹²⁸ She appears as such on the 1939 National Register. For full references see Appendix F.

¹²⁹ ‘Infant Welfare Centre’, via HIWC Minutes.

¹³⁰ Per 1939 National Register; see Appendix F for references.

composition. Nonetheless, that existing members should look to at least some clinic attendees when seeking to expand the committee marked a significant departure from the MAC in Walsall, and reflects Lara Marks' assertion that the infant welfare movement became somewhat 'more democratic and inclusive' during this period.¹³¹

In at least two cases, then, HIWC's essay writing competitions appear to have contributed to service users being invited to join its committee and, through this, make a still wider contribution to local public life. Yet these competitions hold wider significance for other clinic mothers: while they might not have been invited to join the committee, the act of writing an essay, as discussed, was potentially politicising. Writing for an audience encouraged these women to find a voice in the public sphere; arguably, this too may have contributed to the gradual democratisation and expanding inclusivity of HIWC, as more mothers were encouraged to express themselves in public. To some extent, this expanding inclusivity was mirrored in Dudley's Linen League, as Part III will argue. Dudley, like Walsall and Halesowen, saw a Child Welfare Centre established during the First World War,¹³² and it does appear to have had a voluntary committee,¹³³ though its records do not survive.¹³⁴ This is regrettable, but it is also important to note that infant welfare clinics were just one kind of voluntary health association within which women might become active. Linen Leagues, such as the one associated with Dudley Guest Hospital, were another space in which women might undertake a form of 'practical politics', as they engaged with the wider public sphere through the voluntary work these organisations undertook. Compared with organisations which made up part of the infant welfare movement, their role in enabling women's activism has, to some extent, been underestimated.

¹³¹ Marks, *Metropolitan Maternity*, p. 8.

¹³² 'Public Notices. County Borough of Dudley. Maternity and Child Welfare', *Dudley Chronicle*, 16 June 1917, p. 1.

¹³³ For example, it appears that a group of volunteers organised a whist drive to raise funds for the centre in 1920, see: 'District news. For the children', *Dudley Chronicle*, 11 December 1920, p. 5.

¹³⁴ Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, which houses the records of the Halesowen organisation, does not have records pertaining to any voluntary work undertaken by the equivalent Dudley organisation. Brief mention is made in some local newspaper articles, such as the two listed above.

Part III: Dudley Ladies' Linen League, c.1940—c.1948:

The role of the Ladies' Linen League connected to Dudley Guest Hospital was, essentially, to provide all the material goods the hospital needed each year. The League fundraised for the purchase of these goods, then organised their procurement. Women were involved with the League at three levels, each of which held increasing responsibility and opportunities for activism within local public life in contemporary Dudley. Most basically, subscribers made annual donations to the League, and had their names printed in the League's annual reports. The three annual reports which remain in existence (1940, 1944 and 1947) list between 846 and 1,209 individual subscribers who were almost exclusively female (see Table 3.2 and further discussion below). Collectors, all women, were responsible for collecting these annual donations; between 1940 and 1947, 38 individuals took on this role. Finally, the League's Executive Committee appears to have made decisions about how these funds should be spent, liaising with hospital management to organise the purchase of the material goods the hospital needed for the forthcoming year. Pre-war, the committee also appear to have organised some social events as additional fundraisers—whist drives, and the like—but, as is discussed below, the privations of war appear to have put an end to this. In total, 20 women are named as being part of the Executive Committee over this period, some of whom acted as collectors before joining, probably—though the annual reports are unclear—by invitation. The Guest Hospital was, until 1948, a voluntary hospital serving Dudley and the surrounding area. Involvement with the Linen League therefore gave the women on its Executive Committee, and, to a lesser extent its collectors, an opportunity to actively engage with the local public sphere through their contributions to the hospital, although this drew to a close in 1948, with the establishment of the NHS.

Before this, voluntary hospitals in Britain had been reliant, at least in part, on charitable funding to meet their costs. Across the country, these monies had been raised both through large-scale donations from wealthy philanthropists, and smaller donations through fundraising events such as whist drives, social events, and even seeking donations in kind of a particular item, such as eggs. While earlier research into this kind of fundraising suggested that charitable donations to voluntary

hospitals decreased during the interwar period,¹³⁵ more recent research challenges this assertion.¹³⁶ Indeed, voluntary hospitals, argue Nick Hayes and Barry Doyle, were ‘a focus for civic pride, strongly identified with their locality’, and raised more money, from a wider contributing base, than any other organisation in interwar Britain ‘excluding religious bodies’.¹³⁷ Linen Leagues, common to hospitals across Britain, were a significant part of these fundraising efforts for two reasons. First, they played an important role in equipping the hospital: in Dudley, for example, the material goods the League provided included everything from tea towels for the hospital kitchen to doctors’ white coats.¹³⁸ Secondly, and more importantly, they offered a means by which women might become involved not only with charitable fundraising but, at times, hospital management. As Barry Doyle suggests, Linen Leagues were ‘often the only space for female involvement in the management of the hospital’, as many hospitals did not allow women to sit on Boards of Management.¹³⁹ Despite this, within the extensive literature on hospital funding before the NHS, there is no sustained analysis of the importance of Linen Leagues as organisations within which women might contribute to local public life.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Steven Cherry, ‘Before the National Health Service: Financing the Voluntary Hospitals, 1900–1939’, *Economic History Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2, (1997), p. 305–326; Martin Gorsky, John Mohan, Martin Powell, ‘The financial health of voluntary hospitals in interwar Britain’, *Economic History Review*, Vol. 55, No. 3, (2002), p. 533–557.

¹³⁶ Barry Doyle, ‘Competition and Cooperation in Hospital Provision in Middlesbrough, 1918–1948’, *Medical History*, Vol. 57, No. 3, (2007), p. 337–356; Barry Doyle, ‘Labour and Hospitals in Urban Yorkshire: Middlesbrough, Leeds and Sheffield, 1919–1938’, *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (2010), p. 374–392; George Campbell Gosling, ‘“Open the Other Eye”: Payment, Civic Duty and Hospital Contributory Schemes in Bristol, c.1927–1948’, *Medical History*, Vol. 54, No. 4, (2010), p. 475–494; Nick Hayes, ‘“Our Hospitals”? Voluntary Provision, Community and Civic Consciousness in Nottingham Before the NHS’, *Midland History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2012), p. 84–105; Barry Doyle, ‘The Economics, Culture, and Politics of Hospital Contributory Schemes: The Case of Inter-war Leeds’, *Labour History Review*, Vol. 77, No. 3, (2012), p. 289–315; Nick Hayes and Barry Doyle, ‘Eggs, rags and whist drives: popular munificence and the development of provincial medical voluntarism between the wars’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 86, No. 234, (2013), p. 712–740; Barry Doyle, *The Politics of Hospital Provision in Early Twentieth Century Britain*, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014).

¹³⁷ Hayes and Doyle, ‘Eggs, rags and whist drives’, p. 713.

¹³⁸ For instance, in 1944, the League purchased over 270 pre-made items, and nearly 550 yards of material, specifically: ‘5 dozen surgeons’ operating gowns; 362 yards Fergotex; 50 pairs twill sheets; 120 yards pillow cotton; 24 coats; 50 all-wool blankets; 15 yards table damask; 6 dozen huckaback towels; 50 yards screen cover material and 15 pairs of flannelette sheets’. This list appears typical for all three years for which the reports are in existence. AR 1944.

¹³⁹ Doyle, *The Politics of Hospital Provision*, p. 126.

¹⁴⁰ In ‘Our Hospitals’, Hayes merely notes that women in Nottingham were encouraged to become ‘actively involved’ in the Linen League’ (p. 102); in ‘Eggs, rags and whist drives’, Hayes and Doyle record that membership doubled between the founding of Leeds General’s Linen Guild in 1929 and 1938 (p. 737).

In focusing on the Linen League in Dudley, it is argued that the ‘practical politics’ of work within this League enabled a relatively socially diverse group of women from the town to become actively involved with local public life through contributions to hospital management. As with the two infant welfare organisations in Walsall and Halesowen, the League drew on a gendered form of expertise: in this case, domestic management. Helen McCarthy has argued that, during the interwar years ‘women...were able to invest new meanings in the roles of full-time mother and housewife in order to lay claim to the public sphere’.¹⁴¹ Linen Leagues were not necessarily a phenomenon of the interwar period—Dudley’s was established in 1912—but here it is possible to see how the League’s domestic associations allowed women to project their specific expertise into hospital management, through a form of housewifery. While the League arguably gave some women the opportunity to contribute to local public life, it did so in a way that was constrained by contemporary understandings of gender roles.

This section focuses on the years 1940—1947. However, the period up to the implementation of the NHS arguably saw a continuation of the kind of involvement women had had in voluntary health organisations in the interwar years. This section first examines the work of the League during and immediately after the Second World War, suggesting that its continued success during this time indicates something of a continuity in attitudes towards hospital funding from the interwar years, at least until 1948. It is then argued that, in Dudley, the League was part of a wider voluntary and civic associational scene, and there was much overlap between the membership of the League and other contemporary women’s organisations. This is significant because, as will be explored both here and in Chapter 4, Dudley saw limited female involvement in local government, especially when compared with other towns in the Black Country. In Dudley, it appears that voluntary and associational culture provided women with more opportunities to engage with and influence local public life, enabling them to engage with the political process through the practical work such organisations undertook.

¹⁴¹ Helen McCarthy, ‘Service clubs, citizenship and equality: gender relations and middle-class associations in Britain between the wars’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 81, No. 213, (2008), p. 531—552, p. 551.

Dudley's Linen League was established in 1912, but its archival records today exist only as three Annual Reports from 1940, 1944 and 1947. Each report contains a summary of the League's fundraising work for that year; its yearly accounts; a list of current committee members, collectors and subscribers to the League; and notes what goods were purchased that year. As such, these Reports provide a significant insight into the politics of healthcare in Dudley during and immediately after the Second World War. The League went from strength to strength in this period, continuing to raise significant amounts of money. The consistently high levels of support the League received from local women reinforces arguments made elsewhere, and explored in more detail shortly, that the public remained supportive of the existing system of voluntary hospitals until the establishment of the NHS.¹⁴² Indeed, such was its success in this period that it appears that the League planned for its work to continue after 1948. The final Annual Report, for 1947, opened with the news that: 'during the ensuing year, the hospital is expected to come under the National Health Service, but for the present the Ladies' Linen League has been asked to continue the work it has done for 35 years. Apart from this very little of interest has happened'.¹⁴³ That this is the last Annual Report in the archives—and that there is no other evidence of the League's existence after this date—suggests that this did not, in fact, occur. From 5 July 1948, the nationalisation of hospitals, excluding those in the private sector, meant that their costs were met by the state; these costs, of course, included the material goods the hospital required and as such, Dudley's Linen League, in common with similar organisations across Britain, was no longer needed.

Until then, as Nick Hayes argues, hospitals were 'traditionally seen as places where urban elites could—and indeed were expected—to prove their credentials as local social leaders' through involvement with hospital management, and hefty financial donations.¹⁴⁴ This was true of Dudley's hospital, which was originally founded in the early nineteenth century by the first Earl of Dudley to treat workers injured in his limestone quarries. It was entirely rebuilt in 1867, after local industrialist

¹⁴² Further discussion below, but see for instance: Nick Hayes, 'Did We Really Want a National Health Service? Hospitals, Patients and Public Opinions before 1948', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 127, No. 256, (2012), p. 625–661.

¹⁴³ AR 1947, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Hayes, "'Our Hospitals'?" p. 88.

Joseph Guest left £20,000 for the purpose in his will, and renamed ‘Dudley Guest’ in his honour.¹⁴⁵ In the twentieth century, local brewing magnate Edwin John Thompson began his ‘long and generous’ association with the hospital: over the 1920s and 1930s, he made substantial donations to the hospital and became involved its management.¹⁴⁶ In 1927, for instance, Thompson met ‘the entire cost’ of building and equipping a nurses’ home, providing lecture theatres and accommodation for 40 nurses and was elected chairman of the Board of Management.¹⁴⁷ During his tenure the Guest was ‘rebuilt, increased in capacity and modernised’ largely thanks to ‘his financial support’.¹⁴⁸ In 1938 he and his son, George Alan Thompson, purchased 11 acres of land from Dudley council which they donated to the hospital, increasing its capacity.¹⁴⁹ ‘Whether for altruistic or egotistic reasons, the giving of time or money symbiotically conferred status’, argues Hayes.¹⁵⁰ This was true of Edwin Thompson, whose contributions to the Guest resulted in his being made a Freeman of Dudley, while the local press dubbed him the hospital’s ‘fairy godmother’ and ‘benevolent uncle’.¹⁵¹

Such enormous financial donations, out of the reach of all but the very wealthiest, which usually excluded women, naturally attracted attention and reward. Smaller organisations, like Linen Leagues, were far less newsworthy. Nonetheless, the extent to which *all* sections of society were encouraged to raise funds for local hospitals is something which is now widely recognised by historians of twentieth century healthcare. Indeed, Nick Hayes and Barry Doyle note the importance of using ‘localised institutional records’, which suggest that ‘philanthropy...became less dependent on elite contributions and much more located in those processes and activities where all members of society were encouraged to contribute’, which included Linen Leagues.¹⁵² In Dudley, elite contributions—specifically those of the Thompson family—played a significant role in the Guest’s

¹⁴⁵ ‘Death of Mr Joseph Guest of Dudley’, *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, 23 November 1867, p. 8. It reopened in 1871.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Mr E. J. Thompson’, *Birmingham Post*, 13 January 1941, p. 1. Thompson was the director of the family brewing firm Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries, today known as Marston’s.

¹⁴⁷ *Kelly’s Directory of Worcestershire for 1936*, (London: Kelly’s Directories Ltd, 1936), Dudley, p. 84.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Mr E. J. Thompson’.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Gift of land to Dudley Guest Hospital’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 21 July 1938, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Hayes, ‘Our Hospitals’, p. 88–89.

¹⁵¹ The former in ‘Gift of land to Dudley Guest Hospital’, the latter in ‘Mr E. J. Thompson’.

¹⁵² Hayes and Doyle, ‘Eggs, rags and whist drives’, p. 713–714.

financing, but the continued success, into the 1940s, of the League demonstrates the important role more inclusive fundraising schemes continued to play here. Indeed, while much research into hospital fundraising concludes in 1939,¹⁵³ the persistence success of the League in Dudley during and after the Second World War suggests perhaps that there is scope for further study of hospital fundraising schemes through the decade to the introduction of the NHS in 1948. For, as the following table suggests, Dudley's League increased both its number of subscribers (donors), and the amount raised through subscriptions, during this period:

Year:	Number of subscribers:	Total raised:
1940	846 35 men 96% women	£176 16s 6d
1944	1209 39 men 98% women	£238 0s 0d
1947	1202 40 men 97% women	£234 18s 6d

Table 9:¹⁵⁴ Dudley Linen League's fundraising, 1940—1947.

Between 1940 and 1944, the number of individual subscribers to the League increased by nearly a third, and the amount raised through subscriptions also increased, by just over a quarter. This was largely maintained through to 1947: although there was a slight fall in both figures from 1944, this decrease was so small as to be essentially negligible. That the overall funds raised should increase during the conflict is significant, as wartime conditions prevented the League from undertaking some forms of fundraising as it had pre-war. The 1940 Annual Report refers to social events such as whist drives in 1939 and 1940, but these events faded away once the war started in earnest.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, in 1947, the committee lamented that 'catering difficulties make it almost impossible to raise money by social activities', food rationing having become stricter.¹⁵⁶ In wartime, then, the total monies raised

¹⁵³ See Gosling, 'Open the other eye', for a notable exception.

¹⁵⁴ Data derived from AR 1940, AR 1944, and AR 1947.

¹⁵⁵ AR 1940, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ AR 1947, p. 1. For post-war austerity, see: Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

came almost exclusively through individual donations, the overwhelming majority of which, as the table suggests, were from women.

Donating to the League was perhaps a practical way for local women to feel that they were making a contribution to the running of the hospital. The increase between 1940 and 1944 may be attributable to a nationwide surge in enthusiasm for savings and fundraising during the conflict.¹⁵⁷ Second front optimism,¹⁵⁸ and Dudley Guest's role in treating wounded servicemen following D-Day in June 1944,¹⁵⁹ may have encouraged increasing numbers of locals to give—and give *more*—explaining some of this increase. It is also possible that the improvement in women's relative pay during the conflict meant that some residents perhaps enjoyed a greater income, and had more to offer in donations.¹⁶⁰ However, it is notable that this increase was sustained to 1947, and that the League still sought volunteers to work as collectors at this point, anticipating, as noted earlier, that its work would continue beyond the nationalisation of the hospital.¹⁶¹ This suggests that in Dudley, as elsewhere, public attitudes towards the establishment of the NHS were mixed.

Charles Webster argues that outright opposition to an NHS was largely restricted to the doctors of the British Medical Association, concerned about their ability to profit from private healthcare,¹⁶² although James Hinton notes that the right-wing National Housewives' League 'adopted a stance of total hostility' to the NHS.¹⁶³ The general public, however, appear to have held much more

¹⁵⁷ Rosalind Watkiss Singleton explores this phenomenon in her study of the National Savings Movement (NSM) during the Second World War; she notes that 12 million people, fully one third of the population, were NSM members by March 1944. Rosalind Watkiss Singleton, "'Doing Your Bit': Women and the National Savings Movement in the Second World War", in: Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (eds.), *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 217—231.

¹⁵⁸ For which see: Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939—1945*, 2nd Edition, (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 297—298.

¹⁵⁹ 'Wounded men in Birmingham. Treatment in local hospitals', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 June 1944, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Ian Gazeley, 'Women's pay in British industry during the Second World War', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 61, No. 3, (2008), p. 651—671.

¹⁶¹ AR 1947, p. 1. A new collector had just been appointed for Quarry Bank, and a volunteer was requested to act as collector in Kingswinford.

¹⁶² Charles Webster, *The National Health Service: A Political History*, 2nd Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 25—30; see also: Andrew Seaton, 'Against the 'Sacred Cow': NHS Opposition and the Fellowship for Freedom in Medicine, 1948—72', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 26, No. 3, (2015), p. 424—449.

¹⁶³ James Hinton, 'Militant Housewives: the British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government', *History Workshop*, Vol. 38, (1994), p. 128—159, p. 142.

nuanced views about the proposed new system. Nick Hayes argues that prior to the NHS's creation, most people, given a choice of hospital systems, usually selected some form of national system which was state supported, indicating clear support for the proposed NHS. At the same time, however, 'overall satisfaction levels with [the existing system] were high', and voluntary hospitals, like Dudley Guest, 'were particularly well regarded—two-thirds of [those] questioned expressed unqualified approval', with the middle-classes, and women, most strongly favouring voluntary hospital provision.¹⁶⁴ Paul Brigden goes further, arguing that 'the middle-classes remained supportive of voluntarism, but their views were disregarded...by the post-war Labour government',¹⁶⁵ and indeed Claire Langhamer notes that, for many voters in the post-war years, improved housing provision was prioritised over any national healthcare system, suggesting some satisfaction with the existing system, or at least suggesting that housing was felt to be a more pressing problem.¹⁶⁶

Broadly, this research indicates that it was possible for individuals to support both the proposed NHS, *and also* the existing system of voluntary hospitals—or at least the local voluntary hospital with which they were familiar. That the Linen League in Dudley still enjoyed strong financial support in 1947 should not be taken as evidence that residents did not support the creation of the NHS. Rather, as Hayes argues, it suggests that many people in the late 1940s were still satisfied with their current hospital, even while supporting the proposed NHS.¹⁶⁷ In Dudley, the sense that making financial contributions to the local hospital was part of an individual's 'civic duty' appears to have remained.¹⁶⁸ Women continued to subscribe to the League, supporting its work, with even the smallest donation mattering: during the war, the League launched a 'mile of pennies' fundraiser, perhaps with

¹⁶⁴ Hayes, 'Did We Really Want a National Health Service?', p. 660.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Brigden, 'Voluntary Failure, the Middle Classes, and the Nationalisation of the British Voluntary Hospitals, 1900—1946', in: Harris, B. and Brigden, P., *Charity and Mutual Aid in Europe and North America since 1800*, [e book edition, 2012] (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 212—234, p. 214.

¹⁶⁶ Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, No. 2, (2005), p. 341—362.

¹⁶⁷ Hayes, 'Did We Really Want a National Health Service?', p. 660.

¹⁶⁸ Hayes, 'Our Hospitals', p. 85.

the goal of securing donations from less wealthy sections of society, which eventually raised over £161.¹⁶⁹

The League also acted as a space in which local women, from relatively diverse social backgrounds, were able to involve themselves with the organisation of the Guest hospital through the League's Executive Committee. The committee had responsibility for organising the fundraising initiatives, co-ordinating volunteer collectors, and purchasing all the material goods the Guest required each year. This itself was a fairly substantial managerial role within a significant public institution. The committee appears to have been relatively democratic in its organisation. While paucity of the archival record means it is impossible to be certain, some committee members appear to have 'risen up the ranks', first acting as collectors before later joining—likely through invitation—the committee. Although 20 women were named as committee members across the period 1940—1947, in individual years, it consisted of between nine and 12 women.¹⁷⁰ As collectors and committee members are both named in annual reports, it is possible to ascertain that three women who had had the less significant role of collector in 1940 had joined the committee by 1944, while a fourth woman was a collector in 1944 and committee member by 1947.¹⁷¹ It is not unreasonable to assume that this was standard practise, not least as it appears logical to invite women who had already demonstrated an interest in, and aptitude for, an organisational role within the League by collecting subscriptions for their area to then take on a more substantial role on the committee. There are perhaps some parallels here with HIWC, when the winners of the writing prize were later invited to join its committee, further supporting the suggestion that these kinds of voluntary welfare organisations became somewhat more democratic in and beyond the interwar period.

Like HIWC's committee, the League's committee was also relatively socially diverse. A full list of committee members is provided in Appendix G. As it reveals, though five committee members

¹⁶⁹ The Mile of Pennies scheme is not mentioned in AR 1940, but is referred to in AR 1944 and 1947. The League raised £161 8s through this scheme alone (AR 1947).

¹⁷⁰ Not counted among this figure is Lady Patricia Ward, the daughter of the Earl of Dudley, who took the honorary role of Patroness, continuing the family's association with the hospital. (AR 1940, 1944 and 1947).

¹⁷¹ Mrs Chattin, Mrs Parker and Mrs Harrison were listed among the collectors in the 1940 Annual Report, and by 1944 were all on the Executive Committee. Similarly, Mrs Rollason was listed as collector in the 1944 Annual Report and on the Executive Committee in 1947.

were the wives of medical practitioners or members of the Guest's Board of Management the remaining three-quarters of committee members—a clear majority—were *not* related to men who worked in or with the hospital. As such, the League arguably gave these women, who had no personal or professional connection to the hospital, an opportunity to actively engage in local public life through its work. Two of the five women who had a familial connection to the hospital were Helene Thompson, wife of Edwin, and her daughter-in-law. As noted, the Thompson family were wealthy members of the local elite, with Edwin especially being associated with the hospital's management. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that his wife and daughter-in-law should be actively involved with the organisation. The League's President, meanwhile, was Edwin's niece, Norah Hanson (née Thompson) who had married into another wealthy brewing family based in the area, Julia Hanson and Sons. The League's Secretary, Margery Grazebrook, had no connection to the Thompsons, but she was of a similar social background: her husband was then director of Grazebrook ironworks, a Black Country ironworking firm which had been in the family since the eighteenth century, and in 1939, the couple lived in a large house on the Earl of Dudley's estate, employing six domestic servants.¹⁷²

Yet a closer inspection of the committee members suggests that these wealthy, elite women were far from typical. Certainly, committee members do not appear representative of the very poorest residents of Dudley; several other members, for example, were married to men working in business or the professions. Lizzie Bate's husband was a solicitor, Edith Robotham's the manager of a car showroom, and Lucy Smith, Isabella Messiter and her daughter-in-law Rona Messiter all were married to men employed as surgeons at Dudley Guest. However, while undoubtedly middle-class, these women were not part of the local elite to the same extent that the Thompsons, Hanson or Grazebrook were. Other committee members came from still more modest backgrounds: Annie Sargent and Mabel Stuart King were both married to schoolteachers, while Mary Ailsby was the wife of a tailor, suggesting a lower-middle class or even upper-working class background. The League, therefore, appears to have drawn together women from beyond the local elite, if not all sections of

¹⁷² See Appendix G for all references.

society in contemporary Dudley, allowing these women to work together in organising one aspect of the hospital's management.

Arguably, for committee members, the League was a space in which women might contribute to local public life, and, as such it formed a part of women's politics here. By the 1940s, Dudley had developed an active and thriving associational culture, and through the organisations which made up this culture, which included the League, women were able to play an important role in the public sphere. This is significant, because Dudley appears to have seen exceptionally little female involvement in the political process through national or local government. Instead, it appears that women were far more active in local public life through non-partisan organisations. To date, Dudley's constituencies have never elected a woman MP.¹⁷³ More significantly, as Chapter Four shortly explores in more detail, Dudley saw the lowest level of female involvement in local government in the Black Country before 1951. As one of four County Borough Councils in the Black Country at this time, Dudley was among the area's largest councils, yet it only elected two women before 1951 (neither of whom, incidentally, were involved with the Linen League).¹⁷⁴ At Chapter 4 indicates, other local councils, including the smaller Municipal and Urban District Councils, elected many more women.¹⁷⁵ While this suggests a rather pessimistic assessment of women's engagement in public life in the town, a much more positive assessment emerges when considering their involvement with wider associational culture, through organisations like the Linen League.

Helen McCarthy has argued that the non-partisan civic organisations which made up local associational life offered a space in which individuals might engage in politics outside of traditional

¹⁷³ The constituency of Dudley existed until 1974 when it became Dudley East and Dudley West, which were replaced by Dudley North and Dudley South in 1997. To date, none have elected a woman.

¹⁷⁴ Both were Labour councillors; Julia Taylor was first elected in 1933 and Doris Chambers in 1938: *Blocksidge's Illustrated Dudley Almanack, 1940*, (Dudley: E. Blocksidge Ltd., 1940), p. 13; 'Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 November 1946, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ See Appendix H. As Chapter 4 explores, the Black Country at this time was made up of 4 county borough councils; 3 municipal borough councils and 13 urban district councils. Brierly Hill and Halesowen tied with Dudley for the lowest number of women elected: both elected two women before 1951, but both were urban district councils, serving much smaller populations—proportionally, Dudley had the lowest number of women councillors.

party structures, particularly during the interwar years.¹⁷⁶ Crucially, McCarthy asserts that these kinds of organisations were not—as was understood at the time, and by some later historians—a ‘fig leaf for middle-class anti-socialism’.¹⁷⁷ While, as she acknowledges, such organisations could at times be dominated by middle-class members, ‘the true picture was more complex’, with such groups ‘an increasingly important category of democratic participation’.¹⁷⁸ This certainly appears to have been the case in Dudley, where many Linen League committee members and collectors were active in numerous other local voluntary and civic associations. The archival records for some of these organisations remain patchy, but there is nonetheless evidence that some women involved with the League were also active in the WVS,¹⁷⁹ Rotary, via the Inner Wheel, the women’s section,¹⁸⁰ Girl Guiding as leaders,¹⁸¹ and Dudley’s Townswomen’s Guild.¹⁸² This not only suggests a thriving and active associational scene in the town, but several of these groups, including the Inner Wheel and Dudley and Pensnett Townswomen’s Guilds, made regular donations to the League, supporting its work.¹⁸³

While the practical work of the League such as collecting money, and liaising with hospital management in how it should be spent, was important in politicising women by enabling them to

¹⁷⁶ Helen McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 4, (2007), p. 891–912, p. 892. See also: ‘Service clubs, citizenship and equality: gender relations and middle-class associations in Britain between the wars’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 81, No. 213, (2008), p. 531–552; ‘Voluntary Action in Interwar Britain’ in Matthew Hilton and James McKay, eds., *The Ages of Voluntarism: Evolution and Change in Modern British Voluntary Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 47–68; Helen McCarthy and Pat Thane, ‘The Politics of Association in Industrial Society (Commentary)’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (2011), p. 217–229.

¹⁷⁷ McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations’, p. 893. For this earlier critique, see: Ross McKibbin, *Classes and cultures: England, 1918–1951*, (Oxford, 1998).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Committee member Mrs Robotham and collector Mrs Temple were both active within WVS; Mrs Temple was Dudley WVS’s Centre Organiser (see Appendix D).

¹⁸⁰ AR 1944 and AR 1947 both detail a donation of £2 2s from Brierly Hill Inner Wheel, suggesting that there may have been crossover between the Inner Wheel membership and the League.

¹⁸¹ Committee members Mrs Hanson and Mrs Hillman were leaders or patrons of Guiding groups (Mrs Hanson was President of Girl Guiding in Dudley), as was collector Mrs Temple. Guiding records for Dudley are no longer in existence, but reference to these women’s involvement can be found in *Blocksidge’s Illustrated Dudley Almanack* for the 1930s and 1940s.

¹⁸² Dudley TG and nearby Pensnett TG were both named in the Annual Reports as making regular donations to the League. At least ten women involved with the League were active members of Dudley TG, including committee members Mrs Hanson, Mrs Hillman, Mrs Messiter, Mrs Robotham and Mrs Smith. Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, C9796/1/1/2, *Monthly Minute Meeting Book of Dudley Townswomen’s Guild, 1941–1949*. Mrs Plant, collector for Pensnett, was named in AR 1940 as being involved with the Pensnett Guild.

¹⁸³ AR 1940, 1944 and 1947 for donations.

undertake an active role in the local public sphere, so too was the League's place within this wider culture. That there was so much crossover in the membership and leadership of these organisations suggests that the women most actively involved within them were part of a broader social network, encouraging and enabling each other to take an active role in local public life. There is little evidence that many women in Dudley were active in 'formal' politics through local government during this period, but organisations like the Linen League nonetheless contributed to women's politicisation here, enabling active members to take on a recognised role in the local public sphere. Although these other organisations appear to have continued, the abrupt closure of the Linen League, with the arrival of the NHS in 1948, may have reduced this activism somewhat.

Conclusion:

Each of the organisations studied in this chapter—Walsall Child Welfare Association, Halesowen Infant Welfare Clinic and the Linen League in Dudley—enabled women to engage with and in public life in these three locations, largely through their voluntary involvement with the organisation in question. In all three, women were able to take up voluntary roles on organising committees, helping to co-ordinate the work the association in question undertook, which was frequently very practical in nature. While middle-class women exclusively dominated the MAC and HVC in First World War-era Walsall, in HIWC and Dudley's Linen League, the respective voluntary committees became somewhat more socially diverse and inclusive across the 1930s and 1940s. For the more working-class women who were invited to join these committees, the experiences involved may have increased their sense of self-worth and confidence, as they worked alongside women from different social classes on a more equal basis than had previously been possible, such as in the MAC.

This chapter has also considered the ways in which interactions with these organisations might serve to politicise local women, and especially those who were not involved with their general administration through committee work. In Walsall, some of the town's most impoverished mothers who applied to the MAC for aid also applied to other organisations for support, working their way in and around contemporary power structures. In Halesowen, some mothers who attended HIWC participated in its essay competitions, writing for public audiences. Such activities might have served

to politicise these women, by enabling them to engage with organisations within the local public sphere at a time when very few had the time, confidence, or resources to take on more formal roles within organisations. In Dudley, meanwhile, the willingness of large numbers of local women to contribute financially to the League and, by extension, Dudley Guest Hospital has wider implications, suggesting that many were willing to support the voluntary hospital system up to the arrival of the NHS in 1948. As Part III suggested, this provides further evidence for a more complex and nuanced understanding of public attitudes towards the proposed NHS in late 1940s Britain.

Finally, it is worth noting that all three organisations appear to have offered these women an *alternative* space in which to become active in local public life in this period. As the next chapter will discuss in detail, Walsall, Halesowen, and Dudley all elected women councillors across this time—indeed, Walsall elected its first woman councillor as early as 1910. However, none of the women who sat on any of the organising committees discussed in this chapter sought election to any of the respective local councils. There is, in effect, no evidence of overlap between women who were active in the ‘formal’ politics of local government, and those active in the more ‘informal’ politics of organisations like WCWA, HIWC and the Linen League. Arguably, however, this suggests that there were multiple spaces and organisations in which women might become politically across this period and that—at least until the arrival of the NHS closed off some of these avenues, as evidenced by the disappearance of the Linen League—voluntary health organisations remained a significant space in which women might become active in local public life in the first half of the twentieth century.

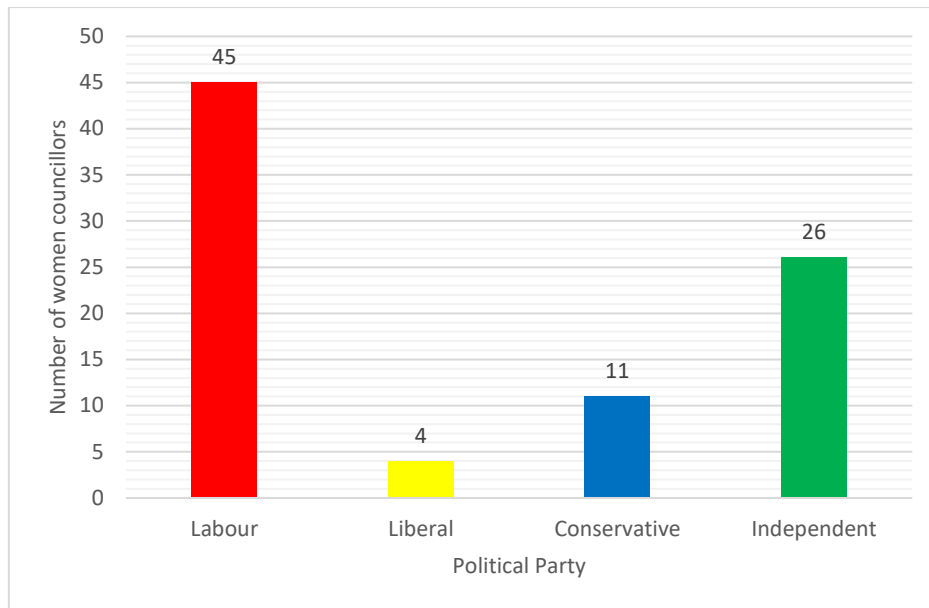
Chapter Four

Women and Local Government

Introduction:

This chapter examines women's involvement in local government as municipal councillors in the Black Country, between 1910, when the first female councillor was elected in this area, and 1951. Evidence from electoral returns in local newspapers across this period, alongside local almanacks and town directories, reveals that 90 women were first elected to one of the 14 county borough, municipal, or urban district councils across the Black Country between these years.¹ In all but three cases, it was possible to identify their respective political parties. A full list of these women councillors, including the date they were first elected and their political affiliations, is provided in Appendix H. As the following graph demonstrates, women were elected from across the three main political parties, Labour, Liberal and Conservative. None were elected representing a minority party, such as the Communist Party, but a large proportion stood as Independents, outside of the party system:

¹ These were the County Borough Councils of Dudley, Walsall, West Bromwich, and Wolverhampton; the Municipal Borough councils of Smethwick and Stourbridge, and the Urban District Councils of Bilston; Brierley Hill; Darlaston; Halesowen; Oldbury; Rowley Regis; Tipton and Wednesbury. Appendix H provides detail of the number of seats on each council, but broadly speaking county borough councils were the largest, with the greatest responsibilities, followed by municipal councils, then by urban district councils. The Black Country did include several smaller, rural district councils but it was not possible to find detail on who was elected to these much smaller councils in local newspapers as this was generally not reported.



Graph 2: Women Councillors in the Black Country by political affiliation, 1910—1951. This graph does not include the three women councillors whose political affiliations were unidentifiable.

Clearly, a significant number of women in the Black Country were politically active in the local public sphere through their roles within municipal government. Any woman who put herself forward for election, won, and went on to serve one or more terms as a councillor was undeniably actively involved in the political process. This chapter, however, is less concerned with the work these women did once elected, but instead asks what had first driven them to seek election: essentially, what had politicised them such that they sought to represent their fellow citizens on a local urban, municipal, or county borough council. As Pat Thane suggests, though local government was ‘more compatible with domestic duties [than parliamentary politics] as it did not require long absences from home’, it was still ‘not very accessible’ to most women.² Though *easier* than being involved with parliamentary politics, it was not *easy*. A woman would have to be very committed to a specific cause, issue, or political party to seek election to invariably male dominated councils; arguably, it was far easier to simply volunteer to become a member of a housewives’ organisation or voluntary health association, such as those considered in Chapters 2 and 3. However, for women who wished to make

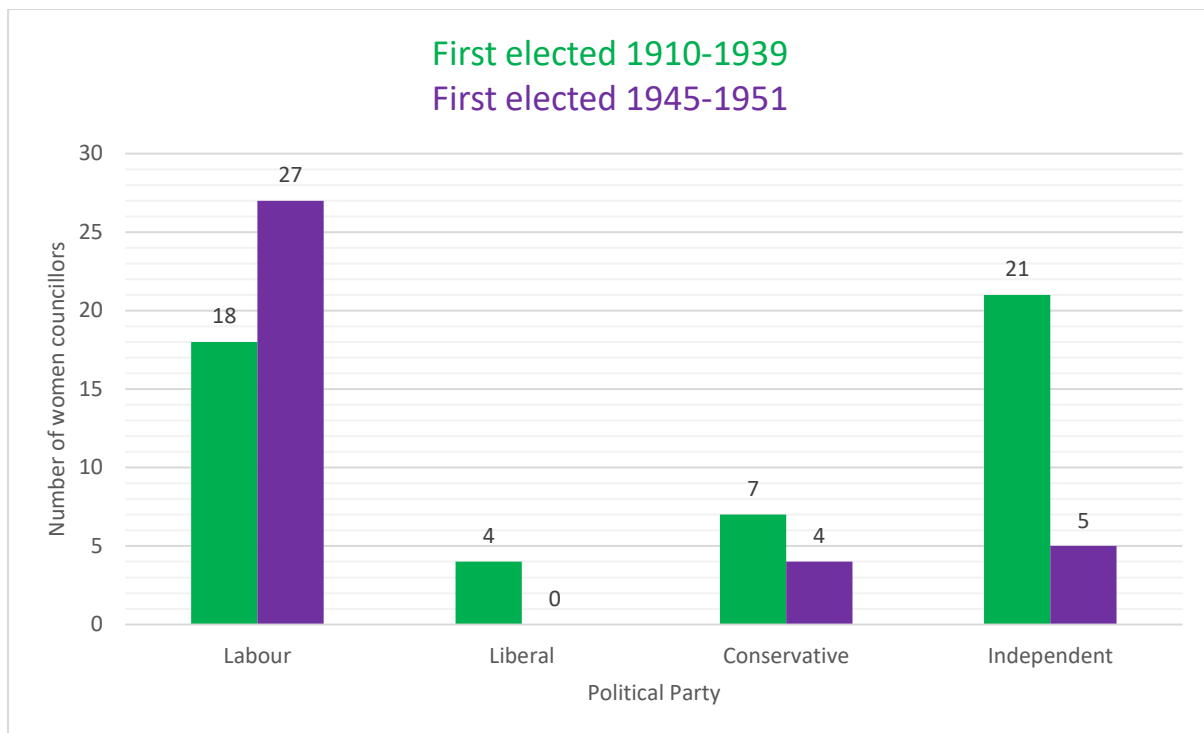
² Pat Thane, ‘The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture, 1918—1939’, in: *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945*, Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye, (eds.), (London: Palgrave, 2013), p. 54—69, p. 63.

specific, tangible, local changes on a specific issue—the ‘practical politics’ discussed in previous chapters—the legislative powers of local government may well have offered an alternative space to do so, for, as this chapter explores, locally there was very little crossover between the women involved in these kinds of organisations, and the more formal politics of local government.

The period to 1951 saw a gradual increase in the number of women councillors here, and therefore an increase in the extent to which women were politically engaged in this sphere of activity. Notably, 89 of these 90 women were elected after 1918, so, as is shortly explored, although some women had been eligible to stand for election to local councils since the late nineteenth century, in the Black Country this was very much a phenomenon of the post-enfranchisement years. This chapter is split into three parts, each of which considers what factors politicised the women who successfully stood for election locally across different time periods. Part I considers the first four women councillors in the Black Country. Before the First World War, during which time elections were suspended, one woman won election (Ada Newman, in Walsall); then in November 1918, three more women were elected. This part argues that familial connections to local government played a significant role in politicising these women, and that there is also some evidence that some anti-suffrage ideology—specifically, the idea of women being especially suited to local government, which was perceived as somehow removed from party politics and focused especially on welfare issues—may have influenced some of these pioneering women.³

Part II examines the 52 women elected between 1919 and 1939, at which point elections were once again suspended for the duration of war. It argues that there was some continuity in these years with this earlier period: many women were politicised through familial connections to local government, and some of this anti-suffrage ideology still held sway during this time. Significantly, this part examines the women elected as Independent councillors, considering how this was very much a phenomenon of the interwar years, as the following graph demonstrates:

³ This is explored in much more detail below, but see: Julia Bush, *Women Against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain Hardcover*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).



Graph 3: Women councillors by political party, 1910—1951.

Part II further argues that there is significant evidence that many women councillors were passionate about what were broadly termed ‘women’s issues’—for example, child welfare, maternity care, or housing, and were perhaps politicised by a desire to make a difference on these issues within their local communities. As suggested above, it is argued that, for these women, the opportunity to use the legislative powers of local government to affect change perhaps drove them to seek election in the first place.

Finally, Part III examines the 35 women who were first elected between 1945 and 1951. It argues both that women were elected at a much greater rate in the post-war period, and that, at this time, women’s involvement with local government was much more driven by partisanship and their involvement with party organisations. Specifically, the rise of the Labour party as an electoral force in the Black Country after 1945 coincided with a rise in the number of Labour women being elected, and a significant fall in the number of Independent women councillors (see Graph 4.2).

In seeking to understand what had politicised these individual women councillors, the total lack of personal sources—private letters or diaries, memoirs, or oral histories—must be

acknowledged. It is not possible to hear directly from the area's women councillors about what had first engaged them in the political process. Instead, the chapter draws largely on local newspapers, which often provide short biographies of women councillors, particularly women 'firsts', and details of what council committees they sat on. As is discussed, this can suggest the specific issues about which these women were passionate, and what it was that had first encouraged them to seek election. These records are, of course, an incomplete picture. However, as Stephanie Ward writes of her study of Labour women activists in this period, 'using what are essentially bureaucratic materials to explore how working-class women became political activists...is particularly important given the dearth of life stories on political journeys which are more common for middle-class women'.⁴ Such records, though incomplete, are often all that remains of women's activism; indeed, in the Black Country, this is true even of affluent, middle-class women. To uncover the experiences of *any* woman councillor in this area, regardless of her social class or political persuasion, it is necessary to utilise such sources.

Women and Local Government:

Comparatively speaking, local government has tended to be a neglected area of historical research; studies of local political cultures tend to focus on the impact of these on national, parliamentary politics.⁵ Within the field of women's history, however, there is a growing scholarship which considers women's role in local government in Britain. Early research generally focused on the first women councillors, elected prior to the First World War. Patricia Hollis's *Ladies Elect* remains an extremely important contribution, authoritatively charting the entry of women into local government from the mid-nineteenth century through to 1914. While many of the women considered in Hollis's study were from middle-class backgrounds, Kim Yoonok Stenberg considered working-class women's roles in local politics in London, demonstrating that some working-class women were

⁴ Stephanie Ward, 'Labour Activism and the Political Self in Inter-War Working-Class Women's Politics', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (2019), p. 29–52, p. 33.

⁵ For a useful example of this in the Black Country, see: Ian Cawood, 'The Impact of the 1918 Reform Act on the Politics of the West Midlands', *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2018), p. 81–100.

equally able to break down some of the barriers to women's participation in local government in the years before the First World War.⁶

Given the interest in women's politics after enfranchisement, it is perhaps surprising that there is no post-1918 equivalent of Hollis's *Ladies Elect*. Sam Davies and Bob Morley's helpful reference guides to county borough elections between 1918 and 1939 are beginning to fill this gap, as they include statistics on the number of women councillors elected to each county borough council across Britain, but gender is not the central feature of their research and they do not consider the smaller municipal or urban district councils.⁷ Elsewhere, much research focuses on a particular geographical area: that is, there are many local studies of women's political participation 'on the ground' in a specific place. Much of this centres on Labour women.⁸ While there is a growing scholarship on women in the Conservative party in this period (as explored in Chapter 1),⁹ this has not

⁶ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865–1914*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Kim Yoonok Stenberg, 'Working-Class Women in London Local Politics, 1894-1914', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 9, No. 3, (1998), p. 323–349.

⁷ The series provides a comparative analysis of each council in England and Wales following each election. Several volumes have already been published but a large number are still forthcoming. To date, the only Black Country council which their guides cover is Dudley. Sam Davis and Bob Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–1938: A Comparative Analysis: Volume 1: Barnsley – Bournemouth*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999); *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–1938: A Comparative Analysis: Volume 2: Bradford – Carlisle*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2000); *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–1938: A Comparative Analysis: Volume 3: Chester to East Ham*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2006); *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919–1938: A Comparative Analysis: Volume 4: Exeter – Hull*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

⁸ See for instance: Pamela M. Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics, 1918–1939*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Chapter 5; Sam Davis, *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool, 1900-1939*, (Newcastle: Keele University Press, 1996), Chapter 4; Karen Hunt, 'Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour women in interwar Manchester', in Matthew Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grassroots: essays on the activities and experiences of local Labour parties and members, 1918–1945*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 79–101; Duncan Tanner, 'Gender, Civic Culture and Politics in South Wales: Explaining Labour Municipal Policy 1918–1939', in: Worley, *Labour's Grassroots*, p. 170–193; Lowri Newman, '"Providing an opportunity to exercise their energies": the role of the Labour Women's Sections in shaping political identities, South Wales, 1918–1939', in: Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane (eds.), *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century: What Difference Did the Vote Make?*, (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 29–44; June Hannam, 'Women as Paid Organizers and Propagandists for the British Labour Party between the Wars', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Vol. 77, (2010), p. 69–88.

⁹ See Chapter 1, and, for a useful overview: Clarisse Berthenzène and Julie V. Gottlieb, 'Introduction', in: Clarisse Berthenzène and Julie V. Gottlieb, *Rethinking right-wing women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the present*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 1–10; Clarisse Berthenzène and Julie V. Gottlieb, 'Considering conservative women in the gendering of modern British politics', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (2019), p. 189–193. For the role of Conservative women in local politics: N. C. Fleming, 'Women and Lancashire Conservatism between the Wars', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3, (2017), p. 329–349.

yet extended into Conservative women's experiences in municipal government. Similarly, there are currently no studies of Liberal women in local government after 1918. There are a number of reasons for the dominance of Labour women in the historical scholarship, including the close links between the development of women's history in Britain and the feminist movement: as Julie Gottlieb and Clarisse Berthenzène recently argued, Conservative women 'have never been embraced by women's historians because of their presumed reactionary views and their complicity with the patriarchal establishment'.¹⁰ However, research in this chapter indicates that far more Labour women were elected in the Black Country than Liberal and Conservative women *combined*. It may therefore follow that, elsewhere in the country, Labour women councillors were also more numerous than their Liberal or Conservative equivalents, contributing to the greater number of historical studies of Labour women. Future research may corroborate this.

In addition to studies of specific locations, there are also several autobiographical and biographical studies of interwar women councillors. The former includes those written by Hannah Mitchell and Annie Barnes,¹¹ while more sustained analysis is provided in recent research into women councillors in Coventry, Devon, and Croydon.¹² Both Cathy Hunt, in her study of Coventry, and Julia Neville, who considers Devon, suggest that, at times, women councillors could be 'pigeonholed' into focusing on what are broadly termed 'women's issues', usually relating to welfare. As Hunt demonstrates, this was not universally true, with some women, like Coventry councillor Alice Arnold, actively opposing this and prioritising class solidarity over gendered issues. This 'pigeonholing' is discussed more fully in Part II below, but there is some evidence from the interwar Black Country that

¹⁰ Berthenzène and Gottlieb, 'Introduction', p. 2.

¹¹ Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: the Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel*, ed. Geoffrey Mitchell, originally published 1968, (London: Virago, 1984); Kate Harding and Caroline Gibbs, *Tough Annie: From Suffragette to Stepney Councillor*, (London: Stepney Books, 1980).

¹² Cathy Hunt, "'Everyone's Poor Relation': the poverty and isolation of a working-class woman local politician in interwar Britain', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (2007), p. 417—430; Cathy Hunt, "'Success and the ladies": an examination of women's experiences as Labour councillors in interwar Coventry', *Midland History*, Vol. 32, No. 2, (2007), p. 141—159; Julia Neville, 'Challenge, Conformity and Casework in Interwar England: the first women councillors in Devon', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 6, (2013), p. 971—994; Ruth Davidson, 'Working-Class Women Activists: Citizenship at the Local Level', in: Peter Ackers and Alastair J. Reid (eds.), *Alternatives to State-Socialism in Britain: Other Worlds of Labour in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Palgrave), p. 93—120; Ruth Davidson, 'A local perspective: the women's movement and citizenship, Croydon 1890s–1939', *Women's History Review*, (2020 advanced access online).

some women councillors actively sought to take on gendered roles, such as chairing a Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, because such ‘women’s issues’ were what had first politicised them.

It is worth noting here, however, that it is somewhat challenging to draw general conclusions about the experiences of women councillors after 1918 owing to the lack of a detailed, nationwide study which parallels Patricia Hollis’s work on the pre-1914 period. It is, perhaps, not yet possible to suggest how ‘typical’ the experiences of Black Country women councillors were, but it is hoped that this chapter may contribute to future research into women in local government after 1918. This is particularly notable, as it is evident from this study of the Black Country that it was not until after partial enfranchisement that the number of women local councillors elected in this area began to significantly increase. Research into other places in the post-enfranchisement years may reveal similar narratives, or, indeed, may contradict the evidence presented here. For, as work by Hollis and Yoonok Stenberg suggests, some parts of the country had already seen a relatively large number of women councillors elected before the First World War. This was particularly true of large cities like London, though some smaller towns had also elected women before the conflict—including Walsall, as Part I now explores.

Part I: c.1910—1919:

Women’s eligibility to stand for, and elect representatives to, different types of local councils evolved slowly from the mid-nineteenth century, though progress was slow and often extremely complicated. As Patricia Hollis notes, the ever-changing qualifications were so unclear that even the President of the Local Government Board found himself, in 1889, unsure if women were eligible to stand for election to the London County Council.¹³ The 1869 Municipal Franchise Act allowed women ratepayers to vote in municipal elections, though this was swiftly clarified, in 1872, to enfranchise only *unmarried* women ratepayers.¹⁴ In 1894, women were permitted to stand for election to urban and rural district councils, and the 1907 Qualification of Women Act allowed unmarried women and

¹³ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 42. The first chapter of Hollis’s work traces this complicated evolution in greater depth.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

widows to stand as borough and county councillors.¹⁵ An amendment to this Act in the summer of 1914 allowed women residents as well as women ratepayers—effectively, married women—the right to stand but, as the war intervened, no elections were held under this system until 1918.¹⁶ Although women ratepayers, at least, had been eligible to stand for election to the Black Country’s municipal and urban district councils from 1894, and for election to its county councils from 1907, across the area only one woman did so successfully before the First World War.

This section considers the earliest women councillors in the Black Country, the four elected between 1910 and 1918. Ada Newman (Unionist) was elected in Walsall in 1910 though no other woman was elected in the Black Country before elections were suspended for the duration of the First World War. In the first municipal elections after this, held in November 1918, three more women were elected: Charlotte Hazel (Liberal) and Grace Cottrell (Independent), both to West Bromwich county borough council, and Emily Francis (Independent) to Stourbridge municipal council.¹⁷ This section argues that their familial connections, and potentially anti-suffrage ideology, may have politicised these women, encouraging them to seek election. Newman, Hazel, and Cottrell all had relatives involved with either local government, or within their respective political parties. Francis did not, but appears to have espoused some of the same ideology as some anti-suffragists. This has wider significance, as there is very little evidence that any woman councillor elected in the Black Country was active in the pre-war suffrage movement, with one exception: Emma Sproson (Labour), elected in Wolverhampton in 1921, after years of suffrage activism.¹⁸ As such, while women’s participation in local government as councillors only took off in the Black Country after enfranchisement, there does not appear to have been a link between this and the rather limited local suffrage movement.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 9 and p. 392.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 400.

¹⁷ References to these women, and all others discussed in this chapter, can be found in Appendix H.

¹⁸ Sproson was initially active in the WSPU, going to prison in Holloway in 1907 after taking part in suffrage action in London, but defected to the Women’s Freedom League in 1908. She later went to prison a second time, in Stafford, after refusing to pay her dog licence as part of a tax resistance campaign. George J. Barnsby, *Votes for Women: The Struggle for the Vote in the Black Country 1900–1918*, (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services Company, 1995); Susan Walters, ‘Emma Sproson (1867-1936): Black Country suffragette’, (University of Leicester, unpublished MA thesis, 1993) and Linda Pike, ‘Emma Sproson’, in: Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, *Hidden Heroines: The Forgotten Suffragettes*, (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press, 2018).

¹⁹ See ‘Context for the thesis’ for an exploration of this.

Indeed, for three of the four first women councillors, it appears that familial involvement in local politics was perhaps what had initially politicised them. Ada Newman's father Joseph was a wealthy ironmonger who had also been a prominent figure within the Unionist party in Walsall; he was a councillor for many years in the late nineteenth century, and Mayor of Walsall in 1880 and 1881.²⁰ Joseph Newman died in 1903, some years before his daughter Ada was elected, but it was likely his influence which led to her taking 'for very many years...a very active interest in the party locally'. She acted as secretary of Walsall Women Unionists Association (WWUA), with her involvement with WWUA dating to 'the time the late Frank James fought for election [to Parliament, in 1891]'.²¹ This familial influence is not insignificant, as Patricia Hollis notes that Ada was first co-opted onto Walsall council when a casual vacancy occurred,²² although one year later, in 1911, she won election in her own right.²³ While it was certainly remarkable that she should be co-opted a scant three years after women were first permitted to become borough councillors, she had by then been an active member of her local party for nearly two decades. The active and prominent role she had undertaken within WWUA before 1910 probably contributed to her selection: the casual vacancy necessitated a known quantity within the local party being put forward, and her twenty years' activism meant she was just this. Her familial connections also likely played a role. Not only had her father been a councillor, the Newmans—Ada never married—were wealthy. Indeed, Hollis writes that Ada 'became vice-chairman of the free library and art gallery committee on the apparent understanding that she would provide many of the books'.²⁴ Certainly Walsall Unionist party may well have seen the advantages of supporting a candidate who could, perhaps, meet her own election expenses.

Like Newman, both Charlotte Hazel (Liberal) and Grace Cottrell (Independent), who both won election in West Bromwich in 1918, had extensive familial connections to the local political scene there. Charlotte Hazel's elder brother, Alfred, had been Liberal MP for West Bromwich from 1906 to 1910. He stood as the Liberals' candidate in West Bromwich in both 1910 general elections

²⁰ 'The Late Alderman Newman', *Walsall Advertiser*, 19 September 1903, p. 2.

²¹ 'Death of Walsall Lady', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30 November 1929, p. 5.

²² Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 397.

²³ 'Paddock Ward Election', *Walsall Advertiser*, 21 October 1911, p. 6.

²⁴ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 428.

and lost narrowly—by only two votes in the December contest—and had begun campaigning as the Liberal candidate in the 1918 general election before stepping aside to allow a straight fight between the Labour candidate, whom he supported, and the coalition Conservative.²⁵ It is possible that, through Alfred's influence, in Charlotte became an active figure in Liberal politics locally in the pre-war years. While West Bromwich party records are no longer available, local newspaper reports indicate that in this period, she was elected Vice President of the Midland Union of Women's Liberal Associations and spoke frequently to Liberal women's organisations across the West Midlands, usually on the topics of poverty or 'the land question', central tenets of the party at this time.²⁶ On several occasions, such as at Walsall in 1911, she was introduced as the sister of a local Liberal MP, before giving her talk, on 'peace abroad and war [on poverty] at home'.²⁷ While Alfred was not involved in municipal government —after he stepped aside in 1918, he left politics to become an academic—his role within the Liberal party may well have drawn Charlotte into the party. Again, if the West Bromwich Liberals were looking for a candidate in 1918, she was essentially a known quantity. There may even have been those who felt that her sharing a surname with the Liberals' general election candidate—Alfred had not yet stood aside at the time of the municipal election—could have a positive impact on her chance of success.

In the same West Bromwich municipal election, Grace Cottrell won as an Independent candidate. As she stood outside of the party system, there was not the equivalent party organisation, or women's section thereof, in which she might have first become active as there had been for Newman or Hazel. Nonetheless, she still benefited significantly from her familial connections to local

²⁵ The December 1910 contest was so tight that several recounts were held and there was eventually a court case with both Hazel and the victorious Conservative challenging supposed fraudulent votes. 'Dr Hazel decides to demand a scrutiny', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 9 December 1910, p. 6. In 1918, Alfred initially stood as the Liberals' candidate but stepped aside to avoid 'splitting the Progressive vote' and encouraged his supporters to vote for the Labour candidate, who duly won. 'Dr Hazel's Appeal', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 14 December 1918, p. 5; Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 406.

²⁶ For example: 'Women Liberals' Conference', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 14 October 1912, p. 2; 'Women Liberals', *Walsall Advertiser*, 1 February 1913, p. 10; 'Access to the Land', *Evening Despatch*, 2 March 1914, p. 7; 'Women Liberals. Address by Miss Hazel', *Evening Despatch*, 5 February 1914, p. 7 (at Brierley Hill); 'Sutton Coldfield. Liberal Reception', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 7 March 1914, p. 11.

²⁷ 'War on poverty. Women's Liberal Association', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 8 April 1911, p. 9.

government and indeed the wider public sphere in contemporary West Bromwich. She was born Grace Jefferson; her father, Frederick Jefferson had co-founded Kenrick & Jefferson printing works in the late nineteenth century, and the company was a major employer in West Bromwich until the 1980s.²⁸ More pertinently, Frederick had been a councillor in West Bromwich,²⁹ and Thomas Cottrell, whom Grace married in 1900, was himself an Independent councillor at the time of her election.³⁰ Indeed, Thomas and Grace's daughter (also called Grace) was elected as an Independent councillor in West Bromwich in 1937, highlighting the strength of this familial influence.³¹

In pointing to these kinds of familial connections, the intention is not to downplay these women's achievements or suggest that they were somehow viewed as substitutes for their male relations. Newman, Hazel and Cottrell all went on to play a significant role in local public life after being elected. Newman remained a councillor in Walsall for twelve years, stepping down in 1922.³² Hazel became a stalwart of public life in West Bromwich: she won re-election at every municipal election except 1929, though was re-elected in 1932, and was still a councillor when she died, aged 84, in 1955.³³ From 1922, she was a magistrate and, because of her role in public life, was asked to be the Centre Organiser of West Bromwich Women's Voluntary Service (WVS; see Chapter 2), a role she fulfilled throughout the conflict.³⁴ In recognition of her services, she was awarded Freedom of West Bromwich (1945) and the OBE (1949).³⁵ Cottrell, too, was regularly re-elected and in 1926,

²⁸ More information about Kenrick and Jefferson can be found via West Bromwich Local History Society <<https://www.westbromwichhistory.com/people-places/kenrick-jefferson-printing-works/>> and Black Country History <http://blackcountryhistory.org/collections/getrecord/GB146_BS-KJ/>, consulted 19.06.2019; Caroline Archer, 'Kenrick and Jefferson Fountain Pen', in: Malcolm Dick, David J. Eveleigh and Janet Sullivan (eds.), *The Black Country: A History in 100 Objects*, (Dudley: Black Country Living Museum Publications, 2019), p. 148. By the 1830s, the Kenricks had grown established in West Bromwich through their large ironworks, money from which was used later to finance the printing company. For the Kenricks: Richard H. Trainor, *Black Country Élités: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialised Area, 1830—1900*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 26; Frederick Jefferson's role in public life in West Bromwich see p. 191.

²⁹ 'Late Mr F. T. Jefferson', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 16 November 1920, p. 3.

³⁰ 'West Bromwich Municipal Election', *Midland Chronicle*, 27 October 1918, p. 3, via Sandwell Archives and Community History Centre (SACHS).

³¹ 'Dad, Mother, Daughter As Mayor', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 February 1949, p. 3.

³² 'Death of Walsall Lady'.

³³ 'How the candidates fared in Midland Civic Elections', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1932, p. 5; 'The Elections: Results from Midland Boroughs', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 12 May 1950, p. 3; 'Obituary. Miss Charlotte E. Hazel', *Birmingham Post*, 10 October 1955, p. 5; 'Killed on the one day she walked', *Birmingham Gazette*, 12 October 1955, p. 6.

³⁴ 'The Full Life', *Birmingham Mail*, 28 August 1945, p. 3.

³⁵ 'The Full Life'; 'Chairwoman. Welfare Work', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 9 June 1949, p. 5.

became West Bromwich's, and indeed the Black Country's, first woman mayor. At her mayoral inauguration, the chairman of the council described her as 'not only the wife of a man who was highly respected, but also...the daughter of one of West Bromwich's greatest townsmen...whose name would long be remembered', although he was clear that the council were giving 'honour where honour was due' in electing her to the mayoralty, and she was mayor again in 1927.³⁶ All three, therefore, clearly went on to make significant contributions within their locales in their own right.

Nonetheless, it does appear that these women may very well have initially become politicised, and chosen to seek election in the first place, because of their familial connections to either (or both) municipal government and the local party organisations. The impact of these kinds of familial connections are discussed much more fully in Part II, as this remained a significant route into local government for many women in the interwar years. However, it is worth noting at this juncture that neither Newman, Hazel, nor Cottrell had any connection—as far as the existing evidence suggests—to other local organisations which may have served to politicise them. For example, as both Chapters 2 and 3 discussed, in the years leading up to the First World War, and during the conflict, a significant number of women in Walsall, often from similarly affluent, middle-class backgrounds to Newman, were active within voluntary organisations there, such as the Tipperary Rooms (Chapter 2) or the Child Welfare Association (Chapter 3). Newman, however, was not a member of these or other similar organisations: essentially, there is no evidence that she had been engaged in work within such voluntary organisations before seeking election. Indeed, the only other local organisations her obituary records her involvement with were the church—she led the Sunday School associated with the Blue Coat School—and Walsall Cricket Club, where she 'followed her father in her keen interest in sport' and acted as the club's scorer.³⁷ There is similarly little evidence that Grace Cottrell was active in any other organisations in West Bromwich, while Charlotte Hazel's activism, prior to her election in 1918, appears to have been in local Liberal women's organisations exclusively. Though she did later become Centre Organiser of the local WVS, this was only after nearly two decades of

³⁶ 'First Lady Mayor of West Bromwich', *Midland Chronicle*, 12 November 1926, p. 5, via SCHAS. Her father, Frederick, had died in 1920.

³⁷ 'Death of Walsall Lady'.

activism in local politics and arguably resulted from it: that is, she was already a well-known figure within local public life, and from this was asked to take on the role.

Perhaps most significantly, none of the three, in common with almost all women elected in the Black Country, had any connection to the suffrage movement. An overview of women's suffrage activism in the Black Country is provided in the contextualising chapter, but it is worth reiterating here that, though the local movement was not large, there were suffrage organisations active in most Black Country towns by the outbreak of war in 1914. Dudley, Stourbridge, Walsall, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton all had National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) branches; Walsall and Wolverhampton each had a Women's Suffrage and Political Union (WSPU); there was a Church League for Women's Suffrage branch in Walsall; a Women's Freedom League branch in Wolverhampton, and a Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association in West Bromwich.³⁸ Local records of these branches have regrettably been lost, but reference to their activities appears in the suffrage press. Keyword searches of Black Country towns were undertaken within digitised suffrage journals, which revealed the names of the most active suffragists and suffragettes in these publications.³⁹ From this, a list of women who were most active in local suffrage branches was cross-referenced with the Black Country's women councillors elected after 1918. Only one name—Emma Sproson, elected in Wolverhampton in 1921—appeared on both.

Several caveats must be noted here. First, there is no complete list of all the women active in these local suffrage organisations: only the most active, typically those who took on organising or speaking roles, appear in such records. Women who merely attended meetings, taking a less visible or active role in the fight for women's enfranchisement, do not tend to appear in such records, and it remains possible that some of these women councillors were more tacit supporters of women's enfranchisement in this way. Furthermore, one woman, Beatrice Pearson, an NUWSS member in

³⁸ Barnsby, *Votes for Women*; Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 124—7; 'Lady Selbourne's and Lady Betty Balfour's suffrage tours', *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, 1 January 1914, p. 345.

³⁹ *Common Cause*; *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*; *Suffragette*; *Suffragist*; *Vote*; *Votes for Women* and *Women's Franchise*. This was supplemented by reference guides to the suffrage movement locally, including Barnsby, *Votes For Women* and Crawford, *A Regional Survey*.

Wolverhampton, stood for election there in 1912. She was unsuccessful and did not stand again but this does indicate some crossover between the suffrage movement and local government in the pre-war period.⁴⁰ Finally, it should also be acknowledged that any of the 35 women first elected after 1945 were probably too young to have been involved with the suffrage movement.

Nonetheless, it is particularly significant that there appears, barring Emma Sproson, to be no real connection between women councillors and suffrage activists in the Black Country, because there is some suggestion that several local women councillors were influenced by certain anti-suffrage ideologies. As several historians have demonstrated, anti-suffrage views varied widely in the years before the First World War.⁴¹ Some anti-suffragists outright opposed any involvement by women in politics in any form, but, as Julia Bush demonstrates, others held far more nuanced views. Some opposed women's involvement in national, parliamentary politics, but instead argued that women could—indeed *should*—seek involvement with local government. It was felt both that municipal government could operate outside of party politics, in a non-partisan manner, and that it was local government which chiefly dealt with many issues concerned with the welfare of women and children. Both factors meant that it was perceived as particularly suitable for women.⁴²

Just as there is no surviving evidence that, excepting Emma Sproson, any women councillors in this area had been active in any suffrage organisations, there is equally no surviving evidence that any had taken an active role themselves in anti-suffrage organisations, such as the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage (NLOWS). Patricia Hollis describes Ada Newman as an 'anti-suffragist', but it is unclear whether this meant Newman was actively involved with the anti-suffrage

⁴⁰ G W Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888—1964*, (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 206; 'Lady Candidate for the Town Council', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19 October 1912, p. 8; see also 'Context for the thesis'.

⁴¹ Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain*, (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Julia Bush, 'British women's anti-suffragism and the forward policy, 1908-14', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (2002), p. 431—454; Martine Faraut, 'Women resisting the vote: a case of anti feminism?', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (2003), p. 605—621; Maroula Joannou, 'Mary Augusta Ward (Mrs Humphry) and the opposition to women's suffrage', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3, (2006), p. 561—580; Julia Bush, *Women against the vote: female anti-suffragism in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Philippe Vervaecke, "'Doing Great Public Work Privately": Female Antis in the Interwar Years', in: Gottlieb and Toye, p. 105—123; Florence Binard, "'The Injustice of the Woman's Vote': opposition to female suffrage after World War I", *Women's History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2014), p. 381—400.

⁴² Bush, *Women against the vote*.

campaign, or whether she simply opposed female enfranchisement.⁴³ I have found no explicit evidence to support Hollis's assertion, but none which opposes it, either—and Newman certainly was not active within any of Walsall's three suffrage organisations. Nonetheless, it does seem that some of the women councillors here were somewhat influenced by certain ideologies espoused by anti-suffrage organisations.

Most explicit in this was Emily Francis, the fourth woman elected in the Black Country before 1919. Unlike Newman, Hazel or Cottrell, Francis, who won election in Stourbridge in 1918, did not have any familial connection to local government there. Her husband, Lloyd, was a medical practitioner, and there is no evidence that he was involved with municipal government in Stourbridge. Emily's family, meanwhile, were from Northamptonshire, where they appear, per census returns, to have remained, suggesting she did not draw on her father or brother's connections locally.⁴⁴ Furthermore, as an Independent, there was no equivalent party organisation to, for example, the Women Unionists' Association in Walsall, that she might join. Precisely what, therefore, first drove her to seek election in 1918 is unclear. However, in 1923, when she sought re-election, she appears to have been influenced by, and espoused, some of the anti-suffrage ideology discussed above. Speaking to local voters, she explicitly emphasised her belief that 'no party politics should enter local government', instead appealing to voters to re-elect her on the basis that 'any question affecting women or children, directly or indirectly, should receive careful attention'. She was, in this election, the only woman candidate in Stourbridge.⁴⁵ Although there is no evidence that Francis was ever formally involved with any anti-suffrage organisation, consciously or unconsciously she was echoing some anti-suffrage ideology in making these appeals to voters: that local government should remain non-partisan, and that it particularly concerned issues relating to women and children. This is particularly notable because, as Part II now discusses, two key features of women's role in local government in the interwar years were the rise of Independent women councillors, who positioned

⁴³ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 416.

⁴⁴ Emily Francis (1911), *1911 Census return for 2 Worcester Street, Stourbridge, Worcestershire*, Piece: 17486; Schedule Number: 101.

⁴⁵ 'Lady to Fight', *Birmingham Gazette*, 29 October 1923, p. 3.

themselves outside the party system, and the number of women councillors who appear to have actively sought involvement in council work which affected women or children.

Part II: 1919—1939:

The interwar years saw a significant increase in the number of women councillors across the Black Country: 48 were first elected in this period. A considerable proportion of these, especially in the 1930s, were Independents:

	Conservative:	Liberal:	Labour:	Independent:	Total:
1920s:	2	1	9	4	16
1930s:	4	2	9	14	29

Table 10: Women councillors first elected, 1919—1939.⁴⁶ In addition, three women were elected whose party affiliations proved untraceable.

It is worth noting these Independents appear to have been truly independent: this was not simply a catch-all term for members of single-interest groups like Ratepayers' Associations, or minority parties. This has significant implications for how historians understand what constituted 'women's politics' at this time. As the previous two chapters noted, women's politics in this period could and did occur in many voluntary, non-partisan organisations. Yet even within local government, recognised as part of the formal political process, many women were still seeking to undertake political work in a non-partisan fashion, in some ways outside of the traditional party system.

This section identifies three key trends in women's role in local government in these years, each of which have implications for understanding what factors may have politicised women, and encouraged them to seek election. These trends are: the significance of Independent councillors; the continued prevalence of women councillors' familial connections to local government or political parties; and their willingness to work, once elected, on what were typically understood as 'women's issues'. It is suggested that the relatively large number of Independents elected indicates that, for some women, party politics was not necessarily a driving factor in their seeking election, and that, like

⁴⁶ See Appendix H for references.

Emily Francis, some may have been influenced by these anti-suffrage ideologies. It is further argued that, as in Part I, familial experiences of what local government actually entailed—the practical politics, to an extent, of being a councillor—may also have served to politicise some of these women. Finally, and while acknowledging the possibility that some women councillors may have been ‘pigeonholed’ into taking on ‘women’s issues’ once elected, there is evidence that some appear to have carved out a kind of expertise for themselves in these areas, based on their own lived experiences in dealing with these issues.⁴⁷ Indeed, in some cases, it might have been a desire to take action on these issues which first drove these women to seek election, once again revealing a thread of ‘practical politics’ running through these women’s activism, and providing evidence for what issues might have first politicised them.

Before this, however, it is worth noting that while the election of 48 women to councils across the Black Country indicates that women did have remarkable success in entering local government at this time, this figure alone does disguise some significant nuances in the extent to which women’s representation on specific councils progressed. Certain councils saw proportionally more women elected than others, and it was not necessarily the case that the larger councils saw more women councillors. For example, in Dudley, only two women were elected across the entire period 1914 to 1951: Julia Taylor, in 1933 and Doris Chambers, in 1938 (both Labour) while in Oldbury, twelve women were elected in total, five before 1939.⁴⁸ Oldbury, however, was a smaller Urban District Council, consisting of only 21 seats, whereas Dudley was a larger County Borough Council, with 30 seats. In theory, there were more opportunities for women to be elected in Dudley, but it was Oldbury which saw greater success.

In other areas, female representation on local councils fluctuated or decreased across this period. For instance, after Ada Newman stepped down in 1922, Walsall did not have any women representatives for three years until Gertrude Cresswell (Labour) was elected in 1925. Cresswell was

⁴⁷ For this ‘pigeonholing’, see for example: Neville, ‘Challenge, Conformity and Casework’, p. 981; Hunt and Hannam, ‘Archaeology’, p. 130—131. Further discussion below.

⁴⁸ See Appendix H for references.

then the only woman councillor in Walsall for five years, until Annie McShane (Labour) was elected in 1930.⁴⁹ Women councillors could be the only female representatives in a locale for a significant number of years: Emily Francis, for example, was Stourbridge's only woman representative for nine years, until she was joined by Mary Thomas (Independent) in 1927.⁵⁰ Furthermore, while the Black Country councils of Walsall, West Bromwich and Stourbridge elected women relatively early, this was far from typical. Of the 14 councils listed in the Appendix, four did not elect a single woman until into the 1930s. Wednesbury was the slowest: Dorothy Hossack (Labour) became the first woman councillor there in 1934.⁵¹ Thus, while the substantial increase in women councillors across the Black Country in the interwar years is significant, this was not simply a period of swift and continuous progress.

These caveats aside, across the three main political parties, the number of women councillors in the Black Country did increase over this period. Additionally, however, the period also saw an increase in the number of Independent women elected, per Table 4.1. There are several possible explanations for this, and it should be emphasised that the suggestions posited below are based on limited evidence which focuses only on the Black Country. As discussed earlier, political historians have not generally afforded local government the attention given to parliamentary politics and the role of Independent councillors in municipal government is arguably not fully understood today. Within local government studies, for instance, contemporary Independents are sometimes counted alongside representatives from minor political parties.⁵² It is also challenging to assess how exceptional the Black Country was in this respect, as there is limited comparable evidence from elsewhere, and existing research into interwar women councillors in other locations presents conflicting evidence for the success of those who stood outside the party system. In Cambridge, for instance, ten of the 13 women councillors elected between 1918 and 1930 were Independents, suggesting that there was

⁴⁹ Cresswell: 'Election Reflections', *Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 7 November 1925, p. 8; McShane: 'Walsall's New Mayor', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 14 November 1942, p. 5.

⁵⁰ 'Midland Elections. Labour Gains', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 November 1927, p. 6.

⁵¹ 'Why she took up politics', *Birmingham Gazette*, 5 November 1934, p. 15.

⁵² Colin Colpus, Alistair Clark, Herwig Reynaert and Kristof Steyvers, 'Minor Party and Independent Politics beyond the Mainstream: Fluctuating Fortunes but a Permanent Presence', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 1, (2009), p. 4–18.

significant scope for ‘non-party’ politics here,⁵³ but in Manchester, only two of the 18 women elected before 1939 were Independents, and they had both been first elected before 1914.⁵⁴

Significantly, one oft-proposed theory within local government studies, that Independent councillors were in fact ‘Conservatives in disguise’, is not supported by any local evidence, though studies from elsewhere perhaps support this idea. For example, Julia Neville’s research in Devon identifies one woman councillor in Plymouth who was initially an Independent but who later switched her allegiance to the Conservative party.⁵⁵ Similarly, two women councillors in Bristol stood as Independents before the First World War, but, because of changes in Bristol’s political culture post-war, stood and won election as Conservatives from 1918.⁵⁶ This suggests that, at least elsewhere in the country, the partisan beliefs of Independent women were more in line with Conservative views than those espoused by the Labour or Liberal parties. However, this does not appear to have been the case in the Black Country. None of the Independent women elected in the area later switched allegiance and joined the Conservatives, or indeed any other party. Furthermore, the theoretical link between Conservatives and Independents has recently been disputed by Colin Copus and Melvin Wingfield who argue that this piece of ‘political folklore’ is ‘flawed’, as it ‘fails to recognise the complexity of...local politics’.⁵⁷

The idea of Independents as ‘concealed Conservatives’ is something which GW Jones argues is evident in his study of Wolverhampton politics between 1888 and 1964. He suggests that Independent councillors there held ‘national allegiance...to the Conservative Party, but in local affairs

⁵³ Pat Thane, ‘Women and political participation in England, 1918–1970’, in: Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane (eds.), *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century: What Difference Did the Vote Make?*, (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 11–28, p. 17.

⁵⁴ Hunt and Hannam, ‘Archaeology’, p. 129.

⁵⁵ Neville, ‘Challenge, Conformity and Casework’, p. 976.

⁵⁶ Hunt and Hannam, ‘Archaeology’, p. 129.

⁵⁷ Colin Copus & Melvin Wingfield, ‘Are Independent Councillors Really Conservatives in Disguise?’, *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5, (2014), p. 647–669, p. 665. Copus and Wingfield cite a number of earlier studies into Independent politics and ‘concealed’ Conservatism, including: W P Grant, ‘Local parties in British local politics: a framework for empirical analysis’, *Political Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (1971), p. 201–212; W P Grant, ‘Non-partisanship in British local politics’, *Policy and Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1973), p. 241–254 and W P Grant, *Independent politics in England and Wales*, (Hants: Saxon House, 1977).

preferred not to bear openly the party label'.⁵⁸ Jones argues that this had more to do with anti-Labour sentiment than a desire to be outside of the party system altogether, adding that 'in council affairs they voted with the Conservatives and were indistinguishable from them', though he does not address gender.⁵⁹ Of Wolverhampton's eight women councillors elected before 1951, two were Independent, but there is no record of either being involved with Conservative organisations.⁶⁰ As noted, there is no evidence that any other Independent women councillors on Black Country councils had any involvement with the Conservative party.

Indeed, although Conservative women councillors in the Black Country were not as numerous as Labour women councillors (see Graph 4.1), a significant number were still elected, suggesting that local Conservative parties were not hostile to women's involvement in municipal government. Nationwide, in this period, Conservative women's organisations were far larger than the equivalent Liberal and Labour organisations,⁶¹ and there is evidence that, locally, these organisations could act as a kind of training ground for women entering local politics. Ada Newman, as noted, had been active in WWUA for nearly two decades before first winning election. Other local Conservative women councillors were particularly active in the Primrose League. Established as a mixed-sex organisation in 1883, the Primrose League is recognised as one of the most effective ways in which Conservative women might become politically active before enfranchisement.⁶² Less attention has been paid to the organisation after 1918, but Matthew Hendley has recently argued that it 'remade itself for its female members' after partial enfranchisement, and remained an important space in which Conservative

⁵⁸ G W Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888—1964*, (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 62.

⁵⁹ Standing as an Independent 'allowed anti-Socialist individuals to insinuate themselves into what were normally Labour strongholds' where presumably voters were more likely to support an Independent than a Conservative; he notes they did not face Conservative opposition at elections. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁰ Mary Lilly Perry (first elected 1925) and Mrs Haydon (first elected 1949). The other six were all Labour.

⁶¹ Thane, 'Women and political participation in England, 1918—1970', p. 14—15.

⁶² Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People: 1880-1935*, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Linda Walker, 'Party political women: a comparative study of Liberal women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914', in: Jane Rendall, *Equal or different: women's politics 1800-1914*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 165—191. The League's somewhat limited involvement with the suffrage campaign is discussed in: Lori Maguire, 'The Conservative Party and Women's Suffrage', in: Myriam Bousshba-Bravard, *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women's Vote in Britain, 1880—1914*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 52—76 and Philippe Vervaecke, 'The Primrose League and Women's Suffrage, 1883—1918', in: *Ibid.*, p. 180—201.

women might engage in politics in the interwar period.⁶³ Notably, three of the six Conservative women councillors elected in the Black Country before 1939 were leaders of their local Primrose League.⁶⁴ Though relatively few in number, Conservative women appear to have had little trouble carving out a role for themselves within municipal government in the Black Country.

Instead, I would speculate that one possible explanation for the large number of Independent women councillors in the Black Country in this period has little to do with their being ‘concealed Conservatives’, and perhaps lies instead in the decline of the Liberal party. The Liberals’ decline after 1918 is discussed with reference to parliamentary politics in Chapter 1, but the situation was perhaps even worse in municipal politics. David Dutton describes ‘a steady fall in the number of [Liberal] municipal candidates’ such that ‘by 1929 less than one in eight of those standing...was a Liberal’.⁶⁵ This decline continued throughout the 1930s and accelerated after 1945.⁶⁶ Of the 90 women councillors in this survey, only four were Liberals, and all were first elected before the Second World War. It is therefore possible that the relatively large number of Independent women councillors was one *symptom* of Liberal decline locally, although not, it should be stressed, a cause.

In the nineteenth century, the Liberal party had had well-established links with the contemporary women’s movement, but such links were less well-defined by the outbreak of the First World War.⁶⁷ The dearth of scholarship on Liberal women in the post-suffrage era, particularly at local level, means it is challenging to assess their fortunes in relation to women from other parties. Certainly, the Liberal’s women’s section was relatively small: though it had over 100,000 members

⁶³ Matthew C. Hendley, ‘Conservative women and the Primrose League’s struggle for survival, 1914—1932’, in Julie V. Gottlieb and Clarisse Berthezène, *Rethinking right-wing women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the present*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 66—87, p. 66.

⁶⁴ They were: Mrs Briscoe-Smith, first elected in Oldbury in 1927 (‘Women’s Economy Task’, *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1931, p. 2); Miss Lilian Lench, elected in Rowley Regis in 1937 (‘Obituary. Miss Lench’, *Birmingham Post*, 19 October 1964, p. 5); and Mrs Dora Wesson, first elected in Wednesbury in 1937 (‘New Magistrates’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 25 July 1941, p. 4).

⁶⁵ David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party Since 1900*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 102

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶⁷ See for instance: Jo Vellacott, *From Liberal to Labour with Women’s Suffrage: The Story of Catherine Marshall*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993); Ursula Masson, ‘Political conditions in Wales are quite different...’ party politics and votes for women in Wales, 1912–15’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2000), p. 369—388; Linda Walker, ‘Gender, Suffrage and Party: Liberal Women’s Organisations, 1880—1914’, in: Myriam Boussahba-Bravard (ed.), *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women’s Vote in Britain, 1880-1914*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 77—101, p. 96.

by 1928, the equivalent Labour and Conservative organisations then had roughly 300,000 and one million members respectively.⁶⁸ Consequently, David Thackeray suggests it is possible that ‘non-party activism provided a more attractive route [into public life after 1918] for Liberal women, rather than participation in its beleaguered party organisation’.⁶⁹ Chapters 2 and 3 considered several of the numerous non-partisan women’s organisations in the Black Country in which local women were active, and which might politicise women without recourse to party politics. Certain individuals may indeed have felt themselves more able to effect practical change on a local level through activism in such organisations than through party politics, particularly if their natural inclination was to support a party which was experiencing such a downturn in its fortunes. Equally, however, it is possible that other women, who perhaps felt that practical change could best be affected through the more formal channels of local government, may have decided to stand as Independents, rather than Liberals, because of this downturn in the party’s fortunes. It is also possible that, because of this general decline, those involved in local Liberal organisations may also have proven less willing to permit women to stand for election, especially if a male candidate was available for one of the few remaining safe seats. It is perhaps notable that the longest serving, and most active, of all Liberal women elected in the Black Country was Charlotte Hazel, whose brother had at one time been an MP, and whose party connections were therefore particularly strong. Less well-established women may instead have chosen to enter local government as Independents.

To reiterate, this is not to suggest that women Independents in this period were ‘concealed Liberals’. Indeed, as noted earlier, it appears that certain Independent women may well have been more influenced by anti-suffrage ideologies surrounding women’s role in local government than any partisan leanings. Independent councillor Emily Francis’s claim in Stourbridge in 1923 that ‘no party politics should enter local government’,⁷⁰ was echoed as late as the mid-1960s by Independent councillor Grace Wilkes who had been first elected in West Bromwich in 1937—she was the daughter

⁶⁸ Thane, ‘Women and political participation in England, 1918—1970’, p. 14—15.

⁶⁹ David Thackeray, ‘From Prudent Housewife to Empire Shopper: Party Appeals to the Female Voter, 1918—1928’, in Gottlieb and Toye, p. 37—53, p. 44.

⁷⁰ ‘Lady to Fight’.

of Grace Cottrell, discussed in Part I above. Wilkes remained a councillor until 1966, when she announced that she would not stand at the forthcoming election, because she believed that ‘there will not be room for Independent members’ after boundary changes were to enlarge the council through an amalgamation with Wednesbury and Tipton councils.⁷¹ She maintained that she was, ‘as strongly opposed as ever to politics in local government, but it look[ed] like they [were] here to stay’.⁷² Not only does this suggest that Wilkes, too, believed in the separation of local government and party politics, it also suggests that this had been somewhat easier to achieve in an earlier period. Wilkes’ suggestion that politics were ‘here to stay’ by 1966 is perhaps reflected in the significant drop in the number of Independent women elected after 1945: only five Independent women were first elected between 1945 and 1951 (see Graph 3).

Grace Wilkes was perhaps unusual in that both her grandfather, father and mother had held positions on West Bromwich borough council before her. No other woman councillor in the Black Country enjoyed quite so many familial connections, though at least 12 of the 48 women elected in the interwar period had some family connection to local government before they themselves won election. Overall, 25 per cent of women councillors in the Black Country elected before 1939 were related to a male councillor, compared with only five of the 36 (14 per cent) first elected post-war. These familial connections appear to be a phenomenon of all political parties: the pre-war figure includes two of the 20 Labour women councillors; four of the six Conservatives and four of the 20 Independents.⁷³ While the three Liberal women elected in the interwar years do not appear to have had male relatives who were local councillors, this is a smaller sample size, and Liberal councillor Charlotte Hazel, who continued to win re-election, was the sister of a Liberal MP, as discussed above. Clearly, being the wife, daughter, or sister of a man who was a councillor, or who was otherwise well-connected in party circles, was not the only way for a woman to enter municipal government in her own right. Yet the sheer number of women who had familial connections to local politics suggests

⁷¹ ‘Alderman not to seek re-election’, *Birmingham Post*, 26 January 1966, p. 5. The amalgamation was part of wider local boundary changes.

⁷² ‘Alderman not to seek re-election’.

⁷³ These connections are detailed in Appendix H.

that this cannot be discounted when considering what first drove these women into this sphere of activity, and, perhaps, what had politicised them.

The precise ways in which these women with familial connections entered local government themselves differed. Certain women served on the same councils as their male relatives, but some years after their relative had stood down. For example, in Smethwick, the Conservative Ethel Woodcock was elected in 1936; her father had been a Unionist councillor there from 1900 until his death in 1923.⁷⁴ Others, however, served contemporaneously with a relative: George Rose had been an Independent councillor in Oldbury for some years when his wife, Vera Ellen Rose (Independent) won election in 1938.⁷⁵ Other women appear to have ‘inherited’ their husbands’ council seats in almost the same way some early women MPs were felt to have ‘inherited’ their husbands’ parliamentary seats.⁷⁶ ‘Wife Succeeds Husband’ declared the *Birmingham Gazette*, when Mary Holden (Independent) was elected to her husband’s seat on Rowley Regis council when he was raised to the aldermanic bench in 1935, necessitating a by-election there.⁷⁷ Other women appear to have joined local councils after a husband’s death. In Wednesbury, for example, Councillor William Wesson (Conservative) died in June 1936, in the middle of his term of office.⁷⁸ The following year, his wife, Dora, was elected. Dora was actively involved in local Conservative party circles in her own right; she was Dame President of Wednesbury Primrose League, for example, and does not appear to have been co-opted immediately on William’s death as her election came in November 1937. Nonetheless, her position as a widow of an eminent local party member—William had served a term as Mayor before his death—may have helped her to secure her candidature.⁷⁹ In Wolverhampton, meanwhile, headlines declared ‘Husband Succeeds Wife’ when Councillor Edith Palmer (Labour)

⁷⁴ He was twice elected mayor, in 1908 and 1919; on the latter occasion, Ethel served as mayoress. Ethel’s brother, Herbert Charles Woodcock, was Conservative MP for Thornbury from 1922 to 1923, and Everton from 1924 to 1929. ‘Death of Alderman Woodcock’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 28 May 1923, p. 10.

⁷⁵ ‘Election Results’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 1 December 1938, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House: A Study of Women MPs* (London: Continuum, 1979), p. 110—111; further discussion in Chapter 1 and below.

⁷⁷ ‘Wife Succeeds Husband at Rowley Regis’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 18 July 1935, p. 7. Like his wife, Mr Holden had been an Independent.

⁷⁸ ‘Death of Mr WH Wesson’, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 13 June 1936, p. 11.

⁷⁹ ‘Death of Mr WH Wesson’; ‘Midland Election Results’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1937, p. 7; ‘New Magistrates’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 25 July 1941, p. 4.

died in 1934, part way through her term of office. Her husband successfully won her seat in the resulting by-election, but he himself had previously been a councillor there. Thus, while the couple reversed the typical pattern of a wife taking over a deceased husband's seat, Edith had, before this, benefited from having a familial connection to the council.⁸⁰

In some cases, women benefited from close familial connections to a local political party, even if they did not have relatives in municipal government. Charlotte Hazel, as noted, was the sister of a West Bromwich MP. In Walsall, Annie McShane (Labour) was elected in 1930, shortly after her husband, John James McShane, won a surprise victory in the 1929 general election in the constituency. John was defeated in the 1931 general election, after which he followed his wife to the local council, though it was Annie who was elected Mayor in 1942.⁸¹ Dorothy Hossack, the first woman councillor in Wednesbury, was General Secretary of the local Labour Party at the time of her election; before her, Ellen Hossack, her mother, had been the first President of Wednesbury Labour's Women's Section.⁸² As such, Dorothy appears to be unique among these women in that she was the only one with a *female* relative who was actively involved with a political party.

The sheer number of woman councillors who had some sort of familial connection to local government or political parties suggests that this was an important factor in demonstrating to some women that municipal politics was a space in which they might become politically active. As argued in Part I, this is not to suggest that these women were somehow 'substitutes' for their male relatives, or that they themselves did not go on to play a significant role in local public life—as noted, for example, it was Annie McShane who was elected Mayor of Walsall, not her husband John, though he had been an MP. However, women with male relatives who were or had been councillors, or who were highly active within local branches of political parties, perhaps enjoyed a general understanding of how local politics actually worked on a practical level, which may have encouraged them to see this as a role they themselves might inhabit. They knew who to initially approach to seek election, and

⁸⁰ 'Husband Succeeds Wife', *Birmingham Gazette*, May 1936, p. 13.

⁸¹ 'Midland Mayoral Elections', *Birmingham Post*, 10 November 1942, p. 1.

⁸² 'Why She Took Up Politics', *Birmingham Gazette*, 8 November 1934, p. 10.

how the electoral process would proceed. They also had some understanding of what would be expected of them, should they successfully win election: how many meetings they would attend; what positions they might take on—chairing a specific committee, for example; how the voting and legislating process worked; and so forth. Casual conversations at home with their husband or father about his experiences may have made the role a familiar one, or at least, more familiar than it was to a woman who had no such connections, arguably making these women's achievements even more significant. A woman with these kinds of connections may also have had a chance to meet other councillors informally, at civic functions or indeed as friends, possibly familiarising herself with, and becoming known to, other local officials.

A woman with a familial connection to a political party, meanwhile, may have benefitted from being a 'known quantity' to local party officials, if she had a desire to stand for election. Parties were unlikely to waste a safe seat on an unknown candidate, perhaps even more so if that candidate was female. Of course, it was possible for women to become involved in a gendered party organisation—the Conservatives' Primrose League, or the Labour Party Women's Sections, for example—in her own right. Here, she might effectively learn the ropes while also becoming known to local party officials. A woman did not have to be related to a man to be successful in local party circles, but it might have helped her to secure selection as a candidate.

Arguably, her being a known quantity within local party circles was perhaps more significant than her being a known, or at least recognisable, quantity to local voters. Indeed, while familial connections may have encouraged a woman to seek initially election, how much impact a husband or father's prior roles had on their *electoral success with voters* is questionable. As discussed in Chapter 1, there are several suggestions as to why so many early women MPs were the wives of men who had sat in the Commons, what Elizabeth Vallance refers to as the 'halo effect'.⁸³ Similarly, in the United States of America, many of the earliest Congresswomen and women Senators were widows. There, the 'widow effect' was a documented phenomenon whereby a deceased politician's wife was asked to

⁸³ Vallance, *Women in the House*, p. 110—111.

complete his term, and sometimes serve another term herself, because ‘name recognition’ could have a positive effect on her electability.⁸⁴ However, the extent to which women like the aforementioned Mary Holden, who took over her husband’s seat in Rowley Regis, or the widowed Dora Wesson in Wednesbury, benefited from this kind of ‘name recognition’ is less clear. With local government being far less newsworthy than national politics, it is very hard to say whether ordinary voters would have been aware of who their councillors actually were, and in turn connected these women with their male relatives. Indeed, Wesson’s surname was perhaps more likely to be known to Wednesbury voters because she had married into a family of local industrialists. W. Wesson & Co. had been a large steel manufacturer—and employer—in the town since the turn of the twentieth century.⁸⁵ Any benefit to being a ‘known quantity’ was most likely limited to *selection*, rather than *election*.

As suggested throughout, many Black Country women councillors were elected without having a male relative as a councillor or in an active role in the local party: this was clearly not a prerequisite. However, that at least a quarter of all women councillors in this survey elected between 1919 and 1939 were related to such a man clearly suggests that this was one factor in at least some first seeking election. An understanding of what the role entailed perhaps contributed to politicising these women, as it allowed them to feel that the role was accessible, one they too might undertake. Women who had this kind of family connection to local government—women who literally knew how it worked, on a day-to-day level—might also have been better placed to understand how municipal legislation could be used to make a difference to women’s lives. They came to local government with an understanding of the practical work local councillors could do. This was especially significant at a time in which women’s electoral rights had suddenly expanded. It is hard to argue that the number of women councillors increased in the interwar period because of the enfranchisement of women, not least as ‘local’ enfranchisement had arrived many years before ‘national’ enfranchisement. But while this did not *cause* the number of women local councillors to

⁸⁴ Before 1976, 73 per cent of women Senators and 50 per cent of Congresswomen were widows. 9 of the 31 women Senators elected before 2003 were direct replacements for deceased husbands. Lisa Solowiej and Thomas L. Brunell, ‘The Entrance of Women to the U.S. Congress: The Widow Effect’, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (2003), p. 283-292.

⁸⁵ [https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/W. Wesson and Co](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/W._Wesson_and_Co) (consulted 27.04.2020).

increase, this increase might be understood as a *symptom* of women being granted the parliamentary franchise. After 1918, women perhaps had a greater awareness of what roles might be open to them. A woman who wanted to make a difference on a specific issue or cause might have been well-placed to consider how she might do so if she already understood how municipal government worked, thanks to a relative's experience.

But what were the issues that drove women to seek election—what else, other than, for some, seeing a male relative's experiences might have galvanised her? A familial connection to local government may well have made it easier for women to understand the *process* of becoming a councillor, which may have encouraged her to seek election, but this alone was unlikely to have been the sole driving factor. Some may have seen local government as a space in which they could engage in a tangible way with specific issues in the public sphere. Arguably, again, this was a kind of 'practical politics', as articulated in Chapters 2 and 3. Because municipal government was, and is, locally-focused, with responsibilities limited to a town or borough, some women may have identified a specific area or cause in which they might make practical, pragmatic changes in this geographic area, through the legislative powers of municipal government.

What these issues were—what the specific problem or cause was that had first ignited an individual woman's passion—is something which is extremely hard to quantify. As noted earlier, no personal sources, such as diaries or memoirs, which might give a first-hand account of a woman councillor's interests, remain in local archives. Municipal elections of the period, meanwhile, tended not to result in the ephemera as general elections such as electoral manifestos, which might provide evidence of a candidate's particular interests, and thus clues as to what had first driven her to seek election. Other sources, however, provide some evidence for this. Careful reading of local newspapers provides occasional quotes directly from these women, while analysis of which council committees women sat on, once elected, also provide some clues as to what causes these women prioritised. From this, it is possible to get a sense of what issues had first politicised them. For example, as noted, Stourbridge councillor Emily Francis informed electors that 'any question affecting women or children, directly or indirectly, should receive careful attention', suggesting that was something she—

the sole woman candidate in this election—was particularly concerned with.⁸⁶ Similarly, when her colleague Mary Thomas (Independent, elected 1927), died in 1935, she was obituarised by the local press as ‘the Children’s Friend’ for her commitment to child welfare through her local government work, first as a member of Stourbridge Board of Guardians, then as a councillor, where she chaired the ‘Cottage Homes committee’.⁸⁷

Child welfare was clearly something with which both women were deeply interested, and it may have been this which first drove them into roles in the public sphere. Across the Black Country, many of the women councillors first elected in the interwar years appear similarly concerned with this issue, based on the kinds of work they undertook once elected. In West Bromwich, for example, Charlotte Hazel (Liberal) took an active role on at least four council committees related to children or welfare work more generally, including the Education Committee, of which she was a member for 22 years,⁸⁸ and, as a magistrate, she chaired West Bromwich’s Juvenile Court.⁸⁹ Darlaston Councillor Edith Chorley (Labour) was also a magistrate on the Juvenile Court there.⁹⁰ In Wolverhampton, Councillor Mary Perry (Independent) sat on the Education Committee, and led the Children’s Care sub-committee.⁹¹ Councillor Annie Lennard (Labour) took such an interest in children’s education that in later years, a local school was named after her.⁹² First elected in Oldbury in 1923, minor boundary changes meant her ward, Warley, was transferred to Smethwick in 1929,⁹³ but on both councils she was an active member of the Education Committee until she stood down in 1961, aged 80.⁹⁴ As Patricia Hollis details, becoming a member of the local School Board had been one way in

⁸⁶ ‘Lady to Fight’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 29 October 1923, p. 3.

⁸⁷ The Cottage Homes were children’s homes. “‘Children’s Friend’. Funeral of Woman Councillor’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 20 August 1935, p. 5.

⁸⁸ The other committees included the Public Health Committee; Mental Welfare Committee; and War Pensions (Children’s sub-committee chair), while she chaired the Attendance and Medical Service sub-committees of the Education committee. ‘The Full Life’.

⁸⁹ ‘Boys Street Game at West Bromwich’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 12 August 1936, p. 3.

⁹⁰ ‘JP Pays Costs’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 19 November 1936, p. 9; ‘Urban Council Elections’, *Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 11 April 1925, p. 4.

⁹¹ ‘Burden of Rates’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 27 April 1932, p. 5.

⁹² The Annie Lennard Primary School (as it is now called) still educates children in Smethwick having been opened in 1954. ‘New Smethwick School’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 14 September 1954, p. 6.

⁹³ ‘Elections in Midlands’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 9 March 1923, p. 3.

⁹⁴ ‘Time to make way for younger people—at 80!’, *Birmingham Post*, 18 May 1961, p. 9.

which women had been able to make inroads into local government from the 1870s.⁹⁵ Though by the interwar years, women had the right to be elected directly onto their local council, it appears that many still sought to work on issues related to child welfare and education, suggesting some continuity from the earlier period—and that this was an issue which continued to galvanise women.

For other women councillors, issues surrounding housing appear to have been particularly significant. The politics of housing was, in this period, often gendered. The home was viewed as the ‘workplace’ of the housewife, and ideas and ideologies of domesticity were frequently espoused in media aimed at women.⁹⁶ Within local government, issues relating to housing, such as the design of new homes, slum clearance, or the positioning of new estates, appear to have particularly interested women councillors from across the political spectrum. In Smethwick, for example, Edith Sands (Labour) was especially insistent that women’s views should be heard in relation to the construction of homes on Smethwick’s new Uplands Estate in 1925. Listening to a report from the Chairman of the Housing Committee on the development of the plans, she asked a series of questions about the design of these houses, enquiring as to whether they were the ‘parlour type’. She then asked if local women might ‘inspect’ the plans. ‘Possibly the women knew more about the needs of modern housing,’ she said, rather pointedly, adding that because ‘there was no woman on the Housing Committee, the opportunity should be given for plans to be inspected’ in order for women to give ‘some useful

⁹⁵ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, Chapters 2 and 3.

⁹⁶ For a very useful overview of women and the politics of housing in this period, see: Krista Cowman, ‘From the Housewife’s Point of View’: Female Citizenship and the Gendered Domestic Interior in Post-First World War Britain, 1918–1928’, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 130, No. 543, (2015), p. 352–383, especially p. 352–355. Maggie Andrews considers the Women’s Institute (WI)’s campaigns for better housing on the grounds that the house was the housewife’s workplace in *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women’s Institute as a Social Movement*, 2nd Edition, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015); relatedly see: Cairtriona Beaumont: “‘Where to Park the Pram?’ Voluntary Women’s Organisations, Citizenship and the Campaign for Better Housing in England, 1928–1945’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (2013), p. 75–96; Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004). For the media, see for instance: Alice Wood, ‘Housekeeping, Citizenship, and Nationhood in *Good Housekeeping* and *Modern Home*’, in: *Women’s Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939*, eds. Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green and Fiona Hackney, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 210–224; Adrian Bingham, ‘Modern Housecraft? Women’s Pages in the National Daily Press’, in Clay *et al*, p. 225–237; Karen Hunt, ‘Labour Woman and the Housewife’, in Clay *et al*, p. 238–251; Lisa Sheppard, ‘Y Gymraes (The Welshwoman): Ambivalent Domesticity in Women’s Welsh-language Interwar Print Media’, in Clay *et al*, p. 281–293.

hints'.⁹⁷ In West Bromwich the following year, Grace Cottrell (Independent) used her Mayoral Address to note that 'she did not forget that to attack the housing conditions in 1918 and to get homes fit for heroes was what the people...had sent her to the Council to accomplish'. She praised the council's slum clearance and construction of new houses but acknowledged that there was 'still much to be done'. 'Perhaps more than anything she was anxious to see the people better housed,' she assured the council chamber, promising to continue the house building programme in the coming year.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, Oldbury Councillor Mrs Briscoe-Smith (Unionist) even felt that poor housing conditions were to blame for Britain's low birth rate. 'Young married couples have to live with their parents or in lodgings so the first years of their married life when they should be having children were spent under the worst possible conditions', she explained in 1938,⁹⁹ overlooking, perhaps, the not insubstantial number of pre-marital conceptions which suggests that a lack of privacy was not an issue for all couples.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, her remarks point to the variety of wider issues housing could encompass. Significantly, Councillor Briscoe-Smith made these comments at the 1938 National Conference on Maternity and Child Welfare.¹⁰¹ Maternal welfare was, perhaps, the most obviously gendered of all these 'women's issues', and a striking number of women councillors appear to have become politically active through this particular concern. In Smethwick, for example, Edith Sands, who had been so vocal about housing issues, was elected the town's first woman Mayor in 1931, and used her inaugural address to praise 'the work of the Heath and Maternity and Child Welfare

⁹⁷ 'Housing. How the Council's policy is developing', *Smethwick Telephone*, 9 May 1925, p. 3. Parlours were a key marker of working-class respectability, but state subsidies for their inclusion in new builds had been removed in 1923, see: Krista Cowman, 'A Waste of Space? Controversies Surrounding the Working-Class Parlour in Inter-War Britain', *Home Cultures*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (2018), p. 129—153.

⁹⁸ 'First Lady Mayor of West Bromwich', *Midland Chronicle*, 12 November 1926, p. 5, via SCHAS. 'Homes Fit For Heroes' had been one of Prime Minister Lloyd George's pledges in the 1918 General Election, see: Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain*, 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁹⁹ 'Housing and Birth Rate', *Birmingham Gazette*, 6 July 1938, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ As Pat Thane writes, 'It had long been normal for couples to have sexual relationships before marriage, until pregnancy precipitated the ceremony'. Pat Thane, 'Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century England', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (2011), p. 11-29, p. 13.

¹⁰¹ It was held that year in Bristol, but she attended in her capacity as a local councillor. 'Housing and Birth Rate'.

Committees', on which she sat, explaining that 'the most important phase of municipal administration is undoubtedly the health of the community', and that, 'the whole basis of health rests upon the foundation laid before and during infancy'.¹⁰²

As the previous chapter demonstrated, in the Black Country—as across Britain—there was significant scope for women to become involved with local public life through voluntary work in infant welfare clinics. Yet municipal government represented another sphere of activity in which women with an interest in this issue might become involved with its local improvement. Indeed, there is evidence that, for some, this was a direct route into local government. The 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act 'enabled local authorities to establish Maternity and Child Welfare Committees which were *required to include at least two women*' (emphasis mine).¹⁰³ Councils, particularly those which did not yet have two women councillors, could co-opt women to sit on this committee. In some instances, these women later won election in their own right, such as Julia Taylor (Labour) in Dudley. Taylor was elected Dudley's first woman councillor in 1933, and, welcoming her to the first meeting following her election, the council chairman acknowledged that she was 'no stranger to most of us, nor is she a stranger to this council chamber, having for a number of years rendered a very valuable service' through her work on the Maternity Committee.¹⁰⁴ His comments are revealing, as they suggest that being co-opted might be an opportunity for women to 'learn the ropes' and understand the practical, day-to-day work of local councils, in turn allowing them to consider how they might find a place within council chambers. This was perhaps particularly beneficial for women like Taylor, who did not have a familial connection to the council. Furthermore, that she was already involved with maternity and child welfare work in Dudley before her election suggests that this itself was something about which she was passionate—she was not elected, and then assigned to the committee as a 'token woman'.

¹⁰² 'Election of Mayor', *Smethwick Telephone*, 14 November 1931, p. 7.

¹⁰³ Pat Thane, 'Women in the Labour Party and Women's Suffrage', in: Bousshba-Bravard, *Suffrage Outside Suffragism*, p. 35—51, p. 45.

¹⁰⁴ 'Mayoral Election at Dudley', *Dudley Chronicle*, 16 November 1933, p. 5.

Not all women councillors with an interest in maternity issues were co-opted in this way, however. In Walsall, Gertrude Cresswell (Labour) was first elected in 1925, and nearly a decade later, in 1934, was elected Walsall's first female Mayor. This was 'largely as a tribute to the work she has done in the maternity and child welfare movement' there.¹⁰⁵ She was 'instrumental' in establishing a Maternity Home in Bloxwich, and had been chair of Walsall council's Maternity and Child Welfare Committee for many years.¹⁰⁶ Unlike Taylor in Dudley, however, she had not been co-opted: she won election in her own right, as a Labour representative, then joined this committee. Notably, issues relating to maternal welfare seem to have politicised a significant number of women in Walsall, from across the political spectrum. Specifically, in February 1939, Walsall's two sitting women councillors, Cresswell and Annie McShane (Labour) organised a coalition of women's organisations in the town to petition the council to separate its Maternity Committee from its Health Committee. The two committees had been distinct until the previous year, when they were amalgamated. The feeling among local women's organisations was that this had caused maternity issues to be side-lined, as the Health Committee had so many other demands on its time, and that women's voices were no longer being heard, because the Health Committee was dominated by men. 'This is a women's business,' the *Walsall Observer* reported Councillor McShane as saying, 'and the women are going to have a say in it'.¹⁰⁷ To that end, McShane and Cresswell organised a deputation of women to attend a council debate over the re-separation of the committees. The deputation included representatives of Walsall branches of 'Labour, Liberal, Unionist, Co-op [Women's Co-operative Guild] and NUR [likely the National Union of Railwaymen] women's organisations'.¹⁰⁸ These women were 'representative of opposing women's political organisations but (as Mrs McShane said) "of one mind regarding the maternity services in this town"'.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ 'Midland Installations Today', *Birmingham Gazette*, 9 November 1934, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ 'Walsall's Next Mayor', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7 July 1934, p. 7.

¹⁰⁷ 'From the Observatory', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 11 February 1939, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ 'Walsall Town Council. McShane Versus Stanley', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 18 February 1939, p. 7.

‘Perhaps never before had so many [women] crowded into the public gallery, where some of them...were prepared to stand until those men down below did what they regarded as the right thing. Actually, a few of them were still standing at six o’clock (the meeting began at three),’ reported the *Walsall Observer*, although it was at pains to point out that ‘the spirit of Mrs Pankhurst...was nowhere in evidence’ with the women being ‘modestly quiet, as real ladies always are’.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, their campaign was successful. Having listened to the deputation of women, the council voted to separate the two committees again, meaning that the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee would no longer be a side-lined subsection of the overall Health Committee. Here, again, it was a specific, local, pragmatic issue that had galvanised women in Walsall—not just the two councillors, but also those active in a range of women’s organisations—to become active and engaged.

This coalition of women’s organisations was never formalised and appears to have disbanded immediately after their aims were successful but nonetheless, there was perhaps a lingering sense of female solidarity in municipal government in Walsall. Later that spring, a casual vacancy occurred, which Eva Brockhurst (Liberal) won. Brockhurst had faced a male Unionist candidate, and Labour’s Jane Deakin.¹¹¹ Despite her loss, Deakin congratulated Brockhurst, saying ‘she was very glad that a woman had been returned because...the help of women was very necessary in [council] work’.¹¹² Her comments perhaps suggest that, even right at the end of the interwar period—this election occurred in May 1939—there was still a sense among some that a specifically female viewpoint remained a necessity.

This specifically female viewpoint appears to have been particularly centred around issues gendered as female such as children’s welfare, education, housing, or maternity care. This does beg the question of whether these women councillors were particularly passionate about these specific issues, and this interest had caused them to first seek election, or whether, because they were one of

¹¹⁰ ‘From the Observatory’, 18 February.

¹¹¹ Deakin had won election to the council in 1932 but lost her seat in 1936. ‘How the candidates fared in Midland Civic Elections’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1932, p. 5.

¹¹² ‘Hatherton’s New Councillor’, *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 6 May 1939, p. 9.

very few, if not only, female representatives on a given council, they were ‘pigeonholed’ into taking on such ‘women’s issues’, as Julia Neville argues could be the case elsewhere in the country:

There was an expectation, widely shared by both women and men, that the specific value of having women on the councils would be for the different perspective they would bring to the decisions about women and children, and about those groups for whom women had traditionally cared, the poor and the sick. This expectation informed the way in which the senior male councillors, who selected committee membership, determined where women councillors should serve.

Neville suggests that ‘most of Devon’s women councillors acquiesced in this pigeonholing’, accepting roles on committees which dealt with what were broadly termed women’s issues.¹¹³ Locally, remarks like Emily Francis’s in Stourbridge that ‘any question affecting women or children, directly or indirectly, should receive careful attention’¹¹⁴ and Jane Deakin’s in Walsall that ‘the help of women was very necessary in [council] work’¹¹⁵ suggest that to some extent, at least some Black Country women councillors recognised a specific female perspective which they might bring to council work, as Neville argues. At the same time, however, many appear to have had a genuine interest in these topics. A desire to make practical change on a particular issue, through the legislative powers of local government, perhaps had contributed to politicising these women, encouraging them to stand for election in the first place.

Even in clear instances of women councillors being pushed into taking on rather trivial roles because they were women, there were usually other factors at play. In Tipton in 1932, for example, the council required a committee to choose the ‘Carnival Queen and her maids-of-honour’ from a selection of local young girls and women. The ‘Carnival Queen Committee’ was made up of the town’s only two female councillors, Lucy Bagnall and Eliza Taylor Beauchamp, and a third woman whom they co-opted.¹¹⁶ Selecting the Carnival Queen was clearly a trivial task, and one which both women councillors were almost certainly asked to do because they were women, but it is also likely that the 22 male councillors may not have felt it prudent to take too keen an interest in the task.

¹¹³ Neville, ‘Challenge, Conformity and Casework’, p. 981.

¹¹⁴ ‘Lady to Fight’.

¹¹⁵ ‘Hatherton’s New Councillor’.

¹¹⁶ ‘Tipton Carnival’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 29 April 1932, p. 8.

Furthermore, this was hardly the only responsibility Bagnall and Beauchamp held. Both women were full members of the council, and sat on many other, more important committees alongside their male colleagues. Indeed, when Beauchamp died in 1968, an obituary in the local press noted that she ‘gave more than 60 years’ service to public life in Tipton’, first as a Poor Law Guardian before joining the council.¹¹⁷

It is also important to recognise that, Carnival Queen committees aside, many of the gendered committees’ women joined, such as Maternity and Child Welfare, were extremely important. Working on such committees often gave women councillors the opportunity to make tangible, practical differences to the lives of other women and children living in their town or borough. In some cases, women councillors appear to have deliberately sought out roles on these committees, possibly because they recognised these practical changes they might make through the legislative powers of local government. Indeed, some appear to have sought to carve out a kind of gendered expertise, based on their own lived experiences. Comments like Emily Francis’s that ‘any question affecting women or children, directly or indirectly, should receive careful attention’,¹¹⁸ or Annie McShane’s that ‘[t]his is a women’s business, and the women are going to have a say in it’,¹¹⁹ or even Edith Sands’ that women’s opinions should be sought on the design of new houses because ‘women knew more about the needs of modern housing’¹²⁰ are less suggestive of pigeonholing than of these women feeling that, as women with experience in these matters, their views were deserving of public consideration. Women could claim this expertise in other ways, too. As noted above, West Bromwich’s Charlotte Hazel took a particular interest in child welfare and education—she was a member of the council’s Education Committee for 22 years—but she also had worked as a teacher for at least two decades.¹²¹ These women’s personal and, at times, professional experiences drove them to take an interest in

¹¹⁷ ‘Obituary. Mrs E. T. Beauchamp’, *Birmingham Post*, 24 January 1968, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ ‘Lady to Fight’.

¹¹⁹ ‘From the Observatory’, 11 February 1939.

¹²⁰ ‘Housing. How the Council’s policy is developing’.

¹²¹ ‘The Full Life’. The census returns of 1901 and 1911 find her working as a teacher at King Edwards’ Girls School in nearby Birmingham.

certain topics, and it was perhaps these very experiences which had first encouraged them to seek election.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that women councillors were frequently involved with numerous committees, not just those that dealt with gendered issues. For example, Grace Cottrell, the Mayor of West Bromwich who was particularly concerned with housing, sat on six committees, including Highways; Tuberculosis; Baths and Estates; Finance; Housing and Town Planning.¹²² Gertrude Cresswell, who was elected Mayor of Walsall in large part because of her role on the Maternity committee there, also sat on the Finance, Mental Welfare, National Health Insurance, Free Library, and Art Gallery committees.¹²³ Edith Sands was elected Mayor of Smethwick in 1931 in recognition of the fact that ‘upon most of the principal Committees of the Town Council she has served long and well’ since first winning election in 1921.¹²⁴ Far from being ‘pigeonholed’ into taking on only gendered issues, many women councillors, instead, held a fairly broad portfolio of council roles. However, that so many appear to have prioritised issues relating to women’s and children’s welfare perhaps suggests that these were issues which had first politicised them. As Chapter 3 argued, concern over infant and maternal welfare was especially central to many women’s organisations in this period. While some women sought to affect these issues from within voluntary health organisations, such as those considered in the previous chapter, for others, municipal government may have seemed a more useful way to make positive, practical changes on these issues in their locale.

Part III: 1939—1951:

Wartime once again saw an electoral truce; no municipal elections were held after November 1938 until November 1945, but casual vacancies meant that two more women joined local councils in the Black Country between these years. In Bilston, Audrey Chettle (Unionist) was nominated to fill a vacancy in 1940, and in Wolverhampton, Dr Margaret Brown MacKay—a stalwart of many women’s organisations in the town, including the National Council of Women (Chapter 2)—was similarly

¹²² ‘Midland Mayoral Elections’.

¹²³ ‘New Walsall Magistrates’, ‘Lady Mayor’ and ‘Walsall’s Next Mayor’.

¹²⁴ ‘Election of Mayor’.

appointed in 1942.¹²⁵ Chettle subsequently won re-election on multiple occasions, becoming Bilston's first woman Mayor in 1949.¹²⁶ Brown MacKay did not seek re-election, however, stepping down from her seat at the end of the war. This is significant, as it appears that she was the only one of the 90 women councillors in this survey who never contested an election: every other woman, including those initially appointed to fill a vacancy, won election in her own right.

The first municipal elections held after the war were in November 1945, with elections held every year between then and 1951, except 1948. That year, municipal elections switched from being held in November, to being held in the spring—that is, they were held in November 1947, then April 1949. This is important because, in the six years in which elections occurred, 35 women were first elected across the Black Country, compared with the 52 who had been first elected before 1939.¹²⁷ Thus, the average annual rate at which women were first elected to local councils in the immediate post-war period was far higher than in the interwar years. On average, 2.48 women were first elected yearly between 1918 and 1939, while 5.83 were first elected between 1945 and 1951. The final section of this chapter therefore considers the two key findings from this data: both the increased rate at which women were elected, and the increase of Labour women in particular. It argues that, in the years after the Second World War, party politics became more entrenched in local government in the Black Country, and women were more likely to become politicised through their involvement with a political party. It further suggests that the relatively high number of women councillors who were elected Mayor in this period is indicative of a general cultural shift towards greater acceptance of women's presence in local government, and wider public life.

Of the 35 women initially elected between 1945 and 1951, over three-quarters belonged to the Labour party:

¹²⁵ 'Bilston Town Council', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 November 1940, p. 5; 'New Council Member', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 31 October 1942, p. 6. Her political party is unclear, but she replaced Councillor G. J. Williams, an Independent (on his being created Alderman) so it seems reasonable to assume that she too was an Independent.

¹²⁶ 'Grandfather's Church', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 25 May 1949, p. 3.

¹²⁷ The remaining three (to total 90) were Chettle and Brown MacKay, as above, and Ada Newman, first elected 1910. See Appendix H for all references. The '52' figure includes the three women (Hazel, Cottrell and Francis) elected in 1918.

Party:	Conservative:	Liberal:	Labour:	Independent:
Number of women councillors:	4	0	27	5

Table 11: Women councillors first elected, 1945—1951.

This suggests that the increase in the number of women councillors in the Black Country was very much interlinked with the post-war success of the Labour party in the area. However, these statistics again disguise several nuances which must be considered when reflecting on these increases. First, some women who had been first elected before 1939 continued to win re-election in the post-1945 period, meaning the picture was not quite as bleak for the Conservative and Liberal parties as these numbers suggest. For instance, while no *new* Liberal women were elected in the Black Country between 1945 and 1951, reflecting the party's continued decline at municipal level,¹²⁸ three Liberal women who had been elected before the war continued to serve afterwards. West Bromwich councillor Charlotte Hazel served until her death in 1955;¹²⁹ Rosalie Smallwood, first elected in Tipton in 1939, went on to serve for 15 years, until 1954,¹³⁰ and Walsall's Eva Brockhurst, also first elected in 1939, served there for many years and was Mayor in 1955.¹³¹

Furthermore, although the average annual rate at which women were elected to local councils increased, women councillors remained a minority overall. Additionally, in some areas, most notably Dudley and Halesowen, female representation *decreased* in this period. Halesowen had elected two women in the interwar period, but both had stood down before the conflict, and no new women councillors were elected in this area before 1951. In Dudley, Labour's Doris Chambers, one of the two women elected before the war lost her seat in 1946, leaving Julia Taylor the borough's only woman councillor.¹³² Incidentally, that year Dudley's Townswomen's Guild set up a rota for

¹²⁸ As noted above, the party no longer controlled any councils after 1945. Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party*, p. 151.

¹²⁹ 'Obituary. Miss Charlotte E. Hazel', *Birmingham Post*, 10 October 1955, p. 5; 'Killed on the one day she walked', *Birmingham Gazette*, 12 October 1955, p. 6.

¹³⁰ 'Obituary. Mrs Rosalie Smallwood', *Birmingham Post*, 29 December 1962, p. 5.

¹³¹ 'Obituary. Mrs Eva Brockhurst', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 March 1976, p. 17.

¹³² 'Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs. Dudley', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1946, p. 3.

Guildswomen to attend council meetings.¹³³ The Guild's records suggest that those who attended reported on the council's discussions at the Guild's monthly meetings. The aim may well have been both to ensure the council was giving adequate consideration to issues affecting local women, and to encourage members of the Guild to take greater interest in council matters and perhaps consider standing for election themselves. As Chapter 2 explored, housewives' associations like the Guild were keen to ensure members took an active role in local government, as both magistrates and local councillors. In Dudley, however, the scheme does not appear to have had an immediate impact: analysis of newspaper results of election returns between 1945 and 1951 indicates that only two women, excepting Julia Taylor, stood in Dudley's municipal elections. Neither were successful, and neither appear to have been connected to the Guild.¹³⁴ Elsewhere, in Smethwick, although many women councillors first elected in the town before 1939 retained their seats post-war, and indeed took on positions of significance—the town saw three women Mayors in 1944, 1946 and 1952—¹³⁵ only two *new* women councillors joined the ranks in this period.¹³⁶

Such nuances noted, it is nonetheless clear that, overall, female representation did increase on Black Country councils after 1945. This increase can be tied almost exclusively to the Labour party, and particularly the wave of electoral success it enjoyed immediately post-war. Of the 27 Labour women first elected in this period, 15 were first elected in 1945 and a further six in 1946.¹³⁷ Labour made substantial gains in municipal elections nationwide in 1945, and the Black Country was no exception: 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands', declared the *Evening Despatch*, the day after polling. West Bromwich was to enter a 'new Civic era', as the party gained control of the council for the first time, just as it did in Walsall, which 'crowned 57 years of Socialist endeavour in the town'.

¹³³ Dudley Archives and Local Heritage Centre, C9796/1/1/2, Dudley Central Townswomen's Guild, *Monthly Minutes Book, November 1941—November 1949*, Minutes of meeting of 8 November 1946.

¹³⁴ Doris Chambers sought election in 1946, when she was defeated, but did not stand again. Mrs A Price contested a seat as a Labour candidate in 1951 but was also unsuccessful. 'Midland Results. Dudley', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 11 May 1951, p. 3.

¹³⁵ Emma Lee was elected for a term in 1944; Elsie May Farley in 1946 and Annie Lennard in 1952 (Smethwick Community History and Archives Service, Staff Manual, List of Smethwick Mayors, 2011, p. 7).

¹³⁶ Mrs Seager (1945) and Mrs Richards (1949), both Labour. 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands', *Evening Dispatch*, 2 November 1945, p. 3; 'Labour Suffers in Midland Polls', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 May 1949, p. 3.

¹³⁷ References to all in Appendix H.

All other Black Country councils either became Labour controlled, or registered significant Labour gains.¹³⁸ The party ‘again recorded substantial gains’ in 1946’s municipal elections.¹³⁹ Indeed, as Chapter 1 suggested, it was arguably only after the 1945 general election that the Black Country became a reliably Labour voting area, a trend also evident in local elections.

The Labour landslide victory in the 1945 general election has been the subject of significant debate. Early work by Stephen Fielding argued that the party’s victory was fuelled less by a desire to see a socialist revolution in British government than by anti-Conservative sentiment, with the Conservatives largely being blamed for the deprivation of the 1930s, but a number of historians have since challenged this, with Peter Sloman most recently arguing that voters were ‘positively attracted...to the identity which the Labour party projected and the arguments for socialism which it advanced’.¹⁴⁰ While, again, it is worth reiterating that it is not always helpful to map parliamentary politics directly onto local politics, the Labour surge in Black Country municipal elections suggests that voters in these elections were also likely motivated by the party’s platform. But was it this general enthusiasm for the Labour party and its principles which had galvanised so many Black Country women in 1945 and 1946, and encouraged them to stand in municipal elections? It is, of course, difficult to conclusively answer this question, particularly without direct evidence from the women themselves. Nonetheless, what evidence is available suggests that from 1945, at least in the Black Country, women councillors were more likely to be those who were already highly active within local and regional branches of the Labour party. Essentially, they appear to have become politicised through their work in these partisan organisations.

¹³⁸ ‘How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands’, *Evening Despatch*, 2 November 1945, p. 3.

¹³⁹ ‘Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1946, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Initial work by Fielding includes: Stephen Fielding, ‘What did “the people” want? The meaning of the 1945 general election’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (1992), 623–639; Stephen Fielding, Peter Thompson and Nick Tiratsoo, *England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). James Hinton offers a critique of the latter, and particularly the methodology used in: James Hinton, ‘1945 and the Apathy School’, *History Workshop Journal*, 43, (1997), p. 266–273, see also: Stephen Brooke, ‘The Labour party and the 1945 general election’, *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (1995), p. 1—21; Peter Sloman, ‘Rethinking a progressive moment: the Liberal and Labour parties in the 1945 general election’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 84, No. 226, (2010), p. 722—744, p. 723.

For instance, Oldbury Councillor Ruby Starkie (first elected 1945) was secretary of Oldbury Labour Party, and also acted as election agent for the constituency's Labour MP in the 1950s.¹⁴¹ Walsall's Edith Riley (first elected 1945) had been chairman of the Women's Section of the party there, and at the time of her election was also chairman of the South Staffordshire Labour Women's Advisory Council.¹⁴² In Wolverhampton, Councillor Ruby Illsley (first elected 1945) was chairman of the West Midlands Regional Council of the Labour Party in 1959, the same year that Oldbury Councillor Mrs Gunn (first elected 1946) was made the branch's treasurer.¹⁴³ These women were all actively involved at local and regional level with Labour organisations, involvement which had perhaps led to their initially seeking election to municipal councils in their area. This was not a new phenomenon of the post-war period. 18 Labour women had been elected before 1939, all of whom would have had some involvement with their local party or they would not have stood as Labour representatives. Arguably, however, the increase in the number of Labour women councillors first elected post-war perhaps suggests that there was, by this time, a greater cultural acceptance by political parties of the role women could play in public life, especially within local government. A woman councillor was, perhaps, no longer 'exceptional' purely because of her sex, even if councils remained male dominated.

That so many women were first elected in 1945 also suggests that there is a possibility that some may have benefitted from a relative absence of male candidates in 1945. While 15 Labour women were first elected in 1945 and six in 1946, there were no new Labour women elected in 1947, four in 1949, none in 1950 and only two in 1951, representing a significant drop in this later period. As many men were still stationed abroad during the November 1945 municipal elections, women may have benefited from there being a smaller pool of potential candidates for the party to choose from. A woman already active in her local party, who wished to stand for election might not, on this occasion, have had to take second place to a male candidate who might otherwise have been handed a safe seat. Evidence from Stourbridge suggests that at least one female councillor was chosen to contest an

¹⁴¹ 'Oldbury to have Woman Mayor', *Birmingham Post and Gazette*, 6 February 1957, p. 7.

¹⁴² 'Five Labour Gains', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 3 November 1945, p. 5.

¹⁴³ 'W. Midland Labour Party Officials', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 April 1959, p. 21.

election in place of a male relative, though she was an Independent candidate: Emma Moody's brother had been due to contest the election, but, as he was still serving abroad in the forces in November 1945, Emma stood in his place, securing a victory.¹⁴⁴ In other cases, a woman might not have so explicitly 'replaced' an absent male relative, but may nonetheless have benefited from men who had been established in local party organisations still being absent. Certainly, further research would be necessary before this could be conclusively proven, but it is nonetheless striking that the number of women elected in 1945 should be so relatively high compared with the later 1940s and early 1950s.

This is, of course, not to suggest that these women were some kind of last resort candidate, only chosen because there was no man available. In contrast, many of those initially elected in 1945 continued to win re-election for many years afterwards. Once elected, they took an active role within local government, with many rising to positions of seniority. Particularly notable is the number of women who went on to become Mayor of their respective council. Of the 90 women councillors elected in the Black Country across the period 1914 to 1951, 24 (27 per cent) were elected Mayor at some point during their term of service. Significantly most of these women were elected to the position after 1945:

When elected Mayor:	Number of women:
Before 1939:	3
Between 1939 to 1945:	4
After 1945:	17

*Table 12: Women Mayors in the Black Country.*¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ 'Stourbridge', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 24 October 1945, p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Women elected Mayor before 1939: Grace Cottrell in West Bromwich in 1926 and 1927; Edith Sands, Smethwick, 1931 and 1932; Gertrude Cresswell, Walsall, 1934. Elected Mayor during the Second World War: Annie McShane, Walsall, 1942; Annie Caudwell, West Bromwich, 1942; Emma Lee, Smethwick, 1944. Elected Mayor post-war: Elsie Farley, Smethwick, 1946; Alison Chettle, Bilston, 1949; Grace Wilkes, West Bromwich, 1949; Annie Lennard, Smethwick, 1952; Alice Braybrook, Wolverhampton, 1953; Hannah Cox, Tipton, 1954; Esther Seager, Smethwick, 1955; Eva Brockhurst, Walsall, 1955; Eva Grant, West Bromwich, 1955; Ruby Starkie, Oldbury, 1957; Ruby Ilsley, Wolverhampton, 1957; Polly Pritchard, Rowley Regis, 1959; Dora Middleton, Walsall, 1959; Janet Scott, West Bromwich, 1959; Minnie Evitts, West Bromwich, 1961; Doris Hollyoake, Oldbury, 1965; Emma Flint, Walsall, 1966. All those elected Mayor post-1951 were all first elected councillors before this date. All references in Appendix H.

The mayoralty is particularly useful to consider because it was something of a ‘status’ or ceremonial position, rather than one which held any real power. Mayors were elected for a term, usually just one year, by and from a pool of their fellow councillors, who almost invariably chose particularly long-serving councillors to fill the role. In essence, it was a mark of respect, and as such conferred respectability. Because of this, there is some evidence from elsewhere that women could be denied their ‘turn’ when this came about. For example, Cathy Hunt’s research into Labour Councillor Alice Arnold in Coventry demonstrates how Arnold’s fellow councillors, including many from the Labour party, tried to deny her the mayoralty in 1936—37, at least in part because she was not considered a ‘respectable’ enough civic representative of the city in the coronation year, though she had by then served for many years as a councillor.¹⁴⁶ There were no similar instances in the Black Country, but the fact that so many women councillors in this area became Mayors of their respective councils in the years following 1945 says much about both who was considered ‘respectable’, and the many years’ service which these women gave to their towns and cities. Some of these women appear to have viewed being elected Mayor as something of a feminist achievement. Labour’s Alice Braybrook, for example, was first elected in Wolverhampton in 1937, and was the first female Mayor there in 1953. On being elected, she declared: ‘I do not see why all the women of Wolverhampton should not regard my election as the fall of yet another pinnacle in the toppling structure of so-called masculine superiority’.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, when Eva Grant (Independent) was elected Mayor of West Bromwich in 1955, she decided to use the title ‘Madam Mayor’, despite ‘Mr Mayor’ being an option, because she ‘did not feel she should retreat behind the guise of a “mere male”’.¹⁴⁸

Such comments are particularly notable in light of the evidence which suggests that, of the women first elected in the period 1945—1951, fewer had been politicised by the kinds of ‘women’s issues’ considered in Part II. Certainly, there is evidence that a small proportion of the 35 women first elected after 1945 were in some way involved with other women’s organisations, such as those studied in Chapters 2 and 3. For instance, Mabel Dale (Labour) was elected in Wolverhampton in

¹⁴⁶ Hunt, ‘Everyone’s Poor Relation’, p. 426—428.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Woman Mayor for Wolverhampton’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 19 May 1953, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Madam Mayor at West Bromwich’, *Birmingham Weekly Post*, 27 May 1955, p. 20.

1945. Her activism in several women's organisations in the city in the interwar period, particularly the National Council of Women (NCW), was explored in Chapter 2. Dale was also actively involved with Wolverhampton Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG), and in Walsall, Lizzie Harrington (Labour) had been involved with the WCG there before her 1945 election.¹⁴⁹ For these women, it is very likely that their experiences in organisations which formed part of the wider women's movement contributed to their politicisation. By the post-war period, they may have felt that local government offered the best route to make practical changes in the lives of ordinary women in their locale. Having 'learnt' their politics in women's organisations, they moved into local government, via the Labour party.

However, although more women were elected as municipal councillors in the post-war years, there is little direct evidence which suggests that many had, prior to their election, been involved with the kinds of organisations considered in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. As noted, Mabel Dale in Wolverhampton and Lizzie Harrington in Walsall had both been members of the WCG in the interwar years, with Dale also involved with the NCW. Margaret Brown MacKay—the Wolverhampton councillor co-opted for the duration of the war—was also an NCW member, but no other members of this organisation were elected before 1951. No women involved with Halesowen Infant Welfare Clinic or Dudley Ladies' Linen League went on to become local councillors—indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, Dudley had a thriving civic scene in which women were actively involved into the Second World War, but no women active within it sought election before 1951. Three women councillors who had been elected in the interwar years were asked to lead their respective WVS Centres during the conflict, but this was because they were already, as Chapter 2 explored, active in local public life.¹⁵⁰ Women who were WVS organisers in other towns, who were not councillors, did not go on to seek election before 1951.

¹⁴⁹ 'Walsall Town Council Meeting', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Advertiser*, 18 February 1939, p. 7; For her role in the Co-op Guild: 'Walsall. Refugees From Spain', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5 June 1937, p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ At the beginning of the conflict, Wednesbury's Dora Wesson (Unionist) and West Bromwich's Charlotte Hazel (Liberal) were asked to take on the role. In summer 1941, Lilian Lench (Unionist) who had first been elected in Rowley Regis became the WVS leader there, following a scandal in which the previous leader had been accused of having an affair with the town clerk. Lench first appears in: WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1941-STAF/RRS B, (September 1941); for the scandal: James Hinton, *Women*,

It must be acknowledged that the paucity of the archival record makes explicit evidence of a direct overlap between women's organisations in a specific town, and municipal government there, somewhat challenging to find. Yet even where these organisational records do exist, they generally do not provide evidence of any overlap. Dudley Townswomen's Guild's attempts to involve its members more fully in council work by arranging for them to attend council meetings did not result in an increase in women councillors in Dudley, as explored above. In West Bromwich, archival records of the town's WCG includes a list of members for the period from 1946, relatively unusually.¹⁵¹ However, there is no overlap between the names which appear on this list, and the seven women, six of whom were Labour representatives, elected in the town between 1945 and 1951.¹⁵² Of course, this is not to say that ordinary members of these kinds of voluntary or housewives' associations did not go on to become local councillors. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, in most organisations locally, only the names of the most active members—usually those who sat on organising committees—appear in archival records; rank-and-file members' names tend not to appear. Thus, it is possible that some women who were members of a given local group, though not in a leadership position within it, were also councillors. However, given the paucity of the archival record, it is very challenging to provide explicit evidence of any such links.

The general lack of apparent overlap between voluntary organisations, such as those considered in Chapters 2 and 3, and local government may also be explained by the personal circumstances of certain women councillors, but again, gaps in the archival record means that this is challenging to substantiate without evidence. Women whose children, for example, were young in the interwar period may have had less time to be actively involved in public life then. Yet, by the late 1940s or early 1950s, when their children had left home or were at least less reliant on their care, these same women may have had more time available to them, and may have been more able to

Social Leadership, and the Second World War: Continuities of Class, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 94.

¹⁵¹ Sandwell Community History and Archives Service, Ref: 2011/12, Women's Co-operative Guild: West Bromwich branch records, 1931–1979, *Minutes Book, 1946*. This contains a list of member names in the front page.

¹⁵² See Appendix H for the seven women councillors.

consider taking on a role in local government. Without personal sources such as diaries or oral histories, this is, however, hard to prove.

Nonetheless, that women should be elected at a much greater rate post-1945, and that so many women councillors should go on to be recognised for their long service by being elected Mayor in the decades which followed, is perhaps indicative of a shifting sense of what kinds of political activism were possible for women in the post-war period. Non-partisan housewives' associations and voluntary health associations, such as those explored in Chapters 2 and 3, helped to create a space for women in the local public sphere, and their roles within these organisations perhaps contributed to a wider acceptance of women's place in public life. So too, of course, did women councillors who had been elected before 1945. Women who stood first stood for election post-1945 generally did not have to break down gendered barriers to enter public life in quite the same way. They were not an 'exceptional first' as other women had paved the way for them: all 14 urban district, municipal, and county borough councils within the Black Country had elected at least one, and usually more than one, woman before 1939.¹⁵³ Although, on occasion, they may have been the only woman on a given council as, for example, Councillor Julia Taylor became in Dudley after her Labour colleague Doris Chambers lost her seat in 1946, this was relatively unusual. Most women elected after 1945 sat alongside at least one, if not more than one, other woman. The work women undertook within all these spheres of activity—local branches of housewives' associations, voluntary health organisations, and municipal government—in the period before the Second World War perhaps contributed to an overall shift in what women's role in public life might be in the post-war period. Arguably, this continued as more women won election to local councils: municipal government increasingly became a sphere of activity in which women were able to take on significant responsibilities.

Into the post-war years, there is further evidence that women councillors sought to affect local public life in a very pragmatic ways, through what I term a 'practical politics'. For example, Dora Middleton, a Labour councillor first elected in 1945, was Mayor of Walsall in 1959, and used her

¹⁵³ Darlaston was the exception in that it only elected one female councillor in this time: Edith Chorley (Labour), elected 1925.

Mayoral address to declare that she ‘hoped that in her year of office, more home helps for the aged and sick and more clinics and an occupational centre for mentally retarded children would be provided’.¹⁵⁴ There are, perhaps, some parallels here with the support the women in Halesowen Infant Welfare Clinic wished to provide to mothers there in the 1930s (Chapter 3) and it does suggest that, for at least some women councillors, these kinds of practical forms of support remained central to their own platforms and perhaps gives some indication of the kinds of issues which had first politicised them. Similarly, Mabel Dale’s activism in several local women’s organisations in Wolverhampton in the interwar years is chronicled above and in Chapter 2; after winning election in 1945, she sat on a number of local council committees, becoming Chairman of the Welfare Services Committee, perhaps reflecting her earlier work on welfare issues through organisations like the town’s Birth Control Clinic, NCW, and WCG.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, as she herself aged, she became increasingly concerned with the welfare of the elderly. Aged 82, she was said to have ‘startled delegates’ at a Wolverhampton conference on old people’s welfare, where she outlined the problems older people faced. Nonetheless, she urged for the elderly not to be ‘patronised’ or stripped of their ‘independence’, informing delegates that she had ‘been a councillor for many years and if anyone says I am not good enough for the job, I will give them a punch!’.¹⁵⁶

Despite this, however, it does appear that in the post-war period, party politics became much more deeply entrenched in women’s experiences of local government. Many of the women councillors who were first elected after 1945 were women who were enmeshed in local, and indeed regional, party organisations, chiefly those of the Labour party. That 27 of the 35 women elected in this period were Labour representatives reflects the party’s dominance of the Black Country in the years immediately following 1945, while the correspondingly smaller number of new Conservative and Liberal women elected—four and zero—is, again, reflective of this dominance. The sudden fall in Independent women councillors in the period 1945—1951 (see Table 4.3) also reflects the entrenchment of party politics in municipal government. In the earlier period, women had been able to

¹⁵⁴ ‘Socialist Rebel Elected Mayor’, *Birmingham Post*, 26 May 1959, p. 9.

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter 2.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Give Old People Independence Plea’, *Birmingham Post*, 11 October 1963, p. 11.

become elected from outside of the party system but, after the war, this appears less possible. Further research, particularly into other parts of the country, may be able to shed further light on why this should be, and whether this was a local phenomenon, or held true more widely, in other areas. Nonetheless, that the rate at which women were elected to local councils increased in the post-war period, indicates that this was a space in which women had largely been accepted as political actors, both by voters, and local branches of political parties.

Conclusion:

This chapter examined women's role in municipal government in the Black Country between 1910, when the area saw its first woman councillor, and 1951. Perhaps more than any other chapter in the thesis, it provided evidence for a gradual increase in women's politicisation, and their activism in the public sphere. In total, 90 women were elected to the Black Country's 14 urban district, municipal or county borough councils, and this was very much a phenomenon of the years following partial enfranchisement: 89 of the 90 were first elected after 1918. This is significant, as the chapter was chiefly concerned with uncovering evidence for what had politicised these women such that they first sought election. By considering what roles they took on as councillors, such as what committees they sat on; any familial connections they had to municipal government, and their roles within local party organisations, it is possible to begin to understand what issues these women prioritised, and thus what had first politicised them.

In the years before 1939, what are broadly termed 'women's issues' appear to have played a significant role in politicising women, as many women councillors serving for many years on committees related to children's or women's welfare. Rather than seeing this as women being pushed into taking on gendered roles within council work, this might instead be a clue as to what specific issues had first galvanised these women. Familial connections also appeared to have played a not insignificant role: as Part II noted, 12 of the 48 women elected before 1939 (or 25 per cent) had a male relative who was, or had been, a local councillor or senior party figure. Post-war, only five of the

36 women first elected after 1945 (14 per cent) enjoyed such a connection.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, the interwar years saw a significant number of Independent women, elected from outside the party system. After 1945, there appears to have been less room for these Independents, with more women appearing to have become politicised through party organisations, especially those connected to the Labour party. As Part III demonstrated, 27 of the 36 women first elected after 1945 were Labour representatives.

That 90 women were elected in only a little over four decades indicates remarkable progress in opening this sphere of activity for women. Of course, as the chapter noted, this success does disguise certain nuances: some councils elected women relatively early but, on their stepping down or losing an election, these councils went back to being dominated entirely by men. Similarly, individual women could be the lone female representative on a council, and across the period, women were a minority on all councils. These nuances aside, it is clear that for these 90 women, municipal politics offered a space in which they might act and legislate to make a real, tangible difference in the lives of ordinary people within their communities. The practical work of local government enabled Labour, Liberal, Conservative, and indeed Independent, non-party women the space to work alongside men, as equals, in the local public sphere.

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix H for a full list and references.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the ways in which Black Country women became politically active and engaged in public life between 1914 and 1951. In so doing, it contributes to wider debates on the impact of enfranchisement on women's lives. It was, as Karen Hunt and June Hannam suggest, 'locally that the majority of women (and men) engaged in or encountered politics', and it is therefore necessary to understand *how* women were doing so, in their towns, neighbourhoods and communities, to fully understand the impact the vote had on women's politics.¹ The thesis has examined four potential spheres of activism in which women might engage: parliamentary politics; non-partisan housewives' associations; voluntary health organisations, and municipal government. Evidence for women's activism in each area was considered in the local context. This revealed that there is little to suggest that many Black Country women were actively engaged in the political process through parliamentary politics, and specifically through the general election campaigns of the four women candidates who stood in one of the area's nine constituencies during this period. In contrast, however, there was substantial evidence that women in the area became increasingly active within local public life through the other three spheres of activity considered: housewives' associations, voluntary health organisations, and municipal government. This latter proved particularly significant. Though the Representation of the People Act of 1918 granted women the right to participate in parliamentary elections, in the Black Country it was local government, and not the politics of Westminster, which offered considerably more opportunities for women to become politically active in the aftermath of its passage.

For ordinary women in the Black Country, activism was mediated through what I term a 'practical politics': political action rooted in the local, the specific, and the pragmatic. This kind of practical, everyday, on the ground activism took place through the organisations and structures examined in case studies across this thesis. Housewives' associations were able to engage local

¹ Karen Hunt and June Hannam, 'Towards an Archaeology of Interwar Women's Politics: The Local and the Everyday', in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945*, eds. Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye, (London: Palgrave, 2013), p. 124—141, p. 126.

women with public life in their towns and communities through their work. Wolverhampton's branch of the National Council of Women (NCW), for instance, engaged with many issues which were central to the interwar women's movement, including campaigns for women magistrates, women police, and access to birth control. Significantly, however, their work on these issues—such as co-ordinating letter writing campaigns, or hosting debates on the topics—was done in Wolverhampton itself, by local women who were members of the town's NCW, as Chapter 2 illustrated. Voluntary health organisations were similarly able to engage in this kind of practical politics to provide welfare support to those in need, support which was, again, enacted in the local community. In Halesowen, for example, the Infant Welfare Clinic there acted to fund the provision of 'home helps' for postpartum mothers in the town, as Chapter 3 demonstrated. Their work was not part of a wider, national campaign for the provision of domestic support to those in need. Instead, it was a pragmatic, locally focused means of working within the community in Halesowen to support mothers there. This kind of practical political action was not just enacted through these kinds of voluntary groups. Women were also able to undertake these forms of activism through more formal structures, especially municipal government. Black Country women who were elected to the various county borough, municipal and urban district councils across the area were able to use these councils' legislative powers to affect change on issues such as maternity and child welfare or housing reform, within that district, as Chapter 4 argued.

The evidence presented in this thesis therefore suggests that a greater appreciation of how such organisations and structures operated on a local level does much to develop the wider understanding of how women came to engage in politics and public life in the years following their enfranchisement. The campaigns and issues which politicised women in the Black Country were in no way unique to this area; on the contrary, their concerns were those with which the national women's movement was engaged at this time. The significance of this study, however, is that it has provided evidence of *how* ordinary women in this area came to be involved with these campaigns and issues: that is, through activism in their towns and neighbourhoods, rather than on a national scale. The

practical, day-to-day work women did on these issues was done within their own communities exclusively.

Equally significant is that, across the period under investigation, three of these four spheres of activity—housewives’ associations, voluntary health organisations, and municipal government—came to be both larger and more inclusive. There is evidence that a greater number of women, from a more socially diverse range of backgrounds, were involved with the organisations and local councils studied in this thesis as the period progressed, consistent with Pat Thane’s argument that the post-enfranchisement years saw ‘more women, from a wider range of backgrounds...actively campaigning...than before the First World War’.² While, for example, leadership positions within Black Country branches of the Women’s Voluntary Service during the Second World War generally remained in the hands of middle-class women, this organisation afforded much more opportunities for its members, typically working-class women, to be actively involved in their local communities than had been possible for members of the Tipperary Rooms in Walsall during the First World War, as Chapter 2 argued. Chapter 3, meanwhile, highlighted the ways in which Halesowen’s Infant Welfare Clinic became more diverse and inclusive of the mothers it served in the interwar period than the Walsall Child Welfare Association had been during the First World War. Most notably, across the entire period, the number of women elected to local councils increased steadily, such that by 1951, a total of 90 women had been elected to one of the 14 councils which made up the Black Country. The period after 1945, especially, saw a doubling of the rate at which women councillors were elected in this area, compared with the pre-war period, suggesting that local government holds particular importance to understanding women’s political activism well beyond their partial enfranchisement in 1918.

Notably, however, this measurable increase in women’s engagement occurred in the three spheres of activity which had already been open to women prior to the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act. Only one sphere of activity studied in this thesis was newly open to

² Pat Thane, ‘What difference did the vote make? Women in public and private life in Britain since 1918’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 76, No. 192, (2003), p. 268—285, p. 271—272.

women: parliamentary politics, as first some, and then all, women gained the right to vote in general elections. This, however, was the only area of activity which appears to have engaged very limited numbers of women, at least in the Black Country. Examination of the parliamentary campaigns fought by women in the area's constituencies, in Chapter 1, suggests there are many potential reasons for this general lack of activism. However, it is possible that some women viewed this kind of 'national' politics as somewhat removed from their everyday lives. This suggests that, overall, women felt more able to make real, substantive change on issues which affected their daily lives through either the 'informal' politics of housewives' associations and voluntary health organisations, or more formally through the political process at municipal level.

Although this thesis has demonstrated significant involvement by women in these three spheres of activity, it is notable that there appears to have been little evidence of overlap between these areas locally, in terms of personnel. Specifically, individual women who were active in either housewives' associations or voluntary health associations did not also become local councillors, with only a very small number of exceptions. There was, at times, some overlap between the membership of housewives' associations and voluntary health organisations in a specific place. For example, many of the women who sat on Walsall's Tipperary Rooms' organising committee (Chapter 2) were also involved with the town's Child Welfare Association (Chapter 3). In the main, however, it appears that activism within these kinds of groups did not lead to an individual seeking election to municipal government. That is, while they may well have been politicised by this activism, this did not then lead them to taking on further roles within the more formal political process. In part, this might be attributable to the time commitment all these activities required. Even a relatively affluent middle-class woman, who did not have to undertake paid work and who perhaps enjoyed domestic support from a paid servant, had limited time and energies in which to engage in public life. Consequently, individual women may have chosen to prioritise activism within one specific group or organisation, or, alternatively, within municipal government. However, as women increasingly engaged in public life through local branches of housewives' associations or voluntary organisations, this may have contributed to the local becoming more recognised as an important site of women's activism. The

increasing visibility of women's in local public life, whether through the more informal politics of voluntary organisations, or through local government, likely contributed to an increased social and cultural acceptance of what roles and responsibilities women might undertake in a specific place. This, in turn, might have encouraged greater numbers of women to seek election to municipal councils over this period.

The significance of a locally-focused 'practical politics' through voluntary organisations and elected office has been asserted throughout this study, and is a concept which might be applied much more widely. However, it is important to recognise that, because the case studies presented within this research draw exclusively on evidence from the Black Country, some of the conclusions presented in this thesis might naturally be specific to this area. As noted in the Introduction, the Black Country is an area made up of several small to medium-sized industrial towns. Research carried out in more sparsely populated rural areas, or indeed larger urban conurbations, may find that the practical political engagement argued for in this study was enacted differently in these other kinds of locations, because of their different geographies, while specific social and political cultures in other places may also impact. Nonetheless, future work which foregrounds the local in this way should be undertaken, to fully understand the impact of these social, cultural and geographic factors on what a 'practical politics' might mean in different locations. As this thesis has demonstrated, it is only by understanding how, when, and where women were active in public life, through specific local organisations or structures, that historians can begin to more fully understand the impact of enfranchisement on women's political activism.

The research presented here further suggests that any such future studies must also pay more attention to women's role in municipal government in the post-suffrage period, as this is something which has, as yet, received relatively limited scholarly attention. In contrast, there is now an extensive literature on women's role in national, parliamentary politics after 1918, which was discussed in relation to the four campaigns by women parliamentary candidates in the Black Country in Chapter 1. However, the number of women councillors elected far exceeded the number of women MPs; in the Black Country alone, 90 women were elected as local councillors between 1910 and 1951, though the

area did not elect a woman MP until 1964. Given such statistics, the limited scholarly attention paid to the prominence of municipal government as a space in which women might become politically active post-enfranchisement is perhaps even more surprising. Indeed, as Cathy Hunt has argued, greater attention has been paid to the extraordinarily small number of women councillors who went on to become MPs, than to those who did not seek to move beyond elected positions locally. Consequently, as she suggests, municipal governance has tended to be presented as ‘a necessary rung on the ladder towards the ultimate goal of Westminster’, leading to ‘a mistaken belief that those who remained at a local level were unable to “progress” to national government’, although this was in fact far from the case.³ None of the 90 women elected to local councils in the Black Country, including the small proportion whose male relatives entered parliament, ever sought to do so themselves, highlighting the significance of municipal government, and not national government, to women’s politicisation in this period.

Future work, therefore, must recentre studies of women’s politics post-enfranchisement around local, and not national government, as it was through the former that far more women were able to effect practical change within their communities via these councils’ legislative powers. This research, too, would also allow for a deeper understanding of how typical—or otherwise—Black Country women councillors’ experiences were in this period. The research into these women’s experiences presented here highlighted several general trends based on evidence from this specific area, but it is unclear how far these trends might apply elsewhere. For example, before 1939, almost half of all women who were elected to various councils in this area were Independents, who stood outside of the party system. As Chapter 4 discussed, there is conflicting evidence from elsewhere as to how ‘typical’ this was: between 1918 and 1930, only two of Manchester’s 18 female councillors were Independents, compared with ten of the 13 women elected to Cambridge.⁴ Figures varied within the Black Country, on specific councils, but it is clear that further research in this area would enable a deeper understanding of how representative women’s experiences of council work were here, and

³ Cathy Hunt, ‘“Everyone’s Poor Relation”: the poverty and isolation of a working-class woman local politician in interwar Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (2007), p. 417–430, p. 419.

⁴ Hunt and Hannam, ‘Archaeology’, p. 128.

whether the Black Country, at least before the 1939, was a place in which women were more able to enter local government outside of traditional party structures. The post-Second World War shift to a greater degree of partisanship among women councillors might—or indeed might not—be reflected in other locations too, but again, future research must be undertaken before any more general conclusions can be drawn.

There is also the potential for future studies to explore how the idea of a ‘practical politics’ can be applied to understanding women’s activism in the post-war era, the second wave women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s and beyond. Many initiatives which grew out of the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, for example, were grassroots causes or campaigns, and reflect a kind of political action rooted in the local, the specific and the pragmatic. Childcare facilities or domestic violence refuges, for example, were often established by groups of local women, acting within and for their communities.⁵ These initiatives reflected wider national concerns within the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but the practical, day-to-day work involved in running a nursery or refuge was done in the towns and communities within which these women lived. Framing these initiatives around the idea of a ‘practical politics’ might produce a deeper and wider understanding of how the women’s movement developed during these decades.

This thesis, then, has argued that in the period 1914—1951, within the Black Country increasing numbers of women were able to become politicised and enter public life through a local, practical politics, centred specifically around activism within non-partisan housewives’ associations, voluntary health organisations and municipal government. As a whole, this activism drew in a greater number of women, from more socially diverse backgrounds, as the period progressed. The issues with which the various individuals and groups studied here engaged were typical of those which concerned

⁵ Many such organisations were established across Britain, but see for example the First Neighbourhood Co-operative Nursery founded in Walthamstow in 1977 (<<https://holdingthebaby.org/podcasts/2019/12/18/bonus-track-doing-it-ourselves>>, accessed 15.10.2020 or the Southall Black Sisters domestic violence refuge established in 1979 (<<https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/>>, accessed 15.10.2020). For research into the importance of local, grassroots organisations during the second wave, see for example: Sue Bruley, ‘Women’s Liberation at the Grass Roots: a view from some English towns, c.1968–1990’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 25, No. 5, (2016), p. 723–740; Sarah Crook, ‘The women’s liberation movement, activism and therapy at the grassroots, 1968–1985’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 7, (2018), p. 1152–1168.

the contemporary women's movement across Britain during this period. However, the activism of Black Country women was exclusively local, undertaken within the towns and communities in which they lived. Without examining this local activism and understanding how these organisations and individuals operated on the ground, within their own communities, much of women's engagement in public life will remain hidden. Reframing women's politicisation in the post-enfranchisement era as centred around the local will help to prevent this, shedding new light on the ways in which women were able to engage in politics and public life. Furthermore, future work which takes a similar approach in a different geographical area, might both reveal these kinds of local connections in other spaces, and also suggest whether this phenomenon was regionally specific to the Black Country, or if it was a wider, national trend.

Appendix A: Full biographical details of the Smethwick women who nominated Christabel Pankhurst for election in 1918

Names appear in the order in which they are listed in the *Smethwick Telephone* article.¹

Name and Address:	Age in 1918:	Birthplace:	Occupation in 1911 (blank if none stated):	Live-in servant:	Husband's Occupation in 1911:	Other information:
Clara Williams² 72, Lewisham Road	60	Walsall			Blacksmith	10 children, 7 surviving, 3 still living at home, age 24, 23 and 19 all employed in manual work.
Janette Theresa Hill³ 70, Vicarage Road	43		Assistant school medical officer of health from 1914; in same post 1939		Single	Hill was not resident at this address in 1911 but was in 1939. She qualified as a doctor, obtaining a medical degree from the University of St Andrews in 1896, but appears not to have moved to Smethwick until around 1914.
Elizabeth Cox⁴ 66, Vicarage Road	75	Hawarden, Wales			Engine and machine fitter, but noted to be out of work in 1911, possibly due to age (65)	Husband from Dudley. 5 children, 3 surviving. Daughter, 32 in 1911, living at home but did not give an occupation.

¹ 'Nomination Day', *Smethwick Telephone*, 7 December 1918, p. 3.

² 'Clara Williams', *1911 Census return for Lewisham Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick*, (Piece No. 17971, Schedule No. 209).

³ 'Janette T Hill', *1939 National Register return for Vicarage Road, Smethwick, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5252G, Schedule No. 110, Sub-schedule No. 1; Wellcome Library, The Wellcome Trust, *Medical and Dental Students Registers, 1882-1937*, 1896, p. 40 via <www.ancestry.co.uk>; 'The New School Doctor', *Smethwick Telephone*, 21 March 1914, p. 2.

⁴ 'Elizabeth Cox', *1911 Census return for Vicarage Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick*, (Piece No. 17961, Schedule No. 21).

Mary Bertha Westwood⁵ 68, Vicarage Road	46	Smethwick			Engineering fitter	2 children, 1 (aged 8 in 1911) surviving. Also living with the family was Mary's 5 year old nephew, born in India to British parents.
Alice M Bartlett⁶ 22, Bearwood Road	41	Jersey	School teacher; Headmistress from 1912		Single	Lived with widowed mother, also from Jersey.
Elizabeth Smith, 7 Claremont Road						<i>Not resident at this address in 1911 or 1939, and untraceable without further information</i>
Helen Crisp⁷ 40, Little Moor Hill	31					Not resident at this address in 1911 or 1939, but a <i>Smethwick Telephone</i> article of 1912 revealed that George Henry Crisp had married 'Helen Shotton, daughter of Charles Shotton, of South Road'. Charles's wife Rose Shotton (Helen's stepmother) was also among those who nominated Pankhurst.
Rose R A Cornforth⁸ 161, Shireland Road	51	Birmingham			Electrical Engineer	3 children, 2 still living. Daughters (21 and 19) employed as clerks for a motor engineer and at a jewellery warehouse.
Jane Evans⁹ 143, Bearwood Road	47	Warmington, Warwickshire			Builder	3 children, all survived. Eldest daughter 18, did not give occupation. Not resident at this address in 1911 but traced to nearby.

⁵ 'Mary Bertha Westwood', *1911 Census return for Vicarage Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick*, (Piece No. 17961, Schedule No. 22).

⁶ 'Alice Bartlett', *1911 Census return for Bearwood Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick*, (Piece No. 17956, Schedule No. 112); 'Smethwick Education Committee', *Smethwick Telephone*, 20 January 1912, p. 3.

⁷ 'Births, Marriages and Deaths. Crisp—Shotton', *Smethwick Telephone*, 17 August 1912, p. 2.

⁸ 'Rose Cornforth', *1911 Census return for Shireland Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick*, (Piece No. 17952, Schedule No. 205).

⁹ 'Jane Evans', *1911 Census return for Cheshire Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick*, (Piece No. 17956, Schedule No. 353).

Margaret J Kay¹⁰ 135, Bearwood Road	54	Kilmarnock	Blank 1911. Milliner, at home, in 1901.	None in 1911. Employed 1 female servant (name illegible) in 1901.	Draper's buyer	Husband from Baslow, Derbyshire. 2 children, both surviving. Eldest, age 14, had been born in Smethwick.
Mary Winefred Fletcher¹¹ 141, Bearwood Road	50	Birmingham		Winifred Brown, 22, from Smethwick	Commercial clerk	2 children, both surviving, neither living at home in 1911.
Ada Louisa Hill¹² 58, Edgbaston Road	40	Smethwick		Annie Westley, 23, from Dudley	Surveyor for the Council	2 children, both surviving, aged 4 and 3 in 1911.
Emily Bowden¹³ 57, Edgbaston Road	64	Smethwick		Lily Patchett, 22, from Birmingham	Architect and Surveyor (partner)	2 children, both surviving neither living at home in 1911 (but see below). Husband George had been actively involved in local politics, as a Liberal, for many years and Emily had been Mayoress of Smethwick in 1904 when George served a term as Mayor.
Edith Maria Bowden¹⁴ 74, Edgbaston Road	40	Wolverley, Worcs.		Sarah Elizabeth Jones, 22, from Coseley	Architect and surveyor (partner)	Daughter-in-law of the above: husband Henry was Emily's son. Edith one son, aged 7 in 1911.

¹⁰ 'Margaret Kay', 1911 Census return for Bearwood Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. Schedule No. 169); 'Margaret Kay', 1901 Census return for High Street, Smethwick, Staffordshire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 2822, Schedule No. 13).

¹¹ 'Mary Winefred Fletcher', 1911 Census return for Bearwood Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece: 17956; Schedule Number: 171).

¹² 'Ada Louise Hill', 1911 Census return for Edgbaston Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17596, Schedule No. 47).

¹³ 'Emily Bowden', 1911 Census return for Edgbaston Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17596, Schedule No. 46). 'Death of Ald. G. Bowden', Birmingham Daily Gazette, 21 November 1929, p. 5; 'Funeral of Mrs George Bowden', Smethwick Telephone, 19 December 1931, p. 5.

¹⁴ 'Edith Bowden', 1911 Census return for Edgbaston Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17956, Schedule No. 61).

Louisa Atkinson¹⁵ 81, Waterloo Road	49	Notting Hill, London		None in 1911. 2 in 1901, when the family lived in London	Surgeon.	Two children, both surviving, aged 13 and 12 in 1911 (both born in London). Her husband had filed for bankruptcy about the time of the 1911 census, which might explain why they did not employ servants in Smethwick.
Mary Gertrude Edinborough¹⁶ 17 ('Ellesmere'), Little Moor Hill	43	London			Commercial clerk for a business	Husband and 2 children (2 and 1) both from Smethwick. Also lived with husband's children from a previous marriage. Hilda (19), elementary school teacher and Percival (17), draughtsman.
Eva and Fanny Whitehouse¹⁷ 36, Little Moor Hill	40 37	Walsall	Both elementary school teachers			Both sisters remained unmarried. They lived with their widowed mother in 1911, and a younger brother who worked at the University of Birmingham. Not resident at this address in 1911 but traced to nearby.
Annie A Bentham 37, Little Moor Hill						<i>Not resident at this address in 1911 or 1939, and untraceable without further information.</i>
Rose Shotton¹⁸ 60, South Road	45	Sheffield	No occupation, but in col. 13, which asked where worked, wrote 'At home'	Jane Brown, 22, from Smethwick	Pawnbroker	Husband from Birmingham. Couple had only been married 4 years and had no children, however 2 from her husband's previous marriage lived with them: son, 22, also a Pawnbroker and daughter, 24, who

¹⁵ 'Louisa Atkinson', 1911 Census return for Waterloo Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece: 17950; Schedule Number: 176);, 'Louisa Atkinson', 1901 Census return for Holloway Road, Islington, London, Subdistrict: Upper Holloway, (Piece: 161; Folio: 48; Page: 9). 'Smethwick Bankruptcy. Doctor's application for discharge', Birmingham Gazette and Express, 26 April 1911, p. 3.

¹⁶ 'Mary Gertrude Edinborough', 1911 Census return for Little Moor Hill, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17960, Schedule No. 197).

¹⁷ 'Fanny and Eva Whitehouse', 1911 Census return for Cheshire Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17956, Schedule No. 296).

¹⁸ 'Rose Shotton', 1911 Census return for South Road, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17960, Schedule No., 271).

						also worked 'at home'. Daughter was Helen Crisp (above).
Mary Ellen Shepherd¹⁹ 25, Corbett Street	47	Limerick, Ireland			Vanman for the Co-operative Society	Husband from Birmingham. Had 5 children, 3 survived. Eldest son (9) born in Limerick; son (7) and daughter (5) both born in Smethwick. Her nephew (16) lodged with the family, employed as a nail maker.
Eliza Florence Price²⁰ 208, Windmill Lane	47	Smethwick	Boot Dealer (at home)		Blacksmith, but noted to be out of work in 1911	3 children, 2 surviving aged 4 and 3 in 1911. One other child had died. Not resident at this address in 1911 but traced to nearby.
Elizabeth Sidwell²¹ 205a, Windmill Lane	45	Birmingham	Assisting in the business (shop work)	No, but did employ 19-year-old Samuel Whittle to help in the business	Owner of a 'fruiter and fishmonger' business (shop)	Lived above the shop. No children.
<i>Sarah Roberts, 29, Windmill Lane</i>						<i>Not resident at this address in 1911 or 1939, and untraceable without further information.</i>

Table 13: Women who nominated Christabel Pankhurst for election in 1918, full details.

¹⁹ 'Mary Ellen Shepherd', 1911 Census return for Corbett Street, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17978, Schedule No. 310).

²⁰ 'Eliza Florence Price', 1911 Census return for Soho Street, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17976, Schedule No. 246).

²¹ 'Elizabeth Sidwell', 1911 Census return for Windmill Lane, Smethwick, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Smethwick, (Piece No. 17982, Schedule No. 315).

Appendix B: Organising Committee members, Walsall's Tipperary Rooms

Names of committee members appear within the Tipperary Rooms collection; no full list was kept, but committee members present are noted at the start of each meeting.¹ Individuals are listed here in the order in which they appear within minutes. First names are added where traceable.

Name:	Role on Committee:	Biographical details:
Mrs Marshall	Committee member	<i>Untraceable</i>
Mrs Footney	Committee member	<i>Untraceable</i>
Mrs Layton² Dorothea	Secretary	Married to a local GP, who was also a Liberal councillor and local magistrate. Member of Walsall Child Welfare Association (WCWA) voluntary committee and the Material Aid Committee (MAC). Had been a founding member of Walsall Women's Suffrage and Political Union prior to the war. Employed 3 live-in servants in 1911.
Mrs Bedwall	Committee member	<i>Untraceable</i>
Mrs F Jesson³ Cordelia	Committee member	Married to an export merchant in the saddlery trade, employed 1 live-in servant in 1911. Was also a member of the WCWA voluntary committee and the MAC, and was also a member of Walsall's Church League for Women's Suffrage.
Mrs Button	Committee member	<i>Untraceable.</i>
Mrs Dix⁴	Unclear	Mrs Dix attended only the first committee meeting and her name does not appear in the minutes after this initial meeting. It is possible that she was the same Mrs Dix who was involved with Walsall's branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild.
Miss Harrison	Committee member	<i>Untraceable.</i>
The Misses Lowry⁵ Eva, Catherine and Amy	Committee members; E Lowry chair to January 1916	All three sisters were members of the committee, with Eva Lowry being elected chair when the committee was established. She stepped down in early 1916 for reasons unclear, though it is possible that the pressures of work (she appears from the 1939 National Register to have been a hospital nurse) might have increased. Amy Lowry was the most active of the three; she was

¹ Walsall Local History Centre, Tipperary Rooms Collection, 335/1, *Minute Book*, 1915—1920.

² 'Dorothea Layton', *1911 Census return for Abelwell Street, Walsall, Subdistrict: Staffordshire*, (Piece: 17170; Schedule Number: 138); 'Widow of a respected doctor dies', *Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 19 January 1968, p. 10; Elizabeth Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Guide*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 124,

³ 'Cordelia Jesson', *1911 Census return for Fairfield Mount, Walsall, Subdistrict: Staffordshire*, (Piece: 17173; Schedule Number: 317); 'Walsall', *Church League for Women's Suffrage*, 1 March 1915, p. 23.

⁴ 'Maternity Centres', *Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 10 October 1914, p. 9.

⁵ 'Amy Lowry', *1901 Census return for Springfields, Abingdon, Sub-district: Abingdon*, (Piece: 1131; Folio: 134; p. 24); 'Birmingham-North Warwickshire', *Common Cause*, 2 December 1909, p. 457; 'Walsall', *Church League for Women's Suffrage*, Nov. 1914, p. 202; 'The War Relief Fund', *Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 9 October 1915, p. 7; 'Amy Lowry', *1939 National Register return for St Thomas's Street, Winchester, Hampshire*, Reference: RG 101/2357H, Schedule Number: 43, Sub-schedule number: 1.

		also involved with Walsall branches of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, for which she was Secretary, the Church League for Women's Suffrage, and Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association. The three were untraceable in 1911 but in 1901 were living with their father, a clerk in holy orders, mother, and 2 live-in servants.
Miss Negus⁶ Margaret	Committee member, then voted chair 11 January 1916	From a family of local gentry, in 1911, Negus was living at the headquarters of Walsall's branch of the Girls' Friendly Society, which she took a leading role in organising, with 1 live-in servant. She was a member of the WCWA voluntary committee and the MAC, and acted as Commandant of a Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital in Lichfield during the First World War.
Miss E J Windle⁷ Ellen Jane	Committee member	One of 3 unmarried sisters living together; her sister Amy Harriett Windle was a member of WCWA voluntary committee and, later, a magistrate. Employed 3 live-in servants in 1911. On her death in 1929, Ellen Jane Windle left over £17,000 in her will.
Mrs Ridley	Committee member	<i>Untraceable.</i>
Mrs Morgan	Committee member	<i>Untraceable.</i>
Mrs Paice⁸ Mabel	Committee member	Married to a clergyman. Employed 3 live-in domestic servants in 1911. Member of WCWA voluntary committee.
Miss Hill⁹	Committee member	<i>Untraceable.</i> A Miss Hill was a member of the Walsall branch of the Church League for Women's Suffrage; given that both Amy Lowry and Cordelia Jesson were members of that organisation, it is possible that this was the same Miss Hill.

Table 14: Organising Committee members, Walsall's Tipperary Rooms.

⁶ 'Margaret Negus', 1911 Census return for Lysways Street, Walsall, Staffordshire, (Piece: 1057, Schedule Number: 194); 'Freeford VAD Hospital', *Lichfield Mercury*, 1 November 1918, p. 3; 'The Late Miss M Negus', *Lichfield Mercury*, 10 June 1927, p. 6.

⁷ 'Ellen Windle', 1911 Census return for Birmingham Road, Walsall, Subdistrict: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17173; Schedule Number: 30); 'Yesterday's Police', *Walsall Observer*, and *South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 9 October 1926, p. 11 (for Amy Harriett Windle); 'Midland Wills', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 19 March 1929, p. 5;

⁸ 'Mabel Paice', 1911 Census return for Hanch Place, Walsall, Subdistrict: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17167; Schedule Number: 368).

⁹ 'Walsall', *Church League for Women's Suffrage*, 1 March 1915, p. 23.

Appendix C: Executive Committee Members, Wolverhampton Branch of the National Council of Women

The following women appear within the Wolverhampton branch's minutes¹ as belonging to the Executive Committee at various points during the 1920s. It is not always clear when each was voted on to the committee, so they appear here in alphabetical order.

Name:	Role on committee:	Biographical information:
Margaret Brown MacKay ²	Executive Committee	Born 21 August 1900. Both she and her husband were medical doctors, with her husband serving overseas during the Second World War. Employed at least 2 live-in servants in 1939. Margaret was a local magistrate and was co-opted as a (probable) Independent councillor in 1942, although as Chapter 4 and Appendix H discuss, she never sought election in her own right post-war. In addition to her involvement with the NCW, she was active in several other Wolverhampton associations, including the Young Women's Christian Association (vice-chairman in the 1940s); Wolverhampton Women's Luncheon Club (co-founder) and Wolverhampton Ladies' Circle.
Lilian Bryne Quinn ³	Executive Committee	Born 15 August 1878. Although she was widowed by 1939, she employed at least 2 live-in servants so had likely been married to a well-established man working in business or the professions, possibly a medical doctor (a Dr Bryne Quinn was present at a Civil Defence Parade in Wolverhampton in 1938). Was a borough magistrate.
Caroline Callear ⁴	Executive Committee	Born 1855 in London, married Samuel Callear of Bilston. Had 8 children, of whom 6 survived to 1911. Samuel worked as a 'journeyman baker' until at least 1901; from 1911 census gave his occupation as 'insurance agent'. 3 daughters, living at home, all employed as teachers in 1911. Family do not appear to have employed live-in servants. Involved with Wolverhampton NUWSS alongside daughters. First woman magistrate in Wolverhampton. President of the Women's Section of Wolverhampton Labour Party; on board of management of Wolverhampton Royal Hospital; active in British Women's Total Abstinence Union. Died May 1939.

¹ Wolverhampton City Archives, National Council of Women, Wolverhampton Branch, D-SO-8/3/1, *Minute book, 1919—1924* and D-SO-8/3/2, *Minute book, 1924—1931*.

² 'Margaret Brown MacKay', 1939 *National Register return for Penn Road, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5363B, Schedule Number: 1, Sub-schedule number: 2; 'Wolverhampton. New Council Member', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 31 October 1942, p. 6.

³ 'Lilian Bryne Quinn', 1939 *National Register return for Bushbury Road, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5346B, Schedule Number: 239, Sub-schedule number: 1; 'High Praise of Ambulance Work', *Tamworth Herald*, 2 July 1938, p. 3.

⁴ 'Caroline Callear', 1901 *Census return for Hunter Street, Wolverhampton, Sub-district: Staffordshire*, Piece: 2677; Folio: 40; p. 31; 'Caroline Callear', 1911 *Census return for Upper Villiers Street, Wolverhampton, Sub-district: Staffordshire*, (Piece: 17041; Schedule Number: 167); 'Woman JP', *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 1 September 1920; 'Wolverhampton's First Woman JP', *Birmingham Gazette*, 23 May 1939, p. 4.

Mabel Dale⁵	Executive Committee; Chair Maternity and Child Welfare Voluntary Committee from 1927	Born 1882 in Derby to a railwayman and his wife, worked as a live-in domestic servant in 1901. Married William Dale around 1904 and in 1911 was still living in Derby; William gave his occupation as 'cycle gear case maker' and Mabel 'housewife'. The couple do not appear to have had children. Moved to Wolverhampton by the early 1920s; it is possible that she was the Mrs Dale who stood for election to Wolverhampton council as a Labour representative in 1920. Became active in a number of women's organisations including the NCW from the mid-1920s. She was a founding member of the Wolverhampton Birth Control Clinic (she worked as a clerk at the centre in 1939) and was involved with Wolverhampton Women's Co-operative Guild. Elected as a Labour councillor in 1945 and served until her death in 1965.
Daphne 'Ella' Gordons⁶	Executive Committee member	Untraceable via census or national register returns, but was a founding member of Wolverhampton Birth Control Clinic and was 'comfortably off'.
Mrs Highfield Jones⁷ Lillie	Executive Committee	Born 1863 in Cheshire but married Benjamin Highfield Jones, a Wolverhampton-born man from a locally prominent family of holloware manufacturer. Employed 1 live-in domestic servant in 1911. Involved with Wolverhampton National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) pre-war and later became a magistrate.
Mrs Morrell	Executive Committee; Treasurer	<i>Untraceable.</i>
Beatrice Pearson⁸	Executive Committee; first Chairman	Born 12 September 1873 in Wolverhampton, daughter of a pawnbroker. Never married. Active in Wolverhampton NUWSS, stood (unsuccessfully) as 'suffragist and Independent' candidate in 1912 local council election. Founding member of NCW. Magistrate from 1920. In 1911, lived with widowed mother on 'private means'. Employed 1 live-in domestic servant. Living alone in 1939, no longer employing servant.

⁵ 'Mabel Riley', 1901 Census return for St Peter's, Derby, Derbyshire, (Piece: 3213; Folio: 67; p. 9); 'Mabel Dale', 1911 Census return for Nottingham Road, Derby, Sub-district: Derbyshire, (Piece: 20856, Schedule Number: 434); 'Progressives Sweep the Midlands', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 November 1920, p. 5; Bishopsgate Institute Special Collections and Archives, WCG/3/3, *Congress Material and Circulars, 1930—1939*. Text of the Presidential Address by Mabel Dale to the Women's Co-operative Guild Annual Congress, Southampton, 20—23 June 1938; 'Mabel Dale', 1939 National Register return for Inchluggan Road, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, Reference: RG 101/53461, Schedule Number: 472, Sub-schedule number: 2; 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands', *Evening Dispatch*, 2 November 1945, p. 3; 'Obituary. Mrs M Dale', *Birmingham Post*, 4 October 1965, p. 5; Clare Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women: Post-suffrage feminism in the early twentieth century*, (London: I B Tauris, 2014), p. 180

⁶ Debenham, *Birth Control*, p. 189.

⁷ Lillie Highfield-Jones, 1911 Census return for Ash Hill, Wolverhampton, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 16982; Schedule Number: 49). Wolverhampton City Council, (2005), 'William Highfield Jones', <<http://www.wolverhamptonhistory.org.uk/people/local/jones>>, accessed 13.01.2020; George J. Barnsby, *Votes For Women: The Struggle for the Vote in the Black Country 1900-1918*, (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services Ltd, 1995).

⁸ 'Beatrice Pearson', 1901 Census Return for Tettenhall Road, Wolverhampton, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 2676, Folio: 132, p. 39); 'Beatrice Pearson', 1911 Census Return for Tettenhall Road, Wolverhampton, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17024; Schedule Number: 190); Lady Candidate for the Town Council', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19 October 1912, p. 8; 'Beatrice Pearson', 1939 National Register Return for Balfour Crescent, Wolverhampton, Reference: RG 101/5343D, Schedule Number: 89, Sub-schedule Number: 1; Barnsby, *Votes For Women*.

Agnes Tomlins⁹	Executive Committee; Chairman from 1922	Born 4 October 1879 in Walsall, daughter of a tool manufacturer. Studied mathematics at Royal Holloway, London (matriculated 1898). Married Archibald Tomlins, an auctioneer and surveyor, c. 1904, had 3 children (all survived) by 1911 and another son born in 1915. Employed 2 live-in domestic servants in 1911 and 1939. Active member of many local organisations, including: Wolverhampton Boot Fund; Wolverhampton Children's Holiday Camp Committee; Wolverhampton Women's Luncheon Club; Staffordshire Women's Welfare Centre. Co-opted member of Wolverhampton council's Maternity and Child Welfare Committee. Local magistrate, also elected to NCW National Executive.
Mrs W E Hicks¹⁰ Esther	Executive Committee; Secretary	Born 2 September 1880. Married to William Edward Hicks, who in 1911, when the couple had two young daughters, gave his occupation as 'Commercial traveller in iron trade' though by 1939 he described himself as 'iron and steel merchant and stockholder'.

Table 15: Select Executive Committee Members, Wolverhampton Branch of the National Council of Women

⁹ Agnes Tomlins, *1911 Census Return for Tettenhall Road, Wolverhampton, Sub-district: Staffordshire*, (Piece: 17020; Schedule Number: 241); Royal Holloway College Student Records and Bedford College Student Records, Royal Holloway and Bedford College Student Registers, 1849-1931, 1887—1930, p. 46; 'Agnes Tomlins', *1939 National Register Return for Stockwell Road, Wolverhampton*, Reference: RG 101/5433E, Schedule Number: 336, Sub-schedule number: 2; 'Obituary. Mrs A. N. Tomlins', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 February 1940, p. 10.

¹⁰ 'Esther Hicks', *1911 Census return for Bushbury Road, Wolverhampton, Sub-district: Staffordshire*, (Piece: 17086; Schedule Number: 265) 'Esther Hicks', *1939 National Register return for Old Fallings Lane, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5349I, Schedule Number: 202, Sub-schedule Number: 2.

Appendix D: Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) Centre Organisers in the Black Country

The following table presents a brief biography of the Centre Organiser for each of the 13 Black Country branches of the WVS. Occasional reference is supplied, where relevant, to other senior members of the WVS in that area. Unless otherwise stated, all women were recorded as 'Unpaid Domestic Duties' on the 1939 National Register. Age refers to their age on the outbreak of war.

Centre:	Name:	Biographical Information:
Bilston	Alice Dawson ¹	Age 58. Gave her occupation as 'Headmistress'. Unmarried, and employed a live-in housekeeper in 1939.
Darlaston	Edith Marie Partridge ²	Age 53. Married to the manager of a soap works, who was also a Conservative town councillor. Employed 1 live-in servant in 1939.
Dudley	Mary Temple ³	Age 37. Married to the headmaster of Dudley Grammar School, both she and her husband were also noted to be Air Raid Precautions (ARP) wardens for Dudley. Employed 2 live-in servants in 1939. Acted as a collector for Dudley's Ladies' Linen League, and also an active committee member for Dudley's Townswomen's Guild (TG). Other WVS members who took leading roles in Dudley TG included Mona Crump ⁴ and Mary Shepherd (whose husband was Archdeacon of Dudley), ⁵ both of whom organised the Housewives' Service, and Edith Rowbotham, ⁶ who was the Deputy Centre Organiser and who was also involved with the Linen League.
Halesowen	Kathleen Somers ⁷	Age 55. Married to Frank Somers, a forge master, from a very prominent local family – he was the son of Walter Somers who founded Walter Somers Ltd. Became first Honorary Freeman of Halesowen in 1957 after many years' involvement in civic life in the town. Employed 3 live-in servants.
Oldbury	Vera Ellen Rose ⁸	Age 43. Married to a wholesale grocer. Had been elected an Independent councillor for Oldbury in 1938; her husband was elected to the council there in 1931 and the two served simultaneously.

¹ 'Alice Dawson', 1939 Register return for Mount Pleasant, Bilston, Staffordshire, RG101/5372A, Schedule Number: 182, Sub-schedule number: 1.

² 'Edith Partridge', 1939 Register return for Bescot Road, Walsall, Staffordshire, Reference: RG 101/5325A, Schedule Number: 37, Sub-schedule number: 2.

³ 'Mary Temple', 1939 Register return for St James's Road, Dudley, Worcestershire RG101/5747G, Schedule Number: 75, Sub-schedule number: 2; Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, Dudley Central Townswomen's Guild, C9796/1/1/2, *Monthly Meeting Minute Book, 1941–1945*.

⁴ 'Mona Crump', 1939 Register return for Himley Avenue, Dudley, Worcestershire, RG101/5749H, Schedule Number: 211, Sub-schedule number: 2.

⁵ 'Mary Elizabeth Shepherd', 1939 Register for Vicar Street, Dudley, RG101/5749A/005/29, Schedule Number: 33, Sub-schedule number: 2.

⁶ 'Edith Robotham', 1939 Register for St James's Road, Dudley, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5747B, Schedule Number: 77, Sub-schedule number: 2.

⁷ 'Kathleen Somers', 1939 Register for Bundle Hill, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5777F, Schedule number: 25, Sub-schedule number: 2; 'Obituary. Mr Frank Somers', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 June 1965, p. 22.

⁸ 'Vera Rose', 1939 Register return for Moat Road, Oldbury, RG101/5788J/010/23, Schedule Number: 124, Sub-schedule number 2; Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 1 December 1938, p. 7.

Rowley Regis	Ruby Homer, through spring 1941 ⁹	Age 40. Married to the manager of steel bar mill, both she and her husband were ARP Wardens in Rowley Regis. Employed 1 live-in servant in 1939. According to James Hinton, she was dismissed from her post as Centre Organiser when she was suspected of having an affair with the Town Clerk. ¹⁰
	Lilian Lench, CO from July 1941 ¹¹	Age 48. Unmarried. Lived with her widowed mother and sister; although recorded as 'unpaid domestic duties', it was noted that she lived on 'private means'. Employed 1 live-in servant. She had been a Conservative councillor for Rowley Regis since 1937, and her obituary noted that she was also involved with local branches of the Personal Service League, the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association, the British Legion, and the Girl Guides.
Smethwick	Winifred McKenzie ¹²	Age 43. Register return noted that she was married, but she was the only resident at home when the document was undertaken, so it is challenging to offer any further detail on her background. The return did note that she was a 'WVS ARP Ambulance Driver', suggesting she was at least well-off enough to have taken driving lessons before the war.
Stourbridge	Lucy Mobberley Louisa ¹³	Age 64. Married to 'firebrick maker (retired)'; also living with them was a son, 35, who gave his occupation as 'importer of timber for an iron works' and who volunteered as an ambulance driver. Although she appears in all WVS records as 'Lucy', she was recorded on the Register as 'Louisa', but this is almost certainly the same woman as she is noted to be WVS organiser for Stourbridge on the Register.
Tipton	Minnie Welch, CO ¹⁴	Age 55. Married to a 'draper and outfitter, employer'. Her husband had also been a Magistrate since 1929.
Walsall	Marguerite Drabble ¹⁵	Age 59. Married to a medical practitioner; noted to be WVS organiser for Walsall on the Register return. Employed 1 live-in servant.
Wednesbury	Dora Wesson ¹⁶	Age 53. Had been married to a prominent local industrialist, William Wesson though he had died in 1936, so lived on 'private means' with her three daughters. Conservative Councillor for Wednesbury from 1937; also Dame President of the Primrose League and, from 1940, a magistrate.

⁹ 'Ruby Homer', 1939 Register return for Barrs Road, Rowley Regis, RG101/5416A, Schedule Number: 78, Sub-schedule number 2

¹⁰ James Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War: Continuities of Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 94.

¹¹ 'Lilian Lench', 1939 Register return for Waterfall Lane, Rowley Regis, Staffordshire, Reference: RG 101/5415G, Schedule Number: 61, Sub-schedule number: 2; 'Midland Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1937, p. 7; 'Obituary. Miss Lilian Lench', *Birmingham Post*, 19 October 1964, p. 5.

¹² 'Winifred McKenzie', 1939 Register return for High Street, Smethwick, Staffordshire, Reference: RG 101/5256A, Schedule number: 224, Sub-schedule number: 1.

¹³ 'Louisa Mobberley', 1939 Register return for Bridle Road, Stourbridge, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5798G, Schedule number: 206, Sub-schedule number: 2.

¹⁴ 'Minnie Welch', 1939 Register return for Birmingham Road, Dudley, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5755A, Schedule Number: 232, Sub-schedule number: 2; 'New Magistrates', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 28 December 1929, p. 7

¹⁵ 'Marguerite Drabble', 1939 Register return for Stafford Road, Walsall, Staffordshire, RG 101/5321C, Schedule Number: 187, Sub-schedule number: 2.

¹⁶ 'Dora Wesson', 1939 Register return for The Heath, Wednesbury, Staffordshire, Reference: RG 101/5440I, Schedule number 123, Sub-schedule number: 1; 'Midland Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1937, p. 7; 'New Magistrates', *Birmingham Gazette*, 25 July 1941, p. 4.

West Bromwich	Charlotte Hazel ¹⁷	Age 69. Unmarried. As Chapter 4 discusses at length, Charlotte had been a Liberal Councillor in West Bromwich since 1918 and was the sister of a one-time Liberal MP. She gave her occupation as 'voluntary social worker' on the Register though this may have been a reference to her extensive role in local government. She lived with another single woman, Caroline Twist, who gave her occupation as Senior Health Visitor and they employed 1 live-in servant.
Wolverhampton	Eileen R M Patrick ¹⁸	Age 30. Married to a Consulting Surgeon, and employed 2 live-in servants.
	Beatrice M Handcock ¹⁹	Age 52. Married to Assistant Schoolmaster at the Grammar School. Takes over the writing of the monthly narrative reports as of April 1940; appears she took over as Centre Organiser from Patrick though unclear why. Secretary of the National Council of Women from 1938.

Table 16: Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) Centre Organisers in the Black Country.

¹⁷ 'Charlotte Hazel', *1939 Register return for Beeches Road, West Bromwich, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/53411, Schedule Number: 206, Sub-schedule number: 1; 'West Bromwich Municipal Election', *Midland Chronicle*, 27 October 1918, p. 3, via Sandwell Archives and Community History Centre (SACHS); see further discussion in Chapter 4.

¹⁸ 'Eileen Patrick', *1939 Register return for Waterloo Road, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5344A, Schedule number: 292, sub-schedule number: 2.

¹⁹ 'Beatrice Handcock', *1939 Register return for Woodfield Avenue, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5363C, Schedule number: 497, Sub-schedule number: 2.

Appendix E: Material Aid Committee Members, Walsall Child Welfare Association

As outlined in Chapter 3, a full list of women involved with the Material Aid Committee, or the related Home Visiting Committee, was not provided within the existing archival records.¹ This appendix is therefore not a complete record of all the women involved with both, but is intended to give some background on those who appear within the legible minutes. As it is unclear precisely when each individual joined the committee, names are presented here in alphabetical order.

Name:	Role:	Biographical information:
Miss E J Brace² <i>Ellen Jane</i>	Home Visitor	Lived off 'Private means' in 1911. Employed 6 servants, including a male servant as a groom. Her older sister married into the Negus family, so Margaret Negus (below) was her niece. Member of SSAFA.
Mrs R R Carter³ <i>Amy</i>	Head of the Milton Street Clinic; involved with MAC (unclear how)	Married to Headmaster of the School of Art. Her husband was heavily involved with relief work relating to Belgian refugees so it is possible that she was also involved in such work.
Mrs Cotterell⁴ <i>Elizabeth</i>	Home Visitor, later Head of Stafford Street Clinic	Married to business owner (buckle manufacturer) Employed 2 servants.
Mrs Hemming⁵ <i>Ellen</i>	Vice chair of MAC	Married to Managing Director of a steel works. Employed 2 servants. Husband was a Borough Magistrate and an honorary VP of WCWA.
Mrs Jesson	Home Visitor	See Appendix B.
Mrs Dorothea Layton	Home Visitor	See Appendix B.
Mrs Winifred Lee	Chair of Home Visiting Committee	<i>Untraceable.</i>
Miss Margaret Negus	Secretary of Home Visiting Committee	See Appendix B.
Miss E J Newman⁶ <i>Emily Jane</i>	Home Visitor	Lived with her sister, Ada, both on 'private means'. Employed 2 servants. Member of SSAFA committee. Her sister was Ada Newman, Walsall's first woman councillor (see Chapter 4).

¹ Walsall Local History Centre, Ref: 360, Walsall Child Welfare Association, *Walsall Child Welfare Voluntary Association General Minutes Book, 1916—1924*.

² 'Ellen Brace', 1911 Census return for Sutton Road, Walsall, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17172; Schedule Number: 231). WCWA Minutes, meeting of 31 January 1917 mentions her involvement with SSAFA.

³ 'Amy Carter', 1911 Census return for Belvidere Road, Walsall, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17173; Schedule Number: 161); in 1920, Mr Carter was awarded the Order of King Albert in connection with his 'hard work' for Belgian refugees: 'Round the Midlands, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 21 June 1920, p. 3.

⁴ 'Elizabeth Cotterell', 1911 Census return for Sutton Road, Walsall, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17172; Schedule Number: 249).

⁵ 'Ellen Hemming', 1911 Census return for Buchanan Road, Walsall, Staffordshire, (Piece: 17195; Schedule Number: 288).

⁶ 'Emily Newman', 1911 Census return for Lichfield Street, Walsall, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17168; Schedule Number: 168); WCWA Minutes, meeting of 31 January 1917 mentions her involvement with SSAFA.

Mrs Noirit⁷ Florence	MAC committee	Wife of saddlery merchant (owned own business). Employed 2 servants.
Mrs Marion Ridsdale⁸	Chair of MAC until March 1917	Wife of chartered accountant. Employed 2 servants.
Miss Marion Smith⁹	Chair of MAC from March 1917	Headteacher of secondary school. Lived with assistant mistress of the school and employed 1 servant.
Miss Symes¹⁰	Home Visitor	The Symes household consisted of Mr and Mrs Symes and their three daughters in their early 30s. Louisa and Mary were both school teachers, Florence was of no stated occupation. It is unclear which of the three was involved with WCWA, but it is possible that either Louisa or Mary had been connected with the organisation through the education authority.
Miss A H Windle¹¹ Amy Harriet	Home Visitor	Lived with her two elder sisters, all of whom gave their occupation as 'private means' and employed 3 servants. Her sister Ellen was a member of the Tipperary Rooms committee (see Appendix B). Amy was a member of SSAFA and Walsall's War Pensions Committee, and later became a Magistrate.

Table 17: Select Material Aid Committee Members, Walsall Child Welfare Association.

⁷ 'Florence Noirit', 1911 Census return for St Paul's Terrace, Walsall, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17164; Schedule Number: 219).

⁸ 'Marion Ridsdale', 1911 Census return for Stafford Road, Bloxwich, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17155; Schedule Number: 102).

⁹ 'Marion Smith', 1911 Census return for Persehouse Street, Walsall, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17169; Schedule Number: 116).

¹⁰ 'Symes household', 1911 Census return for Vicarage Street, Walsall, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17166, Schedule Number: 317).

¹¹ 'Amy Windle', 1911 Census return for Birmingham Road, Walsall, Sub-district: Staffordshire, (Piece: 17173, Schedule Number: 30); WCWA Minutes, meeting of 31 January 1917 mentions her involvement with SSAFA; 'War Pensions', Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 24 February 1917, p. 5; 'Yesterday's Police', Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle, 9 October 1926, p. 11.

Appendix F: Voluntary Committee members, Halesowen Infant Welfare Centre

Names and addresses of all committee members are transcribed on the front page of the HIWC Minutes book, which dates from February 1931.¹ In addition, this list includes the three medical professionals associated with HIWC (Dr Eileen Bulmer, and two nurses). Women are listed here in the order in which they appear on this list. First names are added where traceable.

Name:	Role on Committee:	Biographical details:
Mrs A J Grove ² <i>Eliza Jane</i>	Chairman	Married to Arthur James who gave his occupation as 'horn button manufacturer' in 1911. Does not appear to have regularly attended meetings by 1931, possibly due to age (then 74). 8 children, all survived to 1911.
Mrs Searancke ³ <i>Lauretta</i>	Treasurer	Married to William, who gave his occupation as 'shop manager in the boot trade' in 1939. Register return does not indicate whether she had children.
Mrs W L Brown ⁴ <i>Rose Hannah</i>	President	Born Rose Adams, she worked as a dressmaker before marrying William Brown, a spade finisher. In 1911, had had 4 children, 2 of whom had not survived, and lived in a small (5 roomed) cottage. By 1931, the Browns appear to have had a significant change of circumstances. They had moved to 'Oaklands' in Hasbury, which hosted the HIWC annual garden party in what were described as extensive grounds. and in 1939, William gave his occupation as 'manufacturer of Baby Cars and folding chairs'. Also living with them was Jessie Heague, who was described as a 'companion'.
Mrs W Heague ⁵ <i>Ada</i>	Committee member	In 1939, gave her occupation as 'shopkeeper at newsagent and tobacconist' (her husband Walter was shop assistant). Although living at a different address in 1939 to that given in HIWC records, this is likely the correct individual, as she was the only Mrs W Heague living in Halesowen at this time. Register return does not indicate whether she had children.
Mrs Perkins	Committee member	<i>Untraceable.</i>
Mrs Priest	Committee member	<i>Untraceable.</i>

¹ Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, D13/A1/1, Halesowen Infant Welfare Centre minute book, 1931—1973.

² 'Eliza Jane Grove', 1911 Census return for St Margaret's Well, Hasbury, Worcestershire, Subdistrict: Halesowen, Piece: 17474; Schedule Number: 158.

³ 'Lauretta Serancke', 1939 Register return for Waxland Road, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5777K, Schedule Number: 127, Sub-schedule Number: 2.

⁴ 'Rose Adams', 1901 Census Return for Whitehall Street, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Piece: 2750; Folio: 72; p. 36; 'Rose Hannah Brown', 1911 Census Return for Stourbridge Road, Hasbury, Worcestershire, Piece: 17472; Schedule Number: 16b; 'Rose Hannah Brown', 1939 Register return for Hagley Road, Hasbury, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5777J, Schedule Number: 15, Sub-schedule Number: 2.

⁵ 'Ada Heague', 1939 Register return for High Street, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5775H, Schedule Number: 58, Sub-schedule Number: 2. The address given in HIWC minutes is nearby 'Church Street'.

Mrs Brett Young⁶ Margaret	Committee member	Stepmother of the famed novelist, Francis Brett Young; Margaret was the second wife of Thomas Brett Young, a doctor, who was credited with establishing HIWC. Margaret and Thomas had 7 children, 6 of whom survived to 1911, and that year they employed 3 live-in domestic servants. Thomas died in 1938, and Margaret by 1939 was living alone with her daughter, a nurse, and no live-in servants.
Mrs C A Mather⁷ May	Committee Member	Married to Charles Arthur, who gave his occupation in 1939 as 'Machine Tool Fitter BSA' (presumably the Birmingham Small Arms factory). Register return indicates that she appears to have had 4 children. Although living at a different address in 1939 to that given in HIWC records, this is likely the correct individual, as she was the only Mrs C A Mather living in Halesowen at this time.
Mrs Moore⁸ Effie	Committee Member	Married to Arthur, who in 1911 gave his occupation as 'iron, steel and mineral broker'. Had 1 child, employed 3 live-in servants. Untraceable in 1939.
Mrs Abbiss⁹ Elizabeth Ann	Committee Member	Married to William, who in 1911 gave his occupation as 'schoolmaster'. Had 1 daughter and employed 1 live in servant. In 1939, William was widowed suggesting she died at some point between 1931 and 1939, though this was not mentioned in HIWC minutes.
Miss E Green Miss S Green Elizabeth and Sarah Ann¹⁰	Committee member	Both gave their occupation as 'schoolmistress, retired' in 1939, when they lived with their brother, a solicitor, and his wife.
Mrs H Coley¹¹ Mary	Committee Member from 1937	Married to Horace, who in 1939 gave his occupation as 'spade maker'. Had 1 child of school age in 1939. Invited to join the committee having been a service user in an earlier period.
Mrs Corbett	Committee Member from 1937	<i>Untraceable.</i>
Mrs B Jones¹² Beatrice	Committee Member from 1937	Married to Benjamin, who in 1939 gave his occupation as 'road curber' for the council. Had 2 children of school age in 1939, did not employ servants. Invited to join the committee having been a service user in an earlier period.

⁶ 'Margaret Brett-Young', 1911 Census return for Laurel Lane, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Piece: 17469; Schedule Number: 280; 'Margaret Brett-Young', 1939 Register return for Spies Lanes, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5775C, Schedule Number: 3, Sub-schedule Number: 1; 'Dr T. Brett Young', Western Morning News, 4 March 1938, p. 8.

⁷ 'May Mather', 1939 Register return for Springfield Road, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5774D, Schedule Number: 72, Sub-schedule Number: 2. The address given in HIWC Minutes is nearby Waxland Road, Halesowen.

⁸ 'Effie Moore', 1911 Census return for The Hurst, Hagley, Worcestershire, Piece: 17803; Schedule Number: 24.

⁹ 'Elizabeth Abbiss', 1911 Census return for Cobham Road, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Piece: 17470; Schedule Number: 189. 'William Abbiss', 1939 Register return for Cobham Road, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5775I, Schedule Number: 58, Sub-schedule Number: 1.

¹⁰ 'Elizabeth Green', 1939 Register return for Lapal Lane, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5775B, Schedule Number: 101, Sub-schedule Number: 1.

¹¹ 'Mary Coley', 1939 Register return for Windsor Street, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5777D, Schedule Number: 7, Sub-schedule Number: 2.

¹² 'Beatrice Jones', 1939 Register return for George Road, Halesowen, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5777C, Schedule Number: 119, Sub-schedule Number: 2.

Miss Warmington ¹³ <i>Constance</i>	Committee Member from 1937	Retired Maternity Nurse in 1939; likely asked to join committee because of her professional expertise.
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Table 18: Voluntary Committee members, Halesowen Infant Welfare Centre.

¹³ 'Constance Warmington', 1939 Register return for Walton Hill, Romsley, Worcestershire, Reference: RG 101/5802B, Schedule Number: 4, Sub-schedule Number: 3.

Appendix G: Executive Committee members and Collectors, Dudley Guest Hospital's Ladies' Linen League

Names and roles are taken from the League's Annual Reports of 1940, 1944 and 1947.¹ These give surname only; where individuals were traceable, their first names have been included in italics. As before, women were traced using census returns from 1911 and the 1939 National Register. For this organisation, all women on the organising committee were named, and so have been included even where they proved untraceable through such records.

Name:	Role on Executive Committee:	Biographical Information:
Mrs T Hanson ² <i>Norah</i>	President (all years)	Niece of Helene (below) and Edwin Thompson, wealthy brewers. Married to Thomas Hanson, heir to Julia Hanson and Sons brewing company, though he died in 1927, leaving her widowed and wealthy. Gave her occupation as Director and Assistant Secretary of Public Company on 1939 Register; employed 3 domestic servants that year. Was a JP.
Mrs O Grazebrook ³ <i>Margery Alice</i>	Secretary (all years)	Married to Owen Grazebrook, a wealthy industrialist and manager of Grazebrook ironworks, a family business of almost 200 years standing. Employed 6 domestic servants in 1939. Was a registered VAD Nurse.
Mrs Hugh Smith ⁴ <i>Lucy Eleanor</i>	Treasurer (all years); collector	Married to Hugh Smith, doctor at Dudley Guest. Employed 2 domestic servants in 1911.
Mrs E J Thompson ⁵ <i>Helene</i>	Member, 1940	Married to Edward John Thompson (discussed in chapter). Employed 3 domestic servants in 1911.
Mrs Alan Thompson ⁶	Member, 1944 and 1947	Daughter-in-law of the above. This branch of the family was untraceable through census and Register data, but her husband Alan (sometimes George Alan) was the son of Edward Thompson and also on the Board of Management.

¹ Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, DGU/3/10, *Dudley Ladies' Linen League Collection*, 29th Annual Report, 1940; 33rd Annual Report, 1944 and 36th Annual Report, 1947.

² 'Norah Thompson', (1901), *1901 Census return for Dibdale Street, Sedgley, Staffordshire*, Piece: 2738; Folio: 109; p. 18; 'Norah Hanson', (1911), *1911 Census return for Dixon's Green, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Piece: 17439; Schedule Number: 140; No author, Thomas Hanson Obituary, *Blocksidge's Almanack for Dudley 1928*, (Dudley: E. Blocksidge, 1928), p. 136; 'Norah Hanson', (1939), *1939 Register Return for Cot Lane, Brierley Hill, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5378H, Schedule Number: 154.

³ 'Margery Grazebrook', (1939), *1939 Register return for Himley House, Himley, Worcestershire*, Reference: RG 101/5475A, Schedule Number: 94; the bicentenary of Grazebrook Ltd from: 'Talk of the Midlands', *Birmingham Gazette*, 16 June 1950, p. 4.

⁴ 'Lucy Smith', (1911), *1911 Census return for North Street, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Piece: 17435; Schedule Number: 265. Per the Annual Reports, the Smiths lived at 37, Paganal Street, Dudley from at least 1940, but they do not appear on the 1939 National Register.

⁵ 'Helene Thompson', (1911), *1911 Census return for Himley Road, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Piece: 17433; Schedule Number: 120; also: 'Mr E. J. Thompson', *Birmingham Post*, 13 January 1941, p. 1.

⁶ For mentions of George Alan Thompson, see for instance: 'Gift of land to Dudley Guest Hospital', *Birmingham Gazette*, 21 July 1938, p. 4, where Thompson Jr. deputised for his father.

Mrs Messiter⁷ <i>Isabella</i>	One of the League's founders; Chairman, 1940	Married to Matthew Messiter, surgeon at Dudley Guest. Founding member of League, and its first Treasurer (per AR 1944). Died c. 1943. Employed 2 domestic servants in 1911.
Mrs Cyril Messiter⁸ <i>Rona</i>	Member, all years	Daughter-in-law of the above. Married to Cyril, also a surgeon at Dudley Guest. Employed 1 domestic servant in 1939.
Mrs B H Bate⁹ <i>Lizzie</i>	Member, 1940; also collector; Secretary from 1944	Married to Benjamin, a solicitor. Originally from Rowley Regis, and continued to work as a collector for this area. By 1939, had moved to Belbroughton, a village in rural Worcestershire. Employed 2 domestic servants in 1939.
Miss Mallows¹⁰ <i>Emma</i>	Member, 1940; collector	Matron at Dudley Guest Hospital.
Mrs Stewart Smith	Member, 1940 and 1944.	<i>Untraceable</i>
Mrs J W Sargent¹¹ <i>Annie Elizabeth</i>	Member, 1940; collector	Married to James Sargent, a teacher at a Dudley school.
Mrs Stuart King¹² <i>Mabel</i>	Member, all years; collector	Married to Frederick Stuart King, teacher at Dudley Grammar School in 1940.
Mrs E Ailsby¹³ <i>Mary</i>	Member, all years; collector	Married to Ernest Ailsby, a master tailor.
Mrs J L Hillman <i>Dorothy¹⁴</i>	Member, 1944 and 1947	Married to Joseph Hillman, Managing Director of a leather business. Employed at least 3 domestic servants in 1939. Was a JP.
Mrs T Chattin¹⁵ <i>Olive</i>	Member, 1944 and 1947; collector	Married to Thomas Chattin, co-owner of Chattin & Horton Ltd., a drapery and furnishing company which made frequent donations to the League.
Mrs Parker	Member 1944 and 1947; collector	<i>Untraceable</i>
Mrs Robotham¹⁶ <i>Edith</i>	Member, 1947	Married to Arthur Robotham, sales manager of a car showroom. Was a JP and also active within Dudley Townswomen's Guild and Dudley WVS.
Mrs G Harrison	Member, 1947; collector	<i>Untraceable</i>

⁷ 'Isabella Messiter', (1911), *1911 Census return for Priory Road, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Piece: 17428; Schedule Number: 295.

⁸ 'Rona Messiter', (1939), *1939 Register Return for Ednam Road, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Reference: RG 101/5747G, Schedule Number: 85.

⁹ 'Lizzie Bate', (1911), *1911 Census return for Siveters Lane, Rowley Regis, Worcestershire*, Piece: 17356, Schedule Number: 212; 'Lizzie Bate', (1939), *1939 Register Return for Lydiate House, Belbroughton, Worcestershire*, Reference: RG 101/5803A, Schedule Number: 240.

¹⁰ 'Emma Mallows', (1939), *1939 Register Return for Tipton Road, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Reference: RG 101/5755H, Schedule Number: 1.

¹¹ 'Annie Sargent', (1939), *1939 Register Return for Sedgley Road, Tipton, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5435D, Schedule Number: 213.

¹² 'Mabel Stuart King', (1911), *1911 Census Return for Rollason Road, Dudley*, Piece: 17441; Schedule Number: 101; No Author, *Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire for 1940*, (London: Kelly's Directories Ltd., 1940), Dudley, p. 89.

¹³ 'Mary Ailsby', (1939), *1939 Register Return for Wellington Road, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Reference: RG 101/5750B, Schedule Number: 83.

¹⁴ 'Dorothy Hillman', (1939), *1939 Register Return for Oakham Road, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Reference: RG 101/5755G, Schedule Number: 23.

¹⁵ 'Olive Chattin', (1939), *1939 Register Return for High Ercal Avenue, Brierley Hill, Staffordshire*, Reference: RG 101/5376H, Schedule Number: 40.

¹⁶ 'Edith Robotham', (1939), *1939 Register for St James's Road, Dudley, Worcestershire*, Reference: RG 101/5747B, Schedule Number: 77.

Miss Hardman	Member, 1944 and 1947; collector	Matron at the Hospital – appears to have replaced Emma Mallows who retired during the war. ¹⁷ Unable to trace further.
Mrs Rollason	Member, 1947; collector	<i>Untraceable</i>

Table 19: Executive Committee Members, Dudley Ladies' Linen League.

The League had a larger number of Collectors than Executive Committee members. Individuals are listed below in the order in which they appear in the Annual Reports. (x) indicates the years in which the individual acted as a collector for the League. (*) indicates that the woman was also on the Executive Committee.

Name:	1940:	1944:	1947:
Mrs Temple	X	X	X
Mrs Rogers	X	X	X
Miss Mallows (Matron)*	X		
Nurse Brown	X		
Mrs Ailsby*	X	X	X
Mrs Wakelam	X	X	X
Mrs Parker*	X	X	X
Mrs Stuart King	X	X	X
Mrs MacCormac	X	X	X
Mrs Hugh Smith*	X	X	X
Mrs Hotchkiss	X	X	X
Miss M. E. Shaw	X	X	
Mrs T. Chattin*	X	X	X
Mrs Plant	X	X	
Miss Wilson	X	X	
Mrs J. Lewis Freakley	X	X	X
Miss Audrey Peacock	X		
Mrs J. W. Sargent*	X		
Miss D. F. Hughes	X	X	X
Mrs Bate*	X	X	X
Mrs Taylor	X		
Mrs Mullett	X		
Mrs G. Harrison*	X	X	X
Mrs P. H. Edwards		X	X
Miss Hardman (Matron)*		X	X
Mrs Rollason*		X	X
Mrs D. G. Lloyd		X	X
Mrs Mobberley		X	X
Miss Mason		X	X
Mrs W. Willetts		X	
Mrs Ireland		X	
Miss Jordan Mansell		X	X

¹⁷ Mallows took retirement from the Hospital around 1941. Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, DGU/5/63, 'Grant to retiring matron (Mallows)', 1938—44.

Mrs Kendrick, JP		X	X
Mrs Bergendorff			X
Mrs Grove			X
Mrs Whitehouse			X
Mrs W. E. Woodcock			X
Miss Ison			X

Table 20: Collectors, Dudley Ladies' Linen League.

Appendix H: Women Councillors elected in the Black Country, 1910—1951

This appendix provides some brief detail on the women councillors elected in the Black Country between 1910 and 1951. Short detail on each council is also included.

Bilston:

Urban District Council, 15 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Hattie Holland ¹	Independent	1930	
Miss Audrey Chettle ²	Conservative	1940	Mayor of Bilston, 1949.
Miss Annie Fellows ³	Labour	1945	

Table 21: Women Councillors, Bilston.

Brierley Hill:

Urban District Council, 18 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Florence Hodgettes ⁴	Independent	1928	
Miss Gladys Pitt ⁵	Independent	1931	

Table 22: Women Councillors, Brierley Hill.

Darlaston:

Urban District Council, 20 seats.

¹ 'Bilston Election', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 26 March 1930, p. 5; 'Bilston by-election', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 22 November 1933, p. 5.

² 'Bilston Town Council', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 November 1940, p. 5; 'Obituary. Mrs Audrey C. Hartill', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 7 April 1961, p. 18.

³ 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands', *Evening Dispatch*, 2 November 1945, p. 3.

⁴ 'Urban District Council Elections, 1928', *Woman's Leader*, 4 May 1928, p. 106.

⁵ 'Urban District Council Elections', *Woman's Leader*, 17 April 1931, p. 86.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Edith Chorley ⁶	Labour	1925	

Table 23: Women Councillors, Darlaston.

Dudley:

County Borough Council, 30 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Julia Taylor ⁷	Labour	1933	
Mrs Doris Chambers ⁸	Labour	1938	

Table 24: Women Councillors, Dudley.

Halesowen:

Rural District Council to 1925 then Urban District Council, until 1931, when incorporated as a municipal borough. 16 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Annie Maria Hill ⁹	Liberal	1929	
Mrs Ethel May Harrison ¹⁰	Independent	1937	

Table 25: Women Councillors, Halesowen.

Oldbury:

Urban District Council, 21 seats.

⁶ 'Urban Council Elections', *Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 11 April 1925, p. 4.

⁷ *Blocksidge's Illustrated Dudley Almanack, 1940*, (Dudley: E. Blocksidge Ltd., 1940), p. 13; 'Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 November 1946, p. 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 'District Council Elections', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 8 March 1929, p. 11; 'Halesowen Elections', *Birmingham Gazette*, 21 November 1936, p. 7.

¹⁰ 'Candidates Nominated for Municipal Elections', *Birmingham Gazette*, 23 October 1937, p. 5.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Annie Lennard ¹¹	Labour	1923	From 1929, minor electoral boundary changes meant her ward became part of Smethwick Council. She went on to become an Alderman and was Mayor of Smethwick in 1952—1953.
Mrs L Briscoe-Smith ¹²	Unionist	1927	Alderman from 1936.
Mrs M Growcott ¹³	Independent	1927	
Mrs Vera Ellen Rose ¹⁴	Independent	1938	Husband George Rose had been a councillor since 1931.
Mrs Rosalie Smallwood ¹⁵	Liberal	c. 1939	
Mrs Catherine Nash ¹⁶	Labour	1945	
Mrs Miriam Garratt ¹⁷	Labour	1945	
Mrs Ruby Starkie ¹⁸	Labour	1945	Mayor of Oldbury, 1957.
Mrs Ethel Gunn ¹⁹	Labour	1946	
Mrs Eva Pine ²⁰	Conservative	1947	
Mrs Winifred Eckford ²¹	Conservative	1950	
Mrs Doris Hollyoake ²²	Labour	1951	Husband Wilfred also a Labour councillor from 1946—1951. Mayor of Oldbury, 1967. Awarded the MBE for 'political and public services', 1965.

Table 26: Women Councillors, Oldbury.

Rowley Regis:

Urban District Council to 1933, when incorporated as a Borough; 24 seats.

¹¹ 'Elections in Midlands', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 9 March 1923, p. 3; '3 Women to be Freemen', *Birmingham Gazette*, 31 December 1955, p. 3.

¹² 'Elections in the Midlands', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 5 April 1927, p. 12; 'Women's Economy Task', *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1931, p. 2.

¹³ 'Midland Election Nominations', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 March 1931, p. 7.

¹⁴ 'Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 1 December 1938, p. 7.

¹⁵ For party: 'Returns from 37 other boroughs', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 November 1947, p. 3. Appears in 1940 Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire as councillor for Rounds Green Ward. Appears to be elected in by-election around 1939.

¹⁶ 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands', *Evening Dispatch*, 2 November 1945, p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid; 'Oldbury to have Woman Mayor', *Birmingham Post and Gazette*, 6 February 1957, p. 7.

¹⁹ 'Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1946, p. 3.

²⁰ 'Returns from 37 other boroughs', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 November 1947, p. 3.

²¹ 'The Elections: Results from Midland Boroughs', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 12 May 1950, p. 3.

²² 'Midlands Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 11 May 1951, p. 5; 'Five Midland People Honoured at Palace', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 November 1965, p. 29; 'Ex-councillors wedded bliss', *Sandwell Evening Mail*, 13 November 1986, p. 52.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Miss Sarah Elizabeth Wesley ²³	Independent	1928	
Mrs Annie Smart ²⁴	Independent	1935	
Mrs Mary Holden ²⁵	Independent	1935	Took over her husband's seat when he was made an Alderman.
Miss Lilian Lench ²⁶	Unionist	1937	Her father had been a councillor.
Mrs Polly Pritchard ²⁷	Labour	1946	Mayor of Rowley Regis, 1959
Mrs E Barker ²⁸	Labour	1946	

Table 27: Women Councillors, Rowley Regis.

Smethwick:

Municipal Borough Council, 18 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Edith Mary Sands ²⁹	Labour	1921	Mayor of Smethwick, 1931 and 1932
Mrs A Flattery ³⁰	Labour	1921	
Mrs Nora Chesney ³¹	Unionist	1928	
Mrs Elsie Farley ³²	Labour	1929	Mayor of Smethwick, 1946
Mrs Emma Lee ³³	Labour	1929	Mayor of Smethwick, 1944
Mrs M Kimberley ³⁴	Labour	1935	
Miss E Woodcock ³⁵	Unionist	1936	Father, Charles Woodcock, served as Unionist councillor in Smethwick for many years and was Mayor on 3 occasions (1908, 1919 and 1920). Brother Herbert Charles Woodcock was MP for Thornbury, 1922—23 and Everton, 1924—1929.

²³ 'Urban District Council Elections, 1928', *The Woman's Leader*, 4 May 1928, p. 106; 'Rowley Regis Elections', *Birmingham Gazette*, 26 November 1936, p. 7.

²⁴ 'Midland Municipal Election Nominations', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 24 October 1935, p. 3.

²⁵ 'Wife Succeeds Husband at Rowley Regis', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 18 July 1935, p. 7.

²⁶ 'Midland Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1937, p. 7; 'Obituary. Miss Lilian Lench', *Birmingham Post*, 19 October 1964, p. 5.

²⁷ 'Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1946, p. 3; 'Rowley's First Woman Mayor', *Birmingham Post*, 26 May 1959, p. 9.

²⁸ 'Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs'.

²⁹ 'Municipal Elections', *Smethwick Telephone*, 5 November 1921, p. 3; 'Election of Mayor', *Smethwick Telephone*, 14 November 1931, p. 7.

³⁰ 'Municipal Elections', *Smethwick Telephone*, 5 November 1921, p. 3.

³¹ 'Greater Smethwick. Elections in the new wards', *Smethwick Telephone*, 24 March 1928, p. 3.

³² 'Municipal Election', *Smethwick Telephone*, 16 March 1929, p. 2.

³³ 'Municipal Elections', *Smethwick Telephone*, 9 November 1929, p. 3.

³⁴ 'Birmingham and Other Midland Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1935, p. 5.

³⁵ 'Midland Elections', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 November 1936, p. 9; for father: 'Alderman Charles Woodcock, JP', *Smethwick Telephone*, 2 June 1923, p. 5.

Mrs A Butler ³⁶	Conservative	1937	
Mrs Esther Seager ³⁷	Labour	1945	Mayor of Smethwick, 1955
Mrs M Richards ³⁸	Labour	1949	

Table 28: Women Councillors, Smethwick.

Stourbridge:

Municipal Borough Council, 18 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Emily Francis ³⁹	Independent	1918	Alderman from 1940
Miss Mary Thomas ⁴⁰	Independent	1927	
Mrs Elinor Stuart ⁴¹	Independent	1931	
Mrs Mabel Lunt ⁴²	Independent	1935	
Miss E Moody ⁴³	Independent	1945	Father had been a councillor from 1912 to his sudden death in 1926; her brother had been due to stand in 1945 but was still in the army so she took his place.
Miss A Davies ⁴⁴	Labour	1949	

Table 29: Women Councillors, Stourbridge.

Tipton:

Urban District Council, 24 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Lucy Bagnall ⁴⁵	Independent	1931	

³⁶ 'Conservatives Gain Five in Birmingham', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1937, p. 5.

³⁷ 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands', *Evening Dispatch*, 2 November 1945, p. 3.

³⁸ 'Labour Suffers in Midland Polls', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 May 1949, p. 3.

³⁹ 'Lady to Fight', *Birmingham Gazette*, 29 October 1923, p. 3. Newspaper records not in existence for 1918. Appears in 1921 Kelly's Directory of Worcestershire as councillor for St Thomas's Ward through 1923.

⁴⁰ 'Midland Elections. Labour Gains', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 November 1927, p. 6.

⁴¹ 'Results of Midlands Elections', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 November 1931, p. 5.

⁴² 'Stourbridge prospects', *Birmingham Gazette*, 22 October 1935, p. 5.

⁴³ 'Stourbridge Bye-Election', *County Express*, 26 October 1912, p. 2; 'Stourbridge', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 24 October 1945, p. 5.

⁴⁴ 'Labour suffers in Midland polls', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 May 1949, p. 3.

⁴⁵ 'Urban District Council Elections', *Woman's Leader*, 17 April 1931, p. 86; 'Midland Election Nominations', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 March 1931, p. 7.

Mrs R Beecham ⁴⁶		1931	<i>Party affiliation unclear – appears in no electoral returns.</i>
Mrs Eliza Taylor Beauchamp ⁴⁷	Conservative (likely)	1931	Her husband, Thomas, had been a Conservative councillor until his death in 1931 (she did not fill his seat, but was elected separately that year). It is likely she had the same party affiliations. These were not recorded in newspaper returns.
Mrs W Wittingham ⁴⁸	Independent	1938	
Mrs Hannah Geneva Cox ⁴⁹	Labour	1944	Co-opted when her husband, Councillor Thomas Cox, died but won election the following year. Mayor of Tipton, 1954.
Mrs Olive Gertrude Gutteridge ⁵⁰	Labour	1946	

Table 30: Women Councillors, Tipton.

Walsall:

County Borough Council, 30 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Miss Ada Newman ⁵¹	Unionist	1910	Father had been active member of Walsall Unionist party; had also been a councillor and Mayor of Walsall.
Mrs Gertrude Cresswell ⁵²	Labour	1925	Mayor of Walsall, 1934; Alderman from 1940
Mrs Annie McShane ⁵³	Labour	1930	Mayor of Walsall, 1942. Husband John James McShane was Labour MP for Walsall 1929—1931. Grandfather had been a councillor and Mayor of Walsall in 1893.
Mrs Mary Bradley Dewsbury ⁵⁴	Labour	1931	
Mrs Jane Deakin ⁵⁵	Labour	1932	
Mrs Eva Brockhurst ⁵⁶	Liberal	1939	Mayor of Walsall, 1955; Alderman from 1958.

⁴⁶ 'Urban District Council Elections', *Woman's Leader*, 17 April 1931, p. 86.

⁴⁷ 'Tipton Councillor Dead', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 April 1930, p. 4; 'Obituary. Mrs E. T. Beauchamp', *Birmingham Post*, 24 January 1968, p. 2.

⁴⁸ 'Midland Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1938, p. 4.

⁴⁹ 'Tipton's First Woman Mayor', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 23 February 1954, p. 3.

⁵⁰ 'Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1946, p. 3.

⁵¹ 'Death of Walsall Lady', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30 November 1929, p. 5.

⁵² 'Lady Mayor', *Belper News*, 16 November 1934, p. 6.

⁵³ 'Walsall's New Mayor', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 14 November 1942, p. 5.

⁵⁴ 'Results of Midlands Elections'.

⁵⁵ 'How the candidates fared in Midland Civic Elections', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1932, p. 5.

⁵⁶ 'Hatherton's New Councillor', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 6 May 1939, p. 9; 'Obituary. Mrs Eva Brockhurst', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 March 1976, p. 17.

Mrs Lizzie Harrington ⁵⁷	Labour	1945	
Mrs Alice Taylor ⁵⁸	Labour	1945	
Mrs Dora Middleton ⁵⁹	Labour	1945	Mayor of Walsall, 1959.
Mrs Edith Riley ⁶⁰	Labour	1945	
Mrs Violet Parkes ⁶¹	Independent	1950	Husband was also a local councillor.
Miss Ethel Flint ⁶²	Conservative	1951	Mayor of Walsall, 1966.
Mrs L Summers ⁶³	Independent	1951	

Table 31: Women Councillors, Walsall.

Wednesbury:

Urban District Council, 12 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Miss Dorothy Hossack ⁶⁴	Labour	1934	
Mrs Dora Wesson ⁶⁵	Unionist	1937	Husband had been a councillor before his death the previous year.
Mrs May Bayley ⁶⁶	Independent	1938	
Mrs E Price ⁶⁷	Labour	1945	

Table 32: Women Councillors, Wednesbury.

West Bromwich:

County Borough Council, 24 seats.

⁵⁷ 'Five Labour Gains', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 3 November 1945, p. 5.

⁵⁸ 'Five Labour Gains'.

⁵⁹ Ibid; 'Socialist Rebel Elected Mayor', *Birmingham Post*, 26 May 1959, p. 9.

⁶⁰ 'Five Labour Gains',

⁶¹ 'The Elections: Results from Midland Boroughs'; 'Elections and Party Politics', *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 11 March 1966, p. 12.

⁶² "'Emma's death ends years of epic service', *Walsall Observer*, 26 January 1968, p. 7.

⁶³ 'Midlands Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 11 May 1951, p. 5.

⁶⁴ 'Why she took up politics', *Birmingham Gazette*, 5 November 1934, p. 15.

⁶⁵ 'Midland Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1937, p. 7; 'New Magistrates', *Birmingham Gazette*, 25 July 1941, p. 4.

⁶⁶ 'Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 1 December 1938, p. 7.

⁶⁷ 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands'.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Miss Charlotte Emma Hazel ⁶⁸	Liberal	1918	Brother MP for West Bromwich, 1906—1910.
Mrs Grace Cottrell ⁶⁹	Independent	1918	Mayor of West Bromwich 1926 and 1927. Husband Thomas and father (Frederick Jefferson) both local councillors.
Mrs Edith Annie Smallman ⁷⁰	Independent	1929	Mayor of West Bromwich, 1941
Mrs Annie Elizabeth Caudwell ⁷¹	Labour	1929	Mayor of West Bromwich, 1942
Mrs Caroline Johnston ⁷²	Labour	1930	
Mrs Lydia Pearson ⁷³	Independent	1931	
Miss Grace Cottrell (Mrs Wilkes) ⁷⁴	Independent	1937	Mayor of West Bromwich, 1949. Mother (Grace Cottrell above) and father both Mayor.
Miss V Steed ⁷⁵	Labour	1945	
Mrs E Carpenter ⁷⁶	Labour	1945	
Mrs R Parfitt ⁷⁷	Labour	1946	
Mrs N Sutton ⁷⁸	Labour	1946	
Mrs Eva Grant ⁷⁹	Independent	1949	Mayor of West Bromwich, 1955. Husband also a councillor.
Mrs Minnie Evitts ⁸⁰	Labour	1949	Mayor of West Bromwich, 1961.
Mrs Janet Scott ⁸¹	Labour	1949	Mayor of West Bromwich, 1959.

Table 33: Women Councillors, West Bromwich.

⁶⁸ 'West Bromwich Municipal Election', *Midland Chronicle*, 27 October 1918, p. 3, via Sandwell Archives and Community History Centre (SACHS).

⁶⁹ 'West Bromwich Municipal Election'; 'First Lady Mayor of West Bromwich', *Midland Chronicle*, 12 November 1926, p. 5, via SCHAS.

⁷⁰ 'West Bromwich', *Evening Despatch*, 10 November 1941, p. 3; 'For 2nd Year a Woman will be Mayor of West Bromwich', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 July 1942, p. 4.

⁷¹ 'Results of the Midlands Elections', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 November 1929, p. 3; 'For 2nd Year a Woman will be Mayor of West Bromwich'.

⁷² 'Midland Municipal Election Nominations', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 24 October 1935, p. 3.

⁷³ 'Labour Leaders have brought catastrophe upon themselves', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 29 October 1931, p. 7.

⁷⁴ 'Midland Municipal Election Nominations'; 'Dad, Mother, Daughter As Mayor', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 February 1949, p. 3.

⁷⁵ 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands'.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ 'Labour Forges Ahead in Midland Boroughs'.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ 'Midland Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 May 1949, p. 5; 'Woman Mayor of West Bromwich', *Birmingham Post*, 3 February 1955, p. 1.

⁸⁰ 'Midland Election Results', 13 May 1949; 'Socialist versus Socialist for Mayoralty', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 19 May 1961, p. 35; 'Mayor Takes Trip in Helicopter', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 16 June 1961, p. 28.

⁸¹ 'Midland Election Results', 13 May 1949; 'Mayor's Husband Will Be "Consort"', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 February 1959, p. 23.

Wolverhampton:

County Borough Council, 39 seats.

Name:	Party affiliations:	Year First Elected:	Other relevant information:
Mrs Emma Sproson ⁸²	Labour	1921	
Miss Mary Lilly Perry ⁸³	Independent	1925	
Mrs Edith Palmer ⁸⁴	Labour	1929	Husband had been a councillor before she was elected and, when she died mid-term in 1934, was elected in her place.
Mrs Alice Braybrook ⁸⁵	Labour	1937	Alderman from 1952; Mayor of Wolverhampton, 1953
Dr Margaret Brown MacKay ⁸⁶	Independent (likely)	1942	Filled a casual vacancy during the war; the councillor she replaced had been an Independent, thus it appears she was, too.
Mrs Mabel Dale ⁸⁷	Labour	1945	
Mrs Ruby Ilsley ⁸⁸	Labour	1945	Alderman from 1952; Mayor of Wolverhampton, 1957.
Mrs E Haydon ⁸⁹	Independent	1949	
Mrs W Reynolds ⁹⁰	Labour	1951	

Table 34: Women Councillors, Wolverhampton.

⁸² 'Midland Polling Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1921, p. 5.

⁸³ 'Municipal Elections in Midlands', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 November 1925, p. 3.

⁸⁴ 'Results of the Midlands Elections', *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 November 1929, p. 3; 'Husband Succeeds Wife', *Birmingham Gazette*, May 1936, p. 13.

⁸⁵ 'Woman Mayor for Wolverhampton', *Birmingham Gazette*, 19 May 1953, p. 3; 'Two women who made civic history at Wolverhampton', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 20 May 1952, p. 5.

⁸⁶ 'New Council Member', *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 31 October 1942, p. 6.

⁸⁷ 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands'.

⁸⁸ 'How the Labour Party Swept the Midlands'; 'Two women who made civic history at Wolverhampton'; 'The Mayor of Wolverhampton', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 November 1957, p. 20.

⁸⁹ 'Midland Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 May 1949, p. 5.

⁹⁰ 'Midlands Election Results', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 11 May 1951, p. 5.

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