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## A New Model for Marriage and Motherhood in Postwar Britain, 1945-1960

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A NEW MODEL FOR MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD IN POSTWAR BRITAIN

1945-1960

By

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A senior thesis submitted to the Humanities Faculty of Dominican University of California in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Humanities

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## ABSTRACT

Following the end of the Second World War in 1945, married women, who had been such a crucial part of the British workforce during the war, returned to domestic roles. British government policy focused on relieving poverty and promoting motherhood: pregnant women received maternity benefits and mothers received a family allowance. Although historians such as Martin Pugh argued that women were happy to leave the workplace and enjoy the stability and relative ease of domestic life, women's own stories illustrate the growing frustration with a lack of choice. By examining historical and sociological research, analyzing media influences on women's attitudes towards domesticity and work, and listening to women's oral histories, a different picture emerges. In the 1944 Education Act the government introduced free secondary education and a higher school leaving age, providing the first steps towards improved education for young women. From 1948 free healthcare gave married women access to contraception and allowed them to plan the timing and number of pregnancies. Married women, no longer tied to large families and increasingly better educated, were able to explore other opportunities outside the home. By 1960 a new model of marriage and motherhood emerged, with married women staying at home when their children were small but returning to the workplace once their children entered full time school. Women were no longer confined to domestic roles.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mother Bridget Hirst and my daughter Helena Bland for inspiring me to research women's roles since the Second World War. It is through hearing my mother's stories that I began to realize and appreciate how much women today owe the women of yesterday.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1941 the Conservative government commissioned a report from renowned economist and social reformer Sir William Beveridge, on how to rebuild Britain after the Second World War. The Conservative government recognized that the war would result in both economic and social recession. In 1942 Beveridge's *Social Insurance and Allied Services* identified "five giant evils" of disease, squalor, want, ignorance and idleness. Beveridge concluded that each of these giants needed to be tackled through government welfare programs to provide a healthy and able workforce. Without government intervention, Beveridge argued that British people and British industry would spiral into decline. This paper examines the impact of government policies to tackle the "five giant evils" specifically on the lives of working women, both middle-class and working-class, in postwar Britain from 1945 to 1960, and explores how these policies resulted in a new model for marriage and motherhood.

Major legislation including the 1944 Butler Education Act and the 1946 National Insurance Act, changed the lives of women in postwar Britain, both inadvertently and by design. A new model for motherhood emerged in the 1950s, based on the concept of three uniquely different stages of adulthood for women: 1) single women employed full time, 2) married women engaged in domestic duties full time, 3) a new stage of married women employed in part time work, or retired when their children are older (Myrdal and Viola 50). Despite definite progress in education and healthcare during the 1940s and 1950s many British women remained second-class citizens at school, at work and at home with continued pressure to conform to the domestic ideal of marriage and family first. Following their major contribution to British industry during the Second World

War, women returned to the home and motherhood until it became either socially acceptable or economically necessary for them to return to work. As opportunities grew for women in further education and part time work, and welfare benefits eased the financial burden for families, British women began to explore a new model for marriage and motherhood.

Research for this paper includes historical, sociological and statistical studies and analyses, and consideration of both oral and written histories of women who lived in Britain from 1945 to 1960. Starting with a background on women at work during the Second World War and the attractions of domestic life after the war, this paper discusses how government policies supported women in domestic roles. Focusing on four of Beveridge's "five giant evils" the paper examines "want" and the welfare state, "disease" and the introduction of the National Health Service, "ignorance" and changes to education policy and finally "idleness" and how the government, popular media and women's groups reinforced women's work as primarily domestic. The fifth evil, "squalor," and government policies to improve housing in Britain, is not discussed in this paper as this subject has been thoroughly analyzed and documented by other historical research. Finally, as the economy demanded more workers, research shows that the model for marriage and motherhood began to change; part time work became a new option and married women returned to the workplace.

## WOMEN AND WORK DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Women became a crucial part of the British workforce during the war, and married women were in demand. In 1941 the government introduced wartime industrial conscription for all unmarried women and childless widows between the ages of 20 and 30 (1941 National Service Act, Parliament.uk). As demand for workers grew in 1943, conscription was extended to include housewives and mothers of children over 14 years of age, and women between the ages of 40 and 50 (Beaumont, 129). Women flocked to fill jobs vacated by servicemen; they worked in education, agriculture, manufacturing and also joined the armed forces as ambulance drivers, nurses and administrators. By 1943, approximately 42% of all women, 7.25 million in total, were working in Britain (both full and part time); this included 470,000 in the armed services, and 900,000 mothers. Ninety one percent of all single women 18 to 40 were employed (Central Statistics Office, National Archives). Women not employed were either raising families with young children, disabled and therefore unable to work, or past the age of 50. Married women with children over 14 (and therefore still in school) were a major part of the war effort.

To hire enough women workers, British industries were forced to change their hiring policies by removing the marriage bar and treating married and single women as equals. The marriage bar had allowed companies to legally discriminate against married women; married women were not hired, and once single women married they could chose to resign or be fired. This policy was originally introduced before and after the First World War to secure jobs for men during a time of economic depression, and to dissuade married women from staying at work as employers believed they would be unable to cope with the challenges of balancing both domestic and work life (Royal

Commission 1912). In addition to changes in hiring policies, the Conservative government in power during the Second World War recognized the need to provide services to support married women at work, and subsidized nurseries to provide child-care. Many factories also opened canteens to provide women with meals during the work-day (Myrdal and Klein 68-71). Without these provisions, married women would not have been able to return to work.

Although the marriage bar was abandoned during the war by both the government and private industry, discrimination against women workers remained. In her research paper "Britain at Work," Professor of Labour History Mary Davis concluded that despite the high demand for women workers during the war, many women performing the same tasks as men, women's pay remained significantly lower, "on average 53% of that of the men they had replaced." Davis found that employers and trade unions signed agreements "permitting the temporary substitution of men by women" during the war. The temporary basis of these agreements allowed all employers to "dilute" wages, an acceptable practice during wartime but increasingly opposed in the 1950s and 1960s. During the war Britain had relied upon a substantial female workforce, working for less money than their male counterparts, but as the war ended millions of demobilized men returned to Britain looking for work and once again male workers were given preference over women workers.

Sam Aaronovitch and Ron Smith reported in *The Political Economy of British Capitalism* that nearly 8 million people moved from military to civilian work by the end of 1946 (Aaronovitch and Smith 76). These numbers show the intense competition for jobs in Britain after the war, for both men and women, particularly as many jobs vital to

the war effort would no longer be needed, for example, the manufacture of weapons, aircraft, parachutes and uniforms. Since women were no longer essential to the British workforce, preference was given returning servicemen and marriage bars were reintroduced both in factories and public services (Women in the Civil Service – History). Eleanor Rathbone, a Member of Parliament speaking in the House of Commons in 1942, expressed concern about The Restoration of Pre-War Services Act (1942) and its impact on women in industry. The Act proposed to abolish the temporary working conditions permitted to address labor shortages during the war, in particular the hiring of women rather than men in specific jobs. Rathbone observed that many women now held positions in industry that were no longer the same as their male predecessors due to innovations. Rathbone wondered how these “new” jobs could be legally given to men who had never performed them (House of Commons Debate, 1942). Rathbone stressed that although women were supportive of men returning to work, women should not be excluded from jobs they could clearly perform well. She insisted, “There is no desire by women to take advantage of the war situation to carve for themselves a new place at the expense of their male colleagues who have made sacrifices” (Debate, 1114). Rathbone insisted that the Bill would have the detrimental impact of returning women to what she described as “pre-war status.” In 1943 the Prime Minister Winston Churchill echoed these concerns; he observed that women’s lives had been forever changed during the war because having taken on extra responsibilities women “will be found to have definitely altered those social and sex balances which years of convention had established” (qtd. in Beaumont, 165). After the war these questions remained; how would women’s roles change after their significant contribution to the war effort? Would

married women in particular be prepared to accept a future role as only wives and mothers?

## WANT - THE INTRODUCTION OF THE WELFARE STATE

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the German bombing campaigns had devastated many cities, rationing was still enforced, and the country was almost bankrupt (Chandler and Hein 48). The Conservative government, now responsible for a country in great need of social and economic rebuilding, introduced policies to tackle the “five giant evils” of disease, squalor, want, ignorance and idleness as outlined in Sir William Beveridge’s report commissioned by the government in 1941 and published in 1942 (*Social Insurance and Allied Services* 170). Beveridge, a respected economist and expert on unemployment, understood that the future of Britain depended on the eradication of poverty and unemployment, and improvements to education, healthcare and benefits. He urged the government to provide for people who were forced below a minimum standard of living due to temporary loss of wages as a result of unemployment, sickness, retirement or the loss of a wage-earning spouse. Beveridge wrote in his report, “Now, when the war is abolishing landmarks of every kind, is the opportunity for using experience in a clear field. A revolutionary moment in the world’s history is a time for revolutions, not for patching” (*Social Insurance and Allied Services* 6).

One of Beveridge’s priorities was the financial support of women in domestic roles. In 1945 the Conservative government acted upon Beveridge’s recommendations to introduce the Family Allowance; in an attempt to relieve child poverty it provided married women with 5 shillings per week for each child after the firstborn (Family Allowance Act, National Archives). Eleanor Rathbone, women’s rights campaigner, had been asking the government to address this issue since 1917. In “The Remuneration of Women’s Services” Rathbone argued that the State should support women working in

domestic roles in the home and raising the next generation; work Rathbone described as “the most essential of all services to the State” (*The Economic Journal* 63). Twenty-eight years later the government finally addressed this need. This new government policy of providing Family Allowance to married women with children was a crucial part of the need to make domestic life attractive and hopefully lead to the population growth needed to expand the British population and rebuild the economy after the war. Making domestic life a viable option for married women, Beveridge believed, would also free up jobs for men.

In 1946, four years after the publication of Beveridge’s report, the newly installed Labour government, passed the National Insurance Act, which provided a “comprehensive system of unemployment, sickness, maternity and pension benefits funded by employers, employees and the government” (National Insurance Act, 1946). The National Insurance Act 1946 became “the blueprint for the modern welfare system” (National Insurance Act, National Archives) and embraced the concept of Britain as a welfare state; the government was responsible for providing financial support to all citizens with the goal of establishing a minimum standard of living for all. Women were once again beneficiaries of government policy. Maternity benefits were introduced for the first time: 4 pounds for the birth of each baby, 36 shillings a week for mothers who were normally employed and 20 shillings a week for mothers not employed for a period of 13 weeks (Robson, *Modern Law Review* p171-179). Maternity leave, once a financial strain for many households, now became part of British welfare policy and women were compensated for having children regardless of whether they had been employed prior to maternity leave. Once again the government was supporting women in domestic roles



and encouraged mothers to stay at home and raise their families. Beveridge was insistent that married women should not be under any financial pressure to return to work (Beaumont, 120).

Supporting marriage and motherhood was a key factor in government policy because economic recovery required a growth in population. Britain needed more workers and this gave married women an important role in the country's future. In 1944, planning for the end of the war, the Conservative government announced a Royal Commission on Population, to examine the causes and consequences of population trends. As part of their brief, the Commission examined marriage rates, birth rates and the impact of an aging population. The Commission's work, completed in 1949 under the Labour government, welcomed the increase in early marriages following the end of the war because this increase should result in increased birthrates.

*Table 1 Percentage of married women in Britain 1934 – 1947. Source: Report on the Royal Commission on Population, 1944-1949 (Journal of Royal Statistical Society. Series A. p43).*

	Women 20-24 % married	Women 25-29 % married
1934	27	59
1938	32	64
1947	44	73

The Commission recognized the financial burden many parents experienced when they started a family. They concluded that to encourage increased population, the government needed to improve the financial situation of young families by increasing Family Allowance, and providing means tested home help and day nurseries for mothers to ease the burden of domestic life particularly for large families. Means testing was a method of calculating benefits due to each family based on their income, allowing poorer families to claim higher levels of benefits (Grebenik, *International Journal of Science*

p298-300). The Royal Commission on Population was clear that its goal was not to end freedom of choice for women regarding marriage or motherhood, rather to “render it easier for women to combine motherhood and the care of the home with outside activities’ (Tomlinson, “Democratic Socialism and Economic Policy,” 207).

Beveridge’s initial recommendation of 8 shillings a week had been reduced to 5 shillings a week in the Family Allowance Act (1945), and no adjustments had been made to this amount despite rising food prices. The Commission expressed concern that payments intended to provide a minimum standard of living for each child were, in the reality of 1949, only a subsidy to help with living expenses (Royal Commission on Population, 1944-1949). In 1952 the Conservative government, once again in power, finally increased Family Allowance to 8 shillings a week to ensure children received proper nutrition despite rising food prices and reduced government food subsidies. In 1956, the Family Allowance was extended to include the first child born in a family of two or more children. This was another attempt to support families financially, and alleviated the need for poorer families to send their eldest children out to work.

Beveridge believed that welfare reform would encourage motherhood and lead to an increased population and initially there was an increase in birthrates. He also believed that by encouraging women to stay at home to raise their families, demobilized men would have more access to jobs. Beveridge wrote in his report in 1942:

The attitude of the housewife to gainful employment outside the home should not be that of the single woman. She has other duties...Taken as a whole the Plan for Social Security puts a premium on marriage instead of penalizing it...In the next 30 years housewives as mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate

continuance of the British Race and of British ideals in the world (*Social Insurance and Allied Services* 51).

This argument was supported by the Trade Union Council in the 1948 annual report:

There is little doubt in the minds of the General Council that the home is one of the most important spheres for a woman worker and that it would be doing a great injury to the life of the nation if women were persuaded or forced to neglect their domestic duties in order to enter industry particularly where there are young children to cater for (qtd. in Davis).

With both the government and the trade unions strongly in support of married women working in the home, it is not surprising that so many women returned to domestic life.

## DISEASE – THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

The health of the British people was an important factor in economic and social rebuilding following the war. To address another of Beveridge's "five giant evils," disease, the government launched the National Health Service on July 5, 1948 providing free healthcare for all. For the first time, all women were guaranteed free pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare. Before 1948 most doctors charged fees for their services, restricting access to treatment, surgery, or drugs to those with the ability to pay. Free contraception was now available to married women; therefore, women could plan both the timing and the number of their pregnancies (National Health Service Overview, National Archives). For the first time, married women could choose when to get pregnant and decide how many children they could afford to raise. In addition, the provision of free maternity and childcare reduced stillbirths and infant deaths to the lowest levels on record in 1949 (*Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol 114. No 1, p38). Once again government policy had improved women's lives.

Following the war, according to historian Martin Pugh, there was a surge in the numbers of marriages and a subsequent baby boom; both believed to be a celebration of peace after years of war. First marriages rose from 75.7 per thousand population in 1946-1955, to 82.6 per thousand of population 1956-1960. Birth rates briefly increased from 15.9 per thousand of population 1941-1945, to 18 per thousand of population 1951-1955, before returning to wartime levels 1951-1955 (*Women and the Women's Movement in Britain* 292). In 1956 sociologists Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein found that British families were becoming smaller; in 1911 22% of families included more than five children, in 1951 only 4% of families included more than five children. By 1951 only

23% of British families had more than two children (*Women's Two Roles* 40-42). The concerns of the Royal Commission on Population that the availability of free contraception for married women would lead to lower birth rates had been realized; however, this was offset by lower infant mortality rates due to free childcare and improved immunizations.

There are differences in opinion about married women's returning to domestic life after the war. Pugh argued that women appeared eager to return to domestic life despite achieving greater independence during the war. Pugh suggested that war did not provide women with freedom at all. Working and providing childcare without the support of their husbands (as most married men were involved in the war effort) had been extremely stressful; therefore, the opportunity to return to the home was a respite to be welcomed. Pugh concluded that many women "greeted peacetime with a profound sense of relief; they both wanted and expected to return to normal family life" (283-291). Margaret Thatcher, Member of Parliament, reinforced this concept in her biography *The Path to Power*; she wrote, "The 1950s were, in a thousand different ways, the reawakening of normal happy life after the trials of post-war austerity." (72). Author Frances Partridge, a member of the famous literary Bloomsbury Set, also observed the social pressure to get married and "settle down" after the war, she wrote in her diaries *Everything to Lose*, about the despair of "lonely deserted wives, or those who never found a mate and fear it's now too late...longing to be one of a pair and dreading to be the odd one out" (107). Domestic life clearly had attractions for women in postwar Britain, as an antidote to wartime anxiety and stress and as a social norm. Beveridge's reforms also placed high value on motherhood, encouraging women to stay at home and raise their families.

While these examples illustrate that many women welcomed a return to domestic life, many did not agree. Phyllis Willmott despairingly described full time motherhood as “women’s inevitable lot” (119); she viewed this temporary role as one to be endured rather than enjoyed, “waiting for life to begin again” (*Joys and Sorrows* 121). For many women, domestic life was not so much a choice to be celebrated, but rather a return to normalcy.

## INEQUALITY - WOMEN BENEFITS

There is no doubt that despite increased welfare provisions delivering positive changes for many women, not all women benefitted. Under the structure of the National Insurance Act (1946) women's roles and responsibilities became very clearly defined. The government viewed married women as part of a team, with the woman dependent upon her husband and therefore less in need of welfare protections. Mary Davis, Professor in Labour History at Aston University, argued that the welfare state was based on the "prevailing patriarchal climate," and assumed a traditional family model with a male wage earner and a female staying home to look after the children. Single women working full time were treated equally to men in regard to benefits; however, as soon as they married, women were no longer required to make insurance payments, and benefit payments for married women were based on their husband's earnings. Beveridge's initial recommendation had considered women in other roles, not just single or married; he recognized the need to extend benefits to divorced women, and women taking care of elderly or sick parents. Unfortunately the government decided that providing sickness benefits equally to all women would be too expensive to implement (Family Allowance Act, National Archives). Mary Davis concluded that the patriarchal model was preferential because it was "far cheaper to administer a system which only entitles adult males fully to its benefits" ("Britain at Work").

This policy caused many problems for divorced women in the 1950s and early 1960s, as they were forced to rely on supplementary government payments as they did not qualify for their own benefits. Bridget Hirst, divorced in the early 1970s, found that she was not entitled to a full pension despite a combination of her own insurance

payments as a single woman combined with a share of her ex-husband's payments (Oral Histories, Appendices). Divorced women were clearly disadvantaged by patriarchal model of the National Insurance Act.

The family model of the 1940s and 1950s remained skewed towards a male wage earner and a full time mother; for any families outside this "model" the welfare state was less considerate. Virginia A. Noble, lawyer and historian writing in *Law and Social Inquiry*, examines these shortcomings in "Not the Normal Mode of Maintenance – Bureaucratic Resistance to the Claims of Lone Women in the Post War British Welfare System." Noble concluded:

It quickly became clear that in the actual implementation of the new legislation, the National Assistance Board would attempt to resist the assistance given to women by broadly defining familial responsibility for their support (Noble 344).

The National Assistance Board (NAB) reported an increasing number of single parents (separated and divorced wives and unmarried mothers) were turning to the government for assistance when, in the past, their husbands or the fathers of their children would have been forced to take responsibility under family law. A new family model developed; by 1949 34,000 separated wives claimed assistance from the NAB which increased to 105,000 wives by 1965. The number of unmarried mothers claiming assistance also increased during the same time period from 9,000 to 36,000. Many of these claims were strongly resisted by the NAB. In an attempt to force women to look for any alternative other than government support, the NAB's memo to all local offices emphasized that government assistance should not be regarded "as the normal mode of maintenance" (Noble 345). NAB officers went out of their way to track down missing fathers,



encouraged women to go to court by refusing to provide financial assistance, and rejected claims from women who may have been the guilty party in a separation. Acting as “judge and jury,” Noble argued, the NAB’s primary responsibility appeared to be to protect public funds by denying or deferring claims (Noble 353-358). Noble writes, “The dependence of a wife on a husband was considered to be normal and appropriate” (Noble 368) and little account was taken of fathers who had knowingly disappeared, started second families who required financial support, or women who had endured violence during their marriage or relationship and therefore were unwilling to pursue a court case. Noble concluded, “The intent of postwar social policy, and for many individual women the effect, was to reinforce and increase women’s subordination to partners and family members and circumscribe their rights” (Noble 369). Mary McIntosh, feminist and historian specializing in social policy, writing in *The Welfare State Reader*, accused the government of treating women as “second class citizens” and degrading treatment. She argued, “The welfare state...is utterly dependent upon the social construction of gender” (McIntosh 132). The government had placed marriage at the center of its policy for welfare, and women living outside this model faced discrimination and abuse. Beveridge had made the assumption that women would get married, have children and therefore receive maternity benefits. Their husband (or if single their father) would otherwise be responsible for taking care of them financially.

## IGNORANCE – CHANGES TO STATE EDUCATION

Ignorance was one of the “five giant evils” identified by Beveridge in his 1942 report. In 1944, the Butler Education Act finally began to address the need for improvements in secondary education in Britain. The major changes in this Act included raising the school leaving age from 14 to 15, providing free secondary education to all students either in grammar schools, secondary schools or technical schools, and building separate schools to accommodate primary and secondary school students. Previously students electing to stay in school after the age of 14 were required to pay fees to the local authorities. Ellen Wilkinson, the head of the Labour Ministry of Education from 1945 to 1947, was an enthusiastic supporter of improvements to education because she wanted the next generation to have access to better education than her generation had (Gordon, Aldrich and Dean, 66). In particular the government recognized the need to provide academic education for girls because “girls who displayed academic abilities were entitled to progress...to higher education...[with] their male counterparts” (Gordon, Aldrich and Dean 132). Government statistics show that to some extent the government achieved this goal as the total number of students attending secondary schools increased from 1.3 million in 1946 to 3.2 million in 1961 (House of Commons Library Historical Statistics); however, there were more boys than girls in secondary education showing that parents still considered the education of boys to be a higher priority (see Table on page 22). In theory girls now had equal access to an academic grammar school education, and potentially a university education. In reality, many local authorities recognized that girls’ academic abilities surpassed boys’ at the age of 11 when the crucial examination had to be taken, thus they limited the number of places allocated to girls (Gordon, Aldrich and

Dean 133). In addition, fewer girls attended secondary education until 18 making them ineligible for university entrance exams. As university education was extremely expensive, it was beyond the reach of most British families, and if money was available for university fees boys were given priority. There were also fewer university places open to women. Oxford University, for example, had only 5 female colleges admitting women in comparison to over 20 admitting men in the 1950s. According to Oxford student Judy Batson's memoir, *Her Oxford*, the university-approved quota for women remained restricted to one quarter of men from 1927 to 1957. Also, the five women's colleges were not recognized as full colleges until 1959. Women were not permitted to apply to men's colleges until 1974, and some colleges remained segregated until 2008 ("Women at Oxford" University of Oxford). Margaret Thatcher wrote in her biography that she was unable to take up her place at Cambridge University until she had won a scholarship, as her family was unable to pay the fees (*Path to Power* 33). Other women's oral and written histories describe the expectation that men would attend university but not women. Phyllis Willmott, writer and social worker, wrote in her biography, "I had grown up with the expectation that working for a living was the norm for everyone over the compulsory school leaving age of 14...I had already been privileged by being allowed to stay at school until 16" (*Joys and Sorrows*, 12). Ann Cryer, Member of Parliament from 1997-2010, recounted her desire to go to technical college in 1955 and become a teacher, but her parents refused to pay for further education and argued that they needed her to contribute to the family income and get a job (British Library, Oral Histories). Bridget Hirst, Patricia Plimmer and Judy Gray all left school at 17 without any plans to attend university. Hirst remembered, "University was never discussed. It wasn't even an

option. I don't really know why. I was a good student, but neither of my parents had gone to university so they probably didn't consider it an option for me" (Oral Histories, Appendices).

The Higher Education Statistics Agency confirms this trend and shows that the number of men obtaining degrees remained three times the number of women up until 1960.

*Table 2 Number of men and women obtaining degrees in Britain 1938-1960. Source: ONS/CSO. Higher Education Statistics Agency. House of Commons Library*

Year	Men	Women
1938	7,071	2,240
1950	13,398	3,939
1960	16,851	5,575

Due to these inequalities in secondary and university education, although there was an increase in married women returning to the workplace in the 1950s, most were employed in lower level, manual work. Harold Dent, Ministry of Education official, wrote in his White Paper on Education in 1944, that the Education Act would provide "equality of opportunity" but it appears that this focus was aimed at inequalities within the British class structure rather than gender inequalities (Kynaston 28). The government's policies were aimed at increasing access to grammar schools for working class boys, rather than increasing access for girls. Girls attending grammar schools received the same academic education as boys; however, seventy five percent of all secondary students attended secondary modern schools. These schools had a separate curriculum for girls based on improving domestic skills. Michael Young, wrote in *Labour's Plan for Plenty* in 1947:

The majority of children will go to secondary modern schools...Many of those will unfortunately have to work in routine or semi-routine occupations...Consequently the curriculum will be designed primarily to equip the children to make full and creative use of their leisure time and to look after their own homes with skill and imagination (qtd. in Kynaston 151).

Because most women were expected to work temporarily until they married and had children, educational opportunities for women were limited and tailored to useful skills for running a home.

In the late 1950s the Ministry of Education solicited a report on the current state of secondary education in Britain. In response, The Crowther Report published in 1959 made recommendations on how to provide the country with a more educated and technical workforce. It found that less than 4% of secondary students attended the technical schools built as part of the 1944 Education Act, and intended to promote the sciences and technical skills needed for Britain to be a competitive economy in the future (Crowther Report 17). Regarding equal opportunities for girls, The Crowther Report found that only 53% of girls received any part time or full time education after the age of 15, compared to 72% of boys. Only 2% of girls had the opportunity to take day release from work to attend school at 18, compared to 18% of boys, and the greatest concern was that 77% of girls at 18 were no longer in any type of education compared to 56% of boys (see Table on page 22). From this analysis it is clear that the 1944 Education Act had failed to achieve equal opportunities in secondary education for girls.

*Table 3 Proportion of Total Age Group in Different Kinds of Education 1957-58 (England/Wales). Source: The Crowther Report, 1959 page 6 (education england.org.uk)*

	BOYS/age		GIRLS/age	
	15-17	18	15-17	18
Full Time	23.4	4.5	21.5	2.3
Further Ed	2.1	3.3	3.2	3.1
Part Time	21.6	18.1	6.0	2.2
Evening	24.5	17.8	22.4	14.9
<b>Total in School</b>	<b>71.6</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>22.5</b>
Total no School	28.4	56.3	46.9	77.5

The Crowther Report also worried that too many teachers were spinsters, which was not a good role model for girls who were expected to marry and have children. A new policy of actively recruiting married women teachers was encouraged (Crowther Report 437). The Crowther Report recognized a change in women's work patterns, and noted, "Child bearing and childcare now represent a break in employment for married women rather than an end to it" (Crowther Report 448). To accommodate these changes, the Report concluded, women needed better education and relevant work skills so they could return to the work force after having children, "Girls need...education which encourages [them] to qualify before marriage for careers and develop interests which they can resume later in life" (Crowther Report 448). Education would be key to creating a skilled workforce and giving women access to careers other than, or in addition to, motherhood. The 1944 Education Act had made important changes to educational opportunities for women but The Crowther Report (1959) concluded that much more needed to be done.

## MEDIA INFLUENCE ON WOMEN'S ROLES

The media and academic research contributed to the debate about working women and motherhood. In 1951, well known psychologist John Bowlby influenced government policy by publishing, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, that showed children deprived of their mother's attention up until the age of 5 years old were clearly less successful, less well adjusted, and unhappier than children living with full time mothers. Bowlby argued:

There is a very strong case indeed for believing that prolonged separation of a child from its mother...during the first five years of life stands foremost among the causes of delinquent character development. (Bowlby 34).

Bowlby's research confirmed established beliefs in the value of motherhood; for example, as early as 1945 the Ministry of Health and Education had sent a recommendation to local authorities to reinforce family values:

The proper place for a child under two is at home with his [sic] mother...the right policy would be to positively discourage the mothers of children under two from going to work" (Davis).

There is no doubt that Bowlby's writings contributed to the arguments against the provision of state subsidized nurseries or childcare. The World Health Organization's Expert Committee on Mental Health published a report in 1951 questioning the role of nurseries in child development:

The social and fiscal policies of many nations appears to be designed to press the mothers of pre-school children to undertake productive work outside the home...the committee is convinced that in many instances such a decision...has

been taken in complete ignorance of the price to be paid in permanent damage to the emotional development of a future generation. (Riley 97-87).

Popular women's magazines jumped on the band- wagon, reinforcing domestic stereotypes and focusing on marriage, beauty and fashion, and home and child care. One of the first women's magazines, *Woman*, was launched in 1937 by Odham Press, and is still published today by TI Media. *Woman's* distribution reached over 3 million women by 1953 (Ferguson, 23). To put this in perspective, the distribution today is just over 250,000 (TI Media). A detailed analysis of three *Woman* magazines published in 1950, 1953 and 1955 shows the following areas of focus for advertising and articles:

*Table 4 A detailed analysis of three Woman magazines published in 1950, 1953 and 1955. Source: Woman, February 11, 1950. March 28, 1953. December 3, 1955.*

YEAR	Advertising %			Articles %		
	1950	1953	1955	1950	1953	1955
Beauty	26	47	42	28	44	50
Home	24	20	26	21	23	10
Health	14	14	9	14	3	10
Food	16	14	19	0	7	7
Childcare	20	5	4	0	0	0
Love/Marriage	0	0	0	37	23	23
Work/Career	0	0	0	0	0	0

In *Forever Feminine*, journalist and sociologist Marjorie Ferguson examined the power of women's magazines in promoting the stereotypes of "the good wife and mother,



or the pretty girl waiting to wed” (3). Ferguson concluded that women’s magazines “help shape both a woman’s view of herself, and society’s view of her” and thus act as “agents of socialization” (1-2). In her detailed analysis of the three best selling women’s magazines, *Woman*, *Woman’s Own*, and *Woman’s Weekly*, from 1949 to 1975, Ferguson observed that priority was given to the themes of love, marriage and family, followed by an emphasis on being a responsible, hard working domestic perfectionist. From her research Ferguson also identified a consistent view reiterated by these magazines: “The working wife is a bad wife” (54). Although she noted that the concept of women working outside the home was virtually invisible in magazines until the 1970s. Ferguson identified the major roles for women as being “wife,” “marriage fixated,” and “mother” (62). These three roles accounted for 47% of all female roles appearing in the magazines between 1949 and 1957. In contrast, only 7% of all female roles identified with careers. Ferguson observed that women’s magazines both reflected the position of women in society at a given point in time and directed women to embrace a particular set of values and beliefs about themselves and their role (1-3). In the 1970s Ferguson discovered a change in focus; magazines began to discuss “hard” issues such as housing shortages, equal pay and the concept that the working wife was a good wife; however, love, marriage, and personal relationships still remained a major part of each issue (78-101).

Historian Martin Pugh’s research for his book *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain* found that women’s magazines reflected “the postwar backlash against feminism” and made working women feel guilty of neglecting their families because “they don’t know the day to day matters that are the breath of family life” (298). Women’s magazines had a huge circulation in the 1950s. Pugh reports, 5 out of 6 women

in Britain read one or more magazine every week (289). The circulation of *Woman* magazine in the late 1950s was over 3.5 million, illustrating the significant influence media could have on women's values and self-identity (Beaumont, 192).

Magazines were not the only influence on women's roles. In 1947 Dr. Spock published his best selling child-care book, *Baby and Child Care*, reinforcing gender roles by clearly separating responsibilities for mothers and fathers. Dr. Spock's revolutionary message was that children respond better to love than discipline, and the best person to provide this loving environment was the mother (Baby and Child Care, YouTube). In an 1982 interview, Dr. Spock explained his thinking when his book was published; relaxed parenting resulted in confident children, and the normal model for a relaxed family life was a working father and a full-time, stay-at-home mother. Dr. Spock emphasized that the mother was the primary care giver. He wrote in his first edition, "I don't mean that the father has to give just as many bottles or change just as many diapers as the mother. But it's fine for him to do things occasionally." He also noted, "Some mothers have to work to make a living. Usually their children turn out all right because some reasonably good arrangement is made for their care." Few mothers would be reassured by the idea that their children may turn out "all right" if they work. Married women were inundated with childcare research, magazine articles, and government papers arguing that full time domestic life was their best and only option. Despite this expectation, many women found that motherhood was not fulfilling enough.

## WOMEN'S GROUPS INFLUENCE WOMEN'S ROLES

One successful outlet for women seeking fulfillment, particularly in rural areas, was membership in women's groups such as the Women's Institute (WI), the Mother's Union (MU), and the Red Cross. These groups provided women with a social life outside the home and gave them a role within the community, often involving local charitable work. In *Housewives and Citizens, Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England 1928 – 1960*, University of Warwick sociologist, Caitriona Beaumont, describes how women found meaning within these groups, not just because their role as wives and mothers was valued among peers, but because there were opportunities for education beyond domestic tasks. Many women's groups organized lectures and held music evenings, and encouraged their members to balance the role of wife and mother with other activities. Women's groups valued the role of housewife and mother and "promoted housewifery as a skilled profession for women and argued that women's domestic expertise gave them the right to contribute to local and national affairs" (Beaumont 8). Many women's groups also campaigned for equal rights and put pressure on the government to provide services supporting wives and mothers (Beaumont 4-5). During the discussion about Family Allowance in 1944-1945, both the WI and the MU intensely lobbied the government. Their goal was to ensure that Family Allowance was paid to the mother and not the father as originally planned. They argued that mothers were always the main care provider for children; therefore, they should receive the financial support for this responsibility (Beaumont 128). The MU advised the Royal Commission on Population in 1942 that there may be a "growing reluctance on the part of women to lose the economic independence they enjoyed before marriage or through work" and

encouraged the Commission to consider ways to support married women at home (Beaumont 176). Beaumont argued that women at home in the 1950s, receiving government support in the form of maternity benefits and family allowances, in addition to free healthcare, saw the next step for women's rights to include more flexible work for mothers and improved childcare. Not all women accepted that a career and family were mutually exclusive, especially when their children were older and less in need of their full time attention. They began to look for ways to find fulfillment outside the home and contribute to their family's income. Women's groups although extremely supportive of women's roles as wives and mothers, were a critical part of encouraging women to embrace a "modern life" through their effort to lobby the government to reconsider women's roles and supporting women's rights (Beaumont 189).

## WOMAN AND WORK – THE CHANGING VIEW AND A NEW MODEL

Historian Mary Abbott found that immediately after the war “professional opinion was critical of mothers who took paid work,” and this was often enough to prevent women from seeking work (*Family Affairs*). According to historian Martin Pugh, the Trade Unions also played a part in restricting women’s employment opportunities after the war; they blocked women’s requests for apprenticeships, cut off access to skilled jobs, and actively resisted claims for equal pay (Pugh 272-275). In addition to public opinion and trade union policies, childcare also became an issue for married women wanting to work.

Government subsidized nurseries, opened by local authorities during the war to encourage mothers to work, were now viewed in a negative light, “with high incidence of infection and low incidence of happiness” (Abbott). In 1945 the Labour government withdrew funding for most of the 1,450 nurseries opened during the war. The government argued these nurseries were intended only as “ad hoc arrangements and not as pointers to future government policy” (87 Riley). As women began to leave work after the war, the government argued, nurseries were no longer necessary. Responsibility for nursery education after the war would be the responsibility of the Board of Education and not the Ministries of Labour and Health; therefore, nursery schools and childcare would now be addressed as part of broader education policies (Riley 89). Historian Mary Davis noted that this lack of subsidized childcare for working women contributed to the pressure for women to stay at home and focus on family responsibilities, particularly because full time private child-care was difficult to find and expensive.

Childcare was not the only challenge for married women at home. It is a common misconception that married women had more time on their hands in the 1950s than in earlier decades due of innovations in the home (such as the refrigerator, the washing machine and the vacuum cleaner). These appliances supposedly reduced the amount of time needed to complete housekeeping tasks. While it is true that these appliances, widely advertised in women's magazines and daily newspapers, were part of the new "modern" home, they remained expensive luxuries for many housewives. By the late 1959 only 13% of homes had a fridge, 44% of households had washing machines, and 66% had a vacuum cleaner (*Science Daily*, "How Fridges and Washing Machines Liberated Women"). Married women shopped for fresh food every day as frozen food was not widely available and was extremely expensive, and very few homes had freezers. Laundry was very time consuming as the washing machines of the 1950s were largely manual; women had to fill machines with water for washing and rinsing, use mangles for wringing out clothes, and hang out clothes to dry. Domestic duties, therefore, still consumed many hours of each day (British homes since 1948), and full time work for married women was often not an option.

Married women faced three major challenges after the war: a lack of support from both the government and society to return to work, a lack of opportunity in further education resulting in few qualifications, and a lack of access to full time employment. Most girls were trained for domestic life, and expected to marry and have children. Maternity benefits and Family Allowance gave women the opportunity to control a small amount of their family income. Otherwise, married women were expected to leave the workplace to single women and rely on their husbands for financial support. Historian

David Kynaston wrote that for most men it was a matter of pride that their wives did not have to go out to work (*Austerity Britain* 416).

During the 1950s the economy began to improve; industry needed more workers and with 1.2 million men still working in the army as part of National Service, women were the best solution (National Service, National Archives). The government launched an official campaign to get married women with experience, aged 35 to 50, to return to the cotton mills. Other manufacturing industries also needed lower level workers and married women were the best option. The 1950s' economic boom resulted in full employment, a rise in consumerism, and a higher standard of living. Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister from 1957 to 1963, speaking at a Conservative Party rally in 1957, said, "Most of our people have never had it so good" (Daily Telegraph, "Harold MacMillan's "never had it so good" speech followed the 1950s boom"). Married women working part time while their children were at school, and many working full time when their children left home, became a crucial part of the workforce contributing to the growing economy. Not only did their work help to increase exports but also their consumer spending helped grow the domestic economy.

It was not only industry that needed more workers. One unexpected result of the introduction of the National Health Service and the expansion of secondary education under the 1944 Butler Education Act was the increased demand for clerical workers, teachers, and nurses. In 1931, 657,000 typists were employed in Britain, this number more than doubled to 1,408,000 by 1951 (Pugh, 285). All these fields were attractive to women workers; however, full time work was not an option for many married women because of their domestic and child rearing responsibilities. As a result part time work

became increasingly popular and the number of women in part time work more than doubled from 784,000 to 1,892,000 from 1951 to 1961 (Hakim qtd. in Wilson). Historian Dolly Smith Wilson wrote in *A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain*, “Working only part of the day allowed a woman outside interests, money, and as we have seen, a defense of criticism of neglecting her children” (Wilson 223). Wilson noted that this significant increase in female part-time workers created a new job market. While men were still considered the main wage earner for families, married women brought extra income into the home to improve their families’ lifestyle. Wilson calculated that in 1931 only 10% of married women worked in full and part time jobs, this grew to 21.7% by 1951 and increased significantly to 45.4% by 1961 (Wilson 209). Wilson wrote that despite the pressure from both the government and society to conform to patriarchal family roles, the demand for women workers started to “change the view of ideal motherhood as exclusively domestic bound” (Wilson 206). By 1961, almost half of all married women were working full or part time (Wilson 209).

Increasing support for married women working came not only from the government but also from high profile women. Margaret Thatcher described in *The Path to Power* how she faced discrimination as a working mother in the 1950s. She was often asked about her ability to balance the demands of home and work when interviewing for parliamentary positions (Thatcher 94). Thatcher confessed that she did not find full time child-care to be a rewarding life, “Of course, to be a mother and a housewife is a vocation of a very high kind. But I simply felt it was not the whole of my vocation” (Thatcher 81). Thatcher’s fellow MP Irene Ward also wrote, “While the home must always be the center of one’s life, it should not be the boundary of one’s ambitions” (Thatcher 81).



A new pattern began to emerge in the 1950s with women working before marriage and children, staying home until their children were of school age and then returning to part time work. Myrdal and Klein found that women were able to balance the two roles of paid work and family (*Women's Two Roles* vii). They argued that women were bored with domestic duties and needed the stimulation of work. Family life, they concluded, “is not enough to fill the many years of a woman’s life” (*Women's Two Roles* 29). Myrdal and Klein recognized the importance of a mother’s role in raising young children but suggested that as life expectation for women had now increased it was unrealistic to expect married women to remain at home when their children no longer required their full attention (*Women's Two Roles* 31-37). Both Bridget Hirst and Judy Gray left work when they married and stayed home to raise their families, returning to work once their children went to school (Oral histories, Appendices).

In 1952 Richard Titmuss, Head of the London School of Economics Department of Social Administration, described how women who reached 40 years old and had finished raising their families faced another 35-40 years of life which needed to be “emotionally satisfying” (McCarthy 277). Helen McCarthy’s *Social Science and Married Women’s Employment in Post War Britain* published in 2016 identified the changing views on married women who chose to work in the 1950s. McCarthy suggested that the initial reluctance to support this change came from a “pre- war class-based understanding of married women’s labor as a product of economic pressure and post war anxieties about child development” (McCarthy 272). In the 1950s, *the Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Express* and *The Guardian*, British newspapers with wide circulation, published articles about the modern economy needing married women to return to work and not stay at home and be

idle (McCarthy 294 – 300). Other research conducted by sociologist Pearl Jephcott between 1950 and 1962, for the London School of Economics, concluded that women's lives were not fulfilled as wives and mothers, "The implication is obvious – that employment outside the home is meeting deep-seated needs which are now felt by women in general in our society" (qtd. in McCarthy 287). Although economic factors remained part of the incentive for women to return to work, McCarthy concluded that there was a new factor: women's own "aspirations and needs." McCarthy also noted that married women gained in self-confidence and self-esteem when working, and they no longer saw themselves as just wives and mothers (McCarthy 284).

Nevertheless, married women who wished to work still faced challenges with childcare. In their analysis *Public Funding of Early Years Education in England; An Historical Perspective* for the London School of Economics, Anne West and Philip Norden reported that local authorities were under no obligation to provide free or subsidized nursery or childcare until 1998 (West and Norden 9). Although the 1944 Education Act required local authorities to have "regard" for nursery education, there was no requirement or duty to provide it (West and Norden 11). Areas with the greatest number of working women with children, the manufacturing towns of the north of England, had more government provided nursery schools than the south (West and Norden 8). This reluctance to provide a consistent level of nursery education throughout the country remained an issue until the 1990s. In 1980, Secretary of State for Social Services Sir George Young, spoke about the government's continued reluctance to address this issue, "In general, I do not accept that it is the State's job to provide day care to enable to parents of young children to go to work" (West and Norden 12). The

government assumed that all married women who worked no longer needed to take care of children because they were either grown up or in full-time education. Many working class women who had to work for economic reasons were left to their own devices, and generally found childcare through friends or family despite TUC and Co-operative Women's organizations supporting government provision of nurseries (Riley 84).

Even though the marriage bar was lifted for most public services in 1946, it remained in place in many private industries. A Royal Commission for Equal Pay from 1944 to 1946 examined the arguments for and against a change in law requiring that women were paid the same rates as men for the same work; however, the concerns about cost and potential complaints from male workers prevented immediate action (Tomlinson 201-203). Equal pay for female civil servants in the Home Office was not achieved until 1961, and women were required to leave the Foreign Office upon marriage until 1973. Employers believed that married women would be unable to cope with the "double labour" of work and domestic life, resulting in absenteeism and poor work performance. The Sex Discrimination Act was only passed in 1975, and pregnant women were not protected from redundancy until the 1999 Employment Relations Act. Historian Jim Tomlinson wrote, "Government policies were largely determined by economic and financial priorities...aimed at maximizing women's employment but minimizing the costs of it" (*Democratic Socialism and Economic Policy: The Attlee Years*, 208). Despite small victories for married women in the workplace before 1960, women were still treated as second-class citizens to men. Critical changes to law to promote equality and protect women's rights at work did not occur for many decades. Even today, many women experience the frustration of glass ceilings: the invisible barrier that prevents

women from reaching the highest level of management in companies despite their abilities and qualifications. In 2019, equal pay may be required by law, but companies continue to find ways around the laws by assigning women to lower pay grades, and preferential hiring policies for men.

## CONCLUSION

In 1925, a Member of Parliament and Women's Rights campaigner, Eleanor Rathbone observed, "We can demand what we want for women not because it is what men have got, but because it is what women need to fulfill the potentialities of their own natures" (*The Welfare State Reader* 126). Although Rathbone was speaking twenty years before the end of the Second World War, her words were as relevant in the 1950s as they are today. Thousands of women responded to the call for workers during the Second World War, and afterwards most married women stepped aside because preference for jobs was given to demobilized men. The government succeeded in making domestic life attractive to women, effectively paying women to return home and have children, and as a result, marriage rates and birth rates increased in the early 1950s. As the country's economy recovered, the government once again began an initiative to encourage married women with school age children to go back to work. Many married women entered a new phase of balancing home and work life by working part time. Women's voices, including Rathbone's, continued to argue in favor of a woman's right to design her own life. Women in prominent positions such as Margaret Thatcher and Irene Ward, became role models showing British women that family and work could co-exist successfully. Widely published research from leading sociologists and economists in Britain such as Richard Titmuss and Pearl Jephcott found its way into mainstream media, including women's magazines and daily newspapers, reinforcing the belief that married women should no longer be confined to the home. By searching for and finding a solution of a three-phase life plan, women were able to start their careers as single women, take a break to raise their families and then return to work for many productive years. Despite

the acceptance of married women in the workplace, women did not achieve equal pay and other protections against discrimination by 1960; however, the acknowledgment of a married women's rights to work outside the home, to participate in the country's workforce and economic growth and continue to manage home and family, began with the married women in Post-War Britain. These women wanted to try something different and rejected the domestic models established by previous generations of women. Providing married women with a socially acceptable alternative to domestic life during the 1950s paved the way for the feminist movement of the 1960s, resulting in improved access to further education for women, and significant achievements in equality in workplace. Women in postwar Britain, therefore, rather than being criticized for retreating to domestic life following the Second World War should be credited with creating a new model for marriage and motherhood.

## APPENDICES - ORAL HISTORIES

Oral histories of women available from the British Library's website (including Ann Cryer) illustrate the many challenges women faced in the workplace: sexism, lack of promotional opportunities, and limited professional training. My own interviews with family members and friends reinforced the view that men (fathers, husbands, teachers and managers) viewed women as temporary workers, "killing time" before marriage or between pregnancies, and therefore resisted any investment in their long-term careers. Written biographies of an educated female writer (Francis Partridge), a social worker (Phyllis Willmott) and the politician (Margaret Thatcher) reveal shared experiences as all these women fought to overcome barriers to their chosen professions.

APPENDIX A – ORAL HISTORY BRIDGET HIRST



Bridget Hirst was born in 1930. Unusually for the time her parents divorced in 1937, and her single mother and her extended family of aunts helped to care for her and her older sister Patricia. All male family members were away from home serving in the war.

On family's financial situation:

“There was rationing during the war which made it very difficult to eat well, however, my aunts owned a farm in Hampshire and grew all kinds of vegetables, they even raised chickens and pigs so we always ate well. I'm not sure where my mother's income came from; she didn't work so I assume there was family money. One of my aunts worked as a driver during the war, the others were married and lived on their husband's wages.”

On education:

“I went to private girls school, a boarding school from the age of 7. We were evacuated from London during the war to Hampshire. I liked school especially English and Theater. I didn't like Math or Science, but honestly I think it was because the teachers were so bad. I passed my School Certificate and left school at 17. No one in my family had been to university so it was never discussed for me. I don't know why. I wasn't ready to work yet so I persuaded my mother to let me go to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art to study acting, but I realized it would be almost impossible to support myself so I took a diploma in Domestic Science.”

On working life as a single woman, and marriage:

“I was trained as a cutter in dress design. I had attended the Paris Academy [finishing school] in London when I left school and learned to make my own clothes, so this became my job. I worked for C&A [a large department store] back in the day when all clothes were made in England for selling in England. Nothing was made overseas then.”

On Bridget's co-workers:

“All the girls were single in our department. There were a few men, mainly managers, but the girls, all the cutters were single. Sometimes the married ones stayed for a while, but once they became pregnant they all left. I left immediately I married because my husband's job was in London and I was working in Manchester. So I moved south. I did get another job, doing the same thing, I left when I became pregnant with my first child.”

On domestic life compared to working full time:

“I didn't miss work really to start with, I had a house and a baby and that was plenty of work. We lived in an area with lots of young mothers, so we became good friends and did lots of social things together. The hardest part was when David my son went to full time school; then I was very bored. I started making lots of clothes for the children, for myself, even for friends.”

On Bridget's first job once her children were in school:

"I started a nursery school with a friend when my daughter went to primary school. We figured that we knew a lot about teaching small children, although we didn't have any formal training like you need today. We also wanted the school holidays free to be with our families so that worked well. I didn't need the money really. I chose to work, but the money I earned definitely helped pay for school uniforms, holidays, cars, things like that which would have been harder on my husband's salary."

On Family Allowance:

"It was actually really nice to have some money that was mine, not housekeeping given to me from my husband. I could buy things I needed, makeup, women's stuff, take the children to the cinema. It gave me a little financial independence, but I know some mums needed it for food and clothes, so I was lucky that I didn't have to spend it on that."

On childcare or nurseries for her children:

"I didn't work until they were in school so I didn't need to. Although it was hard sometimes when one of them was sick, because obviously I couldn't take them to work where there were small children. Usually a friend or a neighbor looked after them while I worked. Women really helped each other out where we lived."

On the Welfare State:

[Long pause]. "We didn't really think about it much. Going to the doctors was free, I don't remember ever having to pay, and even hospital treatment like when my son had his tonsils removed was free. I didn't worry about unemployment benefits because my husband had a good job and worked hard. He also had a company pension so long term I knew we would be all right."

On divorce and reduced benefits:

"After the divorce in 1974 my solicitor told me I wouldn't get a full pension because I hadn't worked long enough on my own to qualify. That was a blow. I went back to work until I was 65 to make sure I had enough to live on later."

On the National Health Service:

"I can't believe how expensive medical care is! I would never have been able to afford to pay for my children's health care after my divorce if I lived in the USA [Bridget pays for her own healthcare in the US]. That made me realize that despite all the long wait times and struggle to get treatment, the National Health Service [free medical care in the United Kingdom] is a huge benefit."

Bridget is now 89 years old and lives in assisted living in California. Interviews with Bridget were conducted during April 2019 by Caroline Bland.

APPENDIX B - ORAL HISTORY JUDY GRAY

On education:

“I was born in 1934. I attended a private girl’s school until I was 18 years old and I took the school certificate examination at the end of the final year. I’m not sure what age my parents were when they left school, but I think my mother certainly was younger, probably 16. My father I think stayed until 18. Neither of them went to university, my mother married young and she and my father went to the Congo to work after serving in the First World War. It was a very brave thing to do in the 1920s, but he thought it would be an adventure and my mother was happy to try anything. My brother was born there, but the rest of us, my younger brother and me, were born when they returned to England.

I am sure that I received a better education than my parents. I don’t think the classes my mother took were very academic – more about learning how to cook and sew and look after a home. Domestic science was the focus. A little bit of arithmetic and English too obviously, and history, geography; those sorts of things. We had a broader curriculum when I went to school.”

On first job:

“After leaving school I went to Switzerland and worked as a secretary for Nestle from 1952 to 1954. Then I joined a French holiday organization, Club Med, as an interpreter for both staff and guests. I could speak fluent French after living in Switzerland.”

On further education:

“I went to Roehampton University to train as a teacher. The course took 2 years and my parents paid for it. I had always wanted to be a teacher, but I wanted to travel and live abroad first.”

On marriage and work:

“I got married in 1963 and worked until my daughter was born in 1964. My son was born 2 years later in 1965, but I did not work again until my children were in full time education. My daughter was 8 and my son was 6. I worked as a part time French teacher until I retired at 63.”

On outside groups:

“I didn’t belong to any women’s group but I was a member of the Young Conservatives [political organization] and took an interest in all subjects.”

Judy Gray is 84 years old and lives in Kent, England.

APPENDIX C - ORAL HISTORY PATRICIA PLIMMER

On education:

“I was born in 1928, so I was at school when the war started. I went to private school. I worked for my School Certificate and left school at 16. I wasn’t very good at school, but I liked sports and all the non-academic subjects. I realized after that part of the reason was we had such awful teachers, most adults were involved in the war in some capacity so anyone left behind usually was too old or simply not useful. Perhaps with better teachers I would have done something different. My parents both went to private schools, there weren’t really any other good options in the 1920s. I’m not sure what they studied there, neither went to university. My father was a designer, and my mother never worked outside the home.”

On further education:

“I did a brief domestic science course, cooking, sewing, arranging flowers, that sort of thing it was my mother’s idea, and then I decided that I needed a real job. There weren’t many good options for girls, but I had always liked children and I enjoyed taking care of people so I went to train to be a nurse at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London. It was the hardest thing I have ever done. Long, long hours and just so stressful looking after such sick children. After a few years I knew I couldn’t take it any longer. I didn’t have a boyfriend, I didn’t really have the time for anything other than work and sleep.”

On life as a single woman:

“A friend of mine, also a nurse, and I decided to emigrate to New Zealand and see how we liked life there. Things in London had been so hard after the war, there was so much rationing still, and cities were trying to rebuild – honestly, it was a depressing place to be. There were very cheap boat fares to New Zealand so we just decided to go. We both worked as nannies when we arrived, and then I met Barry, he was a sheep farmer and after we married I helped him with the farm.”

On domestic life:

“I didn’t go to university but the training we had at the hospital was a good practical start to any job. It certainly helped on the farm, when we were so far from any towns. I had five children so that was a lot of work. I also helped with the sheep, had my own vegetable garden, made clothes and prepared food for all the farm hands. It was a full time job. My children all went to boarding school eventually, the local schools were not good enough to provide them with anything more than the basics. That gave me more time for the farm.”

On outside activities:

“I didn’t belong to any clubs, but all the farm wives were very close. We lived the same lives and understood what each other were going through. When anyone needed help we helped each other, that’s what neighbors did back then.”

Patricia Plimmer is 91 years old and lives in New Zealand.

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