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**THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY**

**Aberdeen Business School**

Within their sphere?

Women's correspondence to Aberdeen daily newspapers,  
1900–1918

Sarah Pedersen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**January 2004**

# Page Numbering as Bound

## Abstract

This research provides an insight into the motivations and agenda of women correspondents to Aberdeen local newspapers during the period 1900–18. This was achieved by undertaking a content analysis of all printed letters to the editor identified as being by women correspondents to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press*. Women correspondents were identified by their signatures, feminine noms de plume or the content of their letters. Whilst it is accepted that this method must of necessity have excluded some women correspondents who did not wish to reveal their gender, this research focused exclusively on correspondents who were *willing* to be identified as female in their correspondence to the newspapers. In this way, it was hoped to identify the issues which impelled women out of their domestic and private sphere and into the more public sphere of newspaper debate.

The two Aberdeen newspapers were also well suited for this research because of their lack of editorial gatekeeping, with little censorship of letters discerned, even in wartime. However, a lack of editorial censorship did not mean that women correspondents faced no barriers to the publication of their opinions in the newspapers. Women correspondents had to overcome social conventions, including possibly the disapproval of friends and family, in order to enter the world of public debate.

The research identified particular issues about which it was acceptable for women to correspond to the newspapers and particular women who were allowed to debate these issues. Middle-class women engaged in philanthropic and charitable work, especially that related to women and children or, during the First World War, the war effort, felt justified in writing to the newspapers in order to publicise such activities. Women also justified correspondence to the newspapers on certain matters by claiming that they came under woman's jurisdiction in the domestic sphere. Many women further justified their correspondence on such matters by using pen names which emphasised their domestic and maternal role, such as 'Mother' or 'Wife'. Such correspondence tended to be proactive rather than reactive to other material in the newspapers, which is in direct contrast to the findings of previous researchers into the motivation of newspaper correspondents. Interestingly, the research discovered that women correspondents' use of noms de plume increased from 1900 until the outbreak of the First World War. While some women used pen names to emphasise their familial role, others used them in a much more straightforward way – in order to protect their identity while writing on contentious subjects. Such subjects included controversial issues such as woman suffrage and the sexual double standards of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain. However, even the most militant suffragette justified her demand for a vote by emphasising woman's difference from man. Such correspondents preferred to enlarge the woman's sphere to include social commentary and electoral privilege rather than step outside it altogether.

The research also investigated differences between the two newspapers and between pre-war and wartime correspondence. It is suggested that the *Daily Journal* attracted more letters from 'domestic' women on issues related to a more narrowly defined 'woman's sphere' while the *Free Press*'s correspondents included more New Women. In addition, the *Journal* received more letters from women based in England or further afield, for example the colonies, while the *Free Press* tended to receive letters from women within Scotland. Women's wartime correspondence was dominated by the war effort, which swept most other topics of correspondence off the letters pages, although the later years of the war saw an increase in letters of complaint, usually aimed at increasing bureaucracy and again making use of familial pen names.

Such findings contribute to the broader history of the media and women's studies in the north-east of Scotland, and indicate a broadening and nationalising of interest throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the beginning of an accompanying weakening of local, regional links.



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# CHAPTER I

## *Introduction – Rationale and Methodology*

## Introduction

This thesis is concerned with letters written by women to the editors of two Aberdeen daily newspapers – *The Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *The Aberdeen Free Press* – between the years 1900 and 1918. It aims to investigate the parameters, set by both society and the women themselves, within which women were allowed to comment publicly on the issues of the day. It asks whether women correspondents stayed within the traditional ‘women’s sphere’ of subjects – the home, children, health, education – when their letters were published in newspapers, and whether what might seem like a narrowly defined band of condoned interests could be stretched to tackle more contentious issues. It aims to investigate whether the passing of the Edwardian Age and the onset of the First World War in 1914 brought any changes to women correspondents’ attitudes to writing to, and making use of, their daily newspapers – and whether the identification of women as an active readership impacted on the newspapers themselves, for example, in the introduction of editorial aimed specifically at women. In addition, it aims to go further than any previous research into this area by using collective biography to identify common interests, education or social ties between correspondents.

## Rationale

‘While newspaper news coverage and editorials have been extensively studied through content analysis, letters to the editor have received comparatively limited attention.’<sup>1</sup> What was true in the United States in 1972 – when Byron Lander studied letters to the *Kent Record Courier* commenting on the killing of four students at Kent State University – remains true today. Little is known about the motivations, characteristics or agenda of those who write letters to their local newspapers, despite the fact that such letters are an everyday occurrence and represent the voice of the readership of the newspaper in a unique way. It has also been suggested, by Foster and Friedrich, that letters to the editor of a newspaper can provide researchers with a useful ‘thermometer’ with which to measure the amount of ‘heat’ – in terms of critical debate and discussion – a particular issue is arousing in the locality.<sup>2</sup> In particular, research into the contents of correspondence columns in local newspapers can offer a different perspective from which to approach issues usually examined on a national or regional basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Lander, Byron, G., ‘Functions of Letters to the Editor: A Re-examination’. *Journalism Quarterly*, 1972, 49, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, H Schuyler and Friedrich, Carl J., ‘Letters to the editor as a means of measuring the effectiveness of propaganda’. *American Political Science Review*, February 1937, 31, pp. 71–79.

What research there has been on these issues has focused mainly on the contemporary American experience<sup>3</sup>. There has been a lack of serious investigation in the United Kingdom. During the 1970s, US researchers attempted to define the average letter-writer to newspapers, in particular during presidential election periods. They tended to use evidence gathered for other purposes by bodies such as the Center for Political Studies, and, because of the nature of this evidence, focused on the writer of letters on political subjects. From such research, the average letter-writer emerged as predominately white, male, middle-aged or older, with an above-average education and income. Different groups of researchers found him to be a liberal Democrat voter or a Communist-hating, CIA-supporting Republican. However, all were agreed that his interest in politics was above average and he was more likely to participate in other political activity than the average registered voter.

Two basic motivations for writing letters to the editor of a newspaper were identified by this American research. Many letters were triggered by another letter or piece of editorial in the newspaper. In addition, some commentators suggested that letters to the editor could be seen as a kind of 'safety valve', allowing angry or upset readers to 'get something off their chest' in a harmless but therapeutic way. Linked to this second motivation was the fact that the majority of letters were written in a negative tone, rather than a positive or neutral one. While most researchers felt that such a 'safety valve' role was harmless, Byron Lander's research into letter-writing following the shootings of the Kent State students suggested that such letters could have an effect on the political environment in a community. While the editorials of the *Kent Record Courier* and a minority of letter-writers expressed horror and shock at the shooting of students on their own campus by the National Guard, the majority of correspondents did not follow the editorial lead of the newspapers. Instead, their letters were overwhelmingly hostile to the students and called for further repressive action. Landers suggests that such a response went well beyond the 'harmless safety valve' since such open approval of the killings could encourage further action against the students in the future. In this case, he suggested, letter-writers could well have been shaping future events by their encouragement of the national guards' actions.<sup>4</sup> One of the objectives of the following research is to test such motivational theories for letter-writing on a

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<sup>3</sup> Buell, E. H., 'Eccentrics or gladiators? People who write about politics in letters to the editor'. *Social Science Quarterly*, 1975, 56, pp. 440–449; Volgy, T. J. et al, 'Some of my best friends are letter writers: Eccentrics and gladiators revisited'. *Social Science Quarterly*, 1977, 58, pp. 321–327; Grey, D. L. and Brown, T. B., 'Letters to the editor: Hazy reflections of public opinion'. *Journalism Quarterly*, 1970, 47, pp. 450–456, 471; Lander, Byron, G., 'Functions of Letters to the Editor: A Re-examination'. *Journalism Quarterly*, 1972, 49, pp. 142–143.

<sup>4</sup> Lander, Byron, G., 'Functions of Letters to the Editor: A Re-examination', pp. 142–143.



historical collection of letters to the press, in a geographical area where local politics were at times very different from the agenda set nationally in London or Edinburgh.

Unlike letters published in newspapers, collections of personal letters have proved a rich source of material for social and cultural historians for many years. Biographers have always made good use of the letters of their subjects, whether those written by them or those they received. Historians have also made use of collections of letters, such as those of the Paston and Stonor families in England or the *Geniza* collection of letters between members of a medieval Jewish community in Cairo. Of more relevance to this research, Pat Jalland utilised personal correspondence and papers in her work on the wives and daughters of political figures during the Victorian period.<sup>5</sup> However, such collections of personal correspondence must always be fragmented, dependent on what happens to have survived. Despite the fact that newspaper correspondence offers an opportunity for historians to investigate a complete run of published correspondence, less use has been made of such letters written for publication. This is particularly true when looking at women correspondents, despite the fact that they offer the social historian a particularly valuable source for what Patricia Branca has called the 'history of the inarticulate'. In her study of middle-class women during the Victorian period, Branca utilised the letters of women to the editors of women's magazines, arguing that they offered unique insight into the lives and concerns of a group of women who otherwise left little written evidence:

There exists a genuine need to hear from the multitudes of mute inglorious females of whom no biography was ever written, who never did or said or thought a thing that would distinguish them from the mass of women of the day. Of course the great problem is lack of sources.<sup>6</sup>

Jalland has used the phrase the 'passive majority' to describe this same group of middle-class women who accepted the ideology of their times and lived within its confines, arguing that while historians have studied those who were in the vanguard of the women's movement, or those who lived outside society's norms, such as prostitutes, little work has been done on the more conventional women of this period. However, while Branca used women's letters to magazines – publications aimed specifically at them – there has been little use of their letters to newspapers. The last 30 years have seen a tremendous growth in research in the areas of women's history and feminist criticism of English literature, and good use has been made of the products of women writers – both those products intended for a public readership, such as novels and women's

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<sup>5</sup> Jalland, Pat, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Branca, Patricia, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home*, London: Croom Helm, 1975, p. 11.



magazine articles, and those intended for a more private readership, such as diaries and letters. Elaine Showalter has described a shift in feminist criticism during this period from what she calls a 'critique' of primarily male literary texts to 'gynocritics', or a study of women's writing, and a discussion of 'androcentric' critical strategies which pushed women's writing to the fringes of the literary canon.<sup>7</sup> Dale Spender has argued that 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century women writers who wrote for a public audience posed a potential threat to the status quo, with its distinctions between the male/public sphere and female/private – or domestic – sphere. She suggests that the status quo was re-imposed by the dominant (male) group by creating a distinction between male and female writing.

The taboo on public writing for women has in essence been to exclude them from writing – for men! The dichotomy of male/female, public/private is maintained by permitting women to write for a private audience (which can be extended to encompass other women) but discouraging them from writing for a public audience, that is men.<sup>8</sup>

For this reason, Spender suggests, the Victorian and Edwardian period saw a tremendous growth in women's published writing in areas such as the novel and magazine and newspaper articles addressed to women readers, while it was more difficult, although not completely impossible, for women writers to break into non-fiction genres aimed at a male or general readership. Although the career of journalist was beginning to open to women, the 'woman journalist' was not usually expected to cover the same stories as men. As an article entitled 'What It Means to be a Lady Journalist' in *The Young Woman* made clear in 1900:

Women [journalists]... are engaged to do original work, which men could not do so well, or which they could not do, perhaps at all. Imagine a man at a society ball, describing the thousand and one marvels of the Duchess of so-and-so's gown, or the wonderful shape of the Honourable Lady Blank's new hat. It is Fashion, no doubt, which created the lady journalist. It must have been some blundering man's description of a dress which first suggested to an editor that he should engage a woman on his staff. At any rate, some sensible editor made this daring departure some years ago, and women have been on editors' staffs ever since.

It must not be imagined that the lady journalist does exactly the same kind of work as the mere man. The first thorough lady journalist has yet to come.... It must be distinctly understood that woman's work in journalism is essentially the feminine side. It need not be narrow. There

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<sup>7</sup> Showalter, Elaine, ed., *Speaking of Gender*, London: Routledge, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Spender, Dale, *Man Made Language*. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 192.

are plenty of better things in the world than inquests and police-courts and football matches.<sup>9</sup>

In 1900, the Society of Woman Journalists had only 69 members. Two years earlier, Arnold Bennett had written in *Journalism for Women* that Fleet Street had two species – journalists and women journalists – and that the one was about as far removed organically from the other as a dog from a cat.<sup>10</sup> This does not mean, however, that women's writing could not be found in newspapers outside the women's page, or that women did not read newspapers. The Aberdeen journalist, Caroline A. I. Phillips wrote for the conservative *Aberdeen Daily Journal* during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century whilst also organising the Aberdeen branch of the Women's Social and Political Union, and had to be warned by the editor to retain her objectivity and not mix her political opinions with her reporting. In 1888 the novelist Mona Caird wrote a series of articles for the *Daily Telegraph* entitled 'Is Marriage a Failure?', in which she argued that it was an institution based on the economic dependence of the woman and unsatisfactory for both sexes. Over 27,000 readers, male and female, wrote to the newspaper in response to the articles, the majority in agreement with her point of view.

In view of this suggested distinction between women's writing – for themselves alone or for a female readership – and men's writing, aimed at a general audience, research into women correspondents to Edwardian newspapers focuses on an area outside the female/private sphere, thus moving away from the main bulk of research into women's writing during this period, which has tended to focus on areas where women were most prolific – diaries, women's magazines and newspapers such the suffrage press, and of course novels and poetry. Elaine Showalter's ground-breaking work on women authors during the Victorian and Edwardian periods has led to a new interest in women writing at this time, particularly those producing fiction, but also writers of magazine and newspapers articles, non-fiction and academic research.<sup>11</sup> Showalter has argued that 19<sup>th</sup> century women writers had no tradition of other women writers from whom to learn their craft. Each generation therefore had to continually establish their own understanding of the role of the women writer. Might the same be said of women correspondents to newspapers – particularly in view of their frequent use of noms de plume, which would have meant that a

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<sup>9</sup> 'What It Means to be a Lady Journalist', *The Young Woman* Vol. VIII, October 1899 to September 1900, quoted in Gardiner, Juliet, ed., *The New Woman: Women's Voices 1880-1918*. London: Collins and Brown, 1993, p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in John, Angela V., 'Evelyn Sharp, Suffragette and Rebel Journalist'. *Women's History Review*, 2003, 12(1), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Showalter, Elaine, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

correspondent's identity might be hidden from her friends and family and that therefore each new correspondent would have few personally known exemplars to follow?

Research on women writers has extended over the last 30 years from those few female authors admitted into the tiny band of the 'great' in the English literary tradition – the Brontës, Austen, Eliot – to encompass many others, from the rediscovered Hannah More and Elizabeth Gaskell through to the 'New Women' writers such as Sarah Grand or Mona Caird. Work has also moved away from purely literary authors to include non-fiction writers such as Harriet Martineau and Mary Wollstonecraft or magazine editors and writers like Annie S. Swan. Some of this work has focused on how these writers' femininity impacted on their writing, both methodologically and as a product. Hence we have debate about Austen's methods of writing on an occasional side table in the public areas of the family house; the death of Charlotte Brontë in childbirth and descriptions of Elizabeth Gaskell writing on the dining-table while keeping the door firmly shut against the queries of her servants. Research has also been undertaken into the woman *reader* of the period, for example by Kate Flint, whose book *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914*, attempts to explore the wide range of published material to which Victorian and Edwardian women might have access, although she says disappointingly little regarding their access to and use of newspapers.<sup>12</sup> It can therefore be seen that research into women correspondents to newspapers falls across two areas of current academic interest since such women were both published authors, albeit in a small way, and responsive readers of the newspapers.

In addition, research into correspondence to two Aberdeen daily newspapers offered the chance to make a significant contribution to the local history of north-east Scotland. In particular, it offered the opportunity to investigate women's lives and concerns outside the more frequently researched central belt of Scotland, and to contribute to the history of two newspapers which have been, and still are, central to an understanding of the cultural life of north-east Scotland.

There have been few attempts to analyse historical collections of letters to the editors of newspapers. Nord's research into reader response used letters sent to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Herald* during the period 1912–17.<sup>13</sup> However, the letters used in this research were not those printed in the newspaper, but rather letters the editor had chosen to keep in his private files, with the intention of writing a book about being a newspaper editor one day. Therefore, these letters were not a representative sample of the letters sent to the newspapers; many were not even intended to be published in the correspondence columns but were personal

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<sup>12</sup> Flint, Kate, *The Woman Reader 1837–1914*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Nord D P, 'Reading the Newspaper – Strategies and politics of reader response, Chicago, 1912-17'. *Journal of Communication*, 1995, 45(3), pp 66–93.



attacks on the editor himself. Nord's research focused on reader response to newspaper editorial and concluded that newspaper readers in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chicago brought their own interpretive norms and conventions to their reading of the newspaper. In addition, some readers did not understand or appreciate the new standards of objectivity that US newspapers editors were developing at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another example of a collection of American newspaper letters from this period is that made by Ralph E. Shaffer of the *Los Angeles Times* 1881–89. Professor Shaffer has transcribed all letters to the *Times* during this period and made them available on his website – a task made easier by the fact that letters to the editor in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Los Angeles were not as numerous as in later sources. There were some letters to the editor from women correspondents, but Shaffer has so far made little attempt at analysis of the letters apart from forming them into a narrative whole for presentation on the website.<sup>14</sup>

Matthew E. Lenoe has utilised readers' letters to early Soviet newspapers as a source for early Soviet history. However, the conventions governing letters to the editor in the late Tsarist period and early USSR were very different from those to be found in Britain or the United States of the same period. Russian correspondents could have a variety of motivations, including official encouragement, for writing to the newspapers:

For their authors the letters were a channel for petitions to power of all sorts, whether for restoration of rations, a trip to Moscow, or redress of injustice. Writing letters to the papers was also a means of proving oneself as a civic-minded activist, a morally serious person worthy of admission to the Party..... Yet whatever the motives behind them, letters to Soviet newspapers... do not represent, except in very distorted form, their authors' private aspirations, opinions or beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Correspondents were encouraged to write to Soviet newspapers by both the newspapers themselves and the Soviet authorities, who used reports compiled by the newspapers and based on such letters to monitor public attitudes to their policies. Letter-writing was also seen as evidence of education and political persuasion. As stated in the quotation above, it is difficult to use such letters to gain an accurate picture of the private thoughts of individual correspondents, particularly after the 1920s when writers became very aware that their letters were monitored by the State, and thus the evidence of letters to Soviet newspapers has not been approached by historians in the same way as letters to US or British newspapers.

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<sup>14</sup> Shaffer, R E, 'Letters From the People, *Los Angeles Times* 1881–89', online article at <http://www.csupomona.edu/~reshaffer/> accessed September 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Lenoe, Matthew, E., 'Letter-writing and the State: reader correspondence with newspapers as a source for early Soviet history'. *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, January–June 1999, 40(1–2), p. 140.



The research of Anita Sama into the reporting of the women's suffrage movement in *The Times*, 1900–18, is an example of the use of newspapers to investigate one aspect of British women's concerns during the period 1900–18.<sup>16</sup> However, Sama's research made little use of correspondents' letters and was not based on a systematic study of all – or even a sample – of issues of *The Times* for this period. Instead, she made use of *Palmer's Index to the Times*, which she interrogated using key words. Sama admitted herself that such an approach must, of necessity, be a hit-and-miss affair. Her research, however, again draws attention to the fact that – like Lander's Kent State correspondence – letters to the press did more than merely reflect public opinion but might also affect the chain of events. In March 1912, Almroth Wright, the eminent bacteriologist, notoriously wrote a letter to *The Times* on the subject of women's demand for enfranchisement. This letter was published on the morning of the debate on the Conciliation Bill, which sought to offer a limited amount of political power to women. In the letter, Wright attributed mental aberrations to the majority of women, and suffragists in particular. Such a misogynistic letter called forth indignant replies from many, including famous anti-suffragists such as Mrs Humphrey Ward, but the damage had been done. Almroth Wright's letter was referenced several times during the debate, which ended in defeat for the Bill and a renewal of violence from the suffragettes for another two years.

Leah Leneman's work on the women's suffrage movement in Scotland makes some use of Scottish local newspapers to establish a chronological view of events, but rarely mentions letters to the editor and tends to concentrate on chronology rather than looking at the motivation of women involved in the movement.<sup>17</sup> Lindy Moore does make use of letters to the two Aberdeen newspapers in her study of suffragists' use of the press during an Aberdeen by-election in 1907, but this is a very narrowly focused piece of research and there has been no attempt at a wider use of letters to these newspapers.<sup>18</sup>

### **The newspapers**

The research therefore used a historical collection of newspapers as the principal tool for data collection, focusing on the letters of women correspondents to Aberdeen daily newspapers between 1900 and 1918. With the average letters column in each newspaper running to around eight letters every day it was obviously impossible to transcribe and analyse every letter to the

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<sup>16</sup> Sama, Anita, 'The Times and the Women's Suffrage Movement 1900-1918'. Unpublished MLitt dissertation, St Andrews, 1975.

<sup>17</sup> Leneman, Leah, *Guid Cause: the Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Moore, Lindy, 'Feminists and Femininity: A Case-study of WSPU Propaganda and Local Response at a Scottish By-election'. *Women's Studies*, 1982, 5(6), pp. 675–684.

editor. It was therefore decided to restrict the sample to letters which could be identified as being written by a woman correspondent, thus giving a much smaller sample size. It might have been possible to include both male and female correspondents in the research by restricting the number of issues of the newspapers studied across the period. However, Franzosi warns against the introduction of such sampling techniques into socio-historical analyses of newspapers for two reasons. Firstly, if the phenomena to be studied are characterised by cyclical behaviour, these might slip through the sampling grid, and secondly because the distribution of events in the phenomenon under study may be bounded in strategically linked chains of events.<sup>19</sup> It was therefore decided to avoid sampling by transcribing and analysing *all* letters that could be identified as being from a female correspondent. In addition, by focusing on women letter-writers, the research aimed to contribute uniquely to the body of knowledge about the motivations of those who write to newspapers, discussing both the role of published women writers – while acknowledging that one letter in a local newspaper might be the sum total of these women's publications – and women readers' response to the newspapers. It was also proposed not to narrow the research to political questions such as women's suffrage, as previous research had tended to do, but to look at *all* issues covered by these correspondents. This approach was enabled by the comparatively small sample size (see below).

The years 1900 to 1918 were chosen because this period witnessed some of the most significant changes in the lives and status of British women. In 1900, Queen Victoria was still on the throne, with all that the term 'Victorianism' implied for women – an emphasis on domesticity and morality; women had few employment opportunities and the main career open to them was as wife and mother. Although some advances had been made, particularly in the field of legislation concerning marriage and divorce, women still had few political rights, suffered under legal disabilities, and could not look to any immediate change in this position, the women's suffrage movement being in the doldrums after the energetic campaigning of the 1880s. However, by 1918, women had made their way into many occupations. These included new careers in the professional world, such as teaching and nursing, while the introduction of the typewriter into many offices offered opportunities for a new breed of women clerks. During the First World War, women also served at the front with the newly created women's forces and women's hospitals. In 1918 qualified women over the age of 30 were allowed to vote in a general election for the first time, with women candidates standing as prospective Members of Parliament.

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<sup>19</sup> Franzosi, R., 'The Press as a source of socio-historical data – Issues in the Methodology of Data-Collection from Newspapers'. *Historical Methods*, 1987, 20(1), pp. 5–16.



In addition, this period saw striking social and political change and consequent unrest in Britain and the rest of the world. The previous election during the Boer War having been the first 'khaki' election, with the country continuing to support the Conservative government, 1906 saw a revolt against its policies with a landslide victory for the Liberal party. Expectations were therefore high amongst many reform-minded groups, including the women suffragists, for this new Liberal government, which proposed its own agenda of controversial social and political reform, including an Education Bill, Old Age Pensions Bill and Insurance Bill and more debate on the Liberal ideal of Home Rule for Ireland. However, the Liberal government, first under Campbell-Bannerman and later under Asquith, became bogged down in its fights with the House of Lords over the so-called People's Budget, which necessitated its returning to the country for a mandate to reform the House of Lords twice in 1910.<sup>20</sup> Outside British mainstream politics, the Edwardian period was equally full of changes and tensions, with the growth of socialism, anarchism and nationalism in both Europe and the United States.<sup>21</sup> The period 1900 to 1918 can therefore be seen as a time of rapid social change, with particular implications for the role of women. In their justification for their own research into the popular press and social change in Britain between 1935 and 1965, Smith, Rowman and Littlefield suggested that:

At all times, but especially in periods of rapid social change, the press performs a significant role as a social educator. By its consistent reporting and comment about people and events, the press reflects changing patterns of life in a society. More significantly, by its selectivity, emphasis, treatment and presentation, the press interprets that process of social change.<sup>22</sup>

This research investigates how – or whether – such significant changes impacted on the type of letters written by women to newspapers; whether more freedom in their political and working lives led to more freedom of expression of their opinions in a public arena. However, it also aims to investigate how far women correspondents were allowed – or allowed themselves – to comment on matters 'outside their sphere' in the early part of this period, and the strategies women correspondents used in order to make their opinions known.

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<sup>20</sup> For more on this struggle with the House of Lords, see Jenkins, Roy, *Mr Balfour's Poodle*. London: Heinemann, 1954.

<sup>21</sup> For a very readable introduction to social ideas and changes during this period, see Tuchman, Barbara, *The Proud Tower*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, Rowman and Littlefield, *Paper Voices, The Popular Press and Social Change, 1935-1965*. Totowa, US, 1975, p. 11.

The two newspapers that were chosen for this research are the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and the *Aberdeen Free Press*. The *Journal*, established in 1748 by James Chalmers, printer, is one of the oldest newspapers in Europe. On first publication, it appeared weekly and was a staunch supporter of Whiggery while its first competitor, the *Aberdeen Intelligencer*, supported the Jacobite cause. Within five years the *Journal* had absorbed the *Intelligencer* since the city was not yet large or rich enough to support two newspapers. Another competitor, the *North of Scotland Gazette* appeared in 1847 but in the spring of 1853 transformed itself into the *Aberdeen Free Press*. Matching the *Journal* closely in price, size and content, the *Free Press* enjoyed substantial leaps in circulation in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1865 it began to be published twice a week and by May 1876 was appearing daily. In response, the *Journal*'s owners, the Chalmer brothers, great-grandsons of the founder, sold the newspaper, premises and plant in order to form the North of Scotland Newspaper and Printing Company Ltd so that the newspaper could afford to begin daily publication. A half-century of direct rivalry followed, with both newspapers expanding from four to eight pages and launching evening papers, the *Evening Express* and the *Evening Gazette*, in the early 1880s. During the First World War the two newspapers were forced to co-operate over issues such as restriction of paper sizes, mutual reporting aid and advertising charges. After such co-operation, and with the newspapers now covering the same news, selling to the same area, in the same numbers, and both in need of money, a merger was proposed. In 1922 the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* was born, and so this research focuses on these newspapers' last two decades as independent entities before the merger forced them to suspend hostilities and erase differences.<sup>23</sup>

Even today, the 'P and J', as it is colloquially known, is regarded as representing a well-defined geographical area, recognised in cultural, social and political terms – and such was definitely the case at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> This makes the two newspapers ideal for an investigation of Scottish provincial attitudes to London-based events, such as the political crises of 1910–11, or to national issues where the agenda appears to have been dictated from London or Edinburgh, such as the policies of the various women's suffrage societies. It also offers the opportunity to compare the policies of the Liberal *Free Press* with the more Conservative/Unionist *Journal* and to investigate whether either newspaper attracted more or less letters of either shade of political opinion. In recent years, the benefits of focused, provincial

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the history of the newspapers, see Fraser, George and Peters, Ken, *The Northern Lights*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978 and Harper, Norman, *First Daily: A 250-Year Celebration of the Press and Journal*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen Journals, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> This geographical area is traditionally seen as north-east Scotland, covering Aberdeenshire, Kincardineshire, Banffshire and, peripherally, Morayshire. The common defining characteristic throughout the area is the use of the Doric.



studies, for example in the study of the woman suffrage movement, have been made plain. Such studies can offer completely different views of events and personalities from earlier studies, which tended to focus on the London-based leadership and imposed a 'top-down' view of the movement. (The benefits of such a localised approach to the woman suffrage issue will be discussed further in Chapter IV.)

The two newspapers were also ideal for this study since they show little evidence of what has been called 'editorial gatekeeping'. The majority of the studies mentioned above found that it was difficult to assess the representativeness of letters published in the newspapers studied because of editorial choice or censorship, meaning that many letters were not published. As Grey and Brown put it, 'Editorial policy... severely restricted the research and challenged the whole concept of letters as valid indicators of political feeling.'<sup>25</sup> Such censorship might either be implemented because of a lack of space or, as in the case of the research conducted by Grey and Brown, in an attempt to remain strictly neutral during an election campaign.

There is little evidence of such editorial gatekeeping in either the *Press* or *Journal* during this period. The policy seems to have been one of publication of all letters submitted, as long as accompanied by a name and address (although correspondents could request to remain anonymous in print). Occasionally, the Letters to the Editor columns carried notes from the editor explaining why a particular letter could not be published. This was usually because the correspondent had failed to submit their name and address or because the editor judged that the issue about which the letter was written was now finished, although sometimes the editor was forced to censor a letter which might lead to legal action against either the correspondent or the newspaper. For example, in May 1912, the editor of the *Daily Journal*, stated: 'More Light' – Your letter in all probability would lead to a libel action against you if we inserted it'.<sup>26</sup> Thus it seems that all letters submitted were either printed or at least an acknowledgment of their receipt and the editor's reasons for non-publication appeared, meaning that it can be assumed that an accurate tally of letters to the editor can be compiled. The editors would even apologise to correspondents if their letters had to be held over until the following day because of lack of space. Although the original letters have long since been discarded, no reference to a previous letter not being published has been found in the letters columns of either newspaper. Additionally, on occasion it is possible to trace a correspondent who was asked to submit their name and address doing so and then having their letter published. For example, on 7 March 1916, the *Journal*

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<sup>25</sup> Grey and Brown, 'Letters to the editor: Hazy reflections of public opinion', p. 452.

<sup>26</sup> 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 18 May 1912.

printed a letter from 'Farmer's Wife' on the controversial question of farmers' sons and enlistment. The editor had noted at the end of the letters column a few days earlier that the letter from 'Farmer's Wife' could not be printed until a name and address was forthcoming. The letter that was finally printed points out that a card is enclosed for the editor's information.<sup>27</sup> Editorial gatekeeping of a more restrictive nature, such as faced by researchers such as Grey and Brown, may be a modern phenomenon – according to Sama, *The Times* of this period also published all correspondence submitted. In addition, in his study of the *Los Angeles Times* 1881–89, Ralph E. Shaffer reports little evidence of editor H. G. Otis deliberately suppressing letters stating a position he did not like. Thus, Otis ran many letters that were pro-union, despite his anti-union feelings, although occasionally adding a postscript, in opposition to the author's viewpoint.<sup>28</sup> As will be seen, the editors of the Aberdeen newspapers also occasionally used postscripts to put across an opposing viewpoint or to close a topic of correspondence when they felt it had gone on long enough. Even more modern studies of newspapers, such as Cox and Morgan's study of six daily and weekly newspapers in Merseyside during the 1960s, found that, while space given to readers' letters varied, all editorial staff were confident that this was a consequence of the number of letters the newspapers received rather than any question of editorial policy.<sup>29</sup> Letters might be edited on space or occasionally legal grounds, but 'if their bona fides [sic] are valid, they can expect to be printed, and not only when there is already a controversy in the area concerned'.<sup>30</sup> Cox and Morgan found that letters to the editor were often on subjects outside local government and could express personal ignorance and idiosyncrasy rather than a justified grievance. Editorial staff also suggested that their newspapers were seen as a kind of general ombudsman, with many letters soliciting the paper's help with a particular grievance, a phenomenon not mentioned in contemporary American studies.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Farmer's Wife', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 7 March 1916.

<sup>28</sup> Shaffer, R. E., 'Letters From the People, *Los Angeles Times* 1881–89', online article at <http://www.csupomona.edu/~reshaffer/> accessed September 2000; I am also grateful to Professor Shaffer for discussing this issue in personal correspondence.

<sup>29</sup> Cox, Harvey and Morgan, David, *City Politics and the Press*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

## **Aim and Objectives of the research**

### **Aim**

To provide an insight into the motivations and agenda of women correspondents to Aberdeen local newspapers during the period 1900–18.

This period witnessed many significant changes to women's lives and the research investigated how far greater emancipation (in the broadest sense of the word) impacted on women's freedom of expression in a public arena.

### **Objectives**

The following objectives were identified to achieve the above aim:

- (1) To identify all relevant literature covering the topic and to undertake a content analysis of all printed letters to the editor identified as being by women correspondents to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press*, 1900–18.
- (2) To analyse women correspondents' attitudes regarding writing letters for publication, including whether or not they chose to identify themselves; choice of subject; choice of newspaper and language used.
- (3) To identify, as far as possible, the class, occupation and place of residence of the women correspondents. This included the use of any diaries, autobiographies and obituaries of specific women that could be identified.
- (4) To analyse the motivation of the women correspondents to the newspapers, including a discussion of the three motivations identified by previous research based on modern letter-writers – prompting by articles and correspondence within the newspapers themselves; the 'safety valve' theory; and the need for the newspaper to act as a type of ombudsman.



(5) To investigate the subjects discussed in the women's letters, focusing on subjects deemed by contemporaries to be inside and outside 'the women's sphere', and to evaluate correspondents' attitudes to these subjects.

(6) To investigate any differences in attitude between the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press* – either in the attitude of the newspapers towards the correspondents or in the use made of the newspapers by the women correspondents.

(7) To investigate, and suggest reasons for, any differences between correspondence from women in the pre-war period (1900–14) and the wartime period (1914–18).

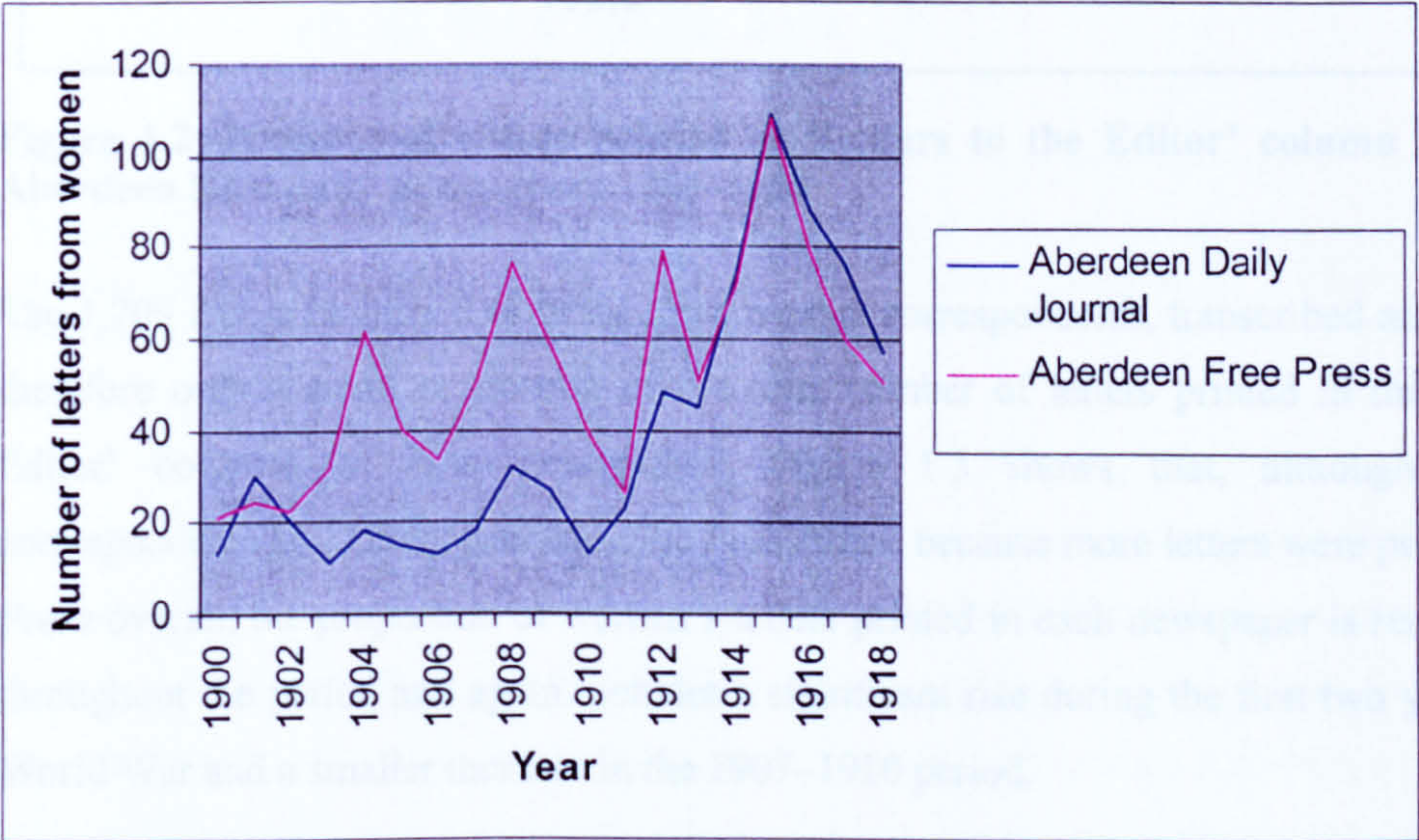
## Methodology

The research aimed to analyse the content of every letter sent by a correspondent identified as a woman to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and the *Aberdeen Free Press* between 1900 and 1918. As mentioned above, not all correspondents chose to have their names and addresses printed with their letters, which did introduce the problem of identifying female correspondents. For the purposes of this research, it was decided to identify as female any correspondent giving her full name; using a female nom de plume or identifying herself as a woman in her letter. Many pen names used in the correspondence columns of the newspapers were gender-specific, for example, 'A Working Man'; 'Dorcas' or – very popular – 'A Mother'. Others, such as 'Suffra Jet' or 'Member of the WSPU', also implied a female correspondent (men were not allowed to be members of the Women's Social and Political Union). It has to be accepted that some female correspondents were not counted using these criteria. It was impossible to discern the gender of pen names such as 'Hopeful' or 'Annoyed of Crathes'. However, since a correspondent using such a non-gender-specific name obviously did not want to be identified as a woman – and was presumed by subsequent correspondents to be male – this did not affect the overall findings. Correspondents who signed themselves with initials or as A. B. Smith, etc, were also counted as non-female – again using subsequent correspondents' assumptions that they were male ('Mr Smith's letter of....'). Such assumptions by correspondents were based on common grammatical usage at the time. Although it was actually grammatically correct to use *they* for sex-indeterminable references, common usage preferred *he*, with 19<sup>th</sup> century grammarians claiming that *he* was the most 'comprehensive' form. The feminist critic Dale Spender comments, 'It is



also, of course, the term which makes males visible, and this is not just a coincidence.’<sup>31</sup> Thus this research identified a specifically female discourse, which was recognised as such by both the newspapers and their readers.

Using these criteria, letters from women correspondents were identified, transcribed and analysed. At the same time as the transcriptions, *all* letters to the editor were counted, in order to establish the proportion of identifiably female correspondents in each year. Overall, 1,709 letters from women correspondents were identified and transcribed. The distribution of these letters across the period is shown in Figure 1.1 below.

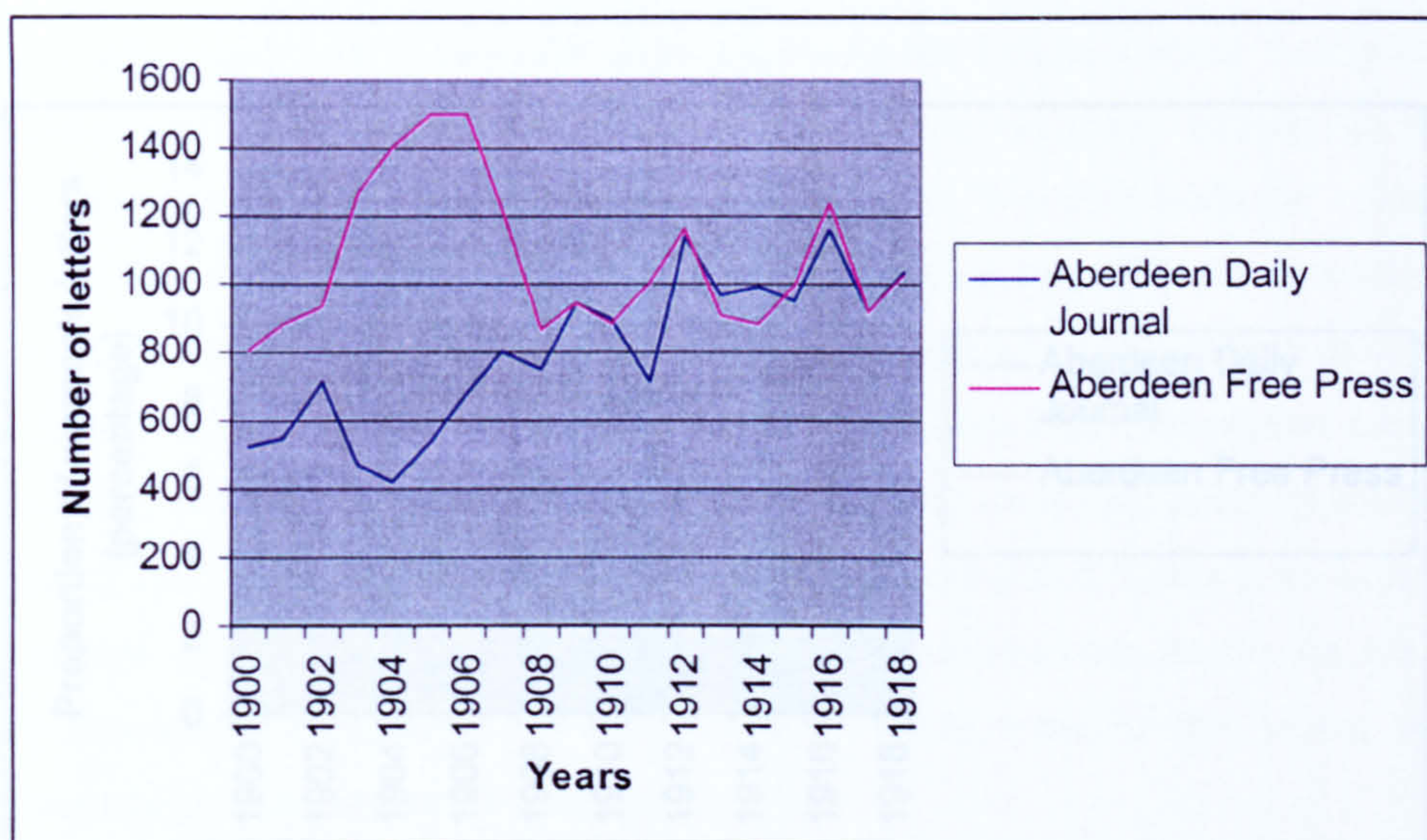


**Figure 1.1: Number of letters from women correspondents to Aberdeen local daily newspapers 1900–1918**

As can be seen from Figure 1.1, until the beginning of the First World War, the *Free Press* continually published more letters from women than the *Daily Journal*, although peaks and troughs in the frequency of correspondence from women to both newspapers are strikingly similar. However, Figure 1.2 shows that a similar distribution occurs if we look at *all* letters published by the two newspapers. In all, 35,368 letters to the editor were read and counted – 15,102 in the *Journal* and 20,266 in the *Free Press*. The distribution was as given below in Figure 1.2.

<sup>31</sup> Spender, *Man Made Language*, p. 149.



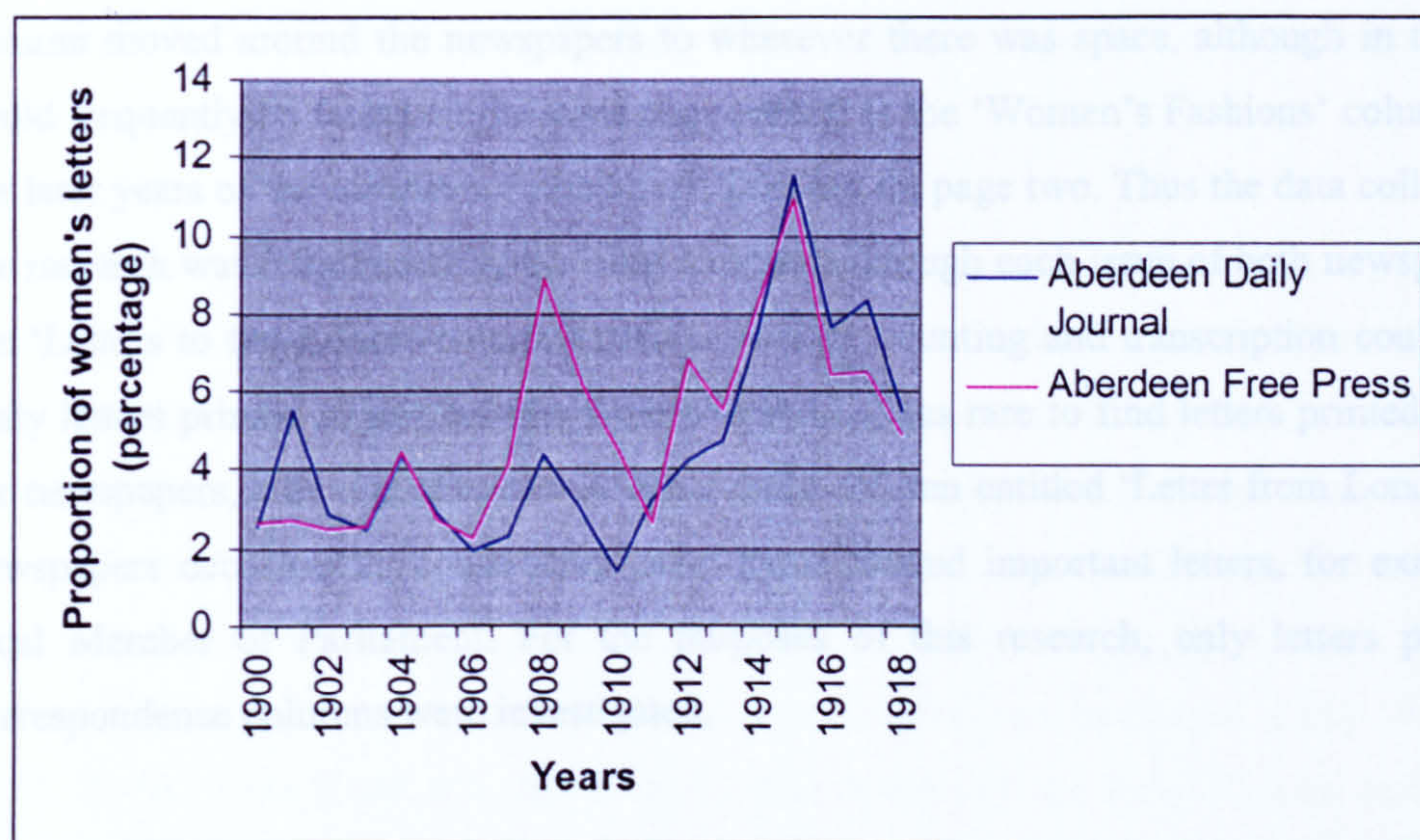


**Figure 1.2: Number of letters printed in ‘Letters to the Editor’ column in Aberdeen local daily newspapers 1900–1918**

The 1,709 letters identified as being from women correspondents, transcribed and analysed were therefore only a small proportion of the total number of letters printed in the ‘Letters to the Editor’ columns of both newspapers. Figure 1.3 shows that, although more women correspondents had letters printed in the *Free Press*, because more letters were printed in the *Free Press* overall, the proportion of women’s letters printed in each newspaper is remarkably similar throughout the period and again includes a significant rise during the first two years of the First World War and a smaller increase in the 1907–1910 period.

<sup>10</sup> ‘A Coder Man and Wife’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 23 September 1912.





**Figure 1.3: Proportion of women correspondents' letters in comparison to number of letters printed in the 'Letters to the Editor' columns as a whole in Aberdeen daily newspapers 1900–1918**

Each letter published in the letters column needed to be read through before it could be definitely counted as from a male, female or unidentified gender correspondent. The majority of all correspondents were those for whom it was impossible to define a gender. Only letters that could be definitely identified as coming from a female correspondent were then transcribed. While the fact that every letter was read meant that reactions to women's letters from both male and unidentified gender correspondents were monitored, women's motivations for writing and their reactions to each other's letters were the main concerns of the research undertaken. In only one case was a letter identified as coming from both a male and female correspondent. On 28 September 1912, a letter from 'A Cottar Man and Wife' was published in the 'Letters to the Editor' column of the *Daily Journal*.<sup>32</sup> The letter dealt with two connected issues: the declining quality of scything in Aberdeenshire and the farm servant problem. It is quite clear that the 'Cottar Man' wrote the first paragraph, bemoaning the poor quality of scything and describing how he scythed properly, while his wife wrote the second paragraph on the quality of domestic servants, which included a description of her own experience in the kitchen. This was the only example found of a letter jointly written by a man and a woman apart from letters submitted to the newspapers by formal committees containing both men and women.

<sup>32</sup> 'A Cottar Man and Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 28 September 1912.



Neither newspaper had a particular page on which the Letters Column was published – the column moved around the newspapers to wherever there was space, although in the *Journal* it could frequently be found on the same page spread as the ‘Women’s Fashions’ column, which by the later years of the sample appeared each Tuesday on page two. Thus the data collection part of the research was lengthened by the need to search through each issue of both newspapers to find the ‘Letters to the Editor’ columns before reading, counting and transcription could take place. Only letters printed in this column were counted. It was rare to find letters printed elsewhere in the newspapers, although the *Journal* had a daily column entitled ‘Letter from London’ and both newspapers occasionally constructed news items around important letters, for example from a local Member of Parliament. For the purposes of this research, only letters printed in the correspondence columns were investigated.

The actual newspapers were located in three libraries in Aberdeen. The issues of the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* for the selected period of 1900 to 1918 could all be found at the University of Aberdeen Library’s Special Collection and Archives on microfilm. If the microfilm for a particular letter was unreadable, it was always possible to access the original newspaper to check the transcription of the letter. Unfortunately, the University’s holding of the *Aberdeen Free Press* did not exist past 1907 and it was therefore necessary to utilise the Aberdeen City Library’s newspaper collection, which is at present undergoing microfilming. These newspapers were originally housed in the basement of the Woodside branch library and researchers wishing to use the newspapers were forced to work in quite difficult conditions, manhandling the heavy bound copies of the newspapers off high and dusty shelves, and working with inadequate lighting (and heating). However, during the last year of the research, users of the newspapers were directed to the local history floor of Aberdeen Central Library, where they needed to order the bound copies of the newspapers at least a week in advance. Neither was a particularly easy way to work, and it is good to be able to report that the microfilming of these newspapers is now nearly complete, although for the purposes of this research it was actually easier to find the ever-mobile Letters to the Editor columns in the original newspapers than when working on the microfilmed version.

Collective biographical research on selected women correspondents who were able to be identified was also undertaken. Obituaries, diaries, correspondence or autobiographies were sought in order to fully understand the motivations of these women and their involvement with the issues of the day. The backgrounds, politics, education and family and social ties of identified women were researched to identify common ground, and the results of such research are given in

Chapter II. In addition, autobiographies and biographies of women from the North-East of Scotland which covered the period studied were accessed to provide background material for the study.

Once all data was collected it was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, using contents analysis. The data was firstly interrogated to discover whether a picture of the average woman correspondent to the Aberdeen newspapers could be constructed. The issues about which women wrote letters to the press were then analysed and investigated. The following chapters present these findings. Chapter II discusses the type of woman who was inspired to write to the two newspapers and attempts to place her both geographically and socially. Chapter III analyses the differences between correspondents to the conservative and traditional *Daily Journal* and the more liberal *Free Press* and discusses the phenomena of the New Woman and the domestic woman. Chapters IV and V then discuss the two most frequent topics for women correspondents during the period 1900 to 1918 – women's politics and the First World War. Chapter IV focuses on women correspondents' attitudes towards political issues of the day, in particular the demand for the vote, while Chapter V discusses how the War impacted on correspondents' priorities and on the profile of the women correspondents themselves.



## **CHAPTER II**

*Who were the correspondents?*

## Introduction

Chapters III, IV and V discuss the variety of subjects about which women correspondents wrote to the two Aberdeen daily newspapers. However, before these subjects are investigated, we need to establish as much as possible about the *type* of woman who felt strongly enough about such issues to discuss them in a public forum such as the local newspaper. Even at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the possibility of emailing or faxing your comments to the newspapers, writing to the newspapers is still an unusual enough activity to warrant a special effort on the part of the correspondent – how much more effort then did the average woman correspondent in 1900 have to put into the process? This chapter analyses the type of woman who wrote letters to the newspapers and attempts to discover if there was such a thing as an average woman correspondent. A few women correspondents revealed a great deal about themselves and their private lives in their letters, while others would not even reveal their own names in print. However, it must also be borne in mind that women might choose to portray themselves in a certain way in their letters and the chapter therefore also discusses the limitations of this type of evidence, which means that we can only see aspects of the published persona of such women.

## The average correspondent

As was discussed in Chapter I, the characteristics of the average contemporary letter-writer were established by research undertaken in the US during the 1970s, such as that by Buell in 1975 and Volgy et al in 1977.<sup>1</sup> Buell's research built on the earlier work of Foster and Friedrich in the 1930s, which had suggested that the average correspondent to newspapers was white, male, middle-aged or older, well educated with an above-average income, a long-term resident in the community and probably a Republican. Buell's findings were derived from a secondary analysis of the 1972 national election study data collected by the Center for Political Studies, which asked whether people had ever written to a newspaper or magazine on a political issue. This research produced some correctives to Foster and Friedrich's findings. Buell suggested that correspondents to US newspapers on political issues were more equally divided by sex; that there was a more equal age distribution and that they were not necessarily long-term residents or Republicans. However, his findings agreed with Foster and Friedrich as far as income, race and education were concerned. He also suggested that people

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<sup>1</sup> Buell, E.H., Jr, 'Eccentrics or gladiators? People who write about politics in letters to the editor'. *Social Science Quarterly*, 1975, 56, pp. 440–449. Volgy, T. J. et al, 'Some of my best friends are letter writers: Eccentrics and gladiators revisited'. *Social Science Quarterly*, 1977, 58, pp. 321–327.

who wrote letters to newspapers on political issues were more likely to have participated in politics in other ways, such as writing letters to public officials, displaying campaign buttons or car stickers, and trying to talk others into supporting a particular candidate. Buell therefore suggested that letter-writing to newspapers was a logical extension of an above-average interest in politics, and not necessarily the mark of a crank. Volgy's research was based on a sample of registered voters from a South-Western metropolitan US area, as part of a larger study investigating public opinion patterns regarding US foreign policy. The letter-writers were drawn from those who had written to two major metropolitan dailies over a 16-month period and were compared with others concerned with political issues, for example, students taking foreign policy courses and adults in foreign policy related organisations, plus a random sample of registered voters. In general, Volgy's findings concurred with Buell's. He found no significant differences between the letter-writers and regular voters in terms of age, race or party, but again the letter-writers were in general better educated. However, Volgy's sample of letter-writers was predominately male and made up of more recent arrivals in the community. He suggested that these findings might be related to the topic of foreign policy, which he suggested was a traditionally male concern, and which recent arrivals in the community might feel happier discussing in comparison to more local issues. (Feminist critics might re-interpret this as foreign policy being a sphere from which a dominant male group had excluded a muted group of women letter-writers.) Again, Volgy found the letter-writers significantly more interested in politics and more politically active than his control groups.

Thus we have a picture of the average letter-writer to contemporary newspapers as middle aged or above, better educated and well off in comparison to the average population. During the 1970s, the correspondents were divided equally between men and women, but earlier research in the 1930s suggested that more men than women wrote to newspapers. However, all of the research discussed above has the limitation that it was based purely on letters written on political topics and did not investigate other issues on which letters could be written. In addition, it was conducted in the United States during the politically charged years of the 1970s. How far can such a picture of the average letter writer be transferred to Edwardian Britain?

### **Women's access to newspapers**

During the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a dramatic growth in the circulation of daily newspapers in Britain. By the outbreak of the First World War, the *Aberdeen Daily Journal*



had a daily circulation of 29,760, an excellent recovery from the late 1880s, when circulation had fallen below 10,000, while the circulation of the *Free Press* followed a similar pattern.<sup>2</sup> To place this in context, the population of Aberdeenshire (excluding the city) in 1901 was 160,322, dropping to 159,330 in 1911 while the population of Aberdeen city itself was 153,503 in 1901 and 164,000 in 1911.<sup>3</sup> In comparison, a national newspaper such as *The Times* had a circulation of 38,000 in 1908, while the *Daily Mail*'s circulation was 800,000.<sup>4</sup> However, most of the growth in circulation benefited Sunday newspapers, since Sunday was the only day on which most of the population had the leisure time to read a newspaper. By 1910, less than a fifth of the population had regular access to a daily newspaper.<sup>5</sup> Such circulation increases were the direct result of both increased leisure time and higher literacy rates throughout the country. The 1872 Education Act (Scotland) had made education compulsory for both boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 13, although exemption was offered to those who could show evidence of an ability to read, write and do elementary arithmetic. However, while some form of education was now compulsory for all children, the education of girls was still different from that of their brothers. While boys were educated so that they could become wage-earners, girls were expected to leave school to become wives and mothers, and hence there was an emphasis on domestic skills in their education. Ambitions outside a domestic role were not encouraged. As Louisa Innes Lumsden, daughter of a gentry family in Aberdeenshire, reflecting on her own education, recorded in her autobiography, *Yellow Leaves, Memories of a Long Life*:

Something to look forward to, something to prepare for, some aim which would make it worth while to study, this was lacking in the old-fashioned school.... Poor Ethel, in the *Daisy Chain*, struggles hard to keep up with Norman without – be it noted – any teacher such as he has, and at the same time to satisfy her own governess, and in the end she is told it is quite useless: she never can keep up with Norman because he is a boy and she is only a girl. Ambition, initiative, even originality, were apt to be taboo, and only the so-called naughty girls dared to overstep the limits prescribed for them.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Harper, Norman, *First Daily: A 250-Year Celebration of the Press and Journal*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen Journals, 1997, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Hamilton, Henry, ed., *The County of Aberdeen: The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*. Glasgow: Collins, 1960, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Sama, Anita, 'The Times and the Women's Suffrage Movement 1900–1918', unpublished Mlit, St Andrews, June 1975, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, Paul, *The Edwardians*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975, p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves, Memories of a Long Life*. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1933, p. 24.

Lumsden persevered with her own education, moving from Aberdeen to Edinburgh to attend the lectures offered to ladies at the university there in the 1860s. She then became one of the first cohort of women at Emily Davies' College for Women at Hitchin, which later moved to Cambridge, and one of the first women to pass the degree examinations at Cambridge – although the university did not grant degrees to such women until 1928. After a short and unhappy stint as Classics tutor at the new Girton College in Cambridge, Lumsden accepted the challenge of helping to found the first public school for girls in Scotland – St Leonard's – and later was Superintendent of the first hall of residence for women at the University of St Andrews. Hers was a very unusual career for a woman at this time. Girls who wished to benefit from further education after the age of 13, or even to attend university, were still in a minority and considered odd – too much education for girls was even supposed to be harmful for their health, and would definitely damage their chances of a good marriage. 'How *can* you send your daughter to college, Mrs Brittain! Don't you want her ever to get *married*?' enquired one neighbour of the mother of Vera Brittain.<sup>7</sup> Adolescent girls were supposed to need to conserve their energies in order to withstand the physical changes occurring in their bodies and to prepare themselves for reproduction. Karl Pearson, a leading social Darwinist, wrote in 1885: 'If childbearing women be intellectually handicapped, then the penalty to be paid for race predominance is the subjection of women'<sup>8</sup>, while even an educated woman like Sara Burstall, headmistress of Manchester High School, could argue in 1907 that the study of mathematics was 'unfeminine'.<sup>9</sup>

What girls read outside school could also be strictly monitored to make sure it was 'suitable'. The autobiographies of women brought up in Aberdeenshire during this period usually emphasise a love of books and reading – sometimes seen as a way of escape from a busy home with many other children – although it is probable that a woman who would later write her autobiography *would* have an early love of books. Lyn Irvine moved with her family from Berwick on Tweed to the manse in Westhill Terrace, Aberdeen, in 1908. She remembered being allowed to read:

*The Mill on the Floss* – but not *Adam Bede*; *Esmond* – but not *Vanity Fair*. I consumed a great deal of contemporary rubbish, school stories (of which the early Wodehouse in *The Captain* magazine were by far the best) and historical romances.... We had a considerable stock of Sunday books. Many of these were little blue paper-covered volumes published by the SPCK, melancholy stories dealing in extremes of poverty,

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<sup>7</sup> Brittain, Vera, *Testament of Youth*. London: Virago, paperback edition, 1978, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Jane, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change*. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.



depravity, misery and piety – *A Peep Behind the Scenes, Froggy's Little Brother, Two Bright Shillings* and *Jessica's First Prayer*. We thought them much better stuff than the Sunday reading passed on from our parents.<sup>10</sup>

She felt that she could devote herself to a book 'with a thoroughness almost impossible for an adult'.<sup>11</sup> In the same way, Louisa Lumsden described her young self seated on a foot stool, 'deaf and blind to everything around me' as she read *The Arabian Nights, Gulliver's Travels* and *Don Quixote*.<sup>12</sup> Not all Aberdeenshire parents were as encouraging of their daughters' reading as the Irvine and Lumsden families. Amy Stewart Fraser, who lived in the manse at Glengairn until 1918, reported in her reminiscences:

My mother did not like to see me continually with my nose in a book, except in the evening when the day's work might be said to be done; she did her own reading then. Her spare time, as a girl, had been spent on needlework, and she considered that reading was a waste of time when one could be doing a useful job about the house. My father had no such ideas and from an early age I was allowed free range over the books in his study.<sup>13</sup>

While young girls would be encouraged to read 'improving' literature carefully selected for them by their parents or school teachers, newspapers were seen as more of a problem. Grace Fulford, one of the case studies given in Paul Thompson's *The Edwardians*, remembered that her father kept his bookcase locked and the children were not supposed to read the newspapers. 'I used to get them on the quiet sometimes. Say there was a spicy murder or something that I wanted to read. But we weren't allowed to, not as far as dad's permission was concerned.'<sup>14</sup> Grace Fulford was a member of the upper middle class living in southern England, as was Winifred Peck, whose account of attending Mrs Quill's academy for young ladies in Eastbourne at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is used in Carol Dyhouse's *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*. Peck remembered 'We were discouraged from discussing politics at all and no newspapers were allowed to us.'<sup>15</sup> Dyhouse comments that such prohibition on newspapers in many girls' private schools stemmed from the belief that the public world of newspapers and business was a male concern from which women, and especially impressionable young girls, needed to be insulated.

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<sup>10</sup> Irvine, Lyn, *So much Love, so Little Money*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves, Memories of a Long Life*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Fraser, Amy Stewart, *The Hills of Home*. London; Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, Paul, *The Edwardians*, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Dyhouse, Carol, *Girls Growing Up in late Victorian and Edwardian England*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 54.



Some of the more modern girls' schools, which aimed at more than 'finishing' young ladies, did encourage their pupils to read parts of the newspapers. However, their access to the newspapers was still censored. Vera Brittain attended St Monica's in Kingswood, Surrey, a newly founded school whose teachers encouraged her in her dreams of attending one of the new women's colleges at university. Despite their educational aspirations, however, the access of Brittain and her friends to newspapers was monitored:

Her [their school teacher] encouragement even prevailed upon us to read the newspapers, which were then quite unusual adjuncts to teaching in girls' private schools. We were never, of course, allowed to have the papers themselves – our innocent eyes might have strayed from foreign affairs to the evidence being taken by the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce or the Report of the International Paris Conference for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic – and the carefully selected cuttings invariably came from *The Times* or the *Observer* unmodified by contrary political opinions, but the fact that we had them at all testified to a recognition of the importance of current events far from customary at a time when politics and economics were still thought by most headmistresses to be no part of the education of marriageable young females.<sup>16</sup>

This titbit approach of delivering the news to young girls also occurred in Scotland. Amy Stuart Fraser from Glengairn was sent to boarding school in Edinburgh in 1906. She remembered that:

We saw no newspapers and it was years before I acquired the habit of news-reading, but once a week we were fed selected titbits from the *Scotsman* and *The Times*, and this way learned that Peary had reached the North Pole, and that Bleriot had flown the Channel.<sup>17</sup>

However, Fraser regretted her disinterest in the newspapers once she attended college, where daily newspapers were in ample supply:

I was by no means the only indifferent student of events of the day, and on topics suitable for discussion with the Warden, Miss Moseley, we were not as knowledgeable as we might have been. By turns we sat at her table, and she took it for granted that we had made ourselves familiar with at least the headlines in the papers.<sup>18</sup>

Once they had left school, married and set up homes of their own, women might not be able to find the leisure hours to read a daily newspaper, although it is evident that both the *Free Press* and the *Journal* expected some female readership. Pages devoted to women's fashions

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<sup>16</sup> Brittain, Vera, *Testament of Youth*, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> Fraser, Amy Stewart, *In Memory Long*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 143.

and other 'female' subjects such as cookery and domestic economy appear infrequently from the beginning of the period studied, and by 1911 the 'Woman's Fashions' column was a regular once-a-week feature of the *Journal*, which by the outbreak of the First World War was also offering an occasional column entitled 'The Household' covering cookery and laundry hints. In addition, it is obvious from the advertisements published in both newspapers that women were expected to at least glance through the newspapers, with advertisements for everything from lemonade and Bovril to a sale on children's clothes at Esslemont and Mackintosh, the leading Aberdeen department store, aimed directly at them. However, the very existence of a 'woman's page' argues that women were not expected to read every part of the newspaper, but instead to devote themselves to issues that might impinge on their domestic sphere. Dale Spender points out that most women's writing that might be found in newspapers or magazines at this time was aimed at women readers on the women's pages, thus maintaining the distinction between private/female and public/male spheres, but that it was still unusual for women writers to address themselves to male readers.<sup>19</sup> Kate Flint quotes Emily Davies on the subject of women's reading habits: 'Newspapers are scarcely supposed to be read by women at all. When the *Times* is offered to a lady, the sheet containing the advertisements, and the Births, Deaths and Marriages, is considerably selected.'<sup>20</sup>

Women readers might, however, be encouraged to take an interest in political news in order to provide their husbands with an audience. As Margaret Beetham points out in *A Magazine of Her Own?*, a woman might read the same pages of a newspaper as a man, but differently. She gives the example of the 1848 issue of the *Family Friend* which advised women that rather than complain about their husbands reading the newspaper, they should read it themselves so that they could talk to him about it.<sup>21</sup>

Women were therefore encouraged to have only limited access to the daily newspaper, after the head of the household had finished with it, and were certainly not expected to indulge in correspondence with its editor. As has already been pointed out in the Methodology chapter, the assumption amongst other correspondents to the letters pages in both the *Free Press* and the *Journal* was that a correspondent using a gender-free nom de plume or signing their letter with their initials only was male unless evidence in the letter pointed otherwise. It could

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<sup>19</sup> Spender, Dale, *Man Made Language*, p. 196.

<sup>20</sup> Davies, Emily, 'On Secondary Instruction as Relating to Girls' (1864), *Thoughts on Some Questions Relating to Women, 1860-1908*, quoted in Flint, Kate, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 121.

<sup>21</sup> Beetham, Margaret, *A Magazine of her Own?*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 26.

cause extreme surprise, if not horror, when a male correspondent found himself in dispute with a woman. In June 1917 'Mearns Farmer' and 'Hopeful' exchanged several letters on the subject of the lot of the farm servant. In her third letter, 'Hopeful' revealed that she was a schoolmistress rather than the 'school teacher' she had previously used. 'Mearns Farmer' immediately stopped the dispute because 'Hopeful's sudden metamorphosis into a lady has somewhat staggered me. In her first letter she led us to understand that she was a 'master' not a 'mistress.'<sup>22</sup> He did not seem to realise that she might have intentionally hidden her gender in order to avoid precisely this reaction.

If women were not expected to write letters to the newspapers, then the women who did so must have been strongly motivated to step beyond the pale of social conventions. This is particularly true of the pre-War years. During the War years, as we shall see, women had a role to fulfil in the organisation of voluntary war work, which meant that they needed to write to newspapers, and this was seen as an acceptable activity on behalf of the war effort. However, before the outbreak of war, women did not have this excuse for breaking the unwritten rules of newspaper correspondence and we thus have fewer correspondents revealing their female sex. Those women that did do so can certainly not be seen as 'average' in any way, but can a picture of the 'average' female correspondent be constructed?

### **Marian Farquharson of Haughton**

How much can we learn about women correspondents' characters and lives from their correspondence to the newspapers? In the case of most women, very little can be gleaned from the one or two letters they submitted for publication. However, a small number of women wrote frequently to the editor, and one or two appear to have revealed a good amount of information about themselves. The most prolific woman correspondent to either Aberdeen newspaper during the pre-war years was Marian Farquharson of Haughton, and her letters exemplify how such evidence can be used to gain an insight into the thoughts and day-to-day lives of women who might otherwise be lost to history. The Aberdeen daily newspapers from 1900 to 1912 carry 141 letters written by Farquharson, offering all sorts of personal information about her life and her opinions and allowing the reader to build up quite a complex picture of this particular lady.

Marian Farquharson was born Marian Ridley in England in 1846, the daughter of a clergyman whose family were minor gentry. We know from her letters that she was a proud descendent of the Protestant martyr Ridley, a fact that she used to justify her letters

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<sup>22</sup> 'Mearns Farmer', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 15 June 1917.



discussing the potential candidates for the Episcopal see of Aberdeen and Orkney – and she explained that it was the example of Ridley, ‘who preferred to suffer death by burning rather than shirk the courage of his opinions’, that inspired her to advertise her opinions so regularly in the newspapers. In 1883, at the late age of 37, Marian married Robert Farquharson of Haughton House, Alford in Aberdeenshire, who was 60 at the time and already had two daughters by his first marriage. After seven years of what seems a happy marriage – Marian wrote of ‘happy days ... learning from my husband many most interesting results of agricultural research’<sup>23</sup> – Robert died, but Marian remained in Scotland for the rest of her life, and had obviously fallen in love with the country. Various letters discuss her love of Scottish song, which she believed to be ‘vastly superior to those of other parts of the kingdom’, and her opinion that ‘Scottish opera would vie powerfully with that of Italian fame’<sup>24</sup>. In 1909, her nationality apparently no bar, she happily accepted the post of Honorary Vice-President of the Aberdeen Centre of the Scottish National Song Society. She was also the Honorary President of the Young Scots Society. Her letters celebrated the Aberdeenshire people, especially their farmers – she claimed that ‘I have for years regarded Aberdeenshire as possessing the most intelligent and honourable agriculturists in the world’<sup>25</sup> – and entered into an argument with other correspondents about when the turnip was first introduced into Scotland. Some of her opinions might be considered eccentric – she felt that the Scottish economy could be revitalised if more householders would use tartan for curtains and carpets, and proudly reported that her stair-carpet was made from tartan – but she would always support her arguments by reference to the opinion of others, as reported in books or newspaper articles.

Marian’s use of the words of others to evidence her own opinions was a very strong element in her arguments. She evidently read widely. In her letters she made reference at different times to articles from the usual national dailies, such as the *Daily News* and the *Times*, but also mentioned *The Lancet*, *The Economic Review*, *The Sugar Users’ Journal*, and *The Veterinary Journal*. However, it should not be assumed that Marian was a keen subscriber to all these journals. In one letter she explained that she used a ‘newspaper cuttings agency’ as ‘through great pressure of business... I have been unable to read most of the dailies’<sup>26</sup>. She also told her readers that she relied greatly on her press cuttings books, which she had been in the habit of maintaining for many years. Indeed, she wrote: ‘It is a matter of hourly

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<sup>23</sup> Marian Farquharson, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 18 May 1904.

<sup>24</sup> Marian Farquharson, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 9 September 1909.

<sup>25</sup> Marian Farquharson, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 18 May 1904.

<sup>26</sup> Marian Farquharson, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 19 May 1904.

wonderment to me how the majority of Scottish men and women... appear to have made no newspaper cuttings, books which I find so invaluable as accurate records of the words our statesmen have uttered at various epochs of their history'.<sup>27</sup> Such statements, and her constant use of newspaper clippings to reinforce her arguments, show that Marian evidently subscribed to the dictum, 'if it's in the paper, it must be true' and suggest that she was therefore making use of this power of the press to legitimise her own opinions.

This belief in the accuracy and truthfulness of newspapers may be one of the reasons why Marian Farquharson wrote letters to the editor so frequently. She was a woman of strong opinions who desired to convince her readership of the righteousness of her particular view. Marian wrote letters on subjects ranging from the medical inspection of schoolchildren and the better organisation of the railways to motorcar safety and how to prevent butter from going bad. Criticism from other letter-writers (usually male) only made her write longer and more enthusiastic letters. She was a keen advocate of equality for women – not merely in the matter of the vote, but in all areas of life. As President of the Scottish Association for the Promotion of Women's Public Work and the Women's International Progressive Union she worked for the admission of women into local government, public bodies and, her particular area of interest, scientific societies. In December 1903 she wrote in scornful protest at the behaviour of the Royal Society, which had named the discovery of radium as the greatest chemical discovery of that year, but had debarred the joint-discoverer, Madame Curie, from the meeting at which the award was presented to her husband on the grounds of her sex.<sup>28</sup> Marian was herself a respected botanist, the author of books such as *A Pocket Guide to British Ferns*, published in 1881, and attempted to be among the first women fellows of the Linnean Society. In her letter discussing the Royal Society's behaviour towards Madame Curie, Marian hoped that it would soon see the error of its ways and follow the example of the Linnean Society, which was then effecting an alteration in its charter to allow women to become fellows. In their *Bicentenary History of the Linnean Society of London*, Gage and Stearn describe Marian's four-year struggle, 'rebuffed but undaunted', to raise the question of the admission of women to the Society.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, in November 1904, the names of 16 women were presented to the Society's meeting for election. Fifteen women were elected – Marian Farquharson was blackballed, probably because of her campaign of agitation for admission. It was not until March 1908 that she was finally elected to the society, and ill-

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<sup>27</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 17 May 1904.

<sup>28</sup> Marian Farquharson, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 15 December 1903.

<sup>29</sup> Gage, Andrew Thomas and Stearn, William Thomas, *A Bicentenary History of The Linnean Society of London*. London: Academic Press, 1988, pp 88–91.



health meant that she was prevented from being formally admitted before her death in Nice in 1912.

With her letters on women's role in the world, butter-making and medical inspections, Marian may have been more prolific than other women correspondents to the Aberdeen newspapers, but she was keeping within the accepted parameters for women's letters to the editor. As inhabitants of a separate 'women's sphere' it was accepted that women had important things to say – or write – about matters such as children, health and the household. With the admission of women as voters in matters of local government, such as school and parish boards, this sphere widened during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, Marian was unique in her readiness to tread where other women feared – or did not want – to go. Marian did not see her femininity as disqualifying her from any subject. One of the most frequent subjects in the letters columns of both newspapers at this time was religion. This subject was usually discussed among a small select group of men, mostly ministers, and the correspondence could get exceedingly abusive. Of all the women who wrote to the newspapers on a wide variety of topics, only Marian, an Anglican, – backed by 'my ancestor Bishop Ridley' – dared take on a group of Presbyterian and Church of Scotland ministers on subjects such as baptismal regeneration and the historical Christ, ignoring their outrage that a woman (and an Englishwoman at that) dared dispute such subjects with them.

Marian's other great topic of correspondence, accounting for 70 of her letters to the *Free Press*, was the defence of free trade against 'Chamberlainism', the re-introduction of some kind of tariff control on imported goods. She wrote at great length on this subject, making use of her press cuttings for facts, figures and opinions from what she called 'men of light and learning', i.e. anyone who agreed with her, and reserving her greatest ire for Joseph Chamberlain, whom she considered a 'turncoat' for his change of heart on the tariff question. Many of her letters quoted at length his speeches from the 1880s, when he was a supporter of free trade, to prove how wise he had once been. In her letters on this subject Marian relied heavily on quotations from the opinion of others, justifying this approach in a letter to one of her critics in the following way:

I feel that, as I am not a member of Mr Balfour's Cabinet, or an MP, and as I do not even possess the advantages of any university training, I have often no means of forming accurate impressions from first-hand knowledge of facts, which is the reason why I invariably make it a rule to base my own opinions on those of persons whose opportunities of grasping information, have been and are greater than my own – following humbly the example of judges, who frequently supplement



their own opinion by a reference to cases of a similar character as recorded in legal books of reference.<sup>30</sup>

This use of the words of others to justify her own opinions meant that, despite frequently congratulating the newspaper editors for the 'terseness' of their leaders, Marian's letters often ran into two columns. Some correspondents objected to her habit of lengthy quotation, and her response to one such letter gives a nice example of both Marian's writing style and her – sometimes exasperating – style of argument:

In reply to 'Worker' – whom I do not know – I beg to say that I do not care to reply in full to various impertinent and inaccurate charges made under the cover of anonymity. In case, however, it is of interest to your readers, I will continue briefly to demonstrate how Chamberlainism is advancing in the opinion of certain persons who can reasonably be considered to be of importance as regards Great Britain and Ireland, their biography being in that most useful reference book *Who's Who*. As your correspondent 'Worker' objects to my making quotations from my relations' views and from other opinion of 20 years ago, I will begin from the year 1903. As the name of Mr William McKenzie [another correspondent on the subject in the *Free Press*] does not appear in *Who's Who* to be strictly logical I cannot refer to his letters in which he has chosen to bring against me certain accusations, or for the same reason to those signed 'Common Sense', 'Reform' and 'Small Farmer'. This reduces the number of the correspondents who have appealed to me, as far as I remember, on the fiscal question to one, namely Mr Harold Tremayne. On page 1536 of *Who's Who* for 1894 I find this gentleman commenced journalistic work on the *Western Morning News* and was on their Parliamentary staff and subsequently joined that of the *Daily Chronicle*; also that 'he contributed extensively on agriculture, etc, to the *New Liberal Review* and other journals.'<sup>31</sup>

Having proved to her own satisfaction, if no one else's, that she could only deal with the arguments of Tremayne, and despite her promise to be brief, this letter then continued for another 424 words. On occasions, Marian's opinionated letters are very similar to the letters of correspondents described by Nord in his analysis of letters to Chicago letters of the same period, who had problems with the new objectivity US newspaper editors were introducing at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Some readers, of course, professed to believe in fairness and impartiality; they understood that modern journalistic objectivity meant balance. They simply demanded more of it for their side.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 5 May 1904.

<sup>31</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 June 1904.

<sup>32</sup> Nord, David Paul, 'Reading the Newspaper – Strategies and politics of reader response, Chicago, 1912–1917', p. 78.

Although Marian's arguments can not always be said to be logical, no one could deny her commitment to the cause of free trade, which led to her forsaking the Primrose League of the Conservative Party and becoming a fervent Liberal supporter, travelling once more against the tide as the Liberal party continued to be rendered asunder by the Gladstonian devotion to the cause of Irish home rule. Again, her discussion of such matters was not always seen as appropriate for a woman. One of her critics, Mr McKenzie, was inclined to dismiss all of her lengthy letters, full of fact and figures, with the words '[Women's] knowledge of public affairs is limited to their own minds... They are not capable of maintaining their views with ingenious and plausible argument'.<sup>33</sup>

With her championship of women's equality with men, it is surprising to find that Marian Farquharson was not in the vanguard of the campaign for women's enfranchisement. Although one of her letters claimed Millicent Garret Fawcett as a friend, this discussed with approval Fawcett's positive attitude towards free trade rather than her leadership of the constitutional woman suffragists.<sup>34</sup> Her attitude seems to have been that, as an issue, woman suffrage was simply not as important as women's involvement in local government or scientific societies and she was particularly horrified by the militant activities of the WSPU, which she felt were harming the wider cause of women's equality. As she pointed out in June 1909:

While so much public attention has of late been drawn to the agitation for votes for women, it is well, I think, that the long-continued and still active movement for the educational progress of women, for the securing for them equal opportunities of competition in the race of life with men, and for obtaining the removal of the various legal disabilities affecting them by reason of their sex, should not be lost sight of.... it is therefore gratifying to the army of quiet and persistent women workers, aided by powerful supporters of the other sex, to realise that their efforts have been widely appreciated, and in many directions crowned with success in moulding public opinion without resorting to any adventitious or 'militant' methods.<sup>35</sup>

By January 1910 Marian was regretting that 'a fanatical minority' should be the cause of the franchise being denied to sensible women'<sup>36</sup> and applauded the 'reasonable methods' adopted by the suffragettes during the Conciliation Bill truce of 1910–11 (for more on this truce see the chapter on women's politics). Marian Farquharson died on 20 April 1912, and so was spared the sight of the more militant methods adopted by the suffragettes, including the death

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<sup>33</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 31 May 1904.

<sup>34</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 20 June 1904.

<sup>35</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 21 June 1909.

<sup>36</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 27 January 1910.



of Emily Wilding Davison on Derby Day, which will be discussed further in Chapter V. However, her earlier comments on such violent methods of protest and her fears that the suffragettes would harm the wider cause of women's equality with men, suggest that she would have been truly horrified by such events – and would have immediately written to the newspapers regarding them.

Before moving on to discuss other women correspondents to the newspapers, it must be pointed out that it was not only men who disapproved of Marian Farquharson's frequent letter writing. On 11 December 1903 a letter entitled 'Mrs Farquharson of Haughton' appeared in both newspapers. This stated:

I have to submit to a good deal of inconvenience and annoyance through the sayings and doings of a lady who, in letters to the press and which are likely to see light through the press, subscribes herself 'Marian S. Farquharson of Haughton' without having the smallest right to the designation. As my name so closely resembles Mrs Farquharson's (not of Haughton), I find myself sometimes credited with peculiar views about things in general – views which I in no way share....

I beg of you to allow me to ... ask the public not to hold me responsible for letters signed 'Marian S. Farquharson of Haughton', or for the acts of Mrs Farquharson, improperly described as 'of Haughton'; and to request the Aberdeen shopkeepers and others not to address to Haughton any parcels or letters intended for Mrs Farquharson, as their doing so only leads to trouble and expense to themselves and to me.'<sup>37</sup>

The letter was signed Maria O. Farquharson of Haughton – Marian's step-daughter – showing that even family, or perhaps especially family, had difficulty with women stepping outside their 'proper' sphere. However, the newspapers to which Marian wrote did not seem to have any problem with her frequent and lengthy letters. The *Journal* published an obituary of Marian Farquharson on 13 May 1912 and made reference to

the ladylike and temperate language of her addresses, as well as the charm of her personality – the very antithesis of the accepted idea of a 'blue stocking' or 'new woman' – loveable, kind-hearted, unselfish, tolerant, broad-minded, generous and sincere, as her life's aims and history showed Mrs Farquharson to be.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Maria O. Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 December 1903.

<sup>38</sup> 'Death of Mrs Farquharson of Haughton', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 13 May 1912.

### The Lumsden family

Another pair of prominent woman correspondents to the Aberdeen daily newspapers was Louisa Innes Lumsden and her elder sister Katharine. Louisa Lumsden's career in higher education has already been mentioned. In later life she retired to the Chanonry in Old Aberdeen, where the university was based, and followed family tradition by involving herself in Aberdonian affairs. Katharine and Louisa were the two remaining sisters of a large and active Aberdeenshire family. As Katherine E. Trail, daughter of Professor Milligan of Aberdeen University and a former pupil of Louisa's at St Leonard's School, stated in her *Reminiscences of Old Aberdeen* in 1932, 'Aberdeen has been very slow in showing the gratitude it owes to the Lumsdens of Glenbogie'.<sup>39</sup> The eldest sister, Rachel, had been Honorary Superintendent at the Sick Children's Hospital in Aberdeen and in 1885 she was asked to become Honorary Lady Superintendent at the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI). The 'honorary' positions meant that she kept her position as a 'lady' by doing only voluntary work and not being paid. When Rachel moved to the ARI, younger sister Katharine agreed to take up her position at the Sick Children's Hospital, a position she filled for 17 years. She also established the Aberdeen Nursing Association in 1892 and later the Aberdeen Home for Widowers' Children. Of the sisters, Katharine was the more prolific in terms of letters to the Aberdeen daily newspapers. Most of these referred in some way to fundraising for the hospital, the nursing association or the new home for widowers' children. However, her interest in the health of Aberdeen did not stop at fundraising. She was particularly concerned with the type of easily preventable accidents she saw the results of at the hospitals every day – the burning or scalding of children left unattended by fires; falls from train carriages when the doors were not properly locked; unhygienic homes leading to disease and death. Her role as Lady Superintendent and sister of the even more hallowed Rachel was used in these letters to justify her correspondence in the newspapers. It was also used to justify her correspondence on related topics, such as the very modern suggestion that Aberdeen establish a crematorium.<sup>40</sup> Despite her age, Katharine's attitude was always intensely practical – in July 1901 she thanked schools and churches for all the kind gifts of flowers that the Sick Children's Hospital received during the summer, but ventured to hint that they would find gifts of eggs far more useful.<sup>41</sup> Her plans for the establishment of a Home for Widowers' Children, a scheme she adopted on her retirement from the Hospital, were just as practical:

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<sup>39</sup> Trail, Katherine E., *Reminiscences of Old Aberdeen*. Aberdeen: D Wyllie and Son, 1932, p. 121.

<sup>40</sup> Katharine M. Lumsden, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 December 1900.

<sup>41</sup> Katharine M. Lumsden, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 11 July 1901.



The fathers must pay a reasonable board, varying of course according to the number of the children and the circumstances of the parent, and the payment will be regularly enforced. The house is no doubt roomy and convenient, and has a bit of garden ground attached to it, but it stands in a modest and dusty suburban road, not a 'crescent' and has none of the 'environments' which might make the children discontented with their own homes. As for the feeding... it will chiefly consist of wholesome Scottish porridge and broth, with an ample allowance of milk and bread and butter. The matron is a motherly, sensible and hard-working country woman, under whose care and training the children may safely be left, but the fathers are encouraged and even required to pay regular weekly visits, so that there may be no severance of the real home tie.<sup>42</sup>

As a woman who was involved in voluntary work in Aberdeen for most of her life, Katharine Lumsden's approach to problems was practical and based on experience. At the end of her life (she also died in 1912) she was still actively campaigning and fundraising for a variety of charities. True to her principles, at her death she insisted on being cremated at the crematorium in Glasgow before her ashes were transported to Aberdeen and interred in St Nicholas Churchyard. Despite her refusal to accept a salary and her insistence of remaining a voluntary lady worker, Katharine Lumsden also campaigned for the equality of women in such areas of work. In February 1906, she wrote to the *Journal*:

At the boards of the Infirmary, the Children's Hospital, the Morningfield Hospital and the City Hospital, no woman may raise her voice, though her help is gladly enough taken as an unpaid collector or other economical assistant. No matter what her experience may have been in hospital matters or management; no matter what solid assistance, pecuniary or otherwise, she may have given; no matter what may be her knowledge of domestic affairs and domestic difficulties – she is only a woman, and not worth recognition or admission into the solemn circle of wise and enlightened Hospital directors. I only ask, is this fair, or is it even good sense?<sup>43</sup>

As will be seen in the chapter on women's politics, arguments for the enfranchisement of women and their involvement in national and local politics were often based on the need in these areas for the special skills of women in terms of domestic management. However, such arguments were less frequently joined by the accusation that it was simply not fair to exclude women. The voice of Katharine Lumsden's own experience as a lady superintendent, burdened with care but with little direct influence, speaks here.

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<sup>42</sup> Katharine M. Lumsden, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 30 June 1903.

<sup>43</sup> Katharine M. Lumsden, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 22 February 1906.

While Katharine was involved in caring for the health of Aberdeen, Louisa Innes Lumsden became actively involved in the local campaign for woman's suffrage. On her retirement to Old Aberdeen, this eminent woman educationist was immediately asked by the Aberdeen Association for Women's Suffrage (the constitutional suffragists) to become its President. Most of her letters to the Aberdeen daily newspapers were official ones as President of this Association, mainly responding to accusations of inactivity by members of the militant WSPU. Such official letters as President of the Association reveal little about Louisa Lumsden's own feelings on the subject. However, her autobiography, *Yellow Leaves*, allows a comparison of her letters in the newspapers to her private thoughts. In *Yellow Leaves*, Louisa comments:

The militant movement never came so far as Aberdeen. The only suffragette I ever heard, Christabel Pankhurst, did not impress me in the least. She came to Aberdeen, scolded us and bored me. Mrs Pankhurst must have been a very fine speaker. I never heard her; but when Whitekirk was burned I was furious, and wrote her a reproachful letter, which somebody else answered, saying that she was abroad but would write when she returned.<sup>44</sup>

As the chapter on women's politics will show, the militant movement came to Aberdeen quite frequently, with visits from both Mrs Pankhurst and Christabel and the establishment of a branch of the WSPU by 1907. In December 1909 Louisa Lumsden had to write to the *Free Press* in response to a letter from 'Suffra Jet' in order to defend the Aberdeen Association for Women Suffrage from charges of indifferent members and few and lifeless meetings. Lumsden replied that while such charges might be true, it was not the fault of the committee, who were endeavouring to attract new and younger members, 'except, of course, from militants, whom their rules exclude'.<sup>45</sup> 'Suffra Jet' had also made allusion to a donation made to the Aberdeen Association by the WSPU on the closure of a separate Aberdeen branch earlier that year (see the chapter on women's politics for more on this event), which Louisa claimed the Association had attempted to return but eventually had been forced to accept. *Yellow Leaves* was published in 1933. Is Louisa's claim that the militant movement did not come to Aberdeen an example of time blurring memories, or did she simply not wish to acknowledge the strength of the WSPU movement in Aberdeen in comparison to that of her own association, which was certainly less vigorous. Even Katherine E. Trail, a fervent supporter of 'that wonderful woman, Dame Louisa Lumsden', nevertheless had to admit of

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<sup>44</sup> Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves, Memories of a Long Life*, p. 170.

<sup>45</sup> L. I. Lumsden, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 22 December 1909.



the Aberdeen Association that, despite her leadership, 'we never made our weight very much felt in Aberdeen'.<sup>46</sup>

While Louisa Lumsden was involved in educational and suffragist campaigns, and her sister worked for the health charities of Aberdeen, they did have an interest in one issue in common – the welfare of animals. Katharine Lumsden was a Director of the Aberdeen Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Society and wrote to the newspapers in reference to fundraising to support inspectors in Aberdeenshire. Louisa Lumsden, in her turn, was a vehement anti-vivisectionist and became involved in a fierce debate about the subject with a (male) member of the Research Defence Society in 1911.<sup>47</sup> Louisa refers to her interest in this issue in her autobiography, but interestingly does not mention her sister's commitment to animal welfare:

Now, when I had settled in Old Aberdeen, I found plenty of work to do, not only for suffrage but also because I became a member of 'The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Vivisection', founded and so named by Miss Ivory of Edinburgh; and with her I went to Nairn and Elgin.... The Secretary of this new society, Mrs Fyvie Mayo, one of my neighbours in Old Aberdeen, and her friend Dr Ferdinands, were zealous workers, and among us we started a magazine, *Our Fellow Mortals*, of which Mrs Fyvie Mayo was editor until her death, when I took it up and carried it on for eleven years, when overwork compelled me to give it up, to the regret of its many readers.<sup>48</sup>

Netta Ivory of Edinburgh also wrote directly to the Aberdeen newspapers regarding the foundation of this society. The connection between the fight for woman suffrage and an interest in anti-vivisection was made explicit by Louisa Lumsden when she referred in her autobiography to animal welfare being 'another and harder fight' than that of woman suffrage.<sup>49</sup> Isabella Fyvie Mayo, the well-known author who had retired to Aberdeen and whose death in 1914 is referred to above, was also a campaigner for woman suffrage, but unlike Louisa Lumsden was a member of the WSPU. In the later chapter on women's politics, the frequency of contact and friendships between members of the different militant and constitutional suffrage societies despite their different approaches to tactics will be further discussed.

Louisa Lumsden's linking of the fight for woman suffrage and the anti-vivisection campaign was not an unusual one. Many women who fought for equality of opportunity for their own sex were also drawn into the campaign for better treatment of animals. Charlotte Despard of

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<sup>46</sup> Trail, *Reminiscences of Old Aberdeen*, p. 121.

<sup>47</sup> See 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 31 May 1911, 3 June 1911, 6 June 1911, 14 June 1911, 15 June 1911, 21 June 1911.

<sup>48</sup> Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves, Memories of a Long Life*, p. 172.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

the Woman's Freedom League, for example, was an active anti-vivisection campaigner. Coral Lansbury has suggested that such women felt a degree of identification with the sufferings of animals and also considered that the medical establishment was beginning to treat women, in particular poor women, in a similar way as subjects for medical research.<sup>50</sup> The one woman who wrote to the Aberdeen daily newspapers in support of vivisection was, of course, Marian Farquharson, who was a member of the Research Defence Society. As a campaigner for the admission of women into membership of scientific societies, Marian Farquharson presumably felt a need to support the scientific view point against the anti-vivisectionists who, she felt, were on a 'wild crusade against science'.<sup>51</sup>

### Limitations of such biographical evidence from letters to the press

It can thus be seen that it is possible, in a limited number of cases, to gain some insight into the wider lives and interests of women correspondents to the daily newspapers. However, women such as Marian Farquharson and the Lumsden sisters are very much the exception. The majority of women who wrote to the Aberdeen daily newspapers were not frequent correspondents and it is not possible to build up such a detailed picture of their interests and convictions. Even in the case of someone like Louisa Innes Lumsden, little can be learned directly from her letters to the Aberdeen press apart from her support for causes such as the enfranchisement of women and anti-vivisection. It is of course her autobiography that tells the reader far more about her life and those of her sisters. Interestingly, in this case, even her autobiography may not tell the whole story. During the mid-1870s, Louisa Lumsden joined Cheltenham Ladies' College, which was at the time under the headship of Miss Beale, as the teacher of Classics. As she puts it in her autobiography:

The girls were delightful and keenly interested; in fact, so popular did Latin become, especially Virgil, that I had to ask Miss Beale to let me have an assistant, whereupon my friend, Constance Maynard, who had taken a First in the Moral Science Tripos, came to help me. We had charming rooms on the Royal Parade.<sup>52</sup>

When Louisa Lumsden was asked to return to Scotland to assist in the foundation of St Leonard's school for Girls in St Andrews, Constance Maynard accompanied her and the two women worked together with another Girton student, Frances Dove, in the establishment of the school. Maynard worked at St Leonard's until 1880 when she left to become Mistress of

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<sup>50</sup> Lansbury, Coral, *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers and Vivisection in Edwardian England*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 84.

<sup>51</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 18 June 1910.

<sup>52</sup> Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves, Memories of A Long Life*, p. 60.



Westfield College at the University of London. This is all we learn from Louisa Lumsden's autobiography. However, much more becomes evident about the relationships between the three women from Maynard's unpublished autobiography and diaries, as Elizabeth Edwards points out in an article in *Women's History Review* in 1995.<sup>53</sup> During the late 1870s, Maynard, Dove and Lumsden formed a triangular relationship. Edwards claims that Louisa Lumsden had longed to be a man and constructed her relationship with Maynard in the language of heterosexual marriage, referring to Maynard as her wife; 'I have been thinking over everything, and I am only too happy; my work, my home, my wife, all are good and I am satisfied'.<sup>54</sup> Edwards points out that such relationships needed to be discreetly conducted, especially between the principals of a girls' school, since they could not afford to endanger either their professional authority or their public respect by any hint of scandal.<sup>55</sup> This is presumably the reason for Louisa Lumsden's suppression of such a relationship in her own autobiography, but is a useful warning that the social conventions of the day have to be remembered when using any published writings of these women correspondents as evidence of their thoughts and convictions. While a woman like Marian Farquharson appears to tell her readers a great amount about herself in her letters to the press, it must be remembered that such letters, written as they were for publication, would have been constructed with care to present a particular image to the world. Even the apparently verbose Marian Farquharson did not tell the whole story in her letters. She frequently made reference to papers she had presented on the subject of women's work at the Paris International Congress, the Women's International Congress in London and the Glasgow Exhibition. However, her obituary in the *Journal* revealed that she herself had not given the papers – 'she was practically always an invalid, so that her clever and convincing addresses... had to be in consequence delivered by deputy, though received with deepest appreciation'.<sup>56</sup> Marian Farquharson's invalid state may be another reason for her frequent letters to the press – writing letters would have been one of the only possible outlets for an evidently intelligent and well-educated woman with such enthusiasm and drive and yet condemned by ill-health to remain out of the public eye for long periods of time.

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<sup>53</sup> Edwards, Elizabeth, 'Homoerotic Friendship and College Principals, 1880-1960'. *Women's History Review*, 4:2, 1995, pp. 149-163.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 156.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>56</sup> 'Death of Mrs Farquharson of Haughton', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 13 May 1912.



Correspondents from outside Aberdeenshire

The majority of women’s letters printed in the two Aberdeen newspapers originated from Aberdeen or the surrounding county. However, a small proportion of all letters printed came from outside this area, from other parts of Scotland, England or even further afield. In fact, the first letter ever printed in the *Daily Journal* – in 1748 – was written by an Englishman concerning a report that English corn was being sent to Bordeaux to feed the starving French. In his history of the two newspapers, Norman Harper describes it as a ‘fascinating picture of xenophobia’.<sup>57</sup>

Figure 2.1 below indicates the number of letters from women identified as based outside Aberdeenshire printed each year in the two newspapers as a proportion of all letters from women.

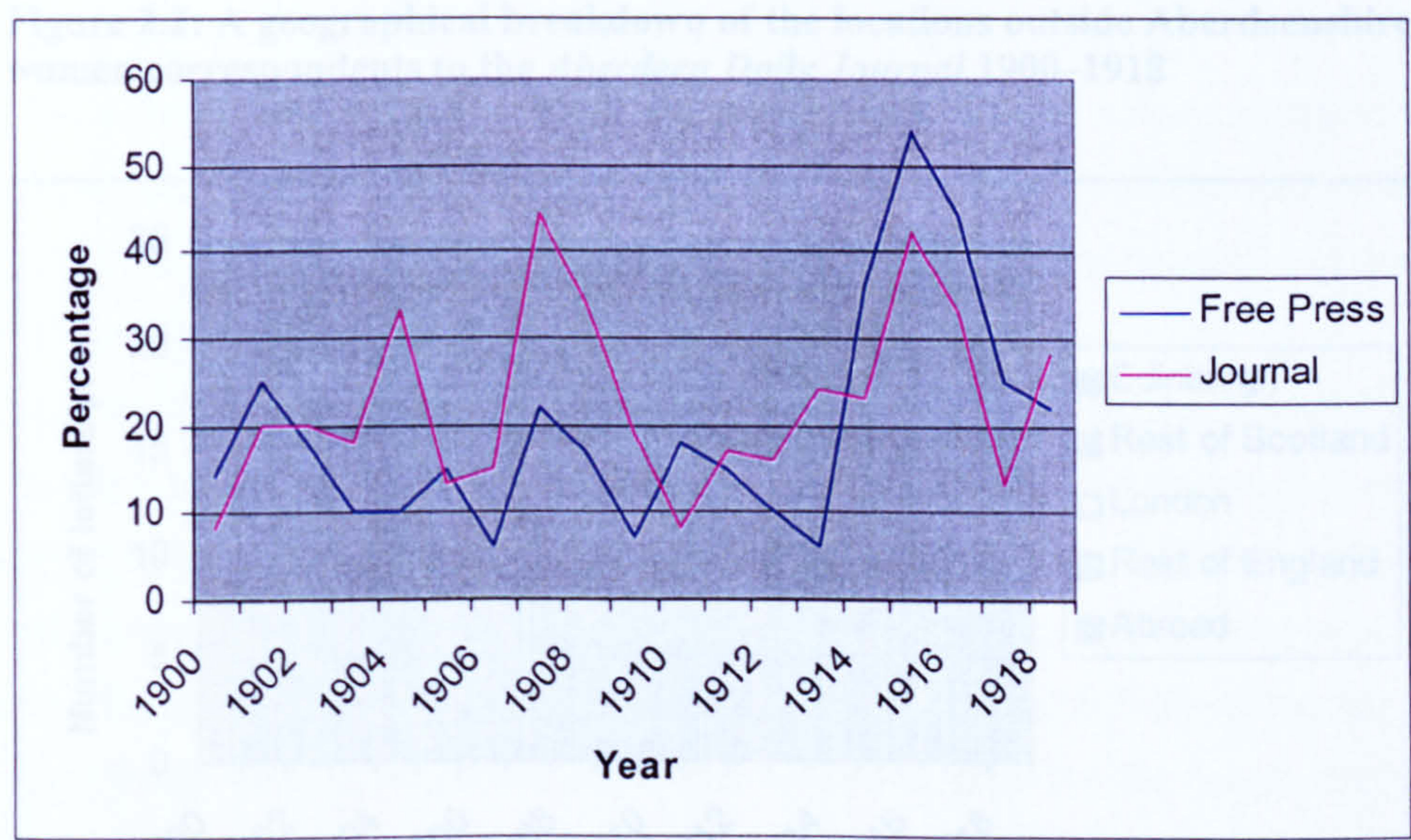
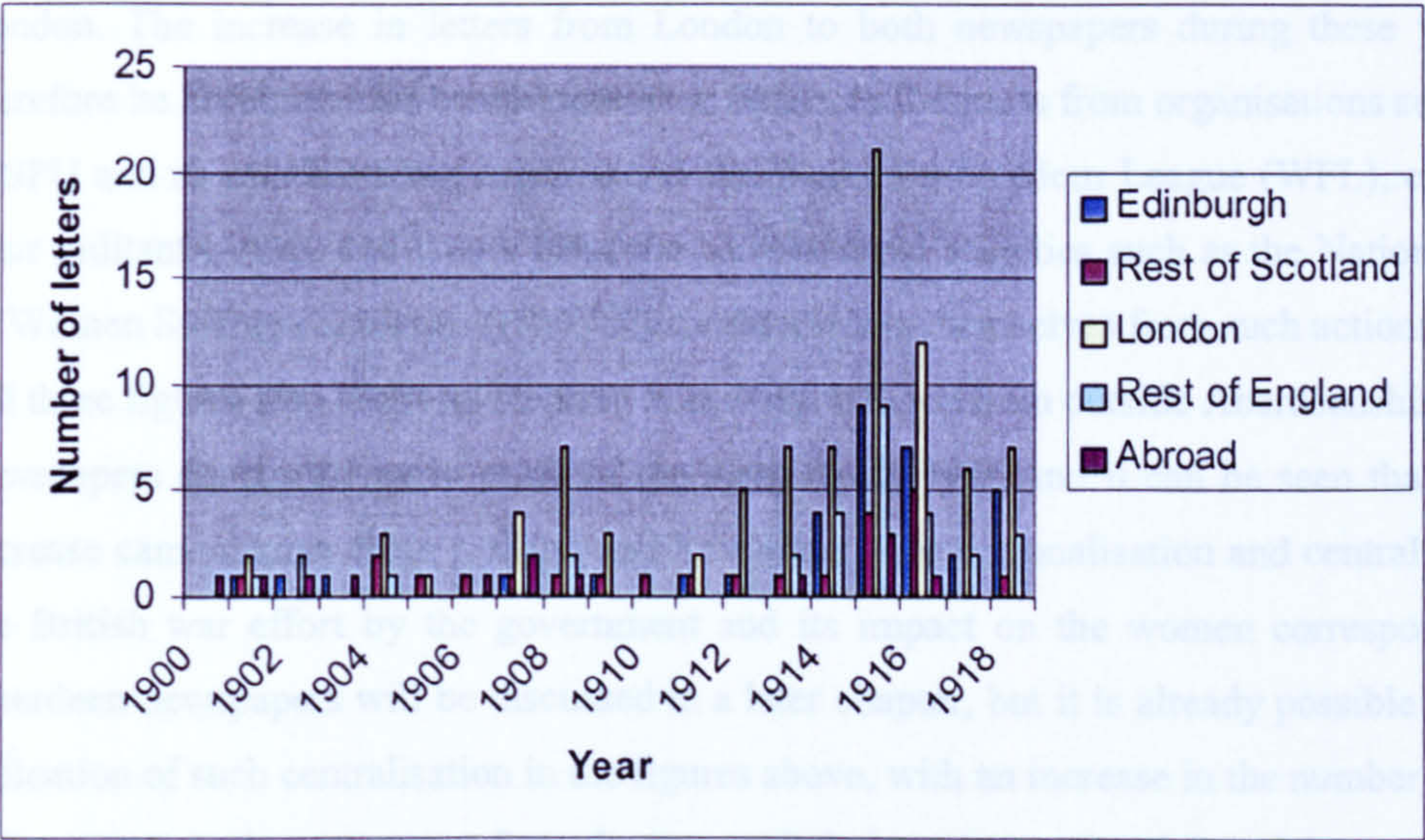


Figure 2.1: Number of letters from women located outside Aberdeenshire as a proportion of all letters from women printed in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press* 1900–1918

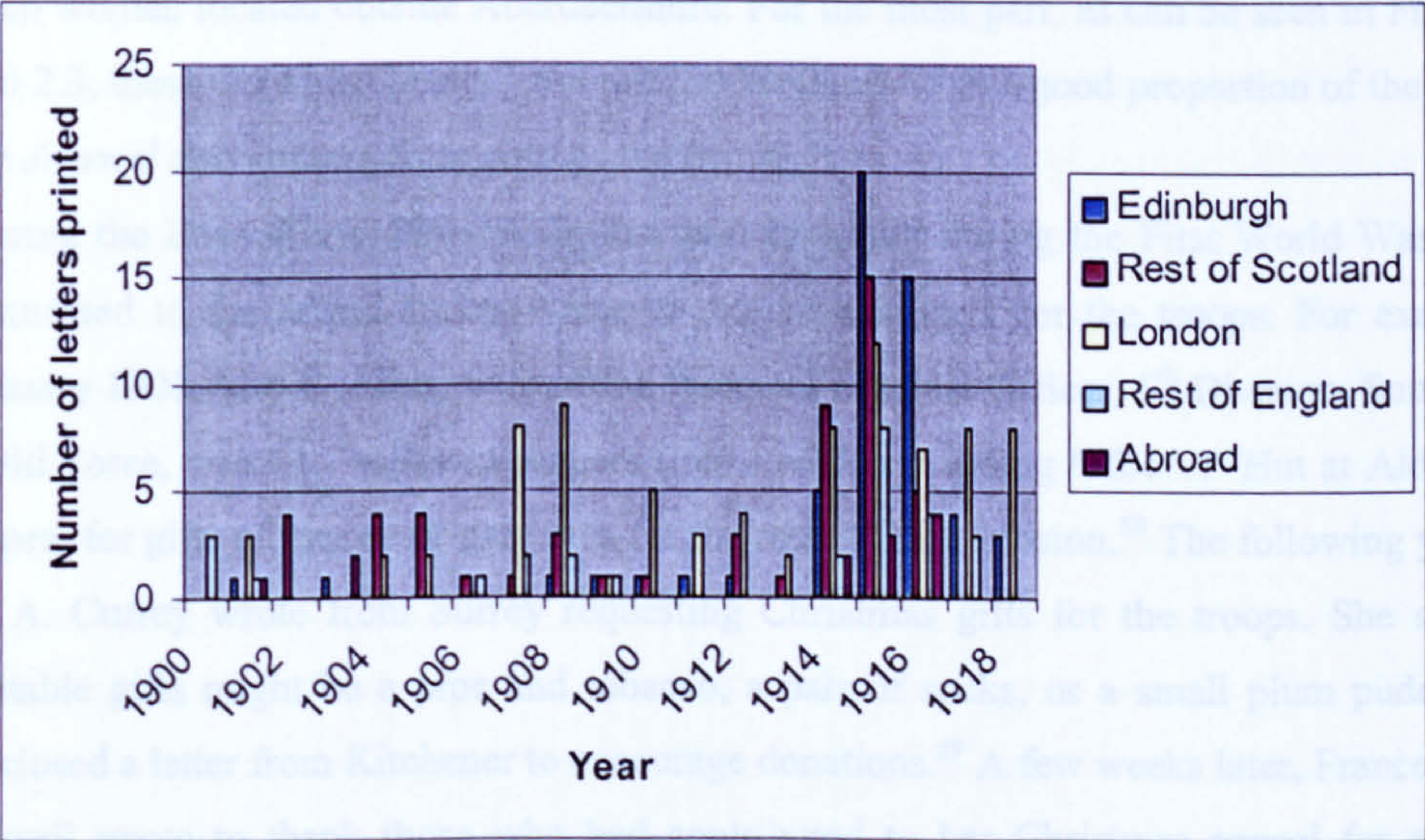
Breaking these figures down into the women’s geographical locations gives us Figures 2.2 and 2.3:

<sup>57</sup> Harper, Norman, *First Daily: A 250-Year Celebration of the Press and Journal*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen Journals, 1997, p. 12.





**Figure 2.2:** A geographical breakdown of the locations outside Aberdeenshire of women correspondents to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* 1900–1918



**Figure 2.3:** A geographical breakdown of the locations outside Aberdeenshire of women correspondents to the *Aberdeen Free Press* 1900–1918

As can be seen from Figure 2.1, until the outbreak of the First World War, the proportion of letters from women outside Aberdeenshire to the two newspapers remained below 30%, with the exception of the years 1907–09. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 indicate that the increase in correspondence during these years originated in London. As will be discussed in a later chapter, 1907–09 saw an increase in activity in the national women’s suffrage societies, in particular the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), which was by this time based in



London. The increase in letters from London to both newspapers during these years can therefore be accounted for by an increase in letters to the press from organisations such as the WSPU and its militant sister organisation the Women's Freedom League (WFL), explaining their militant tactics, and letters from the constitutional societies such as the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) disassociating themselves from such actions.

All three figures also show an increase in correspondence from outside Aberdeenshire to both newspapers during the early years of the First World War, and it can be seen that such an increase came mainly from London and Edinburgh. The nationalisation and centralisation of the British war effort by the government and its impact on the women correspondents to Aberdeen newspapers will be discussed in a later chapter, but it is already possible to see an indication of such centralisation in the figures above, with an increase in the number of letters being sent to both newspapers from the two capitals by women organisers of the war effort.

In the early years of the period, each newspaper printed a small number of letters each year from women located outside Aberdeenshire. For the most part, as can be seen in Figures 2.2 and 2.3, these were also letters from outside Scotland, with a good proportion of the letters to the *Journal* also coming from outside the British Isles.

During the Boer War (1899–1902), just as they would during the First World War, women connected to the armed forces wrote to request comforts for the troops. For example, in January 1900, Mrs E. Allen, wife of the Principal Medical Officer, 5<sup>th</sup> Division, South Africa Field Force, wrote to both newspapers from the Commanding Officers' Hut at Aldershot to appeal for gifts of money or garments for the men of that division.<sup>58</sup> The following year, Mrs F. A. Currey wrote from Surrey requesting Christmas gifts for the troops. She suggested suitable gifts might be a pipe and tobacco, a pair of socks, or a small plum pudding, and enclosed a letter from Kitchener to encourage donations.<sup>59</sup> A few weeks later, Frances Baden-Powell wrote to thank those who had contributed to her Christmas appeal for the South African Constabulary under the command of her husband General Baden-Powell.<sup>60</sup> In comparison to the many demands for comforts for the troops to be printed during the First World War, which will be discussed further in Chapter V, the smaller number of letters of request during the Boer War show how much more contained the impact of that conflict was and how the general population of Britain was not drawn into the war to the same extent. The provision of comforts for the Boer War troops was evidently manageable with fewer public

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<sup>58</sup> E. Allen, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press*, 20 January 1900.

<sup>59</sup> Mrs F. A. Currey, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 24 September 1901.

<sup>60</sup> Frances Baden-Powell, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 December 1901.



appeals, which were co-ordinated by the relatives of senior officers, mostly based in England. By the end of the Boer War in 1901, attention had shifted to the effects of war, with an appeal for the South African Graves Fund in November 1901. Lady Edward Cecil, Lady Goodenough and Miss Margaret Tillard wrote from London to appeal for money to support the work of the Guild of Loyal Women who tended the graves of British troops who had died during the War and would correspond with relations and attempt to locate the graves of their loved ones. Such work was both difficult and expensive since 'numbers of our men lie buried in lonely places many miles from any town or railway, and often very difficult to reach'.<sup>61</sup>

### Letters from abroad

Many of the letters concerning the war in South Africa, therefore, were written by women based in England launching national appeals for aid. During the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Aberdeen newspapers also received letters from abroad making appeals for monetary aid. In December 1901 Mrs Rose Johnson wrote to the *Journal* with an appeal for donations to support the YWCA hostel for girls in Alexandria, Egypt. At present, she explained, the only accommodation they had were two flats, which were insufficient for their needs. She wished to build a meeting hall, library, workroom, bicycle and dark rooms, dining rooms, sitting rooms and bedroom accommodation for 20. The type of woman who would make use of these facilities, Mrs Johnson felt, would be governesses and sick nurses, and accommodation would also be required for 20 maids and 20 Syrian and Armenian girls, for training as servants.<sup>62</sup> The mention of bicycles and photography shows that it was the sort of woman often described as the 'New Woman' who was expected to venture as far as Alexandria for employment. The New Woman was primarily journalistic shorthand for a particular type of woman who had appeared during the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, having benefited from increased opportunities for middle-class women in terms of education and employment. As Lucy Bland describes her:

The term 'new woman' was not equivalent to the term 'feminist', although a self-defined 'new woman' was likely to have held certain feminist convictions. The 'new woman' probably meant all things to all people, but she was generally thought of as a young woman of principle, drawn from the upper or middle class, concerned to reject many of the conventions of femininity and to live and work on free and equal terms with the opposite sex. Her hallmark was *personal* freedom, and her

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<sup>61</sup> Violet Cecil, Anna Goodenough and Margaret Tillard, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 November 1901.

<sup>62</sup> Mrs Rose Johnson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 24 December 1901.



image was constructed above all in the pages of the so-called 'new woman novel'.<sup>63</sup>

A New Woman might very well leave Britain to seek employment and adventure in Europe or even further afield. However, at the outbreak of war in 1914, many such women found themselves trapped behind enemy lines and forced to flee back home. Ada M. Lewis, Honorary President and Founder of the Ada Leigh Homes in Paris, wrote to the *Free Press* in November 1914 seeking donations to help the work of the homes, which offered shelter to women retreating from enemy territory once they had reached Paris. She was sure that their plight would inspire sympathy:

May I call the attention of your readers to the thousands of our young countrywomen scattered over Europe – chiefly the orphan daughters of our cultured classes – whose vital interests are keenly touched by this war.

Many, after years of patient toil, had gained some savings which they will never be able to realise. Others were dismissed at a moment's notice without the salary due to them – some have travelled for days, without refreshment, in cattle trucks, with the wounded, having witnessed sights they will never forget – all arrive exhausted, empty-handed!<sup>64</sup>

Apart from the independent travels of the New Women, another reason for such women seeking employment abroad was spelled out in a letter to the *Free Press* in June 1904 from Ethel Colquhoun in London. She reported that she had recently given a paper at the Colonial Institute on 'Women and the Colonies' and had since then been inundated with letters from 'superfluous middle-class women' who wanted her advice on emigration. She wished to point out to these women that the answer to their superfluity might not be found in the colonies since the only vacancy for the average middle-class woman, either at home and abroad, was that of household work, and the modern middle-class girl was 'brought up to a life of idleness, because of the ridiculous pretentiousness of our social life; because with all her modern education she is a less useful and practical person than her mother'.<sup>65</sup> She was not the only one concerned that the wrong type of woman might see emigration as a solution to all her problems. In November 1902, Katharine Wybergh, who was making a lecture tour of Scotland on behalf of the Transvaal, wrote to the *Journal* to make clear the position there. Like Ethel Colquhoun, she wished to stress that the need was primarily for domestic workers

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<sup>63</sup> Bland, Lucy, 'Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class Women and Marital Sex 1880s–1914'. In Lewis, Jane, ed, *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850–1940*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 133.

<sup>64</sup> Ada M Lewis, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 18 November 1911.

<sup>65</sup> Ethel Colquhoun, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 June 1904.



since there was simply no suitable accommodation for professional women. In addition, she warned that the woman emigrant needed to be able to:

be prepared to take the rough with the smooth, and to find – if not the comfort and convenience of life at home (which I cannot but feel has made average men and women here so lacking in self-reliance), at least a directness and spontaneity, a wideness of view, a tolerance of details, and an absence of conventions that are stupid, which makes it easier with us to live ‘the simple life’.<sup>66</sup>

Such letters warning of the hardships of life overseas may have been necessary correctives to the usual portrayal of the lifestyles of emigrants. Fraser and Morris suggest that around two and a half million people left Scotland for overseas destinations between 1830 and 1914, with extremely high levels of emigration between 1906 and 1913:

In 1906–7 and again between 1909 and 1913 more than one Scot in a hundred was sailing overseas in each year. In the years 1904–13 the total outflow exceeded 600,000 people, the equivalent of almost 13 % of the 1911 Scottish population.<sup>67</sup>

The main destinations for emigrants were the United States and Canada, and organisations were available to encourage and assist suitable candidates to emigrate. Because the majority of emigrants were men, plus higher male death rates at most ages during this period, the phenomenon of the ‘superfluous’ woman was seen as a particular social problem for Britain. The 1911 census, for example, showed that in Aberdeen there were only 80 men over the age of ten for every 100 women – in Dundee the problem was even worse with only 74 males for every 100 women.<sup>68</sup> The option of emigration for such women could therefore seem attractive. As always, for women, the emphasis was on domestic work in the colonies, but not all letters followed the line of the ladies quoted above in emphasising how tough such work could be in the colonies. In August 1902, Mary Gillespie, the President of the Women’s National Immigration Society of Montreal, Canada, wrote to the *Journal* to encourage young women who were of ‘a higher scale of society than domestic servants, but not sufficiently well educated to command good salaries as governesses’ to consider emigration to Montreal to become domestic servants. While such women might not consider the option of domestic service in Britain, they were assured by Gillespie that Montreal was so rich and modern that the life of a domestic servant was actually a very easy one:

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<sup>66</sup> Katharine Wybergh, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 6 November 1902.

<sup>67</sup> Fraser, W. Hamish and Morris, R. J., *People and Society in Scotland, Vol II, 1830-1914*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1990, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.



New houses both large and small are being added every year, and are fitted with such conveniences and luxuries in the way of water laid on for every room, electric light, telephones, etc, that the work of a servant has nothing menial or laborious in it that a healthy-minded young woman should object to.... It is a common custom in Montreal for a charwoman to be employed regularly, so no scrubbing or extra house cleaning is expected of the regular staff in large establishments.<sup>69</sup>

On a similar quest for 'superior women', Miss N. J. Smith wrote to the *Journal* in March 1906 to encourage girls to emigrate to Canada, where they 'can easily earn large salaries' and enjoy 'blue sky and brilliant sunshine'. Miss Smith claimed to have been in the last party dispatched to Canada by the Women's Domestic and Business Guild, which promised to secure a position for suitable girls plus advance passage money, and stated that all 25 members of her party had found good comfortable homes within 12 hours of arrival.<sup>70</sup>

Good news about the emigration experience could also come from women who had returned to Scotland. In November 1903, 'A Scotch Woman' wrote to the *Free Press* after a visit home to Scotland from Canada, where she had lived for 16 years. She had been amused by the 'crude ideas' that some Scots seemed to have about life in Canada and wished to assure them of the beauty and ease of living in a land of plenty. According to 'A Scotch Woman', Canada had a lovely climate; because the houses were well insulated 'I have never been able to wear the heavy clothing in the house that one can wear in Scotland'. There were very few poor people in Canada; she had never seen a ragged child or met anyone worse for liquor; the churches were vigorous and ministers took great interest in the welfare of their people; the education system was excellent and travelling around Canada on the railways an extremely pleasant and safe experience.<sup>71</sup>

However, not all letters portrayed the emigration experience of Scots women in the same idyllic light. In March 1912, Catherine Bowie of Lossiemouth wrote to the *Free Press* regarding her sojourn as a domestic servant in Australia. (Lossiemouth, to the north of Aberdeenshire, marked one of the most northerly limits of the stretch of the Aberdeen newspapers.) It must be remembered that a significant number of emigrants did return to Scotland at one point or another, either on visits to family and friends or because life in the Colonies had failed to live up to expectations. Catherine Bowie had certainly not enjoyed her two years in Australia, where she felt she had been required to 'rough' it and work very hard for her money. Her complaints echo the warnings of Ethel Colquhoun and Katharine

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<sup>69</sup> Mary Gillespie, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 25 August 1902.

<sup>70</sup> Miss N. J. Smith, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 12 March 1906.

<sup>71</sup> 'A Scotch Woman', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 18 November 1903.



Wybergh about the hardships to be faced by women emigrants. Bowie also offered an explanation for why the colonies found it necessary to advertise for domestic workers in Britain and organise their passages across – girls who had been born in the colonies simply would not work as domestic servants.

You do not find Australian girls going to domestic service; no fear, they know better.... I do think it a shame for the best of our girls to go abroad and be drudges to Colonials. Let the Australians train up their own daughters to do their domestic work.<sup>72</sup>

She explained that she had lodged with one Australian family with two daughters and had asked why they did not seek domestic positions but instead worked in factories for less money and no meals provided, as they would be for domestic servants. 'They explained to me that they had tried that several times and that the girls did not get sufficient food and that they had to work like slaves.'<sup>73</sup>

It is noteworthy that the two women who had returned to Scotland from the colonies, either for a visit or to return home, wrote to the *Free Press* regarding life abroad, while those writing from Canada to encourage women to emigrate wrote to the *Journal*. Between 1900 and the outbreak of the First World War, nine women living abroad had letters printed in the *Journal* in comparison to three in the *Free Press*. It seems that it was the *Journal* that emigrant women thought of when they wanted to keep in touch with the 'auld country'. For example, 'An Interested Woman' wrote to the *Journal* from Brooklyn, New York, in April 1907 to protest about the size of the dividend she had recently received from a British company and contended that this was evidence that there was something radically wrong with the trade system in Britain. It was, she said, sad for every true Scot living abroad to see Scotland being 'so fast depleted of her young brawn and brain'.<sup>74</sup>

### Letters from England

Requests for donations to national funds and charities predominated amongst the letters from women based in England to the editors of the *Journal* and *Free Press*, particularly during the war years, and correspondents' philanthropic fundraising will be discussed further in Chapter III. However, this was not the only reason for such correspondents to write to the newspapers. Some letters were in response to editorial, showing that such women living away from Scotland either subscribed to the newspapers, perhaps to keep in touch with family and

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<sup>72</sup> Catherine Bowie, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 2 March 1912.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> 'An Interested Woman', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 April 1907.



friends, or, like Marian Farquharson, used a press cuttings agency. For example, Constance Skelton of Harrow appears to have had family connections to Scotland which lead her to read a reference to the Gordon family of Messina in the *Journal* in July 1908. She at once wrote to the editor to give further details about this family, who had lived in Messina during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Maud Churton Braby presumably subscribed to a cuttings service for reviews of her book *Modern Marriage and How To Bear It*, which was reviewed in the *Free Press* in June 1908. She wrote immediately to complain of the frivolity of the reviewer who appeared to believe that her book recommended a series of trial marriages, each only lasting four years. This, she suggested, reflected badly on the morality of her book and she would be grateful if the editor could kindly put the matter right.<sup>76</sup>

While the majority of correspondence from outside Aberdeenshire on the matter of woman suffrage came under the aegis of the various suffrage societies, and will be discussed in the chapter on women's politics, individual women suffragists occasionally had cause to write directly to the newspapers, usually to correct some mis-statement. Eta Lamb and Elsa Gye of the Nottingham WSPU branch took it upon themselves to write directly to the *Free Press* in December 1907 to deny the allegation that their members had gained entry by the use of forged tickets to a meeting held by Mr Asquith in Nottingham. It is possible that they wrote to newspapers all over the country in the same vein, but more likely that they wrote only to the *Free Press* in response to growing worries in Aberdeen about the following week's meeting in the Music Hall, which Asquith was due to address and which the WSPU were rumoured to be planning to disrupt.<sup>77</sup>

It is doubtful that either of the Nottingham women were frequent readers of the *Free Press*, but the letters columns of both newspapers do offer evidence of non-Aberdonian, and even non-Scots, correspondents responding to particular pieces of editorial. In February 1907, 'An English Suffragette, London' wrote a letter to the *Free Press* discussing the tactics of the WSPU with regard to the South Aberdeenshire by-election, showing by her knowledge of the policies of both main party candidates that hers was not just a general letter deploring the WSPU but a knowledgeable discussion of local characters based presumably on local knowledge or frequent reading of the local newspapers.<sup>78</sup>

The growing campaign for animal welfare has already been mentioned in reference to the Lumsden sisters. Letters from women outside Aberdeenshire concerning this subject were

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<sup>75</sup> Constance Skelton, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 2 July 1908.

<sup>76</sup> Maud Churton Braby, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 18 June 1908.

<sup>77</sup> For more on this meeting, see chapter V.

<sup>78</sup> 'An English Suffragette', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 19 February 1907.



again mainly published in the *Journal*. Some correspondents wrote in support of a particular animal. In January 1904, Julia Andrews of Teddington wrote to ask farmers and gamekeepers to look upon the kestrel as a friend, helping to destroy rats and mice, and to stop persecuting it.<sup>79</sup> In May 1909, Winifred, the Duchess of Portland, President of the Ladies' Education Committee of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, posed the question 'Do Sheep Need Water?' and assured readers that they did, while Ada Withall of Ilfracombe begged readers to heed the 'bitter cry of the rabbit' and to send immediately for her pamphlet on the evils of trapping.<sup>80</sup> Other correspondents focused more on the evils of vivisection, with Netta Ivory, honorary secretary of the Scottish Branch of the National Anti-Vivisection Society, writing to request donations for the society throughout the period.

### The War Years

The *Journal* appears to have been the newspaper of choice for fundraising ladies living in London, both before and during the First World War. A comparison of the letters printed in both newspapers during the War shows that ladies asking for donations of money or comforts for the troops or their dependents were more likely to write to the *Journal*, or to both newspapers, if they were located in London or elsewhere in England, but more likely to write to the *Free Press* if they were based in Edinburgh or Glasgow. In 1915, the war year where women outside Aberdeenshire were at their most prolific in writing letters to the newspapers, the *Journal* printed 21 letters from women in London and 9 letters from the rest of England, in comparison to the *Free Press* which printed 12 from London and 8 from the rest of England. In contrast, the *Journal* printed 9 letters from women based in Edinburgh and 4 from elsewhere in Scotland, while the *Free Press* printed 20 letters from Edinburgh and 15 from the rest of Scotland, in particular Glasgow. All but a tiny minority of these letters were related to the war effort, the war having driven almost every other issue from the letters pages of both newspapers. Thus it seems that, for women living outside Scotland, the *Journal* was the newspaper they chose to use to communicate with prospective donors in Aberdeenshire, while for those within Scotland, the *Free Press* had a higher profile. This may have had something to do with the comparatively longer period of time that the *Journal* had existed, establishing it in the minds of non-Scots as the pre-eminent Aberdeenshire newspaper. In addition, the editor of the war years, William Maxwell, had the ambition of making the *Journal* the leading Scottish newspaper and had moved back to Scotland to work at the

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<sup>79</sup> Julia Andrews, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 6 January 1904.

<sup>80</sup> Winifred Portland, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 31 May 1909; Ada Withall, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 7 February 1913.



*Journal* from employment at the *London Evening Standard* as chief sub-editor and night news editor. Thus the newspaper carried a mixture of local and national Scottish and English news, a private wire having already been installed in the firm's London offices by the previous editor David Pressley in order to improve the flow of news and commentary from London.

Another point that should be made about the women based in England who wrote asking for contributions to the war effort is that they were predominantly titled. As will be seen in the chapter on the war, this was the last period in history when the war effort, whether on the battlefield or amongst the voluntary associations raising funds and comforts, was lead by the aristocracy and landed gentry of Britain. The letters printed in both newspapers during the war years glisten with titles – Marchioness of Tullibardine, Countess Roberts, Her Royal Highness Princess Louise, Viscountess Falmouth. Most of these ladies were related in some way to the war commanders and therefore used their connections to justify their appeals to the nation. Ladies French and Jellicoe, wives of the two leaders of the army and the navy at the beginning of the war, co-operated to launch a campaign for the establishment of United Services Clubs for the families of men in the armed services. Lady Tullibardine, who had been the President of the Scottish League for Opposing Woman Suffrage in the years before the war, wrote from Kettering in November 1914 asking for donations of mittens and gloves for the men of the Scottish Horse Brigade because of the extreme cold.<sup>81</sup> However, by June 1916 she had moved, presumably in company with her husband, to Cairo, where she was the Chairman of the United Services Welfare Committee, and she now wrote to the *Free Press* requesting donations in order to supply the men with fly-veils and games in order to relieve the monotony and heat of their life there.<sup>82</sup> (Incidentally, Lady Tullibardine, while a fervent campaigner against the enfranchisement of women in the pre-war years, ironically became the first Scottish woman MP after the war, inheriting her husband's seat in 1923 on his succession as Duke of Atholl. She also became the first Conservative woman minister on her appointment as Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Board of Education in 1924.)

It was not just wives of the current leaders of the war that wrote to the newspapers. Countess Roberts, who wrote throughout the war years to the Aberdeen newspapers, was the daughter of Lord Roberts, who died at the beginning of the war in 1914. One of the feted leaders of the army during the Boer War, although rather old to be anything but a figurehead by 1914, before his death Lord Roberts had appealed to sportsmen to loan their field, race or stalking

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<sup>81</sup> Lady Tullibardine, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 23 November 1914.

<sup>82</sup> Lady Tullibardine, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 29 June 1916.



glasses to the war effort for the use of officers at the front. His daughter took over this appeal from his death in November 1914, and wrote frequent letters of appeal for this object until 1918. Sportsmen who loaned their glasses were assured that each pair would be engraved with an identifying code so that at the end of the war they would be able to be returned to the generous owner. There seemed to have been no conception that the glasses might get destroyed during battle or lost in the mud of the trenches. On 21 December 1918, Lady Roberts sent a letter to both the *Free Press* and the *Journal* requesting all officers who still had their borrowed glasses to return them to the fund in order that they could be reunited with their original owners. Officers were asked to write a note of thanks which could be forwarded with the returned glasses.<sup>83</sup>

Mrs Frances Parker, the sister of another figurehead from the Boer War – Margot Asquith's 'poster' Lord Kitchener – wrote to the *Journal* in November 1914 pleading for the nation to be put under martial law in order to prevent soldiers from drinking to excess. By February 1915 Mrs Parker was collecting signed pledges to stop drinking for the duration of the war, which she promised would be presented to her brother.<sup>84</sup> The idea of a voluntary prohibition on drink was a popular one at the time, with George V setting an example by refusing to allow alcohol to be served at court during the war.

As has already been discussed, the advent of the First World War forced most other issues off the pages of newspapers, and out of the correspondence columns. Few women wrote to the Aberdeen newspapers from outside Aberdeenshire during the war years about anything other than the war effort. While appeals for other national charities had appeared in the correspondence columns before the outbreak of war, only the most enterprising of fundraisers could pretend that their charity was of equal worth to the needs of the armed services and their dependents after August 1914. Constance Beerbohm, of the Necessitous Ladies' Holiday Fund, had first written to the Aberdeenshire newspapers from Upper Berkeley Street in London in 1913 to request donations to send away

governesses, typists, hospital nurses, secretaries, musicians, actresses, clerks and ladies of gentle birth engaged in other professions who, for reasons of age and ill-health, are out of work and have no means of providing holidays for themselves, yet who, without the possibility of earning money in the summer months, are left behind in London exposed to the suffering attendant on poverty, whereas women of a rougher class are liberally provided for through various other holiday funds.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Lady Roberts, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 21 December 1918.

<sup>84</sup> Annie Milne, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 17 February 1915.

<sup>85</sup> Constance Beerbohm, 'Letters to the Editor' *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 12 August 1913.



In order to encourage donations from Scotland, Constance Beerbohm assured her readers that any monies received from Scotland would be channelled towards Scottish gentlewomen residing in London. Interestingly, Constance Beerbohm continued to request donations to support her necessitous ladies throughout the war years, assuring anyone that might consider the various war-related funds to have a higher claim on their purse that the war had made the lives of such women in London even worse and that therefore they could be considered a genuine war charity. Other ladies channelled their efforts into more obviously related war work. In 1913 and the early months of 1914, Lady Catherine Milnes Gaskell wrote three times from Wenlock Abbey, Much Wenlock in Shropshire, to offer readers the chance to support the cause of the Unionist Party in Ulster by purchasing the root of an 'Orange Lily' which she had bred herself.<sup>86</sup> She was delighted by the response to her offer, and promised in her April letter that she would have a supply of rock plants ready by autumn to be sold on the same terms. The war intervened at this point, and the next letters received from Lady Catherine were in March 1916 and again in September 1917, when she offered her rock plants for sale to support sick and wounded soldiers in Shropshire and Yorkshire hospitals.<sup>87</sup>

There were few letters from women outside Aberdeenshire during the First World War on the subject of anything other than the war effort. One interesting exception, however, is the subject of the English language, about which there were occasional letters during the war years, mainly printed in the *Free Press*. In January 1916, in the same column as an appeal for the Women's Patriotic Society and the Queen's Work for Women Fund, for women who had been thrown out of work due to the war, Christina Just of Ealing, London, wrote on the subject of English pronunciation and spelling. Her letter was reactive rather than proactive, a response to a piece of editorial in the previous week's *Free Press* on the English Association's discussion of proper English pronunciation. She wished to champion a more rational approach to English spelling and hoped that after the war the government would appoint a Royal Commission on the whole subject of spelling reform.<sup>88</sup> The issue of simplified spelling was given a patriotic twist and reference to the war in a letter by Irene Montagu of the Simplified Spelling Society in March 1916. She wrote to inform *Free Press* readers that the only thing lacking to make English the *lingua franca* of the whole world was

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<sup>86</sup> Lady Gaskell, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 11 October 1913, 31 March 1914, 18 April 1914.

<sup>87</sup> Lady Gaskell, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 10 March 1916 and *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 7 September 1917.

<sup>88</sup> Christina Just, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 January 1915.

simplified spelling and quoted a letter from a Russian business man who assured her that the Russians did not really wish to use German as their language of business but were forced to do so because of their difficulties with English grammar.<sup>89</sup> However, Mildred Duke, of Stafford, wrote in August 1916 to champion the cause of Esperanto as the best hope for international understanding after the war.<sup>90</sup> This whole correspondence seems part of a larger issue dealing with the need for communication between nations, so may not be so far removed from the war effort as might first appear. Again, it is worthy of note that it is primarily to the *Free Press* that these suburban correspondents addressed their letters, in direct contrast to the lady volunteer organisers of the various war funds, who addressed their appeals to the readers of the *Journal*, and that all three letters were inspired by editorial in the newspaper – again suggesting the possibility of these women, from all over England, using newspaper cuttings agencies to keep them abreast of developments in their particular field of interest.

### Letters from Scotland

The point has already been made that wartime female correspondents from England tended to write to the *Journal*, while those from elsewhere in Scotland wrote to the *Free Press*. For example, pleas for support for the Scottish Women's Hospitals established in France, Serbia and elsewhere in the war zone under the direction of Dr Elsie Inglis were mostly published in the *Free Press*. One reason for this may have been that the Scottish Women's Hospitals grew out of the Scottish branch of the NUWSS, which was based in Edinburgh. The *Free Press*, as the more liberal-minded newspaper in Aberdeen, was more supportive of women's demand for the vote, and in particular supported the approach of the constitutional suffragists like the NUWSS. The women of the Scottish Women's Hospitals would therefore have been more used to support from the *Free Press* than the *Journal* in the pre-war years and would have naturally continued to correspond with the *Free Press* to publicise their need for funds for the hospitals.

One Scottish organisation which managed to get letters published in both newspapers was the Orphan Homes of Scotland, based at Bridge of Weir. The daughter of the founder, Mary Quarrier, wrote to report on the Homes' progress and to appeal for more donations to support the work of the Homes. Her letters, which appeared in both the *Journal* and the *Free Press*,

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<sup>89</sup> Irene Montagu, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 9 March 1916.

<sup>90</sup> Mildred Duke, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 28 August 1916.



are useful because they allow us to compare the editorial approach to letters of both newspapers and also show why such a charitable organisation would write so many letters to newspapers – the Orphan Homes of Scotland was phenomenally successful in its fundraising, much of which must have been inspired by such letters to the local press.

Mary Quarrier wrote her first letters to the Aberdeen press in September 1904, the year in which the founder of the homes, William Quarrier, died.<sup>91</sup> The first letters, published in both the *Journal* and the *Free Press*, outlined the history of the Homes so far. William had founded the Orphan Homes in the early 1860s. Starting as a single room in a small house in Bridge of Weir, they had expanded to become a 'Children's City' open to fatherless and completely orphaned children from all over Scotland. By 1904, the Homes consisted of a church, schools, stores, workshops and 45 separate homes for 1,400 children. Mary Quarrier estimated that the cost to the Homes per child was around £12 a year and encouraged donations for this amount to support a single child. Because of the success of the Homes, they were now beginning to send some of the older boys as emigrants to Canada and therefore also appealed for donations towards passage money. In addition, the letter to the *Journal* mentioned that the Bridge of Weir complex also housed a Consumption Sanatoria, at that time housing 80 female patients with plans to build more accommodation; £1,000 was needed to support this. One of William Quarrier's last wishes had been to establish a Colony of Mercy for Epileptics, and there were plans to start this building the following year. It appears that the two paragraphs making reference to the consumption sanatoria and colony of mercy were cut from the *Free Press* version of this letter, focusing the letter firmly on the appeal for funds for the orphans. In December 1904, Mary Quarrier wrote a separate letter to the *Journal*, which had shown interest in the wider work of the Orphan Homes, acknowledging an individual gift of £500, which meant that work could start on the Colony.<sup>92</sup>

Mary Quarrier wrote identical letters to the *Free Press* and *Journal* on two other occasions, in September 1905 and June 1909 and on both occasions the editor of the *Free Press* cut parts of her letters, usually those parts giving examples of children who had been helped by the homes.<sup>93</sup> The fundraising of the Orphan Homes seems to have been very successful. In the letter of September 1905, she reported that the last six months had seen gifts of £5,755 for maintenance of the children; £2,224 for the emigration fund; a separate bequest of £1,500 to

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<sup>91</sup> Mary Quarrier, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press*, 13 September 1904.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Quarrier, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, December 1904.

<sup>93</sup> Mary Quarrier, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal* 20 September 1905 and 16 June 1909, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 19 September 1905 and 16 June 1909.

build another home, to be called 'Craigbet'; £1,235 towards the upkeep of the consumption sanatoria; and £1,377 for the building of the colony for epileptics. Of course, Mary Quarrier was always quick to stress that all this money had immediately been spent so that their immediate needs were as desperate as ever; however, as always, she put her trust in God – and the readers of her letters.

### Letter-writers from Aberdeen and the surrounding county

What can we tell from their published letters about the local women who wrote to the two newspapers? In contrast to most of the women who wrote from further afield, their identities were more likely to be recognised by family and friends, and so it is understandable that some preferred to make use of noms de plume in their correspondence. Some noms de plume, as will be seen below, used local place names to establish a woman's local credentials, such as 'Aberdeenshire Farmer's Wife', 'Mrs Buchan Farmer' or 'One Who Knows and Loves the Women of Inverurie' (a plea for these women, newly enfranchised in 1918, to vote for the right candidate). However, many other women correspondents were confident enough in their particular arguments to sign their names, and sometimes their addresses, at the bottom of their letters.

On occasion, a correspondent's address was needed in order to distinguish them from a woman of the same name. We have already seen how Maria O. Farquharson was embarrassed at being mistaken for her stepmother, Marian Farquharson, and protested futilely against her use of the title 'of Haughton' after the death of Maria's father. In February 1901 an Aberdeen housemaid named Ina Boyne wrote to the *Free Press* to complain about message boys and girls who rang the doorbell of houses, causing housemaids such as herself to toil upstairs to answer the door when they might just as well have put their message into the letter-box.<sup>94</sup> The following day the 'Letters to the Editor' column contained a note stating that Miss Ina Boyne of 18 Constitution Street had asked that it be made known that she was not the Ina Boyne who had written to the newspaper.<sup>95</sup> Housemaid Ina wrote again the following week, thanking the *Free Press* for publishing her letter, which had had a positive effect: 'It did so much good every way that I think I will remain till the term. My mistress is highly pleased to think... that she has so 'ingenious' a maid in her service, and she will not hear of me leaving.' However, she was sorry that she had upset her namesake: 'All the same I am

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<sup>94</sup> Ina Boyne, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 30 January 1901.

<sup>95</sup> 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 1 February 1901.



somewhat proud of my name and, apparently, so is she. It is so very uncommon, I suppose, yet both poetic and euphonious.<sup>96</sup>

An analysis of the letters to both newspapers allows us to identify over 200 local women who allowed their names and some kind of address to be published in the newspapers. (It should be remembered that the editors insisted that all correspondents wrote to them with a name and address, but correspondents were allowed to choose to be published under a pseudonym if they wished). The women thus identified range from Lady Aberdeen, writing sometimes from Haddo House, sometimes The Lodge, Tarland, and sometimes from Dublin, where her husband served as Lord Lieutenant, to Alice Anderson of Holburn Street, Aberdeen, whose brother was a sergeant in the Imperial Light Infantry during the Boer War. As might be expected, the majority of the women confident enough to give their names and addresses can be identified as belonging to the middle or upper classes. This identification does not only rest on the content of their letters, but also on the use of local Post Office Directories for the relevant years. Thus Mary Wardlaw Burnet, who wrote to the *Daily Journal* as Convenor of the Emigration Committee of Aberdeen Union of Women Workers, can be identified as the wife of G. W. Burnet, Advocate and Sheriff-Substitute, with whom she lived at 59 Queen's Road, Aberdeen. Despite its title, the National Union of Women Workers was an association of middle-class voluntary workers, rather than working-class women, which was founded in 1910 'to face the problems of sin and suffering in a covenant of sympathy and purpose and to promote the social and moral and religious welfare of women'.<sup>97</sup> During the First World War, the Union formed the League of Decency and Honour, to 'raise and maintain the high standard of morals and manners among women at home as our soldiers are upholding the national honour and good name in the front line', before changing its name to the National Council for Women during the later years of the war because the title 'worker' could no longer be applied only to women doing voluntary social work.<sup>98</sup> Many of the Union's workers in Aberdeen, such as Mary Wardlaw Burnet, lived in 'good' West End addresses such as Queen's Road. Fraser and Lee identify such elite addresses in their recent history of Aberdeen:

By 1890 over 38% of the elite lived in the West End. The most important addresses were initially in Albyn Place and Carden Place, but

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<sup>96</sup> Ina Boyne, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 12 February 1901.

<sup>97</sup> Lewis, Jane, *Women in England 1870–1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change*. Sussex, Wheatsheaf Books, 1984, p. 185.

<sup>98</sup> For more on its wartime activities, see Thom, Deborah, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*. London, New York: I B Tauris Publishers, 2000.

by the 1900s, the focus of the elite was sited in Rubislaw Den and Queen's Road. In 1913 these two streets housed a cluster of the top Aberdonians, while King's Gate, Gladstone Place and Hamilton Place had become prestigious addresses.<sup>99</sup>

Women correspondents to the *Free Press* and *Journal* included two living in Albyn Place; one in Carden Place; five in Rubislaw Den; three in Queen's Road; one in King's Gate; and one in Gladstone Place. They included Mrs S. Clark, honorary secretary of the Aberdeen Union of Women Workers, at 27 Albyn Place; Mrs Maria Ogilvie Gordon, DSc, PhD, FLS, Vice-President of the National Union of Women Workers at 1 Rubislaw Terrace; and Mary Grace Forgan, President of the Women's Foreign Mission at 32 Carden Place. These were women who brought their formidable attentions to the organisation of charitable and social welfare in the city and surrounding countryside. Mrs Forgan was the wife of Reverend Robert Forgan, and she is thus an example of another group of letter-writers to be frequently found – the wives or daughters of clergymen. Gertrude Hector, living in fashionable King's Gate, was wife or daughter of Rev J. Hector while Rosanna Cairney of Jute Street was the daughter of the Reverend R. M. Cairney. It is therefore not surprising that both women wrote to the newspapers in reference to charitable fundraising, Miss Cairney being involved in a mission to the fish-curing girls in Aberdeen and Gertrude Hector organising a collection for presents for the children of servicemen during the Christmas of 1914.

The academic and civic careers of Maria Ogilvie Gordon should be noted at this juncture, although the letters columns of the two Aberdeen newspapers carried no letters from her as an individual and only the occasional one bearing her signature as President of a variety of civic charities.<sup>100</sup> Maria Ogilvie Gordon (1864–1939) was the eldest daughter of the Rev. Alexander Ogilvie, headmaster of Robert Gordon School and the guiding light in the school's development as one of the leading secondary schools in Scotland. Maria herself was educated at the Merchant Company Schools' Ladies College in Edinburgh and then at Heriot-Watt College and the University of London, where she was awarded a BSc and the Gold Medal in zoology and comparative anatomy in 1890. She then studied as a private student under the distinguished palaeontologist Karl von Zittel at Munich before submitting her DSc dissertation on geological strata in the South Tyrol to the University of London in 1893. She was the first woman to be awarded a doctoral degree in geology by the University.

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<sup>99</sup> Fraser, W. Hamish and Lee, Clive H., eds, *Aberdeen 1800-2000 A New History*. East Linton: Tuckwell Press 2000, p. 380.

<sup>100</sup> The following information is taken from Creese, Mary, R. S., 'Maria Ogilvie Gordon (1864-1939). *Earth Sciences History*, 15(1), 1996, pp. 68-75.



Despite her marriage in 1895 to Dr John Gordon, an Aberdeen physician, and their subsequent three children, Maria continued her work on the geology of the Tyrol, spending each summer there, sometimes accompanied by her husband but usually alone. In 1900 she received a PhD in geology from the University of Munich, again the first time such an award had been bestowed on a woman, and until 1913 she published on average a paper a year on Dolomite stratigraphy and tectonics, usually in German. In addition, she translated von Zittel's *History of Geology and Palaeontology* (1901) into English.

Throughout her life Maria combined her geological research with social and philanthropic work, both in Aberdeen and Europe, usually connected with the welfare of women or children. She held a number of offices, for example with the National Union of Women Workers and the International Council of Women. After the First World War and the death of her husband in 1919 she moved with her children to London, where she was immediately drawn into social work there. She served as a Justice of the Peace and was the first woman chair of a London borough court at Marylebone Court of Justice. She also stood several times as a Liberal candidate for election to Parliament, although was never elected, and later served on the Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations. She was awarded a DBE in 1935 and died in London on 24 June 1939. Perhaps with such a record of achievement it is not surprising that letters from Maria Ogilvie Gordon to the editors of the Aberdeen local newspapers were infrequent and were probably only signed by her, rather than composed, in her capacity as President or Chairperson of a particular body.

Another group of middle-class women correspondents clustered around the university in Old Aberdeen, including Elena Miller, daughter of Mr Dimitroff, Bulgarian Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs before the war, now married to Hugh Miller of the University and living at 2, The Chanonry. Here she was a neighbour to both Louisa Innes Lumsden and Isabella Fyvie Mayo. Also based in Old Aberdeen was Rachel Blanche Harrower, whose husband taught Latin at the University, and who worked as a visitor in connection with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families' Association during the war. She lived in College Bounds, where she was a neighbour of Lady Ramsay, a keen supporter of the WSPU and wife of Sir William Ramsay, regius professor of humanity. Also living in the Old Aberdeen area was Katharine Trail, daughter and wife of academics, who worked in association with Louisa Innes Lumsden for the NUWSS, meaning that some of the leading lights of both the constitutional and the militant suffrage organisations in Aberdeen could be found within very few streets of each other around the university.

Of course, many of the women writing to the newspapers did not use their home addresses, but the addresses of the organisations on behalf of whom they were writing. Many such organisations had their headquarters in Union Street, including both the NUWSS and WSPU branches and many of the wartime charities.

Another factor that needs to be taken into account when looking at the location of middle and upper-class women correspondents is the habit of those who could afford it to leave the summer heat of Aberdeen for a house in the countryside. It was usual for the whole family to decamp to an Aberdeenshire village, usually on Deeside and for the father to commute into Aberdeen for work during the week. For example, Louisa Innes Lumsden remembered that in her childhood,

The winters were spent in Aberdeen, but in summer we always went into the country, now to one place and again to another, as, unlike his brothers, my father had no settled country house. Uncle Hugh, Sheriff of Sutherland, lived at Pitcaple, Uncle Henry at Clova, Uncle Tom (Colonel HEICS) at Belhelvie and Uncle William at Balmedie.<sup>101</sup>

Unlike the gentrified Lumsden family, many middle-class Aberdonian families did not have family houses to visit in the summer. In *For You I Remember*, Edith Bishop, whose father was headmaster of Kittybrewster School in Aberdeen, wrote of her family renting a furnished house in the north-east seaside village of Newburgh each year for nine years until the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, minister's daughter Lyn Irvine was travelling with her family from the manse in Westfield Terrace to Speyside for month-long holidays.<sup>103</sup> Such holidaying, with the women remaining in the holiday village with the children and servants to look after during the week, may also have affected the women's access to and correspondence with the newspapers, although Marian Farquharson, for one, does not seem to have allowed her annual holiday to Cruden Bay to disrupt her diatribes on the subject of free trade, although she regretted that she had not brought her press cuttings books with her. Indeed, her travels gave her the opportunity of new topics for letters, such as how the train service to Cruden Bay and the hotel where she was staying could be improved.<sup>104</sup>

The Aberdeen women mentioned so far have all been members of the middle classes and were in the main women who had the leisure time to devote to good works, being supported by their husbands or fathers. The exceptions to this are of course Louisa Innes Lumsden, a

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<sup>101</sup> Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves*, p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> Bishop, Edith, *For You I Remember*. Aberdeen: Gourdas House Publishers, 1980, p. 55.

<sup>103</sup> Irvine, Lyn, *So Much Love, So Little Money*, p. 117.

<sup>104</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 1 November 1905.



retired educationist, and Isabella Fyvie Mayo, journalist and author. A few other letters offer evidence of the occupations of their correspondents. Isabel Murray, who wrote to the *Free Press* in September 1910, was a physical training instructor. She had trained at Aberdeen Physical Training College and was writing in protest against slurs on her qualifications that she claimed had been made by the chairman of the Secondary Education Committee of Aberdeenshire County Council.<sup>105</sup> She was another resident of the elite Rubislaw Den. From the Post Office Directory of 1914–15 we know that Miss H. Birnie Smith of Midstocket Road was a school teacher at Sunnybank Primary School, although her letter to the *Journal* in February 1917 was in association with Mrs Adam Maitland of Rubislaw Den House in connection with a collection for the Ada Leigh Homes in Paris, mentioned above. Miss Birnie Smith was named as the honorary collector for the charity in the letter while Mrs Maitland, as befitted the resident of Rubislaw Den, was the Aberdeen Auxiliary President.<sup>106</sup>

Aberdeenshire teachers can be found quite frequently writing to the newspapers, usually in connection with the terms of their employment by their school boards. Annie S. Barker, Jeannie Davidson, Annie E. Fraser, Mary I Philip and Jamesina Slorach, schoolteachers at Strichen, wrote a joint letter to the *Journal* in October 1917 in protest at their treatment by this school board.<sup>107</sup> (The demands of female teachers for better pay and conditions during 1917–18 will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.) While the Strichen schoolteachers were willing to sign their names to their complaints, the female schoolteacher at Glengairn, near Ballater, who wrote to complain about her school board chose to hide behind a nom de plume, although it must have been quite easy for the school board to identify ‘Female Teacher, Schoolhouse, Glengairn’.<sup>108</sup> Interestingly, this teacher had already written to the *Journal* a month previously under her own name – Annie W. Collie – to protest against the possibility of a negotiated peace with Germany in December 1916.<sup>109</sup> Either the response to this earlier letter had been so negative in her small community that she felt it better to hide her identity in her second letter, or the response had been so positive that she did not want to sully her patriotic image with complaints about pay.

All the women correspondents mentioned so far have been members of the middle and upper middle classes. It is possible to identify a few of the correspondents who gave their names

<sup>105</sup> Isabel Murray, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 24 September 1910.

<sup>106</sup> Mrs Maitland, Mrs Pyper and Miss Birnie Smith, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 3 February 1917.

<sup>107</sup> Annie S. Barker, Jeannie Davidson, Annie E. Fraser, Mary I Philip and Jamesina Slorach, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 17 October 1917.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Female Teacher’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 27 January 1917.

<sup>109</sup> Annie W. Collie, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 18 December 1916.

and addresses as being from the working class, although, as will be seen below, many correspondents from the working class chose to use pseudonyms. Ina Boyne and Catherine Bowie, both mentioned above, were domestic servants. The Post Office Directory of 1900 gives the occupation of John Ross Junior of 12 Forbesfield Road, Aberdeen, as fishcurer, and Miss Margaret Ross, who wrote to the *Journal* in June 1917 from this address, was the honorary treasurer of the Aberdeen Day Nursery, set up for working women's children during the war years. The war also caused Miss Mary Moir of 22 Belmont Road to write to the *Journal* in 1917 in reference to a Highland Feill, to be held in the Edinburgh Music Hall to raise funds to provide comforts for the Highland regiments. Miss Moir had been appointed a collector for the produce stall, possibly because James Moir, of the same address, was a seedsman. However, she was quick to point out that the stall's honorary convenor was Princess Arthur of Connaught (the Duchess of Fife and the King's niece).<sup>110</sup>

While the majority of identified correspondents to the two newspapers were from the monied middle class, with a small group from the working class, there was also a group of correspondents from the upper classes. The majority of these women tended to write in support of the charitable funds of which they were Presidents or in some other way the titular head, although it might be that the actual work of running the charity was undertaken by middle-class ladies. There were some exceptions to this rule. For instance, Lady Aberdeen wrote frequently in support of the Onwards and Upwards Association, which she had founded as the Haddo House Association for the material, mental and moral elevation of women. An early form of correspondence course aimed at servant girls, the Association offered the chance for girls to continue their education, studying subjects such as mathematics, reading or biology in their own time in the houses in which they worked and assisted by their mistresses. The Association was such a success that by 1891 it had spread all over Scotland, and hence the decision to change its name to something with wider relevance was taken and, in addition, an *Onward and Upward* magazine was published until 1930.<sup>111</sup> Not content to be merely a figurehead, Lady Aberdeen was very involved in the running of the Association and was notoriously concerned about the lives of her servants, more so than was seen as proper by some critics. King Edward VII apparently refused to stay with the Aberdeens at the Vice-Regal Lodge on the occasion of his visit to Ireland in 1907 for fear that he would be expected to take a parlourmaid into dinner, although his distaste for the company of the Aberdeens was

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<sup>110</sup> Mary Moir, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 15 February 1917.

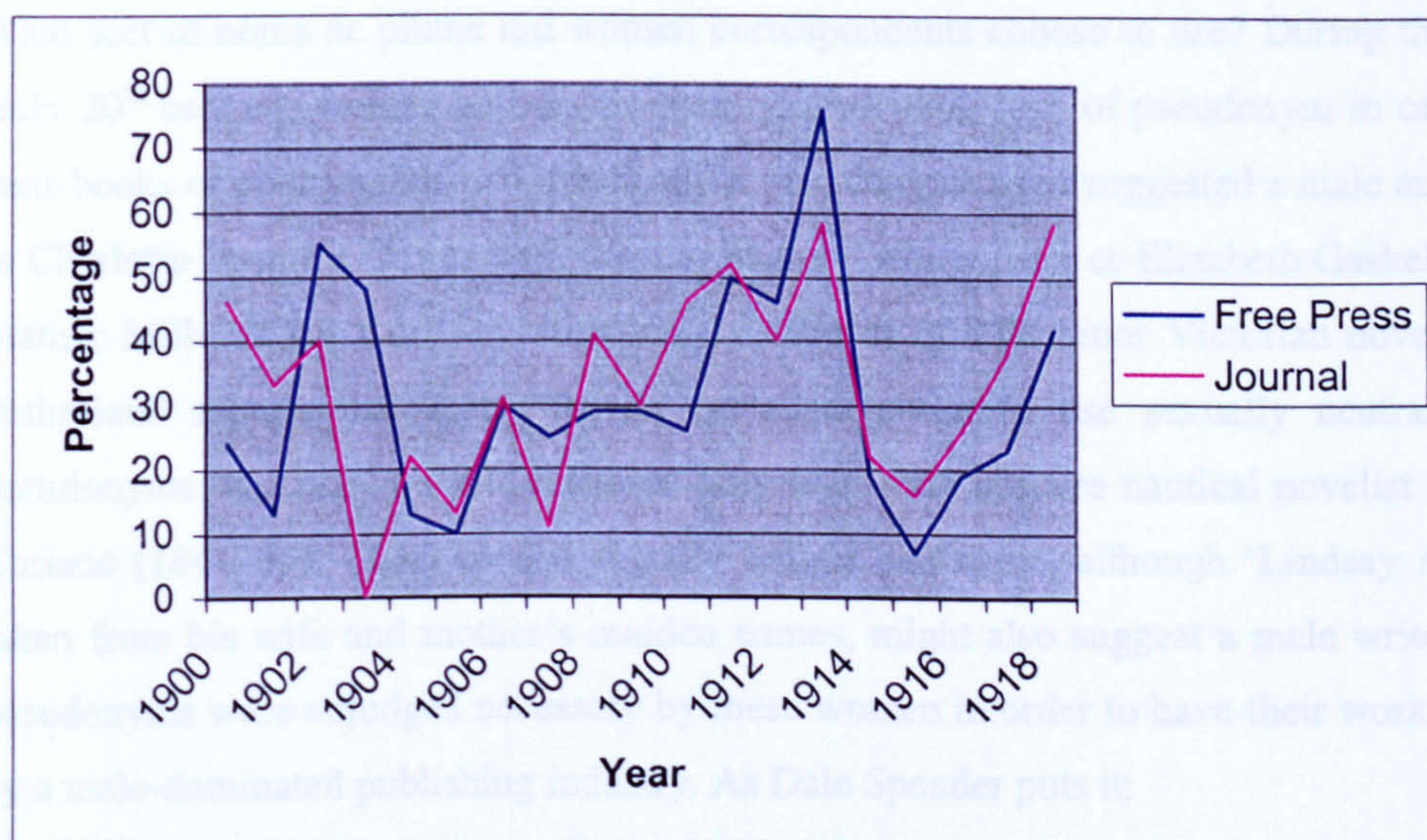
<sup>111</sup> For more on this Association, see Drummond, James, *Upstairs to Downstairs, Advice to Servant Girls and Weary Mothers*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983.



also because they upset his Anglo-Irish friends in his smart set by their support for Home Rule. J. M. Barrie's 1902 play *The Admirable Crichton*, with a nobleman who insisted that once a month his servants were served tea in the drawing-room by his family, was rumoured to be based on the home life of the Aberdeens.<sup>112</sup> However, even the enthusiastic Lady Aberdeen had to rely on local aid for the day-to-day organisation of her association as she travelled with her husband to London, Ireland and then Canada, where he was General Governor. Her letters, however, show that, even when abroad, she could still be called upon to write letters to the local press urging support for fundraising events.

### The use of noms de plume in the letters

As mentioned above, much of the evidence for working-class correspondents to the newspapers comes from working-class noms de plume. The incidence of all noms de plume in the two newspapers in comparison to the incidence of all letters from women correspondents is shown in Figure 2.4 below.



**Figure 2.4: Incidence of noms de plume as a proportion of all letters from women correspondents printed in Aberdeen daily newspapers 1900–1918**

As can be seen, while the incidence of women's use of noms de plume in both newspapers dropped considerably between 1904 and 1906, after this period women's use of pen names in correspondence with the editor increased steadily until a peak just before the beginning of the

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, pp. 3 and 10.



First World War. The early war years were characterised by a very limited use of noms de plume, which began to grow again from 1916. Again, the explanations for these phenomena can be found in the agitation for women suffrage and the outbreak of war. With the arrival of militant suffragism from 1905 onwards, and the visits of the leaders of the WSPU and WFL to Aberdeen in 1907, there was an increase in the discussion of women suffrage issues in the correspondence columns of both newspapers, and an increasing use of noms de plume to cover the identities of the women involved in such discussions. The most frequently used pseudonym employed during the entire period was 'Member WSPU', used 44 times in the *Free Press*. However, once war had broken out in August 1914, few noms de plume were employed in correspondence with the newspapers because women's reasons for writing to the editor changed. They were now concerned with the organisation of a variety of voluntary war charities and the general war effort. As organisers, they needed to communicate effectively with prospective donors of time, money or comforts for the troops, and therefore needed to reveal their names and addresses.

What sort of noms de plume did women correspondents choose to use? During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women authors frequently used some type of pseudonym in order to get their books or poetry published. Most of the pseudonyms used suggested a male author, such as Charlotte Brontë's Currer Bell, Marian Evans' George Eliot or Elizabeth Gaskell's Cotton Mather Mills. In his work investigating the records of 878 minor Victorian novelists, John Sutherland reports that many female novelists chose to use sexually neutral or male pseudonyms whereas he could discover only one – the obscure nautical novelist Alexander Christie (1841–95) – who used a vaguely female pen name, although 'Lindsay Anderson', taken from his wife and mother's maiden names, might also suggest a male writer.<sup>113</sup> Such pseudonyms were adjudged necessary by these women in order to have their work published by a male-dominated publishing industry. As Dale Spender puts it:

Much as this practice of seeking publication by means of male pseudonyms must have disconcerted and even outraged some men, who saw it as 'dishonest', it did allow some women to penetrate the male controlled net of publishing.<sup>114</sup>

Even after works such as *Jane Eyre* or *Adam Bede* were published and acclaimed, the revelation that their authors were women was shocking to the literary world. As a biographer

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<sup>113</sup> Sutherland, John, 'The Victorian Novelists, Who Were They?'. In Finkelstein, David and McCleery Alistair, eds, *The Book History Reader*. London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 259–268.

<sup>114</sup> Spender, Dale, *Man Made Language*, p. 198.



of Charlotte Brontë explained: 'If Currer Bell *were* a woman, she violated ... [the] sense of what was proper in a good daughter, wife or woman of England'.<sup>115</sup> In direct contrast, as Elaine Showalter explains in her book on gender and culture at the fin de siècle, New Woman writers might choose to use a self-consciously feminist pen name, such as Sarah Grand.<sup>116</sup> Dale Spender went further in her discussion of pseudonyms in *Man Made Language* and claimed that the move towards anonymous submissions to academic journals in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century was made to protect women academics from the gender bias of male reviewers.<sup>117</sup> However, the women correspondents to the *Daily Journal* and *Free Press* did not have to conceal their gender in order to be published. As we have already seen, the editors of the two newspapers, like many other newspapers of the time, operated under a policy of full publication of all letters submitted to them, as long as the letters were accompanied by a name and address, although writers could choose to be published under a pen name, and both male and female correspondents sometimes chose to do so. Of course, it is impossible to tell how many of the male or non-gender-specific pen names given in the letters belonged to women correspondents, and male correspondents were just as likely to use a pen name as women were. Again, the assumption by other correspondents was usually that such correspondents were male, although occasionally the subject of the letter might lead some readers to suspect that the author was female. For example, when 'Live and Let Live' wrote to the *Journal* in September 1912 to deplore the violence of the attacks made on women suffragists who tried to disrupt Lloyd George's speech at the Chancellor's home town of Llanystymdwy, they were assumed to be women by a Welsh reader living in Aboyne. Mr E. Cornwall-Jones assumed that as women they were illustrating 'their nobler courage by hiding under a pen-name, and heroically using the dirk in the dark to stab at the reputation of a sister nation'.<sup>118</sup> 'Live and Let Live' responded the next day to insist that they were 'mere men', although supporters of the suffrage movement and to explain why they had chosen to use pen names:

Your correspondent indulges in a harmless jibe at our anonymity. It was our modesty, not our cowardice, that restrained us from flaunting our names and addresses in the public press; but arguments are important, not our personality.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Peters, Margot, *Unquiet Soul: A Biography of Charlotte Brontë*. New York: Futura, 1977, quoted in Spender, *Man Made Language*, p. 198.

<sup>116</sup> Showalter, Elaine, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. London: Bloomsbury, 1991, p. 62.

<sup>117</sup> Spender, *Man Made Language*, p. 196.

<sup>118</sup> E. Cornwall-Jones, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 25 September 1912.

<sup>119</sup> 'Live and Let Live', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 26 September 1912.



So if women did not need to use a male pen name in order to be published in the newspapers, why bother to use a pen name at all? Was the cause, as 'Live and Let Live' claimed, an excess of modesty? Some women presumably did not wish to be identified by family and friends as correspondents on certain controversial issues. We have already seen the use of 'Member WSPU' throughout the correspondence on the violent methods of the militant suffragists in the *Free Press*. This nom de plume was used 44 times, but it is not possible to distinguish whether more than one correspondent used the name – only rarely does the correspondent refer to another letter signed by this pen name, indicating that she had written that letter as well. Other correspondents might be nervous about possible repercussions if they allowed their identities to become known. Such nervous correspondents could range from 'Two Schoolgirls', who wrote to the *Free Press* in December 1903 to protest at the overworking of schoolgirls with home lessons, to 'Old Servant' who complained about her mistress's habit of buying the cheapest salted butter for her household staff to eat and keeping everything locked up, including the sugar bowl.<sup>120</sup> A fear of retribution if the identity of the correspondent was known was not necessarily imaginary. 'Fair Play', who wrote to the *Free Press* in August 1912 to remonstrate at the militant methods of the WSPU, explained:

I should prefer to sign my own name to this letter, but having done so some years ago in a letter to a London paper, in which I pointed out the un-reason of their violent conduct, I received such vulgarly abusive postcards from some of the suffragette 'patriots' and 'martyrs' that in these days of hatchet-throwing and petrol-burning I simply dare not do so.<sup>121</sup>

Helen Jollie, WSPU member from Ballater, wrote immediately in response;

Dear lady – Fear not our hatchets or implements of war. They will not be directed against you. You are not important enough. If you were, they would find their way to you without your help.<sup>122</sup>

It is interesting to note that, despite her earlier, unpleasant experience, 'Fair Play' had not given up writing letters to newspapers, choosing instead to hide her identity. A fear of even more violent retribution might be the reason for the pen names of the two correspondents who used 'Working-man's Wife' when writing to the *Journal* in 1911 in reference to the sentencing of a man who beat his wife to death after a drinking bout. The judge accepted a

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<sup>120</sup> 'Two Schoolgirls', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 December 1900; 'Old Servant', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 March 1902.

<sup>121</sup> 'Fairplay', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 12 August 1912.

<sup>122</sup> Helen Jollie, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 August 1912.



plea of culpable homicide and sentenced the husband to ten years. The *Journal*'s criticism of this sentence was echoed by two letters from working-men's wives, who were concerned that such leniency might encourage other men:

After reading the report of the trial of Cumming, I thought how we working men's wives are unprotected in Aberdeenshire compared with other places in Scotland. If we have the misfortune to be married to a passionate, cruel and callous husband, and he wishes to put us out of his way in as brutal a manner as Cumming, he knows a few years is all he will get here. I trust someone with more learning will take up this matter. We get any amount of law, but where does the justice come in?<sup>123</sup>

This desire for someone else, better qualified, to take up the writer's case is very common in letters signed with female pen names. 'A Mistress for 45 Years' hoped 'some more able pen will take up the defence of considerate and conscientious mistresses' regarding a discussion of domestic servants' grievances in the *Free Press* in May 1912.<sup>124</sup> 'Shop Girl' hoped 'some others will help in the matter' when she wrote to the *Journal* about tram fares to Torry and 'A Worried Mother' trusted 'someone in authority will take this matter in hand' regarding the price of milk during the war.<sup>125</sup> It is as though these women did not consider themselves adequate to do anything about the situation apart from bringing it to the attention of the public through the medium of the newspapers. They believed that, having done so – albeit anonymously – they had done all that they were able to do and trusted that raising the problem in such a public way would suffice to get the matter resolved.

What sort of noms de plume did women correspondents choose? The most popular noms de plume for both newspapers are given below:

*Aberdeen Daily Journal*

Farmer's Wife (11)  
Housewife (10)  
Farmer's Daughter (8)  
A Mother (7)  
An Insured Member (6)  
A Woman (4)  
Only A Woman (4)  
Soldier's Mother (4)

*Aberdeen Free Press*

Member, WSPU (44)  
A Mother (9)  
Miriam (7)  
An Insured Member (6)  
A Would-be Elector (6)  
A Woman Liberal (6)  
A Butter-Maker (5)  
Elm (5)

<sup>123</sup> 'Working-Man's Wife', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 19 January 1911.

<sup>124</sup> 'A Mistress for 45 Years', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 May 1912.

<sup>125</sup> 'Shop Girl', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 6 October 1910; 'A Worried Mother', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 10 January 1916.



In all, 584 female correspondents chose to use nom de plumes on publication in the *Free Press* and 623 in the *Daily Journal*. An analysis of different categories of pen names shows that the most popular female pen names in both newspapers were those which identified the writer as either a wife or mother. 31 women identified themselves as someone's wife in the *Journal*, from the popular 'Farmer's Wife' to wives of soldiers, officers, ministers, scavengers and working men. The *Free Press* only published 11 letters from women describing themselves as a wife, but did publish 29 letters from mothers, in comparison to the *Journal's* 20. Again, many of the mothers distinguished themselves through the men in their family – 'A Mother of Soldiers', 'A Gordon Prisoner's Mother', 'Lad's Mother'. Women might also describe the type of wife or mother they were, such as 'Childless Wife', 'Indignant Mother' or 'A Homely, Shrewd Mother'. There were also 17 letters to the *Journal* and 4 to the *Free Press* where women used other familial relations as their pen names – 'Farmer's Daughter', 'A Soldier's Sister', 'A Farmer's Niece'. There were no pen names used where the writer identified herself with a female member of her family.

Women used their relationships with a male member of their family, usually their husband or son, to justify their letter to the newspapers. They were writing, not on their own behalf, but as a wife or – perhaps more powerfully – a mother. This relationship justified their intervention in public affairs, whether it was to complain about the price of milk or the opening hours of the local school, both frequent subjects for women who identified themselves as mothers, or the conduct of the war or local government. Women correspondents might even use their status as a wife or mother as a justification for their letter when it was not necessary, when they might have been justified in writing on their own behalf. A woman describing herself as a ratepayer wrote to the *Free Press* in August 1905 to complain about the condition of the road and pavement in Elmbank Terrace, where she lived. As both a resident and a ratepayer she had justification in her complaints about the state of the road, and her letter did not mention a family at all, yet she signed herself 'Vexed Mother'.<sup>126</sup>

Such usage of their maternal identity by women correspondents echoes the growing importance of the role of the mother in later Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Linked to concerns about the health of the Imperial nation, and the new subjects of eugenics and social Darwinism, women were urged to strive to become better mothers. With rates of infant mortality still causing concern, the finger of blame was pointed directly at mothers, in particular working-class mothers, who, it was claimed, did not have enough education to

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<sup>126</sup> 'Vexed Mother', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 23 August 1905.



realise the importance of hygiene and good food for the welfare of their children. While fertility rates amongst middle-class families at least were in decline – with a direct link to better mortality rates in these families and therefore less of a need to have large families in the expectation that some children would die – this did not mean that women's maternal duties were lightened. On the contrary, this period saw an increasing emphasis on the role of the mother, which became an ever more hallowed institution, in particular in middle-class homes. Shani D'Cruze points out that the new study of eugenics meant that justifications for the separation of the private sphere could be based on scientific and medical arguments and that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the ideal of motherhood had been reinforced strongly, channelling women's energies into ever higher standards of domestic management, housework and childcare.<sup>127</sup> Hence the use of the pen name of 'mother' by women correspondents chimed in with a national concern about the maternal skills of its women.

Of course, some pen names might be used to add to the impact of the letter. 'A Turning Worm' or 'Widowed Mother of Only Son Lying in France' made the point more effectively than the publication of the correspondent's true name. Women who wished to register their support for the cause of woman suffrage might also choose a nom de plume which repeated their demands: 'Votes for Women', 'Justice for Women', 'Equality' or 'Suffer Yet'. There were 71 women who chose to use suffrage-related pen names in their letters to the *Free Press* and 15 to the *Journal*, demonstrating a difference between the readerships of the two newspapers in relation to this subject, to be discussed further in Chapter IV.

Pen names can also give some indication of the occupations of correspondents, and are particularly useful in helping to identify working-class correspondents. 27 letters to the *Journal* and 28 to the *Free Press* were signed with an occupation-related pen name. These tended to be working class in origin – 'A Servant Girl', 'An Aggrieved Domestic', 'Shop Girl', 'A Servant Lassie' – although pen names such as 'A Nurse' and 'A Teacher' also suggest more middle-class women. In comparison to the letters of mothers and wives, whose topic might not always be directly related to their families, letters signed with an occupational pen name were usually concerned with some aspect of the writer's occupation. Servant girls wrote in complaint about their mistress; shop girls about the length of their hours; teachers

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<sup>127</sup> D'Cruze, Shani, 'Women and the Family'. In Purvis, June, ed, *Women's History Britain, 1850–1945, An Introduction*. London: UCL Press, 1995, p. 73.



about their school boards; and everyone wrote complaining about their pay. It can not be seen as surprising that the writers of such complaints sought to hide their identity from their employers. Of course, a pen name such as 'Farmer's Wife' or 'Farmer's Daughter' was also an indication of a woman's occupation since wives and daughters were expected to work on the family farm, and the 16 *Journal* and 10 *Free Press* letters signed by a variation on the name 'Housewife' can also be counted as occupation-related, including the pointed 'One in Women's Sphere, the Home'.

Occasionally, other correspondents challenged the writer's choice of an occupational pen name. 'Jubilee Nurse' wrote several times to the *Free Press* during late 1903 to criticise plans in Buchan to raise enough money to support a Jubilee Nurse in the area. The Jubilee nursing scheme had been started in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Jubilee nurses, supported by local fundraising, undertook the nursing of those too poor to hire a private nurse; they were the forerunner of the district nurse. 'Jubilee Nurse' was surprised that it had taken so long for the rich parishes of Buchan to decide to raise a fund to support a nurse, and prophesised that one would simply not be enough to cover such a large geographical area with a population of over 11,000.

It appears to me that the first step these would-be philanthropists should take is to promote an Act of Parliament – pending the construction of the 'Great Central Buchan Railway' – to increase the speed limit of motor cars, for apart from doing any nursing the poor nurse will have to spend the £90 in paying fines for furious driving in running through the district she is expected to 'nurse'. A more ridiculous, idiotic and insane proposal we have seldom seen mooted, and I hope the Central Committee in Edinburgh will treat the scheme of these 20<sup>th</sup> century 'Buchan Howards' with the contempt it so richly deserves.<sup>128</sup>

Her contempt for these 'do-gooders' and the 'incompetent medical aid which obtains in many of the rural districts' was freely expressed in this first letter, and resulted in a letter published a few days later from Miss Wade, the Superintendent of the Scottish Branch of the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute of Nurses in Edinburgh, disassociating the Institute from such views. Miss Wade stated that she

should be sorry to think any Queen's Nurse would write such a letter, and, moreover, the letter displays so much ignorance of our work and methods that I am bound to believe the signature an assumed one – very wrongly so, as it may lead to much misconception. No well-trained and loyal nurse would criticise the medical men in a letter to a public paper.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> 'Jubilee Nurse', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 23 November 1903.

<sup>129</sup> Miss J. Wade, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 3 December 1903.

Despite this rebuke, 'Jubilee Nurse' wrote another letter criticising both the scheme and Miss Wade's understanding of the role of the nurse, claiming that all nurses criticised doctors the minute their backs were turned. In response to this, the Honorary Secretary of the Aberdeen District Nursing Association, Katharine Lumsden, wrote on 7 December: 'to request that the author of these letters will in future use another pseudonym than the honoured title belonging to the Queen's Nurses.'<sup>130</sup> 'Jubilee Nurse' responded that she was not 'enamoured with the high-sounding title of 'Jubilee Nurse', and to please Miss Wade and Miss Lumsden I had serious thoughts of discarding it', however she signed this, her last letter on the subject, with the same pen name and continued to criticise the proposed scheme.<sup>131</sup>

Miss Wade and Miss Lumsden had serious doubts that this correspondent was what she claimed to be because of the disrespectful tone of her letters. The credentials of another correspondent to speak for her occupation were questioned a few years later in March 1906. 'Ex-shop Lassie' wrote to the *Free Press* to plead for support for the Early Closing Act. Her letter brought forth a response from Mr W. B. Henderson, Secretary of the Anti-Closing Committee, to which she replied the next day:

I know not who W. B. Henderson, Secretary, Anti-Closing Committee is, but I hardly think he can be a gentleman – and even shop-keepers can be that – else he would not have insinuated that the letter showed 'traces of a firmer hand than shop lassies are wont to write'. Poor, ignorant shop lassies! Now, you know that W B Henderson, Secretary, Anti-Closing Committee, does not think much of your ability as letter-writers.<sup>132</sup>

She reiterated that she was indeed an ex-shop lassie and had 'thought out, composed and written' her letter 'without the aid or suggestion of any other person'.

While it is accepted that women authors during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were forced to use male-sounding pseudonyms to achieve publication of their novels and poetry, the women correspondents to Aberdeen newspapers did not have to use male pen names in the same way. With no visible barrier to the publication of the letters in the *Free Press* and *Journal*, they did not have to assume a male identity. However, at least 30% of women correspondents every year chose to utilise a pen name in their correspondence with the editor. For many, this choice of anonymity was made from a fear of retribution, whether from an employer, teacher or husband, if their identities were revealed. Others might not have wished to reveal their

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<sup>130</sup> Katharine Lumsden, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 7 December 1903.

<sup>131</sup> 'Jubilee Nurse', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 10 December 1903.

<sup>132</sup> 'Ex-shop Lassie', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 29 March 1906.



support of the suffragists, and in particular the militant WSPU. For a few, there was a real fear that their views would leave them open to verbal or even physical assault.

However, while these women might choose to hide their identity, they did not feel the need to hide their gender, and indeed often chose pen names that proclaimed it, such as wife or mother. These relationships could be used to justify women's correspondence on a variety of controversial subjects. It was to be understood that they were complaining on behalf of their children or husband, rather than themselves. Letters utilising noms de plume are also useful in identifying working-class correspondents, who might not be self-assured enough to write to the newspapers otherwise, and indicate that once the middle-class ladies had finished with their newspaper, there was a readership waiting for it below-stairs.

### Summary

This chapter set out to establish a profile of the sort of woman who corresponded with the editor of local newspapers during this period. Research in the United States during the 1970s had already established a profile of correspondents to US newspapers on political issues. Such correspondents had an equal age and gender distribution; good educations and incomes; and were predominantly white. An analysis of the women correspondents to the Aberdeen local newspapers 1900–18 confirmed that women for whom a background can be established were more likely to come from the middle classes. While correspondents from both the upper and working classes can be found writing to the newspapers, members of the middle class predominated, in particular ladies of a certain standing in Aberdeen, involved in a variety of good causes, whose correspondence with the newspapers increased dramatically during the war years. Buell's research also suggested that letter writing was a logical extension of an above-average interest in politics. Certainly, correspondents to the *Free Press* in particular showed an interest in the woman suffrage issue, although not always in support of the more militant suffragists. It is also obvious that many of the middle-class correspondents were linked to the local Women's Liberal Association. However, as will be discussed further in Chapter IV, few women can be found writing on the harder political subjects, always excepting Marian Farquharson, whose prolific output on the subject of free trade skews the sample dramatically. Since the period saw the first Liberal government for some years, able to command one of the largest majorities ever seen in the House of Commons, attempting to implement considerable social reforms such as old age pensions and sick benefit, while split itself over the issue of free trade, and fighting an intransigent House of Lords dominated by the Opposition, this might be considered surprising. Again, chapter IV will discuss women's

approach to political issues in more detail and will attempt to evaluate whether women avoided such topics by choice, lack of interest or because they were seen as male-only territory.

Girls' education during this period continued to focus on producing good wives and mothers. While girls of all classes now had access to at least a basic education, their reading materials were very much monitored by teachers and parents. Access to newspapers, in particular, was censored, even by the most modern minded. On establishing their own homes, women might be expected to make themselves familiar with the headlines in order to provide an informed audience for their husband, but the growth of the phenomenon of the woman's page in newspapers shows that this was where women's main attention was to be focused. In the pre-war years in particular women were presumed not to be interested in corresponding with a newspaper's editor – hence the shock of a male correspondent in discovering that another correspondent had hidden her female gender and the assumption that writers using non-gender-specific nom de plumes were male. However, women correspondents faced no actual censorship and the policy of both newspapers appears to have been one of publication of all letters received. This raises the question of why at least 30% of women correspondents every year chose to use a nom de plume in their correspondence with the editor, although it must be remembered that male correspondents might utilise pen names as well. It is obvious that some women used pen names in order to hide their identity from the newspaper's readership. In particular, this happened when a letter discussed a controversial subject, such as pay and conditions of service or woman suffrage. However, women might also have used pen names in order to add value to their letter, making the signature part of the message, or in order to justify their correspondence. This was especially true in the case of women using their roles as wives or mothers as their identities to the newspapers.

While it is usually impossible to learn much about individual correspondents from their letters to the press alone, analysis of data gathered has allowed fuller pictures to be constructed of a few of the more frequent correspondents. These confirm the impression of middle-class, educated women involved in charitable good causes and frequently interested in the woman suffrage issue. Not necessarily all 'New Women' – the *Journal* was pleased to state that Marian Farquharson was the 'very antithesis of the blue stocking or new woman' – but usually interested in the advancement of their sex. However, it must always be borne in mind that letters published in a local newspaper were written to portray their writer in a particular way, and such a public face can not be used to fashion a complete picture of an individual's opinions and personality. While it may appear that much can be learned from her



letters about someone such as Marian Farquharson, her obituary and the autobiography of a woman like Louisa Innes Lumsden demonstrates how one-sided any such picture would be – and in the case of Louisa Innes Lumsden other evidence also shows how even her own autobiography does not tell the whole story.

A small proportion of the letters published in Aberdeen newspapers came from outside Scotland. Many of these letters were in response to other letters or editorial in the newspapers, indicating that such women used the local newspapers to keep in contact with events, family and friends in their home town. In particular, women living in England or further abroad used and corresponded with the *Daily Journal*. This may be because of the *Journal*'s comparative longevity, plus the editors' desire to establish it as more than a local newspaper in competition with the newspapers of the central belt. It is interesting, therefore, to note that women outside Aberdeenshire, but living in other parts of Scotland, corresponded more frequently with the *Free Press*. The focus of the following chapters will be on the distinctions between the two newspapers in relation to the *content* of women's letters.

## CHAPTER III

*Within and without the woman's sphere*



## Introduction

Having established as clearly as possible who the women correspondents to the two Aberdeen newspapers were, the following three chapters examine the issues about which they wrote letters to the local press. Two of these subjects, women's politics and the impact of the First World War, were such frequent topics of correspondence that each has a separate chapter assigned to it. This first chapter of analysis of the contents of correspondents' letters will therefore examine the other frequently discussed but less dominant issues with which women correspondents were concerned, predominantly before the advent of the First World War. In particular, the chapter will identify similarities and differences between two groups of correspondent – those who wrote to the *Journal* and those who wrote to the *Free Press* – and ask how far outside the conventional 'women's sphere' such correspondents were prepared to venture and whether their choice of one newspaper over another indicates anything about the correspondent. Letters which appeared in both newspapers will also be discussed in order to evaluate any differences in editorial approach between the two newspapers.

## Simultaneous publication

Seventy-six of the letters were printed simultaneously in both newspapers between 1900 and 1914, with this number being spread evenly throughout the period. During the war years, 103 letters were printed simultaneously, with the greatest amount of such letters appearing in the first two years of the war. The majority of these duplicate letters either asked for aid or gave information. The secretaries of various charities, such as the Red Cross, the Orphan Homes for Scotland or the Aberdeen Home for Motherless Children, wrote to request subscriptions or other types of aid, or to report on their year's fund-raising. The leaders of woman suffrage societies wrote to offer information on their societies' aims or to correct generally held misconceptions. During the war years, letters were written to request comforts for the troops or to advise readers about particular aspects of the voluntary war effort. This explains the concentration of duplicate letters in the early years of the war when such arrangements were first being made and when the organisers of the voluntary war effort needed to communicate with as many people as possible. What is important to note about these duplicate letters is that, for the most part, they were not written in response to anything else printed in the newspaper. As Chapter I noted, earlier research looking at people who write letters to newspapers, for example by Foster and Friedrich,<sup>1</sup> has

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<sup>1</sup> Foster, H. Schuyler and Friedrich, Carl J., 'Letters to the editor as a means of measuring the effectiveness of propaganda'. *American Political Science Review*, February 1937, 31, pp 71–79.

suggested that most letters are triggered by other letters or editorial on the subject. In addition, some commentators suggest that letters to the editor can be seen as a kind of 'safety valve', allowing angry or upset readers to 'get something off their chest' in a harmless but therapeutic way. Linked to this second motivation was the fact that the majority of letters studied in contemporary newspapers were written in a negative tone, rather than a positive or neutral one. As will be seen, this is also true of the vast majority of the letters studied here, at least those printed in the newspapers before the outbreak of the First World War. Most women correspondents before the war wrote to the Aberdeen newspapers to agree or disagree with something they had read in the newspaper – and the majority of letters were written in tones of complaint. Once war broke out, however, women's letters became much more proactive as the great voluntary war effort swung into action. (This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter V.)

The majority of the letters printed simultaneously in both newspapers do not conform to the reactive/complaining pattern. Instead, they were generated to raise awareness of a particular issue. For example, Katharine M. Lumsden always sent copies of her letters to both newspapers. As the honorary superintendent of the Aberdeen Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Katharine Lumsden's letters were attempts to raise awareness about issues such as children's burning accidents, collections for the hospital, and the need for a crematorium in Aberdeen. Such duplicate letters are useful for checking the amount of editing letters would receive before being published. Most, such as Katharine Lumsden's letters, seem to have been published in both newspapers with very few changes. This might also reflect the high profile of Miss Lumsden and her family in the city and the high esteem that all three of the Lumsden sisters enjoyed. Such esteem would also presumably be the reason Katharine Lumsden could send duplicate copies of her letters to both newspapers and expect them to be published by both. It should be noted that her sister, Louisa Innes Lumsden, did not follow her example in this, but many of Louisa's letters, especially on the subject of vivisection, were in response to particular letters in one newspaper or the other, rather than being written to raise awareness of an issue, as Katharine's tended to be.

Other duplicate correspondents were not always treated with the same kind of respect. In particular there is evidence of a certain amount of editing being applied at the *Daily Journal*. For example, on 15 June 1906, the letter of 'Only a Woman' was printed in the *Journal* complaining about work being undertaken in the churchyard in Strichen. A similar letter from the same correspondent appeared in the *Free Press* of the same day. The *Journal* letter begins: 'Since the



question of providing additional burying ground was raised, now practically five months ago...'<sup>2</sup> The *Free Press* letter starts more aggressively, 'Since this disreputable case began...'<sup>3</sup> The rest of the two letters are exactly the same, outlining the problems occurring in the churchyard and asking what Strichen folk should do about it all. However, they diverge again near the end. The *Journal* letter suggests 'I hold that the people of Strichen would be acting lawfully in removing these turfs that have been laid down'<sup>4</sup> while the *Press* version says 'I hold that the people of Strichen would be acting more lawfully in removing these turfs that have been laid down by the factor's orders than he did in laying them there. He has by a long way exceeded his powers, and he is tampering far too much and has tampered far too long with the feelings of a peaceable community.'<sup>5</sup> The editor of the *Journal* did not appear to want to print such criticisms of a particular individual.

The same editing by the *Journal* of strongly worded criticism of authority can be found in August 1911, during a strike by the railway workers. 'Stationmaster's Wife' wrote to both newspapers to explain the railway workers' grievances. In almost identical letters she asked who was more worthy of a salary increase. In the *Journal* she asked 'Is it the high official or is it the patient, hardworking stationmaster and clerk?'<sup>6</sup> In the *Press* this became: 'Is it the high official who struts about showing his authority, or is it the patient, hardworking stationmaster and clerk, who are not ashamed to own the dignity of labour, and who can despise the lordling who would, if he could, sweat the very life blood from his supposed inferiors?'<sup>7</sup> Since the rest of these letters are identical, it may be presumed again that the editor of the *Journal* removed the offending criticisms before printing the letters.

Of course, it might be suggested that such differences were the result of the correspondents' self-censorship. Could correspondents expect to be given a freer rein in their discussion of individuals in authority by the liberal and less-established *Free Press*? However, a reading of the entire text of such letters leads to the conclusion that the differences should be ascribed to the editorial pen. It should also be noted that the editor of the *Journal* was more inclined to edit anonymous correspondents' letters, and usually allowed duplicates from named women (and, in particular, named Ladies) to be published untouched. Editing of correspondents' letters is not only to be found in the *Daily Journal*. The *Free Press* might also edit letters, either for reasons of length or subject matter, as has already been revealed in Chapter II where its editing of the letters from the

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<sup>2</sup> 'Only a Woman', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 15 June 1906.

<sup>3</sup> 'Only a Woman', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 15 June 1906.

<sup>4</sup> *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 15 June 1906.

<sup>5</sup> *Aberdeen Free Press*, 15 June 1906.

<sup>6</sup> 'Stationmaster's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 18 August 1911.

<sup>7</sup> 'Stationmaster's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 18 August 1911.

Orphan Homes of Scotland was discussed. However, the editing of anonymous letters by the editor of the *Journal* appears to be much more than an attempt to limit the length or scope of these letters, as appears to be the case in the *Free Press*'s handling of the Orphan Home letters. In the cases quoted above the *Journal* editor also appears to be attempting to remove personal criticism of establishment figures from the letters of correspondents who refused to be identified. During the war years, five incidents of the editing of duplicate letters by the *Journal* and one by the *Free Press* can be found. On none of these occasions does the editing appear to be anything more than an attempt to save space – possibly a more urgent concern during war-time paper rationing. However, one difference between such editing and that occurring in the pre-war years is evident. The war-time *Journal* did not spare letters from ladies who gave their names and addresses if it felt a need to edit. Thus Julia Stewart's appeal to the readers of both newspapers on behalf of comforts for the Indian troops in November 1914 was slightly edited by the editor of the *Journal*. Her appeal in the *Free Press* to all those 'who know and love India, who have served it in any capacity whatever, or profited by trading connections with that country, and who realise the extreme importance of the Indian factor on our Imperial system' was cut in the *Journal* to 'those who realise the extreme importance of the Indian factor on our Imperial system'.<sup>8</sup> Not perhaps a particularly important cut, and possibly made in a kindly attempt to enlarge the response to her appeal, but interesting that it should be made to a letter written by a member of an important gentry family in Aberdeenshire by the usually respectful *Journal*. Continuing this new policy of increased editorial intervention, a month later the *Journal* made a cut to a long letter from Elizabeth Asquith, the daughter of the Prime Minister writing directly from 10, Downing Street. Miss Asquith's letter requested donations for the 'Arts Fund' which aimed to provide financial support to those artists, actors and other workers in the arts thrown out of employment by the war. Her letter in the *Free Press* listed 17 individual funds which would benefit from donations while the *Journal* version of the letter cut this information, presumably for purposes of space-saving.<sup>9</sup>

### Similarities and differences

As has already been discussed in Chapter I, one of the reasons that these two Aberdeen newspapers were chosen for this research was that little evidence of what is called 'editorial gate-keeping' can be found during the period in question. Many contemporary studies of newspaper

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Stewart, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 November 1914.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Asquith, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press*, 5 December 1914.



correspondence have found it difficult to assess the representativeness of letters published in newspapers because of an element of editorial choice or censorship, meaning that some letters are not published. Such censorship is usually implemented because of a lack of space or in an attempt to remain strictly politically neutral in print. A lack of such frequent editorial censorship in the *Journal* and *Free Press* means that it can be assumed that any differences in *subject* matter between the two newspapers' letters columns have their root in the correspondents, and their perception of the appropriateness of the subject matter for that particular newspaper, rather than being a result of editorial choice. The rest of this chapter will therefore investigate similarities and differences in the subject matter of correspondents' letters to the two newspapers and will discuss whether the *Journal* and the *Free Press* attracted distinctively different women readers. In particular, it will look at how far outside the domestic sphere women correspondents chose to venture in their letters to the newspapers and what impact the interests and concerns of what were characterised as the New Woman and the domestic woman had on Aberdeen correspondents.

### The New Woman

Much has been written in recent years about the phenomenon of the New Woman, usually in connection with what is termed the New Woman novel, but with increasing interest in the impact of the figure of the New Woman outside literature. In July 2000 there was even a conference on the subject of the New Woman in the National and International Periodical Press at Manchester Metropolitan University. The New Woman was a product of the new opportunities in education and employment open to primarily middle-class women during the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Once women were able to access better education, at school or even university, the question had to be asked – what were they being educated *for*? The New Woman did not look to marriage and a family as the only possible way to a fulfilling life. Other opportunities were opening for her, and New Women were beginning to demand economic independence through equality of opportunity with men for education and employment. By such demands, they were seen by many to be turning the natural order of things on its head and attacking men's God-given role as patriarch and breadwinner of the family. The 'New Woman' was a useful label for journalists to attach to any women demanding equality with men in education, employment or politics, in the same way as 'The Girl of the Period' had been used slightly earlier and 'The Flapper' would be used in the 1920s. She might also blend seamlessly into the 'Shrieking Sisterhood', as anti-feminist critics stigmatised those women campaigning for women's suffrage. New Women were attacked in print by both male and female writers, such as Marie Corelli and Eliza Lynn Linton. For example, doctors claimed that the New Woman was dangerous for society

because over-education would develop her brain at the expense of her uterus, which would be starved until it could no longer function. In his presidential address to the British Medical Association in 1886, Dr William Withers Moore warned that educated women would become 'more or less sexless. And the human race will have lost those who should have been her sons.'<sup>10</sup> New Woman novels by writers such as Sarah Grand or Mona Caird shocked traditionalists by their criticism of contemporary sexual mores and exploration of the possibilities of marital and sexual revolution. Their novels, which they explicitly stated were written for women readers and made a political or moral statement on behalf of their sex, explored themes of female sexuality, new forms of marriage, single motherhood and sexual equality. For example, Sarah Grand attacked what many saw as society's conspiracy of silence on the subject of syphilis and its dangers for women in *The Heavenly Twins*, a theme also raised by dramatists such as Ibsen and suffrage campaigners like Christabel Pankhurst. In *The Woman Who Did*, seen as a New Woman novel although actually written by a man, Grant Allen, the heroine insists on staying true to her principles and refuses to marry her lover. Instead, they set up home in Italy, where he almost immediately dies, leaving her to bring up their illegitimate daughter alone. Her eventual suicide on her grown-up daughter's discovery of the truth about her birth is more conventional in its treatment of the 'fallen woman' than the majority of New Woman novels, but even so it shocked contemporary society on its publication in 1895.

Such novels and articles in magazines and newspapers by both New Women writers and those who attacked them helped to establish the model of the New Woman. She would be an enthusiast for the equality of women, a supporter of causes such as women's entry into the universities and the professions and the emancipation of women through enfranchisement. As Juliet Gardiner has pointed out, on one hand the New Woman was characterised as masculine, aggressive and de-sexed, but on the other, was seen as fast, forward and assertive.<sup>11</sup> Different writers could attack her for modern habits such as face-painting while others described her as a humourless and unattractive old spinster bent on the sexual dominance of young men. All were in agreement that she would be interested in such modern leisure pursuits as cycling, swimming and even driving a motor car rather than more domestic chores.

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Showalter, Elaine, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. London: Bloomsbury, 1991, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Gardiner, Juliet, ed, *The New Woman: Women's Voices 1880-1918*. London: Collins and Brown, 1993, p. 6.



### Leisure activities of the New Woman

Does the New Woman appear in the correspondence columns of the Aberdeen newspapers? We have already seen a reference to her in the *Journal's* obituary of Marian Farquharson, where she was praised as 'the very antithesis of the accepted idea of a blue stocking or new woman'. However, if Marian Farquharson can not be described as a New Woman it is difficult to see who can be. Her campaigns for women's admission to scientific societies and her membership of associations such as the International Women's Progressive Union and the Scottish Association for the Promotion of Women's Public Work certainly pay testament to her interest in issues such as women's equality and need for personal freedom. In addition, she appears to have been almost a caricature of a New Woman in other aspects of her lifestyle. Although presumably prevented by age and invalidism from the more usual New Woman hobbies of swimming or cycling, Marian Farquharson was evidently an enthusiastic motorist. She wrote 12 letters to the *Aberdeen Free Press* on this subject between 1905 and 1911 and sounds as though her approach to driving was more enthusiastic than cautious. Most of her letters were on the subject of the need for better care and attention on the part of other road-users, such as cyclists, pedestrians and drivers of horse-drawn vehicles, and they are full of descriptions of 'close-runs' and near accidents:

Yesterday a cyclist appeared round a sharp corner of the road on the wrong side; my motor was not going more than ten miles an hour, but at this speed so close was the cyclist that to pull up was impossible. To avoid a collision my motor was swerved to the wrong side, but the cyclist then swerved to the middle of the road and back to the wrong side, giving the appearance of being intoxicated. Had we been going at a higher speed the cyclist would have been killed....I never motor without coming on cyclists, pedestrians, as well as horse-driven vehicles invariably on the wrong side of the road. If a few heavy fines were imposed on obstructors of the roads instead of only on motorists I venture to think fewer so-called motor accidents would happen.<sup>12</sup>

Marian was also of the opinion that 'a motor going at 20 miles an hour is as easily controlled as a horse going at a small trot of say 10 miles an hour'.<sup>13</sup>

Hers are the only letters from a woman to the Aberdeen press on the subject of motoring, although the existence of women cyclists in Aberdeen is evidenced by a letter to both newspapers on 14 August 1905 by Frances Comper of Lumphanan who was knocked off her bicycle in King Street, Aberdeen, by a carriage carrying three ladies on their way to a military parade.

I rang my bell, but the coachman did not slacken, and I narrowly escaped the horses' feet. A friend, who was following me, had only just time to

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<sup>12</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 26 August 1908.

<sup>13</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 13 May 1911.

jump backwards off her bicycle, the front of which went under the carriage.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that the coachman did not stop his horses to discover if she was injured, Miss Comper wrote to the newspapers in the hope that the ladies travelling in the carriage would wish to recompense her friend for the injury done to her bicycle.

The letters columns also give examples of enthusiastic female golfers, walkers, swimmers and even footballers. Such women needed determination to pursue their chosen leisure pursuits since they encountered criticism and sometimes outright obstruction from both individuals and the authorities. The idea of women utilising leisure facilities which until then had been the sole preserve of men was not popular. 'Ferryhill Golferess' wrote to the *Journal* in November 1912 to protest at her treatment by the Links Golf Course in Ferryhill, Aberdeen.

I love golf, but am unfortunately of the 'other sex' and, on tendering my 'tuppence' on Saturday afternoon, was informed by the courteous official at the receipt of custom that ladies were not allowed on the course on Saturday afternoons. I was not militant enough to smash the window of the pay-box, but hied myself to the board on which appears the by-laws of the Links Golf Course. True enough, unless the official is specially kind, I and my sex are not allowed on the course after one on Saturdays and not at all on holidays.... I look to Councillor Shaw, wise councillor and descendent of my Covenanting forefathers, to do something real for the weaker (?) sex.<sup>15</sup>

Golf clubs may have required the segregation of women golfers, but at least the sight of women playing golf was not shocking to the general public. During the war years, the public was far more shocked – or titillated – by the sight of women in footballing shorts, albeit long and baggy ones. In 1916, Miss Polgreen, of the Swedish Gymnasium, Rose Street in Aberdeen, wrote to the *Free Press* to protest against the *Daily Mail*'s use of a photograph of a team of women footballers from Portsmouth, although what she thought the *Free Press* could do about this is not clear. She assured her readers that she was not a prude and had played football herself as a young girl – but not in shorts or in public – and was now a keen cricketer and hockey player (in a skirt at all times). However:

I should like to raise a protest against the unseemliness of football and football 'togs' for women. It gave me quite a shock when I realised that evidently a team of ladies dressed in jerseys and 'shorts' as represented by a photograph in the 'Daily Mail' had appeared in public at Portsmouth

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<sup>14</sup> Frances M M Comper, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 August 1905.

<sup>15</sup> 'Ferryhill Golferess', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 12 November 1912.



last Saturday. Are women losing their heads? If not their heads, are they losing all their womanly self-respect?<sup>16</sup>

‘A Modern Woman’ wrote in response the next day, defending women’s use of shorts and declaring football a healthy game – perhaps more so than a ‘mixed’ game such as hockey! A real ‘modern’ woman, she declared:

Speaking from personal experience, and being a very keen motorist, both on cycle and car, I always wear riding breeches and tunic, which I find exceedingly comfortable, and consider such dress to be much safer and more in keeping than a skirt (be it ever so short) for such sport, also for long country walks and hill-climbing.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that Miss Polgreen’s antipathy towards women footballers may also have stemmed from her employment at Aberdeen’s Swedish Gymnasium – she had written to the *Free Press* earlier, in 1914, to recommend Swedish gymnastics to all as a healthy way to improve both body and mind.<sup>18</sup>

Swimming was another particularly controversial topic for the women correspondents to the Aberdeen newspapers. There are seven letters concerning women swimmers’ limited access to facilities printed in the columns of the *Free Press* and two in the *Daily Journal*. In November 1902, three letters dealt with the subject of women’s access to the swimming baths in Aberdeen. As ‘J. L.’ explained, women were only allowed to use the baths for a few hours a week:

It was bad enough in summer, when the baths were only open to them for a few hours on Tuesdays – that is, from 10 till 4 during the daytime, and from 6 till 9 in the evening; but now even that is curtailed, and if one does not care to go on that one evening in the week from 6 to 8.30 pm, or cannot do so, as in my case, they are deprived of all swimming practice during five or six months of the year. I think it is rather too bad that the ladies cannot have even one day to themselves – it seems very selfish of the gentlemen to monopolise the baths all the time in this way. I know the excuse is that not enough ladies come to make it pay, but I very much question if more gentlemen will go on Tuesday afternoons than there would be ladies. We really ought to have two evenings during the week, as (in summer, at all events) the baths are most uncomfortably crowded, and one generally has to wait some time for a box.<sup>19</sup>

‘Schoolgirl’ and ‘Grieved’ wrote the following day in support of ‘J. L.’, with ‘Schoolgirl’ requesting that the baths be made available for the use of schoolgirls one afternoon a week since

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<sup>16</sup> G. A. Polgreen, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 21 November 1916.

<sup>17</sup> ‘A Modern Woman’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 22 November 1916.

<sup>18</sup> G. A. Polgreen, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 3 March 1914.

<sup>19</sup> ‘J. L.’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 November 1902.

it was difficult for them to use the baths on a schoolday evening.<sup>20</sup> One schoolgirl who did use the baths during Tuesday evenings was Edith Bishop, daughter of the headmaster of Kittybrewster School in the city. In her reminiscences of a childhood spent in Edwardian Aberdeen she recalls:

I was very keen on swimming and the only day I could go to the Baths, which were at the Beach, was Tuesday (Ladies' Day). Until I was deemed old enough to look after myself properly, Sadie [her great-aunt] accompanied me there, where she waited patiently till I came out and dressed.<sup>21</sup>

Edith Bishop's testimony shows that such women swimmers were not merely concerned with splashing about but were serious swimmers. She recalls developing her racing technique under a coach, joining a ladies' swimming club called the Thistles, and preparing to swim the Scottish mile, until the outbreak of the First World War halted all such activity. Edith Bishop's home life seems to have been particularly 'modern' – in her reminiscences she recalls her mother scandalising Aberdeen society by having her hair 'bobbed' and taking tea in a café on her own. However, despite letters of complaint in the newspapers and the enthusiasm of women like Edith Bishop, matters did not improve for ladies at the swimming baths. Complaints continued about women's limited access throughout the period and were joined by complaints about the dirtiness of the water, especially after days of being used by men. As 'One of Them' explained to the *Journal* in July 1908:

This grievance – which has been long felt and endured – is, briefly, that the water is not run clean into the baths on the one orphan day in the week on which ladies are permitted to enter them. There are six days out of seven allotted to mere man, on two of which he enjoys fresh water run in from the sea.

It is surely a small request – and it comes from a large body of injured regular attenders – to ask that the ladies' day should be changed to either of the two clean water days. Painstakingly learning to swim and going down that delightful chute entail the swallowing of a little – sometimes a lot – of the briny; and we do implore the pleasure, or rather peace, of knowing that it is newly caught from the sea.<sup>22</sup>

'A Swimming Club Member' pointed out to the *Free Press* that 'only their extreme fondness for swimming induced them to conquer their feelings of repulsion', while 'A Lady Swimmer' and 'Another Lady Swimmer' considered it to be nothing short of scandalous that a city which attempted to sell itself to tourists as 'a coming Brighton' should be content with such a state of

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<sup>20</sup> 'Schoolgirl' and 'Grieved', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 15 November 1902.

<sup>21</sup> Bishop, Edith, *For You I Remember*. Aberdeen: Gourdas House Publishers, 1980, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> 'One of Them', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 30 July 1908.



affairs.<sup>23</sup> Their only alternative, as 'A Lady Swimmer' explained in her letter dated late September, was to swim in the sea, 'which is cold but clean'. During the summer months – and apparently far into September – brave souls, including Edith Bishop, swam in the North Sea from Aberdeen beach. However, women swimmers faced additional problems even here, as 'Abigail' reported in her letter to the *Daily Journal* in August 1909:

Since the advent of the fine weather I have indulged in sea bathing, but so far as ladies are concerned, no encouragement is given us to have a dip. In the first place, around the ladies' coaches a queue of about 50 men congregate, and while leaving and re-entering our coaches, we are subjected to most insulting remarks. Of course, I cannot call these men gentlemen, for no gentleman would, or could, condescend to such vulgarity. One morning the 'Rescue' endeavoured to move the queue, but it was of no avail. No policeman could be seen. This is, however, nothing new, for the Aberdeen police force seems to be becoming smaller and beautifully less.<sup>24</sup>

Naturally, the ladies who swam at the beach in view of the public made sure that little of a sensational nature could be seen by these vulgar bystanders. Lyn Irvine, whose father was a minister in Aberdeen, recalled in her autobiography how shocked her mother was by a family who allowed their little boy to race around the beach in Aberdeen naked, and how she made sure her daughters were properly attired for swimming:

At that time my bathing suit had full bloomers that tied with a tape round my waist and a voluminous blue tunic almost down to my knees ornamented with rows of white braid. It was a wonder that I did not go to the bottom with the weight of wet material.<sup>25</sup>

Can women engaging in such sporting activities as swimming, footballing and golf be seen as New Women? They certainly show some of the perceived attributes of New Women – and by the First World War there is evidence of 'modern' women claiming equality with men in such sporting pursuits as golf and football, possibly encouraged by the absence of male competition on the sporting field. However, whether such women considered themselves New Women or even saw their complaints in the wider terms of a campaign for political and economic equality with men is questionable. As 'One of Them' remarked in the last line of her letter to the *Journal* in

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<sup>23</sup> 'A Lady Swimmer', 'A Swimming Club Member', 'Another Lady Swimmer', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 20 and 21 September 1911.

<sup>24</sup> 'Abigail', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 19 August 1909.

<sup>25</sup> Lyn Irvine, *So Much Love, So Little Money*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957, p. 80.

July 1908 requesting women's access to the swimming baths on at least one day with clean water, 'if we were suffragists we would also ask for two hours' grace on the other clean water day'.

### Sexual double standards

New Womanhood, however, was not exclusively or even primarily concerned with leisure activities. New Women demanded equality with men in the fields of politics, marriage, employment and education. The question of woman suffrage will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV, although it should be noted here that the *Journal* printed 79 letters on this question during the period while the *Free Press* printed 216. The phenomenon of the *Free Press* printing more correspondence dealing with issues of female equality than the *Journal* will be discussed in detail later. As far as the question of marriage and sexual politics is concerned, neither newspaper carried the flood of correspondence that Mona Caird's articles on 'Is Marriage a Failure?' in the *Daily Telegraph* prompted in 1888. However, there was some discussion of sexual morality by women correspondents to both newspapers, usually prompted by a particular case reported in the press. For example, in September 1917 both newspapers received letters concerning the imprisonment for five years of a young woman for the murder of her child. The girl had been a 15-year old servant when seduced and left pregnant by an unnamed man. Her childcare arrangements for the baby had broken down when the baby was 14 months old and she had killed the child in a desperate attempt to keep her job. Most of the letters to the newspapers on this subject from men asked why the authorities had not stepped in to look after the child. However, the two letters to the *Journal* and one to the *Free Press* that can be identified as being from female correspondents were more concerned with placing some of the blame for the situation on the shoulders of the unnamed seducer. Margaret Cooper of Rosemount Viaduct, Aberdeen, wrote to the *Journal*, 'It is ever thus: the woman is stoned, while the man goes free', while 'A Woman' fumed in her letter to the *Free Press*: 'It's the same old story! The woman has to pay every time.'<sup>26</sup> 'Justice for Women' was infuriated by the response of other, male, correspondents to the case, and in particular the letter of an anonymous minister:

This chivalrous minister, who meekly places himself among the 'upper classes' would try to raise the moral life of the country people by refusing to employ immoral persons or females who have been guilty of being mothers of illegitimate children....What is condemned [by female correspondents] is the different treatment meted out to her from that of the male delinquent who, to the evident satisfaction of the cleric, got off scot free, his name not being even mentioned.

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Cooper, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 26 September 1917; 'A Woman', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 26 September 1917.



Why should the girl be made to endure all the shame and suffering attached to this sin? Is it because she is of the female sex? In reading the arguments of this letter of the minister one is compelled to think that in this twentieth century of Christianity, we have with us a Pharisee who would not be afraid to cast the first stone at the woman caught in adultery.<sup>27</sup>

Both this correspondent and Margaret Cooper contrasted the outcome of this case with the sensational Malcolm murder case which had recently been tried in London. In this case, Lieutenant Malcolm had been tried for the murder of his wife's lover, whom he had shot when on leave from the trenches. Malcolm was found not guilty of murder. His defence had been that he suspected the other man was a spy, although no evidence to support this suspicion was presented during the trial. Margaret Cooper remarked, 'Both parties had arrived at a deadlock in their affairs, where no road seemed clear. Both took what to them seemed the only way out – a human life – but with what different results!'

An earlier case of infanticide in Tarland in 1908 had prompted 'Mater' to write to the *Journal* pleading with the man responsible to come forward and share some of the blame for the crime, again regretting the dual standards of morality which allowed him to suffer no blame or punishment:

Whoever the father of the child may be, he is morally responsible for its death and for the pitiful position of its mother; and, if he has a spark of true manhood in him, he will yet come forward and do what he can to right the wrong. As the law stands at present, he, and such as he, can act so, as there is no penalty attached. Surely the day will come when women will have justice – not laws made entirely for one sex.<sup>28</sup>

Demands for the end to the sexual double standard intermingled easily with demands for the enfranchisement of women since the leaders of all suffragist parties explicitly linked women's lack of political power to their sexual victimisation. This became a particularly strong thread in the later arguments of the Pankhursts, with Christabel Pankhurst publishing a series of articles in the *Suffragette* on prostitution, the white slave trade and venereal disease, which she re-published in book form in 1913 as *The Great Scourge, and How to End It*. This book claimed that 75–80% of men were infected by gonorrhoea and a considerable percentage by syphilis and argued that the real cure for the situation was a two-fold one – Votes for Women, which would give women greater self-reliance and a stronger economic position, and Chastity for Men. Other militant societies also discussed the injustices and double standards of the legal system, and could point to

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<sup>27</sup> 'Justice For Women', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 3 October 1917.

<sup>28</sup> 'Mater', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 July 1908.

specifically Scottish examples. For example, in November 1913, *The Vote*, the newspaper of the Women's Freedom League, discussed a Dundee case. Sheriff J. M. Gray at the Dundee Sheriff Court had recently sentenced one man to 40 days' imprisonment for stealing two pounds of sugar and another to 14 days for sexually assaulting a little girl.<sup>29</sup>

This explicit linkage between political power for women and the end to the sexual double standard occurred in a series of letters to the *Free Press* in 1911 in response to a lecture on immorality in Aberdeen by a Professor Finlay. 'A Nurse' argued:

It is the exception to find a social worker who is not a suffragist, because she knows that any little she can do is mere tinkering at the evil, and until the Criminal Law Amendment Act is still further amended, and it is made difficult instead of (as at present) easy for a man to evade the consequences of his deeds, no social work will ever be effective. About 98% of the women doctors are suffragists for the same reason. Now women do not want the vote for the mere fun of putting a cross on paper, but they know from the men's experience that, armed with a vote, they can command legislation in this matter. The result of the women's vote in our Colonies won the raising of the age of consent, and in New South Wales the father of an illegitimate child is compelled by law to support his child, and the law provides that he cannot evade.<sup>30</sup>

Her letter was supported by 'One of the Many Earnest Women of the Day' and 'A. W. S.', which probably stood for 'A Woman Suffragist', who added:

I may just add that by devoting his attention to a practical question of this kind, Captain Murray, the member for Kincardineshire, would be spending his time to infinitely better advantage than he is at present by wasting his energies in a fussy and futile attempt to defeat woman suffrage.<sup>31</sup>

Women suffragists might even use women's subordinate position within the law as justification for their acts of violence and cruelty against children. In 1913 another particularly nasty case of infanticide and child abuse through neglect and drunkenness on the part of the mother prompted 'A Suffragist' from Aberdeen to write to the *Free Press*:

The woman in this case might greatly be forgiven because she is a woman, and therefore without a hundred or more rights and privileges a man possesses. And also because – according solely to man-made laws – she has no proper place in the constitution, and is not even the legal

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<sup>29</sup> *The Vote*, 14 November 1913, example given in King, Elspeth, 'The Scottish Women's Suffrage Movement'. In Breitenbach, Esther and Gordon, Eleanor, eds, *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800–1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990, p. 141.

<sup>30</sup> 'A Nurse', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 8 March 1912.

<sup>31</sup> 'AWS', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 9 March 1912.



parent of the children in question, though six times she went into the door of death to bear them.<sup>32</sup>

Thus women correspondents to the Aberdeen newspapers were led to a discussion of morality and sexual double standards through their reading of cases of infanticide, murder and abuse in the newspapers. While the majority might not agree with New Women novelists in their attitudes towards the sexual permissiveness, they did deplore the criminalisation of such 'fallen' women and felt anger at the double standards applied by society in focusing on the woman's crime while ignoring her seducer's part.

Such discussions on subjects such as morality and sexual double standards were possible in a changing social climate. While Ibsen, Christabel Pankhurst or the New Woman novelists criticised contemporary sexual mores, society flocked to plays such as *Sapho* [sic], which arrived in Aberdeen in September 1903. Starring the English actress Olga Nethersole as Fanny Legrand, this was the notorious Broadway production which the American Society for the Suppression of Vice had attempted to ban. Based on the French novel by Alphonse Daudet, it was the story of a seductive woman with many lovers. The most shocking scene for theatre-goers was when Nethersole was carried unprotesting up a flight of steps, evidently towards a bedroom, by a man who was not her husband. Although a New York Police Inspector had passed the play as not immoral (after sitting through six performances), the Society for the Suppression of Vice had succeeded in having Nethersole arrested and prosecuted for violating public decency. However, the New York jury dismissed all charges against her in fifteen minutes and the curtain rose on the play again the same night. The play which arrived in Aberdeen 1903 was the same production, now touring the UK after success in London. The play, and all who went to see it, were immediately denounced from the pulpit by an Aberdeen minister, the Reverend Stodart, which raised the ire of 'An American Girl', as she explained in her letter to the *Journal*:

From many kind friends I have met in Aberdeen, I should take the matrons to be quite capable, both intellectually and morally, of seeing and judging for themselves and families as to whether they would be in the least contaminated by sitting through a performance of 'Sapho' produced from an artisan standpoint, by a finished artist, and a lady. Mark me, I grant you the book is plain French, but the dramatisation in the hands of Miss Olga Nethersole, is not only harmless, but has a lasting moral, showing how an empty, butterfly life is simply castles in the air, falling at will only to leave a hopeless void of nothingness; and that, after all, a true life is the only one to guide us to the higher life.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> 'A Suffragist', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 6 January 1913.

<sup>33</sup> 'An American Girl', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 15 September 1903.

She particularly objected to Mr Stodart's summary of the play to a mixed audience in his congregation since he forbore to explain the moral message behind the play and concentrated on the 'shady side' and 'physical debauchery' of the drama.

Plays such as *Sapho* were the exception rather than the rule in turn-of-the-century Aberdeen. Nonetheless, they are indicative of a new wind of social change brought by the kind of discussions about sexual mores in plays, novels and periodicals which began to appear by the 1880s and which characterised *fin de siècle* and New Woman writings.<sup>34</sup> Such criticisms of social convention and accepted behaviour filtered slowly down. By 1900 in Aberdeen, not only were there Aberdonians prepared to watch notorious plays, but some were even happy to allow their schoolgirl daughters to act on stage themselves. In December 1900, the *Free Press* printed a letter from 'Two Girls' defending the High School for Girls' production of *She Stoops to Conquer*. An earlier, male, correspondent had written to the editor criticising both the choice of play and the fact that the girls were allowed to perform publicly at all. Advising him to 'mind his own business' the 'Two Girls' defended the production, stating that the play was an innocent comedy and the girls' dresses 'all that could be desired in the way of modesty'.<sup>35</sup>

## Education

The New Woman was also expected to campaign for women's equality with men in terms of education and employment and, although the most prolific, Marian Farquharson was by no means the only woman correspondent who wrote to the newspapers on this issue. Education was the first priority, since without a good education women could not compete equally with men for employment outside the home. In June 1901, Sara Reid Tait of Birkenhead, member of the local Women's Suffrage Executive, wrote to the *Free Press* in reference to Andrew Carnegie's generosity, making a general plea to him to channel some of his funds towards the cause of educating women. She argued that girls should receive better educations whether they planned to marry or not. As wives and mothers, they needed to be educated to completely fulfil their role in the home, and if they did not marry they needed education in order to earn their own living. Indeed, Sara Reid Tait, echoing the New Woman novelists, argued that marriage might not be the ideal state for all women:

Marriage, notwithstanding that glamour about it which conceals the fact from inexperienced people, and the unhealthy, sentimental literature

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<sup>34</sup> For more on *fin de siècle* literature see Showalter, Elaine, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. London: Bloomsbury, 1991.

<sup>35</sup> 'Two Girls', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 26 December 1900.



which is considered, even by high-class magazines, the proper intellectual nourishment for growing girls, is a hard life for women and no one should be forced into it. If circumstances compel, force is used as truly as if it were physical. There should be a chance for an honourable and lucrative career without it, a thing which is not possible to the great majority now.<sup>36</sup>

However, not all girls were grateful for the new educational opportunities opening to women. 'Two Schoolgirls' wrote to the *Free Press* in 1903 complaining about the overworking of schoolgirls by homework and claiming that 'grinding' for examinations was futile since 'the average girl passes just decently, but after the examination, knows no more about the subject than if she had never heard of it before'. They completed their rather subjective letter with a bitter complaint about teachers for 'their great excitement when the holidays draw near, and their solemn self-pitying sort of behaviour when they return to work'.<sup>37</sup>

With a better education behind her, a woman could compete with men for gainful employment. In 1903, the university periodical *Alma Mater*, picking up on a *Free Press* story concerning the number of women students now at the university, 'wondered where all the women are to find employment after they graduate'. 'I. P. P.', a female graduate from the previous year, wrote to the *Free Press* to assure women students that there were plenty of opportunities to be found in England. Assuming that the vast majority of women students were planning on teaching, she explained that the 1902 Education Act meant that there was a shortfall of several thousand teachers in England and that 'very greatly improved scales of salary have already been adopted'.<sup>38</sup> Her advice to women graduates to seek teaching positions in England is slightly ironic considering the traditional view of Scottish education as being one of progressive enlightenment and a meritocratic tradition. However, recent critics examining women's experience in Scottish education have argued that the education of girls, and the employment of women teachers, in Scotland has been far more limited than the mythology of the opportunities open to the 'lad o' pairs' may suggest.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Sara Reid Tait, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 June 1901.

<sup>37</sup> 'Two Schoolgirls', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 December 1903.

<sup>38</sup> 'I. P. P.', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 22 December 1903.

<sup>39</sup> For example, see Paterson, Fiona M. S. and Fewell, Judith, eds, *Girls in their Prime, Scottish Education Revisited*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990 and Corr, Helen, 'The Sexual Division of Labour in the Scottish Teaching Profession, 1872-1914'. In Humes, Walter M. and Paterson, Hamish, M., eds, *Scottish Culture and Scottish Education, 1800-1980*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983, pp. 137-150 and Moore, Lindy, 'Educating for the Woman's Sphere: domestic training versus intellectual discipline'. In Breitenbach, Esther and Gordon, Eleanor Moore, eds, *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800-1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990, pp. 10-41.

Such news regarding teachers' pay would have been encouraging for those women contemplating a teaching career. Throughout the period both newspapers carried letters from women teachers complaining about the terms and conditions of their employment, particularly in comparison to that of male teachers. The recruitment of women into teaching had been boosted by the introduction of compulsory elementary education by the 1872 Education Act (Scotland). In 1851, women comprised 35% of the teaching profession in Scotland, but by 1911 this had increased to 70%. The replacement of the pupil-teacher system of teacher training with the bursary system after 1907 meant that would-be teachers of both sexes had to stay on at school for longer before becoming student teachers at the age of 17. This meant that the status of teachers rose and many middle-class women began to enter the profession – many women teachers came from the increasing ranks of the new women university graduates. By 1914 the majority of women teachers in Scotland were certificated and trained – in comparison with England and Wales, where half the teaching force remained untrained.<sup>40</sup>

However, while teaching was seen as a highly suitable profession for a woman because it involved her caring for children, the highest position she could attain was infant mistress in the elementary schools. Men dominated the promoted posts and secondary schools. In addition, male teachers received higher salaries than women, on the understanding that working women did not have to provide for a family. Although the so-called 'marriage bar' was not officially introduced to Scotland until 1915, when Glasgow and Dundee School Boards introduced a 'resign on marriage' clause into every woman teacher's contract, and was not formally enacted in Aberdeenshire until 1923, there was an assumption that women teachers would resign their position on marriage.<sup>41</sup> In teaching, the mean annual salary for women between 1872 and 1900 was £62–72 and for men £121–143.<sup>42</sup> Such wage differentials were argued on the grounds that male teachers were more qualified than women, but by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with an influx of women graduates into the profession, this argument no longer held water. In September 1910, 'Fair Play' wrote to the *Daily Journal* to point out the iniquities in salary for a vacant position being advertised by the Lanark School Board. For a male teacher, the board offered £120, rising by annual increments to £150. However, for a female teacher, the salary would be £80 rising to £100. Interestingly, 'Fair Play' argued that such a salary difference was a

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<sup>40</sup> Fraser, W. Hamish and Morris, R. J., *People and Society in Scotland, Vol II, 1830–1914*. John Donald Publishers Ltd 1990, p. 308.

<sup>41</sup> For more on the marriage bar, see Adams, Katharine, 'Divide and Rule: The marriage ban 1918–1945'. In , Paterson, Fiona M. S. and Fewell, Judith, eds, *Girls in their Prime, Scottish Education Revisited*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990, pp. 71–88.

<sup>42</sup> Fraser, W. Hamish and Morris, R. J., *People and Society in Scotland, Vol II, 1830–1914*, pp. 212–214.



problem for male teachers since 'this pernicious practice... can only end in driving men from the profession altogether'.<sup>43</sup> Edith Bishop, who trained to be a teacher in Aberdeen during the war, reported in her reminiscences that for a newly trained female teacher in Aberdeen, the commencing salary was £45 a year if living at home and £50 if living away.<sup>44</sup> No wonder the teachers of 'Two Schoolgirls' looked forward to their holidays so keenly!

Women teachers might be especially bitter about the lack of support they felt they received from other women on school boards. As will be seen in Chapter IV, women were now eligible to vote for and stand for election on to school boards, and one of the arguments often used in their campaigns for election was that women representatives on such boards would be better able to understand the needs of women teachers. Not all women teachers agreed that such support was forthcoming. As 'C. D.' wrote bitterly to the *Free Press* in March 1904:

In your Wednesday's issue, a report is given of the annual meeting of the Aberdeen Women's Suffrage Association. The president, in the course of her remarks, congratulated the association on having returned two lady members to the School Board. The women class teachers of Aberdeen have less reason for jubilation over this great feat referred to. Last week, at the School Board meeting, judgement was given on the memorial presented to the board by its women class teachers. Among those who ranged themselves against these, was one of the lady members, for whose return to the School Board this association of women offers up special thanks.

The women class teachers did not expect the lady members to rise to any sublime height of standing in dealing with their case, notwithstanding that last April the chief argument used for their coming forward as candidates was that so many women were in the service of the board and their interests would be more safely guarded by those of their own sex. The board was asked to pay its women class teachers a salary more in accordance with that given by other boards of the same standing. But no! this lady member subscribed to the 'skilled mechanic' theory, or was utterly carried away by the wonderful array of figures produced by the chairman to prove that a rise of 2½d per week was granting the women class teachers the 'half of what they asked'.

These women who, at public meetings, are always clamouring for what they call justice, should remember that this they can never have, until they are first just to themselves.<sup>45</sup>

It was not only their wages that women teachers complained about, but also their conditions of service. 'Schoolmistress' wrote to the *Free Press* in October 1906 to bring up the vexed question of privacy. She reported that in her country school there was no room put aside for teachers to use during breaks, so on wet days she was forced to eat her 'piece' in the same room as the children.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Fair Play', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 26 September 1910.

<sup>44</sup> Bishop, Edith, *For You I Remember*, p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> 'C.D.', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 5 March 1904.

Much worse, 'at no country school in my district is there any proper lavatory accommodation for women'. She might have greeted the appearance of a woman on her school board with more delight than 'C. D.' since most of the members of her country school board were 'rough, hearty farmers whose principal qualification for the post is their knowledge of the good points of a horse or a bull' and who did not understand her problems.<sup>46</sup> Helen Corr points out that, in Scotland, a maximum of three females was generally interpreted as an acceptable number out of 15 members of city school boards. However, in rural areas there was usually only a sole female among five school boards members or none at all.<sup>47</sup>

Women teachers looked to their union, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), for assistance in their campaign for better wages and conditions of service, but in 1917 a spontaneous movement rose from amongst the training schools in Scotland, as Edith Bishop explained:

In my final year at the Training Centre we were enlivened and excited by 'The Students' Movement' which aimed at not only increasing the miserable pittance of teachers' salaries, but also raising the whole status of the Teaching Profession.

By this time, 1917, there was a great shortage of teachers, so we thought if we could get most final year students in Scotland to sign they would not accept a post with a salary under a certain amount, this would achieve our purpose. The tail would wag the dog.

'Naturally, the Educational Institute of Scotland showed friendly interest in our proposition and we elected our President [Mary Sutherland] and Committee and I, full of enthusiasm, was elected to be secretary.'<sup>48</sup>

Mary Sutherland wrote to the *Daily Journal* in June 1917 to explain that the Scottish Association of Teachers in Training had a membership of 70% of all teachers currently in training in Scotland and that its aim was to 'raise the status of the teaching profession by the cultivation of a professional conscience'. Every school board in Scotland had been informed by letter that members of the Association were pledged not to take any position which offered less than £80 per annum.<sup>49</sup>

Edith Bishop reports that 90% of the students at her training centre signed the pledge, which meant that 'nearly all Aberdeen students had to take jobs in England where, at many places, they already had the £80 minimum'. She was only able to stay in Aberdeen because she was offered a position at the Training Centre's Demonstration School at a salary of £80. Obviously an excellent

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<sup>46</sup> 'Schoolmistress', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 October 1906.

<sup>47</sup> Corr Helen, 'Home Rule in Scotland: the teaching of housework in schools, 1872-1914', p. 42.

<sup>48</sup> Bishop, Edith, *For You I Remember*, p. 82.

<sup>49</sup> Mary E. Sutherland, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 19 June 1917.



student to be offered this position, Edith was forced to resign when her fiancée returned from the war the following year and they married.<sup>50</sup>

Aberdonian women teachers were further enraged in 1918 by the refusal of the Aberdeen School Board to consider raising their salaries. The Minister of State for Education, Robert Munro, had earlier made a grant to all Scottish school boards to enable a raising of the women teachers' maximum salary to £115. However, the Aberdeen School Board had not done so and by 1918 the maximum a woman class teacher could earn was £95, with an additional £5 after five years. As 'A Woman Treasurer' reported in an open letter to Munro published in the Letters column of the *Journal* in June 1918, 'many women have taught 20 and 30 years for that'.<sup>51</sup>

The School Board promised to present a new salary scale in the autumn of 1918 and women teachers' letters to the *Journal* during the summer of this year campaigned for a salary scale from £100 to £250, or as a bare minimum the improved scale of pay newly introduced in Glasgow. However, they were concerned that they were not receiving the support needed from their union officials. As 'A Dissatisfied Member' wrote in August 1918, the 'ever cautious and wary officials of the Educational Institute' were 'evidently afraid of giving offence to the School Board by taking too definite a stand'. She urged women teachers in Aberdeen to threaten to leave the EIS and set up their own representative body if they did not receive the support they required.<sup>52</sup> Such warlike talk was echoed by letters the following day by 'Another Dissatisfied Member' and 'A Turning Worm'.

However, not all correspondents to the *Journal* were so supportive of the teachers' pay claims. The letter of 'A Woman Ratepayer' on 6 September 1918, a few days before the School Board was due to present its new salary scale, suggested that women teachers were not worthy of a pay rise since:

They are recruited from the working class for the most part. Attracted in the first place by the short hours and the pay, which they now affect to despise, there are numbers of them who, having secured certificates by dint of much cramming, have promptly renounced all further efforts to fit themselves for their calling, and devote their spare time, of which they have a great deal, to novel reading, golf playing, whist drives and other such social entertainments.<sup>53</sup>

By her account, the teaching profession in Aberdeen was full of New Women! 'Fairplay' and 'Common Sense' immediately wrote to the newspaper to defend women teachers from this attack, but 'A Woman Ratepayer' fought back with another letter in which she explained that the only

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<sup>50</sup> Bishop, Edith, *For You I Remember*, pp. 83–103.

<sup>51</sup> 'A Woman Treasurer', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 17 June 1918.

<sup>52</sup> 'A Dissatisfied Member', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 6 September 1918.

<sup>53</sup> 'A Woman Ratepayer', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 11 September 1918.

reason women teachers frequently collapsed with nervous strain (as claimed by 'Fairplay') was that 'their pursuit of amusement is too strenuous and expensive' and dismissed both correspondents' letters as obviously 'the effusions of uneducated women'.<sup>54</sup>

The disagreement between the two sides was only brought to a halt in the correspondence columns of the *Journal* by the announcement at the end of September that the School Board would raise women teachers' salaries by a maximum of 3s 4d a week, with some receiving a raise of only 1s 10d. Three women teachers wrote to the *Journal* the following day to angrily register their protest at the miserliness of such increases and to fulminate against the EIS officials who had advised caution. Before closing the correspondence on 2 October 1918, the editor printed one last letter from 'A Woman Teacher' who finished her letter with the bitter words, 'Education, Sir, does not pay!'<sup>55</sup>

Teaching, however, was one of the only professions so open to women. In *The Edwardians*, Paul Thompson points out that, while women comprised nearly a third of the Edwardian workforce, they tended to be clustered in the lower grades of workers.

Thus the top group of higher professionals, a mere one per cent of the entire workforce, was predictably almost entirely male: characteristically a clergyman, doctor or lawyer. The lower professional, typically a teacher, was by contrast more likely to be female. There was also a rising number of women clerks. Employers and managers were predominately male: typically shopkeepers, followed by farmers, manufacturers and businessmen. Women in this group were mostly shop or boarding house keepers.<sup>56</sup>

The predominance of women in the latter positions in Aberdeen was attested to by a letter to the *Free Press* in April 1912 from 'J. R. W.', who was objecting to the incredulous laughter of some men present at a meeting of the newly formed Associated Women's Friendly Society when reference was made to women running large business concerns successfully.

Is it not true that women have been distinguished leaders in many of our cities in the matter of tea rooms and high-class restaurants, large and expensive concerns, requiring great initiative, resource and organising ability? So attractive have the houses been made that they have marked a new era in catering and have proved the best possible counter attraction to the public house. The management of these places has been characterised by the greatest possible consideration for the employees.

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<sup>54</sup> 'A Woman Ratepayer', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 14 September 1918.

<sup>55</sup> 'A Woman Teacher', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 2 October 1918.

<sup>56</sup> Thompson, Paul, *The Edwardians*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975, p. 16.



Beside good wages various encouragements are given – money, sick provision, and marriage gifts.<sup>57</sup>

There are few mentions in the Aberdeen newspapers of opportunities for women in the other professions, although some unusual suggestions for their advancement. In 1900, 'E Pur Si Muove!' wrote to the *Free Press* with a solution for the diminishing numbers of men presenting themselves for church ministry.

Woman is possessed of all the qualifications that go to the making of a good minister, with a good many more into the bargain. She has usually tact, sympathy, common sense, keen moral perception and powers of organisation, whilst the greatest enemy of the sex admits that she has generally 'the tongue well hung', as the French say. Thus, for conducting services, preaching, visiting the poor, arranging sewing meetings, etc, woman possesses all the natural gifts and graces; and she has shown that, given a fair field and no favour, she can not only rival, but even exceed 'mere man' in most branches of learning, whether classical or scientific.<sup>58</sup>

As shall be seen in Chapter IV, the argument for women's involvement in politics and local and national government was based on a description of their special skills and different natures from man. In this letter, the correspondent also emphasised women's unique qualifications for a role in a 'caring' profession.

In May 1910, Marian Farquharson wrote to the *Free Press* celebrating the fact that women artists were now eligible to be elected as Associates of the Royal Academy. In addition to her campaigning for women's entry into scientific societies, she had found time to write to the secretary of the Academy on the matter and was pleased to report his reply. However, there were few other successes reported by correspondents. In July 1910, 'Academicus' wrote to the *Free Press* to use an anomalous situation as a pro-suffrage argument:

You publish today an important report upon the Scottish universities by a Departmental Committee. The second signature attached to this report is that of Miss Elizabeth S. Haldane. Miss Haldane is considered fit to have a place upon a Departmental Committee appointed to consider and report upon the claims of the Universities for further Government grants. Her presence on the Committee is approved by everyone, and her counsel has undoubtedly helped to the wise preparation of the report. Yet Miss Haldane is considered unfit to have a vote for Parliament. She is allowed to advise the Government and Parliament as to how they should spend their money: She is refused a voice in electing that Parliament. Surely this is an anomaly.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> 'J. R. W.', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 April 1912.

<sup>58</sup> 'E Pur Si Muove!', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 5 December 1900.

<sup>59</sup> 'Academicus', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 26 July 1910.

Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane was the sister of R. B. Haldane, at this time Secretary of State for War in the Liberal government. Haldane himself was chair of the Royal Commission for University Education referred to here, but it must not be assumed that this was the reason for his sister's inclusion on the commission. Elizabeth Haldane was a formidable woman in her own right, an authoress and social welfare worker who had founded an organisation for slum reconstruction and housing project management and was, among other published works, a translator of Descartes. In 1914 she became the first woman member of Andrew Carnegie's United Kingdom Trust and in 1920 was the first woman Justice of the Peace in Scotland. However, in 1910 this was all to come and – as 'Academicus' pointed out – as a woman, she did not have a voice in Parliamentary elections.

What evidence do we have, therefore, for the existence of New Women amongst the correspondents to the two Aberdeen newspapers? The attributes of the New Woman have been discussed earlier – an interest in the education, political and social advancement of women; criticism of contemporary sexual mores, in particular sexual double standards; and an interest in 'modern' leisure pursuits such as golf, swimming and bicycling. The above analysis of women's correspondence to the two newspapers has discovered a certain amount of letters to the Aberdeen press on all these subjects during the Edwardian period. It has also shown that letters on such subjects were more likely to be printed in the *Free Press* than the *Daily Journal*. Apart from the issue of teachers' pay, the majority of letters which could be described as being on New Woman issues were published in the *Free Press*. Scanning the footnotes for the pages of this chapter dealing with the New Woman will show that the majority of letters quoted in this section were from the *Free Press*. For example, there were 18 letters on the subject of leisure activities such as cycling, motoring, swimming and golf published in the *Free Press* and only six in the *Journal* – and it was a letter in the *Journal* on the subject of access to swimming facilities that denied that the correspondent was a suffragist. While both newspapers carried women's letters responding to the sexual double standards to be found in infanticide and child abuse cases, it was the correspondents to the *Free Press* who made the explicit connection between this and the need for women's enfranchisement, and, as the following chapter will show, letters on the subject of women's involvement in both national and local politics were far more frequently published in the *Free Press*. Since little evidence of editorial gatekeeping can be discovered, it must therefore be assumed that it was the women correspondents who decided that it was more appropriate to submit letters on such subjects to the *Free Press* rather than the *Journal*. The anomaly of the issue



of women teachers' pay, it might be suggested, can also be linked to a conscious decision on the part of women correspondents regarding the destination of their letters. The women teachers who wrote to the *Journal* wished the reasons behind their demand for a pay increase to be read by the members of the Aberdeen School Board who were about to decide their fate. Did they expect that such conservative and establishment figures were more likely to read the *Journal* than the more liberal *Free Press*?

### The domestic sphere

So if we can characterise the average female correspondent to the *Press* as possessing some of the attributes of the New Woman, keen to debate political issues and the 'woman question', what sort of woman wrote to the *Journal*? Does an analysis of letters dealing with the traditional women's issues indicate a clear division between the New Woman of the *Free Press* and the domestic woman of the *Journal*?

Increasingly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the middle-class world had become divided into public and private spheres. As the home and the workplace became separate, women were expected to retreat into the domestic sphere and concentrate their energies on home-making and bringing up their children to be useful members of an Imperial nation. As Jane Lewis explains, this separation of the spheres was much more rigid for middle-class women.<sup>60</sup> While working-class women increasingly went out of their homes to work, usually because of economic necessity, policy makers and philanthropists urged all women to pay more attention to their duties as wives and mothers. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women's duties as mothers were urged even more strongly in response to a high mortality rate in all classes of society. Even those women who needed to work tended to find employment in the homes of others. As Paul Thompson points out, at the age of 20, two-thirds of all working-class Edwardian women were employed and a full third of these were domestic servants.<sup>61</sup> In Aberdeen, 23% of the entire female labour force was engaged in domestic service.<sup>62</sup> Domestic service was seen as the occupation which provided the best training for marriage. While one in ten married women still engaged in some kind of work outside the home, again almost entirely from the working classes, critics wondered whether married women should be banned from engaging in such work on the grounds that it might morally or physically damage their husbands or children. Gail Braybon points out that, in the

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<sup>60</sup> Lewis, Jane, *Women in England 1870–1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change*. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984.

<sup>61</sup> Thompson, Paul, *The Edwardians*, p. 75.

<sup>62</sup> Fraser, W. Hamish and Morris, R. J., *People and Society in Scotland, Vol II, 1830–1914*, p. 79.

years before the First World War, no analysis of women's labour was complete without a discussion of how women's work affected their families. Discussion of how their work might affect the women's own health focused on whether it left them fit enough to bear healthy children.<sup>63</sup>

While working-class women's involvement in the work force was accepted as an unfortunate necessity, commentators were united in their belief that the proper place for a married middle-class woman was in the home – hence the assumption that female teachers would resign their posts immediately on marriage. The choice for such women was usually seen as a stark one between a career and marriage and a family. As Jane Lewis states:

It was generally accepted that the role of wife and mother was incompatible with a career, not only because of the time and energy required, but also because of the very different qualities and characteristics it demanded. It is interesting that both Mrs Pankhurst and Millicent Fawcett only entered public life as feminists after their husbands' deaths.<sup>64</sup>

Middle-class Victorian women had, however, successfully extended this domestic sphere to include charitable and philanthropic work. The idea of social maternalism offered a socially acceptable way for middle-class women to engage with the world outside their homes, drawing them into activities such as prison visiting or membership of the boards of schools, hospitals or orphanages. Such activities could be approved as an extension of the domestic sphere, capitalising on women's supposed natural abilities in the care of children and the needy. Of course, as we have seen in the case of the two eldest Lumsden daughters and their work for the Aberdeen hospitals, such women would be working in a purely voluntary and honorary capacity in order to preserve their middle-class gentility. Any paid positions in the organisation of such philanthropic work would naturally be taken by men.

Helen Corr's work on the promotion of domestic science in Scottish schools has argued that this first generation of women elected on to school boards tended to promote girls' study of domestic subjects, in keeping with the 'equal but different' philosophy and also in recognition of girls' future employment, either as servants or mothers and wives. The support of gender differences in education by women who were in the first wave of feminists may seem surprising. However, Corr argues that, for this group of upper middle class women, the elevation of domestic activities to the status of scientific subjects was viewed as a way of helping to increase the status of women's

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<sup>63</sup> Braybon, Gail, *Women Workers in the First World War*. London: Croom Helm, 1981, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis, Jane, *Women in England, 1870–1950*, p. 91.



work.<sup>65</sup> Such promotion of domestic subjects also chimed in with a growing concern in the aftermath of the Boer War about the health of the nation and the fitness of women to become mothers. Jane McDermid points out the mixture of motives behind middle-class women's promotion of domestic training in schools – to imbue working-class girls with middle-class notions of femininity; ensure that working-class wives acted as agents of social control in their own homes; to prepare working-class women for the role of domestic servant, and to raise the moral standards of working-class women.<sup>66</sup> In 1903 the Scottish Education Department introduced two-year supplementary courses for the majority of pupils who would remain in elementary schools and leave at 14 rather than going on to secondary schools. These consisted of core courses in English and civic responsibilities and a choice of one of four special courses – commercial, industrial, rural, and household management for girls.<sup>67</sup>

There is certainly evidence of a concern to offer schoolgirls an appropriate education in the letters to the editors of the Aberdeen newspapers. 'Mother' wrote to the *Daily Journal* in April 1906 to comment approvingly on the teaching of sewing in schools, from which she felt she had benefited herself, while a letter from 'Cottar Nancy' printed in the *Journal* in March 1909 explicitly made the connection between women members of the school boards and such domestic skills:

Would it not be well to elect one or two lady members to each board, to see that needlework is really taught in our small country schools, and that our cottar girls are to be able, when the time comes, to 'mak 'auld claes look amaist as well's the new', and not to be – as they are in some danger of being – a bye-word for thriftlessness?

However, as Corr's research makes clear, working-class parents were not always impressed by these attempts to educate their daughters in domestic science, which they saw as training already provided at home. Indeed, there was some suspicion that schoolteachers were merely using the girls as cheap labour to clean the school or darn their clothes.

The introduction of domestic science as an academic subject in schools can also be linked to the continuous discussion of what was called 'the servant problem'. In 1899 there was a session at the Industrial Section of the International Congress of Women on the 'Scientific Treatment of Domestic Service'. Here, the problem was stated to be two-fold: there were not enough domestic

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<sup>65</sup> Corr Helen, 'Home Rule in Scotland: the teaching of housework in schools, 1872–1914', pp. 38–53.

<sup>66</sup> McDermid, Jane, 'Women and education'. In Purvis, June, ed, *Women's History Britain, 1850–1945, An Introduction*. London: UCL Press, 1995, p. 108.

<sup>67</sup> Moore, Lindy, 'Educating for the Woman's Sphere: domestic training versus intellectual discipline'. In Breitenbach, Esther and Gordon, Eleanor, eds, *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800–1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990, p. 29.

servants, and those that did exist were not good enough. As Patricia Branca points out, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, critics constantly suggested that women were losing the art of housekeeping because of an incomplete education.<sup>68</sup> 'A Mistress' wrote to the *Free Press* in November 1912 regarding the opening of the new School of Domestic Science in Aberdeen that month. While applauding the intention behind the school, however, she pointed out that, with fees set at £45 for a three-year course, only the daughters of the rich could benefit from the School. Her opinion of the current crop of domestic servants in Aberdeen was not a positive one:

No girl will be a domestic if she can possibly get any other kind of work, even at half the pay. To make good domestics good brains are wanted, but at present their ranks are filled by those who are too poor or too stupid to get a good education. Need we wonder that so many of them are heartbreaks?<sup>69</sup>

Her complaints were repeated in letters from mistresses to both newspapers throughout the period studied and are typical of the perceived 'servant problem' which was discussed endlessly by mistresses throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As Carol Dyhouse and Patricia Branca point out, the manuals of domestic advice aimed at middle-class mistresses during this period are full of discussion of this problem and advice concerning the monitoring of servants' behaviour and their consumption of food, light and heating. 'A Mistress for 45 Years' complained to the *Free Press* in April 1912:

What of their rudeness, falsely called in Aberdeen – 'independence'. Their unfortunate 'manner' is getting more exasperating than ever. Servants seem to mistake civility for servility, and the boasted education they receive (so valuable in itself) does little to soften their roughness of address.<sup>70</sup>

'Another Mistress' assured her readers that 'the more you consider them the more they take advantage'.<sup>71</sup> 'Efficiency' felt that this was because the better class of girl was emigrating to Canada, where the wages were higher although, she was assured, the work was harder.<sup>72</sup> 'A Mistress' suggested that, if this was the case, the government should put a stop to the bonuses paid to emigration agents and should raise a subscription to bring the Scottish girls back. She could not approve of a scheme to bring Norwegian girls over to Scotland to replace the Scottish

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<sup>68</sup> Branca, Patricia, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home*. London: Croom Helm, 1975.

<sup>69</sup> 'A Mistress', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 2 November 1912.

<sup>70</sup> 'A Mistress for 45 Years', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 April 1912.

<sup>71</sup> 'Another Mistress', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 May 1912.

<sup>72</sup> 'Efficiency', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 13 May 1912.



girls who had gone to Canada, remarking 'Norwegian mothers are not fools. They will not allow the pick of their girls to come here. We will get only the off-scourings.'<sup>73</sup>

Of the seven letters from women regarding domestic service published in the *Free Press*, four were as quoted above from mistresses in Aberdeen criticising modern servants. The other three letters were from domestic servants complaining about delivery boys' misuse of doorbells, including the two from Ina Boyne discussed in the previous chapter. Neither Ina Boyne nor 'An Aggrieved Domestic' had any complaints about their mistresses, but focused on the iniquities of the delivery boys in the city of Aberdeen. In comparison, there were 12 letters from women on the subject of domestic service published in the *Daily Journal* during the period, four from mistresses, three of whom lived on farms, and eight from servants, three of whom were farm servants. The servants who wrote to the *Journal* were far more critical of their mistresses and the pay and conditions of their work and more willing to defend themselves against criticism. When 'A Sorrowful Housekeeper' wrote to the *Journal* in 1902 regarding waste in the kitchen, her comments were immediately criticised by 'Sorrowful Housekeeper's Maid' and 'Old Servant', both of whom felt that if mistresses were more considerate of their servants the situation for both would improve.<sup>74</sup> Two servant lassies wrote letters to the *Journal* in April 1912 to complain of servants' working conditions. One described how 'the majority of girls in this city sleep in the basement floor, adjoining the kitchen, with all the smell of the day's cooking, and during the day, never see sunshine through the iron bars' while the other drew readers' attention to the fact that many servant girls were not properly fed and were expected to survive on bread and margarine and the scraps from the mistress's table.<sup>75</sup>

During 1913, heated discussion between farm servants and mistresses was carried out in the correspondence columns of the *Journal* on the same subjects of food and conditions of service. This dispute was brought to a head by the demands of the union representing (male) farm labourers for a half-day's holiday once a week. 'Country Cousin' pointed out bitterly that farm servants were more in need of a holiday than the men since their work was never done.

If we go out any night between eight and half past nine there are questions about where we have gone to, but there is no word about the men. As soon as the spoon is out of their mouths, away they go with their cycles, and return home in the small hours of the morning. If any of the

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<sup>73</sup> 'A Mistress', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 22 August 1913.

<sup>74</sup> 'A Sorrowful Housekeeper', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 21 February 1902; 'Sorrowful Housekeeper's Maid', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 28 February 1902 and 'Old Servant', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 March 1912.

<sup>75</sup> 'A Servant Lassie' and 'Another Servant Lassie', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 16 and 18 April 1912.



domestic servants did the like of that, we would soon be put down the road.<sup>76</sup>

Of course, one of the reasons for this inequality between the maids and the men on farms was that the average domestic servant was a young girl, living away from home for the first time and being trained in domestic work in the hope that one day she would have a home of her own. Patricia Branca reports that in the 1871 census, 49.7% of general servants were under 20 while 38% were between 15 and 19.<sup>77</sup> They were seen to be under the care of the mistress of the house, who had a duty of care for them as both employees and young women. 'A Grieve's Wife' explained the relationship between mistress and maid in her letter to the *Journal* in November 1913:

Owing to the nature of a domestic servant's work, I do not think it will ever command the same measures of independence as other callings have claimed, but provided the mistress of the farm is kind and does not forget that her domestic, owing to the existing conditions under which she earns her livelihood, is at the same time a foster child in the home, since she is denied the benefit of living in her own home – I hold that domestic service is a natural and desirable occupation for a country girl.<sup>78</sup>

The controversy over female servants' terms and conditions was revived the following year with the proposal of the Farm Servants' Weekly Half-Holiday Bill, which contained a clause giving every woman servant in, at or about a farm a Saturday afternoon holiday from 12 o'clock onwards. 'A Farmer's Wife' wrote in complaint, asking how the farmers' wife was expected to cope without any help on a Saturday afternoon. Her description of the typical farm servant reinforces the impression of the domestic servant as a young and inexperienced girl.

It is the common practice that girls after they are 14 and away from school go to a farm until they are full grown up to get their 'bones up' to use their own mother's expression. Later on they may drift to towns if they choose, but they usually take two years at a farm to get their health established. Surely if a girl or a woman spends her life in the open air there is not the same crying need for a half-holiday as for the shop girl or the factory worker. If our maid wants to go for a picnic or an excursion, she has but to ask permission to go, and that permission is rarely refused to my knowledge.<sup>79</sup>

She considered it likely that a farmer's wife might have only one or perhaps two of these girls to help her. Patricia Branca has made the point that the majority of middle-class women did not have a large domestic staff to run their homes, but instead had to rely on one or possibly two

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<sup>76</sup> 'Country Cousin', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 18 September 1913.

<sup>77</sup> Branca, Patricia, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home*, p. 56.

<sup>78</sup> 'A Grieve's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 26 November 1913.

<sup>79</sup> 'A Farmer's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 6 May 1914.



maids of all work. She has calculated that the average middle-class home had an income of around £300 a year, which was only enough to afford one maid of all work plus an occasional girl. The wages of a maid of all work would be between £9 and £14 a year. The letters of the correspondents quoted in this section confirm this picture of a mistress working in her own home and reliant on the extra help of an untrained girl rather than giving orders to many servants.

Take a country girl sent into town to her first place. She has absolutely no training whatever in housework of any kind. She may have had to assist at home, but there is very little attempt at teaching her properly. Such a girl is engaged, and the work of training falls to her first mistress. After six months, when she is getting into the ways of her place, she imagines she is now qualified as an experienced general servant, and puts her name in a registry as such. She demands, of course, a good general's wage, and amongst her qualifications she says she can do plain cooking, though her only knowledge of cooking is probably watching the dinner after it has been set agoing. This so-called experienced girl, to whom is paid a high wage, if left at any time on her own responsibilities, is helpless. She can do the work only when the mistress is continually standing over her, and beyond boiling an egg and making tea, her knowledge of cooking does not extend.<sup>80</sup>

Shani D'Cruze agrees with Branca that middle-class women had to balance the appearance of a leisured lifestyle with the necessity of sharing at least some of the household work that had to be done to support it. She makes reference to the tea parties in Mrs Gaskell's *Cranford*, where the mistress would pretend she was surprised at the cakes the maid served, even though everyone knew she had spent the morning baking them.<sup>81</sup> In addition, D'Cruze points out that the growing numbers of low-income families who could barely afford one servant had every interest in getting as much work out of them as possible. Servants resisted these attempts to control them – mainly by moving to a new position. She suggests that most, especially those in one or two-servant households, changed jobs every 12 months.<sup>82</sup>

#### **The newspaper as ombudsman – food control**

As Branca points out, this means that the typical middle-class woman in the late Victorian and Edwardian period was not a pampered woman of leisure but an active agent in the family, whose functions could easily outstrip her means.<sup>83</sup> Such women correspondents to the Aberdeen newspapers were always in search of a bargain and quick to write to the newspapers to complain

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<sup>80</sup> 'Efficiency', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 13 May 1912.

<sup>81</sup> D'Cruze, Shani, 'Women and the Family'. In Purvis, June, ed, *Women's History Britain, 1850–1945, An Introduction*. London: UCL Press, 1995, p. 55.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>83</sup> Branca, Patricia, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home*, p. 22.



if the price of foodstuffs rose too steeply. The use of the 'Letters to the Editor' column as a kind of local ombudsman was mentioned as a possible reason for correspondents to write to the newspaper in Chapter I. In the 1970s study by Cox and Morgan, editorial staff at the local newspapers in Merseyside felt that many letters sought their newspaper's help with a particular grievance.<sup>84</sup> This use of the correspondence column can be clearly seen in women's letters regarding the price and quality of different foodstuffs.

Overall, the two newspapers printed 39 letters dealing with the price and quality of foodstuffs during the period studied. Of these, 14 were printed in the *Free Press* and 25 in the *Journal*. The majority of the letters deal with problems with dairy products – cheese, milk, eggs and in particular butter. Butter appears to have been an especial problem for Aberdeen housewives throughout the period and letters concerning bad butter come in waves, bunched together in groups of up to eight letters. Particularly bad times for butter were the summers of 1902, 1904 and 1908 and the springs of 1908 and 1918. Both the consumers and the producers of such dairy produce wrote to the newspapers concerning problems with supply and quality. The production of butter, cheese and eggs was traditionally the job of the farmer's wife, and income from the sale of such items seen as an additional extra rather than a core component of the farm's economy. It was the farmer's wives who therefore wrote to the newspapers to defend the quality of their products. The main problem for the consumers of butter in Aberdeen city itself was accessing a continuous supply of good quality butter. Since Aberdeenshire was a beef-producing county, much of the milk produced on farms went into calf rearing, meaning that it was only the excess that was available to farmer's wives to produce butter and cheese. Once they had produced enough for their own needs, they sold on the surplus, mostly to neighbours. What was not disposed of in this way needed to be transported to the city, either by the farmer's wife herself, in a butter box and using the railway, or through the agency of a middle-man such as a grocer. By the time the butter reached the end consumer, it was rarely in perfect condition, and any good butter that had survived the journey tended to have a high price attached to it. The grocers, who were male, tended to place the blame for bad butter on the source – the farmers' wives. The farmers' wives considered that until they were paid a better price for their highest quality butter it was not worth their while concentrating much effort into larger production.

The butter problem generated 27 letters to the two newspapers from women correspondents, 18 to the *Journal* and 9 to the *Free Press*. Everyone had their own opinions on who should be blamed for 'bad butter', as the letters were invariably headed. The majority of farmers' wives tended to

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<sup>84</sup> Cox, Harvey and Morgan, David, *City Politics and the Press*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.



blame the grocers for their greed in charging high prices for poor quality butter. In July 1902 'An Aberdeenshire Farmer's Wife' declared that the grocer was 'the present great stumbling block of the butter trade' and needed to 'take a firm stand, and refuse to put on the market stuff that is unsaleable'.<sup>85</sup> In the summer of 1904, 'Farmer's Wife' agreed with this view, complaining that 'What 'Butter Merchant' wants, in spite of all one hears and reads to the contrary, is finest butter at cart-grease price'.<sup>86</sup> 'A Butter-Maker' described the mistreatment of her butter at the hands of the grocer in a letter to the *Free Press* in the summer of 1902:

Sometimes you may see it in a heap on a shop counter. Even in Aberdeen you can see it set up in a shop window like some bit of new millinery. No fear of microbes there! You may happen to see it in an evil-smelling place called a warehouse, cheek by jowl with red herrings and soft soap, etc. But the abomination of abominations is the plan of working up all sorts and conditions of butter together into one or two pounds, and sending it off as a genuine new-made article. Feugh! I could not eat my own butter after it had been left in the house three days.<sup>87</sup>

Other farmers' wives pointed the finger of blame closer to home. 'A Farmer's Wife' in March 1908 found the schools at fault, pointing out that:

Few of our servants can be trusted to skim, churn or even clean dairy utensils properly, or know anything of the principles underlying the same.

They are not wholly to blame for their ignorance – the subject has not been made interesting to them before going out to service. If in our rural schools simple theoretical instruction in the rudiments of dairy farming and dairy bacteriology was made a compulsory subject, our farmers' and cottars' daughters would take a more hearty intelligent interest in the practical part when they had it to do, either as mistresses or servants.<sup>88</sup>

In the same year, 'Tariff Reform', 'A Farmer's Wife' and 'A Farmer's Wife No. 2' agreed that the farmers themselves were to blame, for feeding turnips to their cows. Turnips, it was agreed, made the milk, and hence the butter, taste and smell odd. Thus bad butter during the winter time was the farmers' fault. As, 'A Farmer's Wife No. 2' put it: 'Speak of women suffragists – is not this enough to make women rise and stand for their rights, even against their own husbands, the farmers?'<sup>89</sup>

Once the butter arrived in Aberdeen, it might be sold by grocers or the 'butter wives' themselves at the market or the green. Many butter wives came into Aberdeen once a week to sell their butter

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<sup>85</sup> 'An Aberdeenshire Farmer's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 29 July 1902.

<sup>86</sup> 'Farmer's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 14 June 1904.

<sup>87</sup> 'A Butter-Maker', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 2 July 1902.

<sup>88</sup> 'A Farmer's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 19 March 1908.

<sup>89</sup> 'A Farmer's Wife No. 2', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 19 March 1908.



and eggs directly to the consumer. 'Mrs Roddenback' described the scene in her letter to the *Journal* in May 1908, making it clear that the housewife herself was to blame for buying poor quality butter because of her determination to save money:

Of course, we know – we all know – that there is plenty of good butter to be had in the Green and the Market. But that's nothing – we want it cheap; and Mrs Good Butter won't let us have hers for less than 1s 3d or 1s 4d per lb at the present time. Isn't it ridiculous to ask that price when Mary Watery Nib is willing to let me have it at 6d per lb less, and dear Alice Dirty Clout will sell hers still lower ere the day be done – if I take a pound or two? So I buy my stock from Mary and Alice, and gurgle with happiness when I unroll my bargain at home. Only, Peter and the 'kiddies' think there is a slight smell at first. Then I begin to feel it myself; and I fear that, by the end of the week, if it still gets stronger, I may have to give Pussy the lot – or my patent leather boots.<sup>90</sup>

Marian Farquharson, an inevitable contributor to the correspondence on such a contentious subject, suggested yet another group on whom blame should be placed – the county councillors. As mere men, she pointed out, they could not possibly understand the production of butter:

By a somewhat curious arrangement, men only are supposed to understand cookery, laundry work, butter-making, egg production and other British industries that the ratepayers are taxed to afford technical instruction in under the superintendence of men who offer themselves as representatives to the County Council! Women may vote for these lords of Creation, but for them only.<sup>91</sup>

'Farmer's Daughter' wrote in response, begging to point out to Mrs Farquharson that a delegation of agriculturalists was about to leave for Denmark to study Danish methods of agriculture and their possible application to Scotland. However, she did not think that such a 'pilgrimage' to Denmark would solve the real problem, which of course she saw as the farmer's wife not being paid enough for her best butter.

While the controversy over bad butter re-surfaced in the correspondence columns every few years, most of the letters concerning other foodstuffs occurred during the First World War. By the last years of the war there were severe shortages of some of the basic staples, particularly in working-class areas or around munitions factories. As shortages increased, the price of staples such as butter, meat and bread rose. There were sharp price rises in all foodstuffs at the beginning of the war, then a brief plateau and then further steady upward movement. Arthur Marwick calculates that in June 1915 food prices were about 32% up on those of July 1914. By September

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<sup>90</sup> 'Mrs Roddenback', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 27 May 1908.

<sup>91</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 14 June 1904.



1916 the increase was 65%.<sup>92</sup> In January 1916, 'A Worried Mother' wrote to the *Free Press* to complain that the amount of milk she received from a dairy farm near Aberdeen for five pennies had dramatically reduced over the previous few months.<sup>93</sup> Legislation was introduced to combat hoarding and to fix prices, with the price of milk being fixed by the end of 1916. Such government intervention was confusing for many housewives, however, especially those used to buying milk by the pennyworth rather than a particular amount. 'Housewife' was one of three women who wrote to the *Journal* in late 1916 and early 1917 in confusion about the new measures of milk. She requested the production of a table in the newspaper showing the different amounts of milk available and the government's fixed price for each.<sup>94</sup>

Rationing of certain foodstuffs was eventually introduced, fixing supplies to regular customers. By March 1918, bacon, butter, bread and meat were rationed in this way. Several letters to both newspapers at this time reveal concerns that government intervention and new regulations might cause many farmers and their wives to simply stop producing butter. 'Housewife' from Inverurie suggested that

Butter will be very plentiful soon, but the farmer's wife may not sell it to any customer unless she can guarantee an equal supply all the year round – which is impossible. Since she may not dispose of it, she will cease to make it, hence the consumer will be deprived of all home-made butter in the summer – because, forsooth, it cannot be made in the winter.<sup>95</sup>

In the same way, 'Housewife without a cow' suggested that farmers would prefer to refuse to register rather than have to conform to the rules of the Food Controller.<sup>96</sup> She felt that those who lived in the town had no idea how difficult rationing would be for country housewives, where 'for many years it has been more difficult to get dairy produce in the country than in the town'. However, those who lived in the countryside had better access to unrationed supplies – as Amy Stewart Fraser remembered in her *Edwardian Recollections*:

When meat was rationed in wartime, we, in Glengairn, found savoury mealie puddings much to our liking. With these and rabbits and hares, which were un-rationed and were plentiful on the Glen, and an unending supply of home-grown potatoes, we did not lack wholesome fare.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Arthur Marwick, *Women at War 1914–1918*. London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1977, p. 137.

<sup>93</sup> 'A Worried Mother', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 10 January 1916.

<sup>94</sup> 'Housewife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 22 November 1916.

<sup>95</sup> 'Housewife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 8 March 1918.

<sup>96</sup> 'Housewife Without A Cow', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 11 March 1918.

<sup>97</sup> Fraser, Amy Stewart, *Roses in December: Edwardian Recollections*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 32.



Rationing and food shortages introduced the new phenomenon of the queue to British shops. Deborah Thom reports that, in munitions areas, the time spent in queues by a working woman could average two hours a day.<sup>98</sup> Although Aberdeen was not a munitions area, housewives had complaints about queuing and the limited amount of time shops were open. As 'Housewife' pointed out to the *Journal* in February 1918:

In view of the fact that all customers will be on rations by the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, is it necessary for butchers to close half of the week as at present? I don't think so, and now that every effort is being made to get rid of queues, why shut so many days? It only crushes the work into a few hours daily when it could be spread over the whole day. No one can buy more than her allowance, so that the reason given for closing is now removed.

Then there is another hardship. What is the housewife who is probably tied up at home with a young family to do on a forenoon when she cannot get out? If the shops were open in the afternoon, she could get out to provide for the following day. Now that some of the butchers' shops have 'discontinued to deliver' orders, they at least should keep open till six o'clock at any rate. Customers have had to put up with a lot of inconvenience of late, so why not remove some of it now that the opportunity occurs?<sup>99</sup>

In addition to complaining about the price or quantity of rare foodstuffs during wartime rationing, women correspondents also looked to the newspapers to provide advice on how to prepare and cook rationed food. In May 1917 'A Housewife' wrote to the *Journal* to request the publication of a few simple recipes, for example on how to prepare scones and bread using wartime ingredients.<sup>100</sup> Other requests during the war included advice on the waxing of cheese and the preparation of herrings.

On questions of food pricing and quality, women correspondents appealed to both newspapers to act as unofficial ombudsmen, apportioning blame for problems such as bad butter and, during wartime, making sure that the authorities were involved with issues of hoarding and profiteering. It should also be noted that the vast majority of correspondents quoted above used noms de plume such as 'Farmer's Wife' or 'Housewife' in their letters rather than reveal their identities. Their identity as wives, part of their natural domestic sphere, was used to justify their correspondence in a public space on such issues. By doing so, they extended their domestic sphere to encompass public correspondence in the newspapers and entered this sphere of public discourse protected by their housewifely roles. Women's use of their domestic roles to justify their entrance into the public sphere of newspaper debate has already been mentioned and is further evidenced here.

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<sup>98</sup> Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*. London, New York: I B Tauris Publishers, 2000, p. 167.

<sup>99</sup> 'A Housewife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 20 February 1918.

<sup>100</sup> 'A Housewife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 May 1917.



Such use of domestic identities also occurred when women correspondents to the *Journal* and *Free Press* used their role as mothers to discuss and even criticise the local providers of education.

### Mothers and schools

Separate from the issue of teachers' salaries, the *Daily Journal* printed six letters from women correspondents regarding the conduct of individual schools and school boards during the period studied. All correspondents used pen names, four of which indicated a maternal relationship – two 'A Mother', 'Materfamilias', and 'Worried Mother'. In addition, there were nine letters printed on the subject of schools in the *Free Press*. Of these, seven were signed by a maternal pen name – 'Materfamilias', several 'A Mother', 'Fyvie Mother' and 'Maternal' – one was signed 'Auntie' and the only woman who signed her own name to a letter on the subject of schooling was of course Marian Farquharson, who had freely expressed her opinion of men or women who 'hid' behind such devices in many of her letters and, in addition, was only a disliked stepmother. The majority of the letters – ten out of the total of 15 – were on the subject of school hours. It is evident that schools in the city of Aberdeen did not conform to identical hours, which could cause problems for the mothers of more than one child. As 'A Mother' pointed out to the *Free Press* in September 1904:

Just think of the dinner hours of the household from which a boy goes to the Grammar School, a girl to the Central, and two or three to the public school, while the father's dinner hour is from 2 to 3. Here we have at least four different hours in the household – all because of the muddled state of school hours.<sup>101</sup>

'Maternity' and 'Materfamilias' echoed her complaints, and all three looked to the members of the Aberdeen School Board to 'earn the blessings of hundreds of mothers' by imposing a uniform timetable. Again, there is evidence in their letters that it was the mothers themselves who were preparing all these individual dinners rather than ordering members of a large household staff to do so. 'Materfamilias' described herself as a 'hardworking, struggling mother' who was 'always preparing two sets of meals, and sometimes three'.<sup>102</sup>

School holidays were also a frequent matter for complaint from mothers. Half-day holidays were particularly disruptive for their domestic arrangements, and for this there was a tendency to blame the teachers. 'A Mother' wrote angrily on 31 December 1901 to the *Journal* urging parents to rise en masse and rebel against half-holidays, and stating 'It is agreed by everyone that teachers get

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<sup>101</sup> 'A Mother', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 4 September 1907.

<sup>102</sup> 'Maternity' and 'Materfamilias', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 5 and 6 September 1907.



more holidays than any other class of the community, and still they curtail the hours'.<sup>103</sup> The timing of summer holidays could be even more controversial. In the city, as was described in Chapter II, many middle-class families used the school summer holidays to move their children out to the countryside away from the heat and dust of Aberdeen in the summer. However, as another 'Materfamilias' pointed out in her letter to the *Journal* in May 1901, the insistence of the School Board that teaching recommence on the last Tuesday in August caused 'great inconvenience to many families who rent summer quarters for the month of August. It will involve coming back almost a week before the end of the month.'<sup>104</sup> In the countryside, schoolchildren and their parents faced different problems in the timing of their summer break, as 'Fyvie Mother' explained to the *Free Press* in 1909:

The holidays are to be made not in the interests of the bairns, nor the teachers, but for the benefit of the farmers. What though scholars sit in stuffy schoolrooms during July and August, what though the holidays are not given till the month of October, as was the case two years ago? As long as the farmer gets cheap labour the children need not be considered. The truth is the farmer has already far too much to do with education. The great majority of our rural boards are composed entirely of men like 'Small Farmer' – men entirely unsuited for the job, who discuss all questions connected with the schools from the narrow view of the parish pump. I heartily wish the Department would issue a circular making proper summer holidays compulsory on all boards. It is one of the scandals of our time that our children have to be sacrificed to the greed – for it can be called no other – of the farmer.

Here in Fyvie we are also completely ruled by the farmer. We usually have the holidays announced only a day or two before the schools are closed, so that we can never make arrangements for taking our children away till the last moment. We have had an epidemic of whooping-cough throughout our parish during the past nine months, and my own children are sadly needing change of air, but we must keep our bairns at school, until, forsooth, the farmer's corn is ripe!

Correspondence regarding school hours and holidays tended to blame the school boards for the present short-comings in the system, with some mothers going as far as naming names, such as the hapless Mr. Thompson who was blamed by several Aberdeen mothers for the differences in school hours despite the fact that he had unsuccessfully campaigned for change. Members of the school boards were held accountable not only for the organisation and physical buildings of their schools, but also for the quality of teaching and achievement of the children. 'Mavis' wrote to the *Journal* in 1911 to register her disgust at the failings of the Ellon School Board in north Aberdeenshire. Not only was the financial position of the board a scandal, but the headmaster had

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<sup>103</sup> 'A Mother', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 31 December 1901.

<sup>104</sup> 'Materfamilias', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 31 May 1901.



admitted that only one child could be put forward for a leaving certificate that year and the chairman of the board had stated that he was obliged to send his own children to school in Aberdeen to get a good grounding. Since Ellon ratepayers had just paid for the building of a new school, the old one having been blamed for many of the educational short-comings of previous years, 'Mavis' suggested that the board instead paid for more children to travel to Aberdeen to receive their education there.<sup>105</sup>

Women correspondents thus used their role as mothers to legitimise their criticism of their local school boards. Issues such as the family, servants and food were very much at the heart of the woman's traditional, domestic sphere and therefore even the most domestic and old-fashioned women felt justified in corresponding to the newspapers on such subjects. Mothers and wives wrote letters on these subjects to both newspapers, but overall there were more letters on such domestic subjects to the *Journal* throughout the period studied. In particular, correspondents from farming communities, whether farmer's wives or their domestic servants, tended to submit letters for publication to the *Journal*. Such women came from a very traditional and conservative way of life, with less time or opportunity to attend 'consciousness-raising' events such as suffrage meetings or take part in leisure pursuits than their sisters in the towns, so it is perhaps not too surprising to discover that they were more frequent correspondents to, and presumably readers of, the well-established and more conservative *Journal*.

### Philanthropy and the church

As has already been described, during the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century middle-class women had succeeded in establishing philanthropic and charitable acts as an important part of their domestic sphere. For some women, attendance at charitable events or visits to the poor and needy might be their one escape from the day-to-day domesticity of their lives. How far did this middle-class activity impact on women's correspondence to the two newspapers?

Church-going was a very important part of the life of the average middle-class family in Aberdeenshire. Fraser and Morris have described the lives of middle-class Scots at this time as 'shaped by work and religion', with church-going and Sabbatarianism the outward manifestations of respectability. The religious makeup of north-east Scotland was particularly complex. Although largely Protestant, parts of the area had previously been the heartland of the Roman Catholic faith within Scotland. Within the Protestant sphere, two major fault-lines had emerged. Firstly, the split between Presbyterians and Episcopalians (Anglicans) that occurred in the late

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<sup>105</sup> 'Mavis', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 21 July 1911.



17<sup>th</sup> century. The Episcopal Church (to which Marian Farquharson claimed allegiance) adhered to the fundamental principles of the Anglican Communion and North-East Scotland was the stronghold of this denomination. The second fault-line was the disruptions within the Presbyterian Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which led to the emergence of the Church of Scotland (the Established church) and a number of smaller, dissenting sects, such as the United Free Church and the Free Church of Scotland. A unifying feature of all these Protestant churches was their strict observance of the rituals of the Sabbath.

Brown and Stephenson's work on women and religion in Scotland 1890 to 1950 involved the use of oral history sources to establish working-class women's religious practices. They also found a pattern of highly religious activity on Sundays for most Scottish protestant families.<sup>106</sup> Edith Bishop's father was an elder at the United Free Church in Aberdeen, and therefore the family attended church regularly.

We attended morning service, afternoon Sunday School and evening service every Sunday, also the Band of Hope on Friday evenings. We had at least one and a half miles to walk to the south Church. Even when tram cars ran part of the way, we were not allowed to board one, that would have been sinful, forcing someone to work on Sunday.<sup>107</sup>

In her own reminiscences, Katherine Trail, daughter of a university professor, recalls that as a child 'on Saturday evenings all our usual books and employments, knitting and sewing were carefully put away, not to appear again until Monday'<sup>108</sup> while Louisa Innes Lumsden remembered from her own, earlier childhood in Aberdeen that 'Sundays were strictly observed in those days; it was a special privilege to be allowed of an evening to play with my kitten while everybody else sat quietly reading.'<sup>109</sup> However, she also remembered that her family was perhaps not as religiously inclined as some of their neighbours:

The only thing which ruffled our peace of mind in those Culter days was the religious revival which started, I think, in America and created much excitement everywhere. Friends and acquaintances were divided. One could never be sure that somebody, even a complete stranger, would not thrust a tract into one's hand or ask some question which required all one's patience and good humour to answer. My mother took no part or interest in the movement, and we all with one exception were of her mind. Not that we were indifferent, far from it. We employed a nice sensible woman as a missionary to visit the lowest slums in Aberdeen.

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<sup>106</sup> Brown, Callum G. and Stephenson, Jayne D., 'Sprouting Wings?: Women and religion in Scotland, 1890–1950'. In Breitenbach, Esther and Gordon, Eleanor, eds, *Women in Scottish Society, 1800–1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990, pp.95–120.

<sup>107</sup> Bishop, Edith, *For You I Remember*, p. 17.

<sup>108</sup> Trail, Katherine, *Reminiscences of Old Aberdeen*, p. 72.

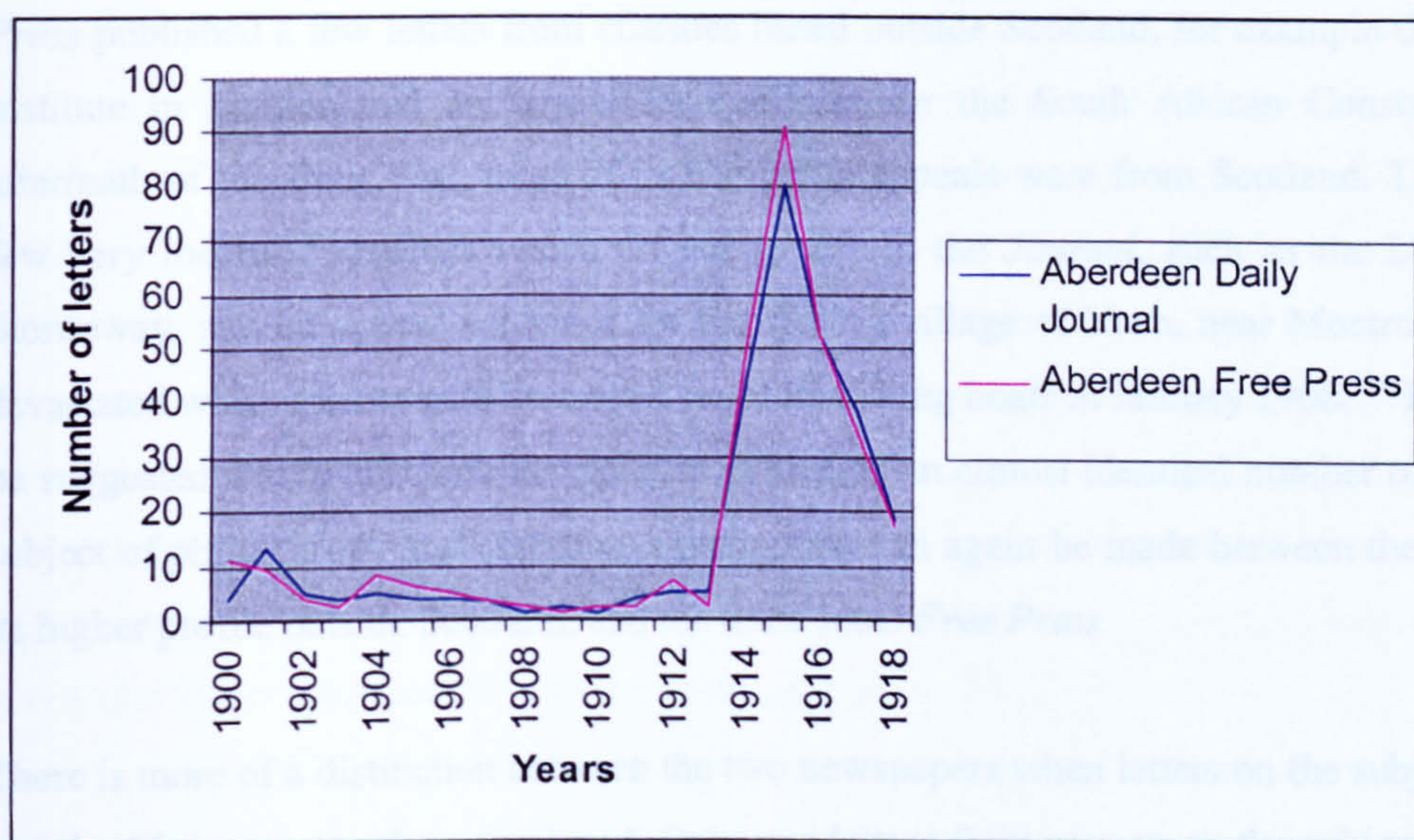
<sup>109</sup> Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves*, p. 3.



Her account of her experiences was always interesting and often amusing.<sup>110</sup>

It seems that the Lumsden women were more interested in actual charitable work, whether amongst the poor, hospitals or animals, rather than discussions of their own religious beliefs. One has to wonder how some of their neighbours would have reacted to Katharine's subsequent commitment to the cause of cremation!

Philanthropic and charitable endeavours were popular topics for women correspondents to the newspapers throughout the period studied, but in particular in times of war. As Figure 3.1 shows, the two newspapers received a strikingly similar number of letters on this subject:



**Figure 3.1: Number of letters from women correspondents on the subjects of charities and philanthropy to the Aberdeen daily newspapers 1900–1918**

Further analysis of the correspondence reveals that there is little distinction to be made between the charities appealed for in either newspaper. Most frequently appealed for were the armed forces, in particular comforts for various companies. As will be seen in Chapter V, the provision of comforts, either in the form of clothes, food or money to buy the same, dominated the war effort of provincial middle-class and middle-aged women, who were typical of the correspondents to the Aberdeen newspapers. Before the outbreak of the First World War, the two newspapers printed a similar amount of letters appealing for donations from both local and national charities. Locally, appeals were made for the Sick Children's Hospital, the Royal Infirmary, the Home for Widowers' Children, the Onward and Upward Association and the

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 30.



Orphan Homes. The number of letters printed in each newspaper for such charities is very similar, and, as discussed earlier, such letters were most likely to be duplicated in both newspapers.

There is, however, more of a difference in the charities which wrote to the newspapers from further afield. As was discussed in Chapter II, the *Journal* appears to have had a higher profile in England and abroad, which might explain why certain charities based outside Scotland had appeals published in this newspaper only. For example, the Colonial Nursing Association, the Transvaal Educational Union, and the Necessitous Ladies' Holiday Fund, based in London, wrote only to the *Journal*, as did Lady Gaskell with her fundraising for Irish unionists. While the *Free Press* published a few letters from charities based outside Scotland, for example the Shaftesbury Institute in London and an appeal for comforts for the South African Constabulary in the aftermath of the Boer War, most of its charitable appeals were from Scotland. These include a few very localised charities which do not appear in the *Journal*, such as the Lewis Hospital, Stornoway, and an appeal for funds for the fishing village of Usan, near Montrose, which was devastated when a fierce gale destroyed six of its fishing boats in January 1908.<sup>111</sup> It can therefore be suggested that, while both newspapers published an almost identical number of letters on the subject of philanthropy and charities, a distinction can again be made between the *Journal*, with its higher profile outside Scotland, and the more local *Free Press*.

There is more of a distinction between the two newspapers when letters on the subject of religion and the Christian church are analysed. Only two letters from women on the subject of the church or religion were published in the *Journal*, both from the early part of the period studied. This should not be taken to indicate that religion and the church formed no part of the *Journal's* 'Letters to the Editor' column. Both newspapers frequently published very lively correspondence on such subjects. However, in the *Journal* the correspondence was almost entirely dominated by men, and in particular ministers. The two letters from women in the *Journal* were both from older women and both letters make reference to their writer's religious beliefs. The first used the nom de plume 'Old Lady' and the second correspondent described herself as an old member of St Margaret's Church in Aberdeen. Both therefore used their advanced age rather than their sex to justify their correspondence to the newspapers on such matters and both writers criticised the present state of affairs at her parish church. 'Old Lady' objected to 'the fashionable singing in church' with which she was unable to join in. She wished to praise God herself, not by proxy

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<sup>111</sup> Eliza Stansfeld, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 21 January 1908.



through a choir.<sup>112</sup> The letter of 'T. C.' was slightly more incoherent, but she appears to have been criticising the present incumbent of St Margaret's church for his lack of parish visiting. She described herself as 'one of the late rector's hooligans' and having 'trouble, sickness and poverty', but despite this Mr Comper, the minister, had not once visited her at home.<sup>113</sup>

These are the only two letters on the subject of religion to be found in the 'Letters to the Editor' columns of the *Daily Journal*. While critical, the two correspondents focused on the state of affairs at their own parish churches rather than evaluating the Christian religion or the Protestant faith as a whole. Letter-writers to the *Free Press*, however, were inclined to more general criticism of the Church. There were 20 letters on the topic of religion printed in the *Free Press* during the period studied. Nine of these were written by Marian Farquharson, mostly in 1906 as part of her dispute with a group of Aberdonian ministers on the subject of baptismal regeneration. Mr Burnett of Kemnay had claimed in one of *his* many letters to the newspaper that the Church of England did not believe in baptismal regeneration, and Marian set out to prove to her own satisfaction, if not his, that it in fact did. Describing herself as a Scottish Episcopalian, and introducing the bracketed words 'nee Ridley' into her signature in an attempt to invoke the authority of 'my ancestor Bishop Ridley', Marian attempted to persuade Mr Burnett and others that Article XXVII of the English Book of Common Prayer taught that baptism was a sign of regeneration and that Mr Burnett's interpretation of the article was 'an inaccurate tissue of assertions without shadow of evidence to support them'.<sup>114</sup>

Marian was not the only woman correspondent to write several letters on the subject of religion. During the war years, 'Miriam' wrote to the *Free Press* on seven occasions to urge that the war offered an outstanding opportunity for the reconstruction of the Christian Church. Although few of her letters offered any concrete examples of how such a reconstruction should work, she was certain that the war and the general state of the church was making people 'think'. She quoted with approval H. G. Wells' 1916 novel *Mr Britling Sees It Through*, where the hero – and the novelist himself – underwent a religious conversion, saying that it showed the intellectual upheaval caused by the war and hoping that those who read it would consider their own attitude to God. Hers appears to have been a rather 'fundamentalist' approach to Christianity, critical of the current hierarchy of the church and fond of pointing out that 'Jesus did not have an army of specially trained theologians':

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<sup>112</sup> 'An Old Lady', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 9 November 1900.

<sup>113</sup> 'T. C.', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 25 January 1902.

<sup>114</sup> Marian Farquharson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 17 March 1906.



Notwithstanding the great intellectual upheaval among the deeply thinking religious men and women of the time the religious organisations go on in the time-worn fashion, jogging away like an old boxcart.<sup>115</sup>

On the question of young ministers volunteering to fight, she was definite that 'ministers of military age who join the fighting ranks will do more for the influence of true religion and for the consolation of the people than thousands of standardised patriotic sermons by 'young and muscular preachers'.'<sup>116</sup> At the same time she protested against the constant singing of the National Anthem in church, because it droned and did not stir the blood the way the 'Marseillaise' or 'Scots Wha' Hae' did.

'Miriam' could be just as scathing as Marian Farquharson about those correspondents who did not agree with her, referring to other correspondents' letters as 'the sort of cant which seeks to pass muster as discussion'.<sup>117</sup> However, it has to be pointed out that religion was – and is – always a topic which stirred up passions in the correspondence columns of newspapers and that the letters of male correspondents, even ministers, could be just as aggressive.

Other correspondents to the *Free Press* on the subject of the church could be equally as critical as Marian or 'Miriam', and perhaps even more controversial. Mrs C. Farquharson-Kennedy of Aberdeen wrote to criticise a talk given by Rev. John Fairlie under the ambitious title 'Was Jesus a Socialist?' Mr Fairlie appears to have made the unfortunate confession early on in the talk that he was actually unsure what socialism meant. As Mrs Farquharson-Kennedy said,

In that case, he must be ruled out, as a competent authority on the matter of principles, which he has not even heard, or seen clearly defined. Let me state a parallel case. Should I confess that I had never read or heard a clear definition of the Christian principles, or methods of Church Government which govern Mr Fairlie's activity as a Church of Scotland minister, and should I then proceed to state, and answer the question, 'Is the Rev John Fairlie a Christian?' I should lay myself open to great condemnation.<sup>118</sup>

After taking Mr Fairlie's talk to pieces, however, Mrs Farquharson-Kennedy did admit herself gratified that so serious a subject was being discussed – even to rows of empty pews – since 'it is the question of the hour'.

A further critic of the established church could be found in 'Member WSPU' of Aberdeen, who warned the *Free Press* in 1913 of the 'antagonism of women to organised Christianity' unless the

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<sup>115</sup> 'Miriam', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 30 April 1918.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> 'Miriam', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 27 September 1916.

<sup>118</sup> Mrs C. Farquharson-Kennedy, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 13 February 1908.



Church woke up to its responsibilities towards the women's movement.<sup>119</sup> Women correspondents who wrote to the *Free Press* on the subject of religion, therefore, were not afraid to criticise ministers and the established church and were hopeful of wholesale change as a result of either intellectual argument, popular agitation, such as the woman suffrage movement, or the cataclysm of the First World War.

### Summary

This chapter set out to analyse frequent topics of women correspondents' letters to the *Aberdeen Journal* and *Free Press* and to establish whether any pattern emerged of the type of letters each newspaper published. Bearing in mind that it has already been established that there is little evidence of gatekeeping in the editorial policy of either newspaper towards the publication of correspondents' letters, it can be assumed that it was the women correspondents themselves who made a conscious decision as to which newspaper to submit their letter. Of course, such a decision would have rested primarily on which newspaper the woman read herself, but people tend to read newspapers with whose opinions they agree, and so any distinction that can be made between the letter-writers of the conservative *Journal* and the liberal *Free Press* can also be applied to their readership.

Of course, in the case of a few woman correspondents, such as Marian Farquharson, we have evidence that they read, and corresponded with, both newspapers. In addition, women such as Katharine Lumsden and the honorary lady secretaries of many local and national charities addressed their letters to both newspapers. In the main, these duplicate letters were prompted by the need to communicate their contents as widely as possible in the community and were proactive rather than reactive, as most other letters to the newspapers were. Such duplicate letters ran the risk of editing, in particular by the *Journal* if the letter was critical of authority and the correspondent refused to allow their name and address to be published. However, there is evidence of such editorial input in only a small number of cases, and most editing appears to have been limited to a judicious pruning due to space consideration, particularly during the years of wartime paper rationing.

How far were women correspondents to Aberdeen newspapers keeping within the traditional 'woman's sphere' and how far were they moving outside it to discuss non-traditional subjects? What impact did the phenomenon of the New Woman have on correspondents to, or readers of,

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<sup>119</sup> 'Member WSPU', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 November 1913.



the Aberdeen newspapers? There is evidence that the *Free Press* in particular attracted letters from women who at least shared some of the attributes of the New Woman. Correspondence on the subjects of leisure activities such as golf, swimming, footballing and cycling, indicate that women were beginning to demand a new equality with men where their leisure was concerned. Men's domination of the swimming baths and the golf links in Aberdeenshire was being challenged by some women, who were not content to stay at home and pursue more traditional female past-times such as needlework. That this incursion into male territory was not approved of by all can be seen in the comments shouted at women swimmers on the beach, the refusal to allow a woman golfer on to the Ferryhill links or the accusations thrown at 'novel reading and bridge playing' women teachers.

Letters in both newspapers indicate that another characteristic of the New Woman – criticism of sexual double standards and a desire for a more equal moral code – can also be found among the women letter-writers of Aberdeen. Attacks on male morality were usually the product of women's reading of cases of child abuse or infanticide in the newspapers and their comparison with reports of other cases of violence or murder in which a man was the accused. While women correspondents did not go to the lengths of the New Women novelists by concluding that marriage itself was to blame or looking to a brave new world of free love, they did call for a re-evaluation of society's values. Correspondents to the *Free Press* also made the connection between women's sexual victimisation and their demand for enfranchisement, following Christabel Pankhurst's demand of 'Votes for Women and Chastity for Men'.

The New Woman also looked for a new equality of opportunity for women in terms of education and employment. For most middle-class women, the two were inextricably linked since teaching was the profession most freely open to women. The teaching profession became more attractive to middle-class women as new standards and qualifications for teachers were applied at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, there was a double standard at work here too, and women teachers were forced to accept lower salaries and fewer promotion opportunities than men and to choose between their career and marriage. Women teachers who corresponded with the newspapers campaigned for better conditions of service and a more equal pay scale, but their hopes were frequently frustrated by the local school boards, who appear to have been less open to change than school boards in the central belt. Such conservatism may have been indicative of their membership, with many Aberdeenshire school boards dominated by local farmers and clergy, who had their own ideas about education and their own agendas to pursue – as was exemplified by the letter complaining about how school holidays were dictated by the harvesting needs of local farmers. Even when women were members of the school boards, elected



because of the 'special nature' of their bond with other women and children, women teachers could complain that they did not feel any benefit and that such women could be as conservative-minded as their male counterparts.

If the *Free Press* attracted letters from New Women correspondents, can it therefore be assumed that the *Journal* attracted letters from the more domestic woman? Certainly, the *Journal's* correspondence columns published more letters on the minutiae of daily domestic life such as domestic servants, the price and quality of food and children's school hours. While the *Free Press* did carry some letters on these subjects, it printed fewer letters from domestic servants, while the *Journal's* correspondence columns were used by some servants to criticise their own working conditions. There is also evidence that more of the *Journal's* correspondents came from the farming community, with a greater number of correspondents using noms de plume such as 'Farmer's Wife' or describing themselves as farm servant lassies. However, some domestic issues were evidently universal, with letters concerning bad butter, for example, published frequently in both newspapers.

Women correspondents on such domestic subjects to either newspaper had a tendency to use pen names rather than reveal their own identities. Such pen names were frequently indicative of the writer's role in life – with wifedom and motherhood particularly dominant factors. Women used such pen names to justify their entrance into public discourse in the newspapers. By utilising their identities as wives or mothers they moved the subject under discussion into their domestic sphere. In this way they did not move out of this sphere to join in a public debate but instead appropriated the discussion into the domestic sphere. They considered themselves justified in corresponding with the newspapers about subjects such as education or domestic servants or even criticising authorities such as school boards simply because they were wives and mothers and therefore these subjects were part of their remit.

Equally, women had established philanthropic and charitable activities as part of their sphere, and so it is not surprising to find correspondence from women dealing with these subjects in both newspapers. There is, in fact, a striking similarity between the two newspapers in the number and frequency of letters on this subject. Such letters usually appealed for funds or donations for a particular charity, and the only small difference that can be discerned between the two newspapers is one of geography, with the *Journal* publishing marginally more letters from charities based in England or abroad and the *Free Press* publishing letters from more local, Scottish appeals.

Concerns about morality and charity might lead naturally to concerns about religion, so it is interesting to discover that few women wrote to the *Journal* on this subject. Those that did so

justified their correspondence in terms of their age rather than their sex, possibly because the subject in both newspapers' Letters columns was so dominated by male correspondents, in particular ministers. Despite the aggressive tone of the correspondence on such matters, some women, such as Marian Farquharson or 'Miriam' felt the need to engage in argument concerning religion, and showed that women correspondents could be equally aggressive in tone. Other women correspondents to the *Free Press* attacked the established church for its attitudes towards new movements such as socialism and feminism.

Overall, it is clear that a distinction can be made between women correspondents to the *Journal* and those to the *Free Press*. If evidence of what can be called the New Woman in Aberdeenshire is sought, it is in letters to the *Free Press* rather than the *Journal* that it will more frequently be found. Women writing on more domestic subjects such as servants, food and children's school hours, tended to submit their letters to the *Journal*, especially if they came from a more conservative background themselves, such as the farming community. However, such a distinction must not be taken too far. There were plenty of women writing to the *Free Press* who were concerned with bad butter or the servant problem, and some correspondents to the *Journal* who campaigned for better opportunities in employment and education for women or wanted equal access to the swimming baths.

The following two chapters extend this discussion of the New versus the Domestic woman by investigating the issue of women's politics and the impact of the war upon women correspondents. They ask how far a distinction between the conservative *Journal* and the liberal *Free Press* can be made when women's involvement in political issues is discussed and whether it was the domestic woman, knitting socks, or the New Woman, driving an ambulance, that dominated the correspondence columns of the two newspapers during the First World War.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### ***The Appearance of Women's Politics***

## Introduction

As has been discussed in chapter I, a newspaper's 'Letters to the Editor' column represents its readership in an unique way and can provide a useful 'thermometer' with which to measure the extent of critical debate and discussion that a particular issue generated in a locality. In this chapter, the letters of women to the editors of the two Aberdeen newspapers are analysed to discover the type of political issues with which these women concerned themselves. It is argued that the women must have felt particularly strongly about such issues since they were prepared to take their arguments outside their social circle and to identify themselves as politically active in the pages of their local newspaper.

A letter to a local, or national, newspaper was one way in which a woman of the early twentieth century could make her political opinions known to people outside her social circle. She could assume that both men and women in a comparatively wide geographical area would read, and either agree or disagree with, her letter. The letters from women which appear in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Free Press* are from both highly politicised women who have ventured into the public sphere in other ways (such as political meetings, local government, suffrage organisations or charitable associations) and from other, often more anonymous women, writing on a subject that has particularly vexed them. For many of these women, the one or two letters printed in a local newspaper may be the only printed inheritance we have of them. Thus, for a local study looking at women's attitudes to the political issues of the time, letters to the editor offer a unique source, allowing understanding of grass-roots opinion.

The following chapter assesses letter-writers' attitudes to contemporary political issues, whether local, national or those perceived as 'women's issues', in particular women's involvement in local politics and the suffrage question. It is suggested that the majority of women correspondents on these issues tend to be examples of the New Woman – keen to be involved as much as possible in politics and eager to share their opinions with men and women outside their immediate circle. However, this research has also identified a different kind of woman emerging, perhaps more reluctantly, during the period to deal with what was perceived as a governmental attack on the 'woman's sphere'. As will be shown later, some good examples of this kind of correspondence occurred in response to the Health Insurance Bill of 1911, when women usually hostile to woman suffrage and all that the name 'suffragette' implied, and reluctant to get involved in political debate, committed themselves in print to a political debate which they felt impacted directly on their domestic sphere.



### Previous research into woman suffrage in Scotland

It is not the remit of this thesis to present a history of the woman suffrage movement in Scotland or Aberdeen. A detailed history of the movement within Scotland has already been written by Leah Leneman<sup>1</sup>, which is noteworthy for its coverage of events outside the central belt as well as in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Leneman's *A Guid Cause* was published in 1991, at which time she argued, 'So far the story of the fight for the vote in Britain has been told almost exclusively from the point of view of the metropolitan leadership'.<sup>2</sup> It was her aim to expand the geographical boundaries of the history of the suffrage movement by examining grass-roots activity in all areas of Scotland, including the Isles. After all, as she pointed out, Scotland featured prominently in suffrage campaigns. Asquith, Haldane and Churchill, leading members of the Liberal government which came to power in 1906, all held Scottish seats at one point or another and Scotland, in particular Aberdeenshire, was a great stronghold of Liberalism in the UK. Thus the leaders of the main suffrage parties, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Teresa Billington-Greig and Charlotte Despard, all visited Scotland during their campaigns against the Government's policies. Leneman continued her efforts to explore Scottish grass-roots support for the movement in her examination of the imprisonment and force-feeding of suffragettes in Dundee and Perth in the later years of the suffrage campaign<sup>3</sup>, in which she again points out:

The equation of the women's suffrage movement with London in nearly every book on the subject is a far more potent reason for the lack of awareness amongst Scots of the drama that was played out in their midst... And everything of note that happened in Scotland did not necessarily happen in Edinburgh or Glasgow. Dundee was an active centre of suffragism throughout the militant period of the movement, and Perth was the focus of Scottish activity in the final and most intense stage of conflict between suffragettes and the government over the issue of votes for women, a conflict that was only ended by the outbreak of the Great War.<sup>4</sup>

Leneman has not been alone in her desire to move the focus of historical research into the suffrage movement away from its leadership in London. In 1988 Ann Morley and Liz Stanley published what they described as a 'feminist biography' of the suffrage 'martyr' Emily Wilding Davison, which set out to try to understand Davison's motivations for her

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<sup>1</sup> Leneman, Leah, *A Guid Cause – The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Leneman, Leah, *Martyrs in our Midst: Dundee, Perth and the Forcible Feeding of Suffragettes*. Dundee: Abertay Historical Society Publication No 33, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 39.



actions, including throwing herself in front of the King's Horse at Epsom, through an investigation of her circle of friends and acquaintances.<sup>5</sup> Such an investigation took the authors away from London and the main leadership of the WSPU, and included acquaintances in Aberdeenshire, where Davison memorably was imprisoned for assaulting a Baptist minister on the platform of Aberdeen railway station with a dog whip under the mistaken impression that he was Lloyd George. While this study is written more in the style of a detective story than a piece of straight historical research, the authors again make the point that the history of the woman suffrage movement needs to move away from the 'dead famous woman approach'<sup>6</sup>:

Any large-scale organisation which exists on both a national and a local level – where local groups are active and involve large numbers of people – is complex and its activities are not easily summarised. Moreover, this is only to deal with the formal organisations. Cross-cutting this, at both levels, will be informal connections, between people made on the basis of friendship, political analysis, social interests and emotional and sexual involvements. This is true of the WSPU, but what has most often happened is that vast generalisations have been made about the WSPU from the small bit that sticks up clearly above historical water: the formal pronouncements of the leadership. On this basis the WSPU has been denounced as all things reactionary and fanatical, or lauded as all things radical and wonderful. Such simplicities are really not good enough.<sup>7</sup>

Morley and Stanley's discussion of the actions of Emily Wilding Davison also make the point that Davison did not act at all times under the guidance, or even with the permission, of the leadership of the WSPU, which by the time of her most dramatic actions was focused around Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. Indeed, they point out, the Pankhursts were frequently initially opposed to her activities and only supported them after the event when they received the acclaim of other activists. Morley and Stanley's research into the lives of Wilding's friends in the suffrage movement, such as Mary Leigh, suggests that this reactive rather than proactive response by the Pankhursts to women outside London and the main leadership acting on their own initiative was not unusual and further leads to the need to investigate suffrage activities outside the capital.

The approach of Leneman and Morley and Stanley to the history of the woman suffrage movement can also be seen in the work of Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, whose *One Hand*

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<sup>5</sup> Morley, Ann with Stanley, Liz, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*. London: The Women's Press, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 175.



*Tied Behind Us*<sup>8</sup> introduced to a wider public the work of provincial and working-class suffragists such as Mary Gawthorpe and Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, and in the publication in 1999 of Elizabeth Crawford's *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928*, which attempts to offer short biographies of women, men and organisations involved in the movement all over the country.<sup>9</sup> However, while a useful demonstration of how geographically diverse and numerous were those involved in the movement, Crawford could not be expected to cover every single activist throughout the country and there remains a case to be made for small, geographically focused studies to supplement what is already known. While it is not the main aim of this thesis to investigate the woman suffrage movement in Aberdeen and the surrounding countryside, it will be possible to throw some light on the local movement through the use of the evidence of correspondence to the local newspapers by both adherents to the cause and those hostile to it, and therefore to further supplement what is known about the attitude to woman suffrage at a grass-roots level in Scotland and to examine the tensions and connections between the different societies and political associations locally.

#### Political allegiances within the newspapers

During this period the *Journal* came under the editorship of three men: David Pressly (1894–1903), Robert Anderson (1903–1910) and William Maxwell (1910–1927), all of whom were concerned with establishing the conservative *Journal* as the pre-eminent newspaper in north-east Scotland, in particular in the face of strong competition from the more liberal *Aberdeen Free Press*. As has already been discussed, the later editor, William Maxwell, was an especially strong Unionist, who aimed at converting the fundamentally liberal North-East to Unionism.<sup>10</sup> He also desired to make the *Journal* the national Scottish newspaper, and so went into competition with the *Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald*. This desire to develop a provincial newspaper into a national newspaper meant more coverage of national news (both Scottish and British). Throughout this time, the *Free Press* remained a staunch supporter of the Liberal cause, despite the decline of this party's popularity during and after the War. During the First World War there was a degree of co-operation between the two newspapers regarding the restriction of paper sizes, mutual reporting aid and

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<sup>8</sup> Liddington, Jill and Norris, Jill, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*. London: Virago Ltd, 1978, new revised edition Rivers Oram, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Crawford, Elizabeth, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928*. London: Routledge 2001.

<sup>10</sup> For more details on the newspaper and its editors at this time, see Fraser, George and Peters, Ken, *The Northern Lights*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978, pp. 46–71.



advertising charges, which presumably helped pave the way towards the newspapers' eventual amalgamation in 1922.<sup>11</sup>

As has been discussed earlier, no material evidence of editorial gatekeeping has been found in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* or *Free Press* during the period 1900–18. The policy appears to have been one of full publication of all letters, as long as they were accompanied by a name and address. When the editor did decide not to print a letter, a note appeared at the bottom of the Letters column, giving a reason. For example, on 13 January 1914, the editor of the *Journal* (William Maxwell) noted: 'To Miss O. Walton and Miss Agnes Kelly – As the case was, in harmony with public sentiment, conducted in private, and as no point of public interest is raised anew, correspondence of this kind will serve no good purpose.'<sup>12</sup> An Olive Walton was the WSPU organiser in Dundee at this time, and a Miss Walton is mentioned by the newspaper in March 1912 as presiding at a meeting of the Women's Social and Political Union in Aberdeen's Union Street, so it is probable that her letter touched on some aspect of women's politics. An Englishwoman, Olive Walton was something of a militant activist, with prison sentences in England during 1911 and 1912 for window-smashing and a period of hunger striking whilst in gaol. She became WSPU organiser in Dundee from November 1913 and was twice arrested for throwing a rubber ball at King George V and Queen Mary during a royal visit to Scotland in July 1914.<sup>13</sup> However, since no record of unpublished letters survives, it is impossible to confirm that the letter referred to here was on the subject of woman suffrage.

As was mentioned in chapter I, other historical studies of newspapers' correspondence columns have suggested that the columns were used by supporters of policies at odds with those of the editor to get their arguments across. Thus Sama suggests that women were able to use letters to the editor of *The Times* to get their demands and arguments printed in this anti-suffrage newspaper run by an anti-suffrage editor since *The Times* had a policy of fairness throughout and published letters from both sides.<sup>14</sup> In 1906, Mrs Fawcett commented approvingly that

Evidence of the progress of the [suffrage] movement is the correspondence on the subject in *The Times*. There had been a column or

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 59

<sup>12</sup> 'Letters to the Editor', *The Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 13 January 1914.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the life of Olive Walton, see Crawford, Elizabeth, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928*, pp.699–700.

<sup>14</sup> Sama, Anita, 'The Times and the Women's Suffrage Movement 1900–1918'. Unpublished Mlit dissertation, St Andrews, 1975.



more of interesting correspondence on woman suffrage in that journal for the past week and very little opposition had been expressed.<sup>15</sup>

In his study of the *Los Angeles Times* 1881–89, Ralph E. Shaffer reports little evidence of editor H. G. Otis deliberately suppressing letters stating a position he did not like. Thus, Otis ran many letters that were pro-union, despite his anti-union feelings, although occasionally adding a postscript, in opposition to the author's viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> Leah Leneman notes such a use of the editorial comment in *The Dundee Advertiser*, whose correspondence columns were frequently filled by letters from militant suffragists.<sup>17</sup> The editor of the *Aberdeen Journal* also used postscripts to put across his opposing political viewpoint. For example, on 30 July 1912, Helen Tollie, Aberdeen WSPU Organiser, had a letter printed on the subject of 'Suffragettes and Equality'. The editor followed this with a postscript stating: 'That women can never be similar to men is obvious, and when Suffragettes, or women generally, try to compete with men on their own ground they are not only unequal, but, as a rule, they become mere imitations of third-rate men – The Editor' (again, the Unionist William Maxwell).<sup>18</sup> It should be noted here that the appearance of Helen Tollie, an organiser of the WSPU in Aberdeen, is a good example of the impossible task facing Elizabeth Crawford in her effort to provide an exhaustive reference document to all suffrage activists in the UK – Helen Tollie is one of many women who appear in the correspondence pages of the Aberdeen newspapers claiming to be members or even organisers of the suffrage organisations who do not appear in Crawford's book.

### Incidence of letters on 'political' issues

The letters this chapter concentrates on are those that might be described in some way as 'political'. If we take this group to include letters on parish councils, school board elections, government legislation, MPs and political parties, as well as the issue of women's suffrage and equality of opportunity, there is a total of 551 letters from the period in question.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Shaffer, Ralph E., 'Letters From the People, *Los Angeles Times* 1881–89', online article at <http://www.csupomona.edu/~reshaffer/> accessed September 2000; I am also grateful to Professor Shaffer for discussing this issue in personal correspondence.

<sup>17</sup> Leneman, Leah, *A Guid Cause – The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991, p. 136.

<sup>18</sup> 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 30 July 1912.

Issue	<i>Aberdeen Journal</i>	<i>Aberdeen Free Press</i>
Parish Councils	5	7
School Boards	10 [3]*	10
Individual MPs/ political parties	11 [6]	12 [4]
Women's Suffrage	79 [5]	216 [6]
Anti-suffrage	9 [2]	5
Other equality of opportunity issues	8	25 [3]
Strikes	1	0
Women's crimes and punishment	7 [3]	2 [1]
Home Rule for Ireland	5	2
Free Trade versus Protection	4	78
The Insurance Bill	12	4
Teachers' rights	14 [14]	2 [2]
Servants' rights	10 [1]	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>175 [34]</b>	<b>376 [16]</b>

\* Figures in square brackets are number of letters written on this subject during the war years (included in overall totals)

**Figure 4.1: Number of women’s letters on political issues printed in the letters columns of Aberdeen daily newspapers, 1900–1918**

This is out of a total of 730 letters to the editor identified as being written by women and published in the *Aberdeen Journal* and 979 letters to the editor of the *Aberdeen Free Press* between 1900 and 1918. In other words, 24% of all women’s letters printed in the *Journal* and 38% of those printed in the *Free Press* were on political issues, although it must be noted that all the letters regarding free trade and protectionist policies came from the prolific pen of Marian Farquharson.

Using the incidence of such letters as a ‘thermometer’ to measure the ‘heat’ generated by individual issues, we find, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the issue that sparked most letters during this period was that of woman suffrage, although there is a definite difference between the coverage it was given in the correspondence column in the *Free Press* and that of the *Journal*. Other issues generating more heat in the columns of the *Free Press* include



the wider area of equal opportunity and that of tariff reform, while issues seemingly of more interest to female correspondents to the *Journal* include teachers' and servants' rights and the Insurance Bill. The following chapter will look at such issues, and the differences and similarities between correspondents' approaches to them, in more detail.

### Local government

It might have been expected that there would be much correspondence on local government matters from women. This was, after all, a sphere in which they could be actively involved rather than merely spectators. In 1868 the Reform Act had given women ratepayers the local vote, meaning that they could vote in elections to school boards, town councils, poor law boards and, from 1888, county councils. Married women who were disenfranchised could still stand for school boards, poor law boards and, from 1894, parish councils. In *People and Society in Scotland 1830–1914*, Fraser and Morris point out that most of the women active in local government were 'single, middle class, wealthy, Liberal and committed to improving women's social and political position' – in other words, precisely the sort of woman who wrote letters to the local Aberdeen newspapers.<sup>19</sup> However, as can be seen from Figure 4.1, representation on school boards and parish councils and related issues did not attract a flood of correspondence from women during the period 1900 to 1918.

What correspondence there was on this subject indicates a concern that responsible women should put themselves forward for election to these bodies, although an overall unwillingness among correspondents to stand themselves. The notion of the 'special nature' of women was used to justify women's entry into the municipal sphere. It was felt that, as wives and mothers, women had special skills associated with household management and the rearing of families. During the Victorian era such special skills had been used as justification for women's involvement in charitable work, which was thought to require the particularly female skills of home-making, piety and self-sacrifice, a British version of 'kinder, küche and kirche'. Such philanthropic activities could now lead to an entrance into local government through election to parish councils and school boards, but still with an emphasis on the 'special nature' of skills that a female candidate could bring to the work. So-called 'social maternalism' argued that women were the natural guardians of moral order and thus their domestic sphere should be extended to include such charitable and governmental work which needed the feminine touch. As Jane Lewis points out in *Women*

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<sup>19</sup> Fraser, W Hamish and Morris, R J, *People and Society in Scotland, Vol II, 1830–1914*. John Donald Publishers Ltd 1990, p. 225.



in *England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change*, women who engaged in charitable work tended to confine themselves to particular activities, principally fund-raising and visiting the homes of the poor and institutions, while it was men who ran the executive committees of charities and occupied the paid positions in workhouses and prisons.<sup>20</sup> As we have seen, on election to school boards or parish councils women were expected to concern themselves with the female teachers and pupils, the teaching of domestic subjects, the visiting of orphanages, and other concerns which were adjudged to fall within women's 'domestic sphere'. As Lewis wryly points out, middle-class women were to leave their own homes in order to tell working-class women to stay in theirs.<sup>21</sup>

On her retirement to Aberdeen, Louisa Innes Lumsden became a member of several school boards. As the ex-principal of a girls' school and the first warden of a women's hall of residence at a Scottish university, it might be expected that her input on questions of educational policy was sought by her fellow members. However, her description of her role in her autobiography shows that even an eminent woman educationist was expected to remain firmly in the woman's sphere:

As Chairman of the Rhynie School Board I was, of course, brought into close relations with the village. With the help of good housewives cheap daily dinners for the school children were served in Rhynie, and I took part in social meetings for women, in which every member joined freely in our discussions.<sup>22</sup>

The argument for the need for a 'woman's touch' in local government occurs in correspondence to the Aberdeen newspapers throughout the period in question. In October 1901, a letter to the *Journal* from Agnes Bruce urged that 'our sex ought to have adequate representation on local boards' and called for a lady 'public-spirited enough to consent to be nominated'. The reasons she put forward for this need were that there was a large proportion of women ratepayers who ought to be represented by one of their own sex, and the nature of the work of parish councillors. 'A great deal of the practical knowledge and shrewdness that come to a woman who has had to make the best of a small sum would be very useful there.'<sup>23</sup>

It was not only the parish councils which were perceived as needing female input. In March 1902 'S. B. C.' wrote to the *Free Press* to urge that at least two women be elected on to the

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<sup>20</sup> Lewis, Jane, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change*. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984, p. 92.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves, Memories of a Long Life*, p. 106.

<sup>23</sup> Agnes Bruce, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 17 October 1901.



Aberdeen School Board at the forthcoming elections, arguing again that while it could not for one moment be expected to find them the equal of men intellectually, women had certain special skills that made their presence beneficial,:

Aberdeen, it must be confessed ... is distinctly behind other cities in the place it gives to women in public work of this kind, for, surely, where there are upwards of 18,000 children being educated and two-thirds of these are girls and 'infants', it cannot be unsuitable for women to have some voice in the conduct of the work. Besides this, in one of our average schools, which employs 20 teachers, 16 of them are females! Here we have the additional reason for the presence of women on our boards .... There are many details about a large school which may well come under the care of women visitors, and which are apt, naturally, not to be recognised by men, unless they happen to be of an unusually domesticated turn of mind; but this is rarely combined with an erudite character, nor is it desirable that it should be.

Women, in asking to be directly represented on the School Board, do not wish for a moment to advance the theory that they are equal to men either in matters of intellectual knowledge or finance, but they do venture to believe that there is honest, useful work connected with these schools where large numbers of children are being educated, which could be advantageously shared in by women.<sup>24</sup>

However, while there was a perception of the need for female representation on public bodies because of women's peculiar virtues, this was not to suggest that any woman could fill this role. As 'S. B. C.' pointed out herself, 'they [women] are the reverse of helpful if unsuitable appointments are made'.<sup>25</sup> The quality and background of prospective female candidates was just as important as that of the male ones, and, with the rise of feminist politics in the persons of the suffragettes, could be suspect. Although two women put themselves forward for election to the School Board in March 1909, a letter from Jean Coutts questioned their motivation:

There is a point which neither lady has yet made clear to the electors. I am tempted to ask if the principle of the representation of women is their only object in coming forward ... I ask these questions because it would be extremely undesirable ... that at present the two ladies mentioned, who are practically unknown in the public life of the city, should even be considered seriously as candidates without these points being clearly understood.<sup>26</sup>

Later correspondence to the newspapers shows that Jean Coutts was an active worker on behalf of women in the city herself. In the early years of the First World War, as the Secretary of the Women's Corps and Bureau, War Emergency Workers' Committee, she

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<sup>24</sup> S. B. C., 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 21 March 1902.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Jean Coutts, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 15 March 1909.



wrote several letters to the newspapers concerning the fate of local women who had married Germans before the outbreak of war and were now destitute and in danger of being parted from their families.<sup>27</sup> Her concern that candidates for election to the School Board should be committed to the cause of education rather than suffrage should therefore not necessarily be seen as an anti-suffrage statement, particularly in view of the fact that the address that she wrote from – 173a Union Street, was given in 1908 as the address of the Organising Secretary of the Women's Freedom League, a militant suffrage organisation.<sup>28</sup> Other correspondents queried the over-qualification of some women candidates for election to this School Board. Surprisingly, 'Schoolmaam' felt that women who had once worked as teachers should not be allowed to stand as candidates to the Board because they might bear grudges against their former employers. While admitting that women members of the Board were essential, she argued that three of the candidates

are former teachers, which, while it implies knowledge, equally implies possible bias. In their professional days they would not have been human had they not had their likes and dislikes, and that very fact suggests their reserving their activities for other fields of usefulness.<sup>29</sup>

She also argued that 'it would be a vast tactical blunder, however, to run too many [women candidates] – two seems ample.' 'Schoolmaam' suggested the names of Mrs Ramsay, Mrs Harrower and Mrs Ogilvie Gordon as possible candidates – all of whom were mentioned in Chapter II as members of the middle-class elite of Aberdeen, involved in the organisation of a variety of good works, and correspondents to the newspapers in connection with such activities.

Usefully, the sample contains three letters from a serving female member of the city parish council. Mrs Susan Murray wrote her first letter in 1903 as a parish councillor elected by the St Nicholas Ward. There were two other letters from her in autumn 1904, objecting to the smearing of her name during the council elections – which she lost:

I see that Mr William Robertson, at the Rubislaw Ward meeting last night, said that 'The three ladies who had sat on the board were useless, and whenever the chairman and his friend Mr Macphail proposed a thing, these ladies were to be found supporting them'... Speaking for myself, this is not the case. I always voted according to my own convictions, which were

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<sup>27</sup> Jean Coutts, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 13 October 1914 and 22 October 1914.

<sup>28</sup> Jessie M Third, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 October 1908.

<sup>29</sup> 'Schoolmaam', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 12 March 1909.



often in opposition to the views of the chairman and his party, tending too often to my discomfort on the board.<sup>30</sup>

She, too, felt that she was peculiarly qualified as a woman to act as councillor through her varied experience amongst the poorer classes for thirty years, and stated in a letter to the *Journal* on 26 October 1904 that she had told the ward committee that she would not consider standing down unless another woman came forward to take her place.<sup>31</sup> However, Mrs Murray may not have been the dedicated councillor she claimed to be. Two of her three letters apologised to the ward electors for her non-attendance at meetings and she even admitted that, 'Living at a distance, and for other reasons, I am in ignorance of what is going on amongst the councillors.'<sup>32</sup> An interesting admission! It can therefore be seen that, a few decades after women first became eligible for election, there was an accepted need for some sort of female representation at local government because of the special skills and personality traits women were supposed to bring to the job. However, women might also be seen as either suspect because of their motivations in standing for public office or weak because of their supposed ingrained submissiveness to men.

### The fight for woman suffrage

Before analysing the correspondence in the Aberdeen newspapers on this topic, it may be useful to give a short summary of the history of the woman suffrage movement during this period in order to place the discussions in the newspapers in context. The summary below has been compiled from a reading of secondary literature on the subject of both the suffragist campaign in Britain and more specifically in Scotland.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Susan Murray, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 26 October 1904.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Murray, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 26 October 1904.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Murray, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 December 1903.

<sup>33</sup> In particular, Leneman, Leah, *A Guid Cause – The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991; Leneman, Leah, *Martyrs in our Midst: Dundee, Perth and the Forcible Feeding of Suffragettes*. Dundee: Abertay Historical Society Publication No 33, 1993; Morley, Ann with Stanley, Liz, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*. London: The Women's Press, 1988; Liddington, Jill and Norris, Jill, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*. London: Virago Ltd, 1978, new revised edition Rivers Oram, 2000; Crawford, Elizabeth, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928*. London: Routledge 2001; Marlow, Joyce, ed., *Votes for Women: The Virago Book of Suffragettes*. London: Virago Press, 2000; Purvis, June, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography*. London: Routledge, 2002; Rover, Constance, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866–1914*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967; Strachey, Ray, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*. London: Virago, 1978, first published 1928; Tickner, Lisa, *The Spectacle of Women*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1987; Marshall, Rosalind K., *Virgins and Viragos, A History of Women in Scotland from 1080 to 1980*. London: Collins, 1983; Lumsden, Louisa Innes, *Yellow Leaves, Memories of a Long Life*. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons Ltd, 1933



The first committees to campaign for the enfranchisement of British women were formed in London in 1866, and by January 1871 the National Society for Women's Suffrage had a committee in Edinburgh, with branches in Aberdeen, Glasgow, St Andrews and Galloway. Aberdeen saw its first public meeting to support the claims of women householders for the vote in April of that year. This was held at the Music Hall with Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson – the first woman to qualify as a doctor in the UK – as one of the main speakers. However, despite enthusiastic petitions and meetings in favour of woman suffrage held all over the country, the Third Reform Act of 1884 enfranchised many more men, but no women. A woman suffrage amendment had been moved, but Gladstone, who was anti-woman suffrage, ensured that it did not pass.

From this period until 1903 around a dozen petitions, resolutions and private members' bills for woman suffrage were presented to the House of Commons, but none were successful. In 1897, twenty London and provincial societies amalgamated into the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) with Millicent Garrett Fawcett, younger sister of Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, as President. The NUWSS was the most important and numerous of what became known as the 'constitutional' or suffragist societies, who believed that petitions, meetings and lobbying members of Parliament would eventually win the day for the cause through the education of the electorate. In 1903, the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage, which had been formed the previous year and liaised closely with the Edinburgh Society, affiliated to the NUWSS. An Aberdeen society of some 60–70 members preferred to go its own way until February 1905 when it too joined the NUWSS.

This period also saw the growing involvement of women in party political organisations. The passage of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act (1883) meant that the volunteer labour of women was now essential for the smooth working of political parties, with new limitations on the amount of money which could be spent in election campaigns and a ban on the payment of election canvassers. The Women's Liberal Federation was thus formed in 1887 and the Primrose League of the Conservative Party created a Ladies' Grand Council in 1884. Thus, as Pat Jalland points out, a legitimate supporting role for women in politics was created and these auxiliary political organisations played an important part in politicising women and training them in political activities and organisation.<sup>34</sup>

In 1903, growing frustrated by the apparent lack of success of the NUWSS's constitutional policies, Emmeline Pankhurst, the widow of a socialist politician from Manchester, formed

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<sup>34</sup> Jalland, Pat, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860–1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 204.



the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) to campaign for women's right to the vote. She was supported in this by her three daughters, Christabel, Sylvia and Adela, and also her son Harry, who tends to be forgotten and who, always a sickly youth, died before the outbreak of the First World War. The first act of militancy occurred in October 1905 when Christabel and Annie Kenney, a working-class factory girl from Oldham, disrupted a Liberal meeting in Manchester by heckling the speakers and were arrested after Christabel spat at a policeman. Faced with the payment of a fine or a short prison sentence, both opted to be imprisoned. The resulting publicity was an educational experience for the leadership of the WSPU and it adopted these new 'tactics' of interrupting meetings and refusing to pay fines, coining the slogans 'Votes for Women' and 'Deeds Not Words'. It should be noted that even the WSPU were campaigning for women to have the vote 'as it is or may be granted to men', and were not necessarily in favour of manhood suffrage. Despite the adherence of women such as Annie Kenney and Mary Leigh, the WSPU, like the NUWSS, was predominately middle class in membership and aspiration. The sixth point of the Constitution of the WSPU stated that it aimed at the:

Education of public opinion by all the usual methods, such as public meetings, demonstrations, debates, distribution of literature, *newspaper correspondence* and deputations to public representatives. [my italics]<sup>35</sup>

At the beginning of 1906, the Liberal party came to power under the leadership of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and the WSPU moved its headquarters to Clement's Inn in London to continue its militant campaign in the capital. The flat at Clement's Inn was the property of Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, wealthy socialists who now joined the leadership of the WSPU and gave much-needed financial support. It was at this time that the WSPU formed its policy of opposition to all government candidates, irrespective of their views on the subject of woman suffrage, a policy which, as shall be seen, was a difficult one to implement in a Liberal heartland such as Aberdeenshire.

The WSPU organised meetings to establish branches all over the country, including Scotland. One of the leadership, Teresa Billington, spoke in Glasgow in the autumn of 1906, where she inspired Helen Fraser, a Glasgow illustrator, to join the WSPU and to travel to Huddersfield to help their campaign at the local by-election. On her return to Scotland the following year, Fraser was asked to become treasurer of the Glasgow WSPU and an organiser in Scotland for the WSPU. Teresa Billington-Greig (she married around this time)

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<sup>35</sup> As quoted in Rover, Constance, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866-1914*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967, p. 76.



was an important figure for the establishment of the WSPU in Scotland, and so when she led a break-away group from the Union in 1907 to form the Women's Freedom League, the new society found strong support in Scotland. Billington-Grieg and Charlotte Despard broke away from the WSPU in October 1907 in protest at the organisation's lack of democracy and frustrated by the new personality cult of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst as the leaders of the WSPU 'army'. While Helen Fraser remained loyal to the Pankhursts, her importance to the Scottish branches and her establishment of a Scottish Women's Social and Political Union with a headquarters in Glasgow soon meant that she was seen as a threat to the leadership in London and she was asked to resign in 1908. A few months later, in January 1909, a similar ousting of a local leader occurred in Aberdeen, when the WSPU organiser Caroline Phillips, a journalist with the *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, was informed by telegram that Sylvia Pankhurst was travelling north to replace her and to strengthen ties with the London leadership.

While Campbell-Bannerman had been open to suffrage arguments, he was forced to resign through ill-health in 1908 and H. H. Asquith became Prime Minister. Asquith was a convinced anti-suffragist leading a party where the majority of members were pro-suffrage – though few were willing to work actively for its achievement in the near future. Frustrated by their non-progress, the suffragettes (a term coined by the *Daily Mail*) increased their militancy. 1909 saw the first hunger strike – a tactic which did not originate with the Pankhursts, but with Marion Wallace Dunlop, another Scottish illustrator, who lived in London and was arrested for defacing the wall of St Stephen's Hall with suffrage slogans. She was sentenced to one month's imprisonment, was refused First Division treatment as a political prisoner, and hence began a hunger strike that lasted 91 hours before she was released. As has already been mentioned above, while Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were not always the initiators of tactics such as stone-throwing, window-breaking or hunger strikes, once they had occurred and had caught the media's attention, they were keen to adopt them as part of the WSPU's policies and sometimes even to claim that they were originally sanctioned by Clement's Inn. Hunger striking was followed quickly by forcible feeding of the suffragette prisoners, although it was not until 1914 that this occurred in Scottish prisons.

In 1910 the Liberal Party was returned to power, but with a greatly reduced majority. A cross-party Conciliation Committee was set up in the House of Commons to promote a Suffrage Bill and militancy was suspended to give the Bill the best chance. The Suffrage Bill actually passed its second reading with a majority of 110 votes, amid much celebration,



and hopes were high that the vote had been won. Sylvia Pankhurst was commissioned by her mother and sister to write a history of the WSPU at this time, in the assumption that the fight was over. However, in 1911 the Bill was 'torpedoed' (to use the words of Lloyd George) by the announcement of a government reform bill that would be capable of amendment in favour of women (in January 1913 the Speaker ruled that actually such amendment was not possible). The disappointment felt by all the suffrage societies, not just the WSPU, at the failure of the Suffrage Bill was huge. The truce was over and the WSPU signalled its determination to continue with ever more violent tactics with a mass window-smashing in London. It was at this time that Frederick and Emmeline Pethwick-Lawrence were ousted from the WSPU by Emmeline and Christabel (by now living in Paris to avoid arrest) because of their criticism of the violence of some of these tactics.

It was also in 1912 that the fledgling Labour Party came out in favour of woman suffrage and allied with the NUWSS, which would now work to support its candidates in elections. Ironically, in the same year the WSPU announced that it would be extending its campaign against Liberal Party candidates to those from the Labour Party since the much-reduced Liberal party now looked to Labour MPs for support in the House of Commons. The WSPU now had a policy of campaigning against all Liberal and Labour candidates and only supporting the Conservative candidate if he was pro-suffrage (a rare policy for a Conservative at this time). If they could not support the Conservative candidate, the WSPU planned to use election campaigns to educate the electorate in the issues surrounding woman suffrage.

Throughout 1913 and 1914 until the outbreak of war the WSPU's militancy grew more and more violent, with arson and bombs being added to their tactics. The theory behind such attacks on property was that it would force insurance companies to put pressure on the government to pass a suffrage bill in order to stop their increased pay-outs. While property was attacked, however, it was WSPU policy to avoid damage to persons apart from themselves. The hunger strikers faced a new peril in the form of the Prisoners' Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Bill (the 'Cat and Mouse' Act) which was introduced in 1913. This allowed prisons to release ill hunger-strikers and then to re-arrest them to recommence their sentence when their health was improved. On Derby Day 1913 the cause received its first martyr with the death of Emily Wilding Davison as she tried to catch the bridle of the King's horse at Epsom. The horse also died.

Such was the state of affairs in August 1914 when war was declared against Germany. Both the NUWSS and WSPU immediately suspended all campaigning for the duration of the war



and determined to show the country how useful women could be in such a crisis. While the leadership of both organisations were willing – in some cases, eager – to support the war effort, not all of the suffragists felt the same and some were brave enough to link feminism with pacifism and to campaign for an immediate cessation of hostilities.<sup>36</sup>

While official campaigning for the vote was suspended during the war, the issue of woman suffrage did not go away. Indeed, the whole issue of universal suffrage became more and more important as the war progressed. If there were to be any sort of election during or immediately after the war, then reform of the current qualifying rules was needed, which required a man to be resident at his home for a certain period of time before voting – thus disqualifying all members of the armed services. In 1916 it was decided that the electoral register would be reformed to include all men serving in the armed forces. A Speaker's Conference was arranged to discuss the inclusion of women and here the actual terms of an acceptable form of woman suffrage were beaten out. In 1917 the House of Commons passed Clause IV of the Representation of the People Bill which entitled women aged 30 and over with household qualifications to vote. Men over the age of 21 were entitled to the vote, but if women over the age of 21 had been given the vote it would have resulted in a female-dominated electorate, something few were ready to accept. In January 1918 the House of Lords passed the Bill and in December 1918, with the war having ended a month before, women voted in a general election for the first time. They were also allowed to stand as candidates – and 16 women, including Christabel Pankhurst and Charlotte Despard, stood for election. Only one woman was elected, Constance Markievicz, but since she was a member of Sinn Fein she did not take her seat in the House of Commons. The first woman to become a Member of Parliament was Nancy Astor, who stepped into her husband's shoes as Conservative MP for Plymouth Sutton on his elevation to the House of Lords in 1919, and who had not hitherto been involved in the campaign for the enfranchisement of women. However, once a member of the House of Commons, she did campaign for the lowering of the age of women electors to 21, which was achieved in 1928. As has been previously mentioned, the first Scottish woman MP was the anti-suffragist campaigner Lady Tullibardine in 1923, who also became the first Conservative woman minister at the Board of Education in 1924.

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<sup>36</sup> For example, see Oldfield, Sybil, 'Mary Sheepshanks edits an Internationalist Suffrage Monthly in Wartime: *Jus Suffragii* 1914–19'. *Women's History Review*, 2003, 12(1), pp. 119–131.



### The issue of woman suffrage in letters to the Aberdeen newspapers

The vast majority of women's letters to the editors of the two newspapers on political topics focus on women's suffrage. There are 79 pro-suffrage letters in the *Journal* during this period and 216 in the *Free Press*, plus another 14 anti-suffrage female correspondents. Women correspondents who were prepared to identify themselves as women were overwhelmingly pro-suffrage. In his study of the opposition to women's suffrage in Britain, Brian Harrison comments on the 'amateurism' of the anti-suffragists' attempts at publicity and states that members of the Anti-Suffrage League were less energetic than the suffragists at voicing their views in the correspondence columns of the press.<sup>37</sup> Those who wrote anti-suffrage letters to the Aberdeen newspapers were mainly male correspondents or chose not to identify their gender. However, it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions from this about women readers' overall opinion of suffrage, since it may well be that anti-suffrage women were more anxious about identifying themselves, to both the general public and to suffragists. Certainly, in 1909, one correspondent stated at the end of her letter criticising those who were campaigning for the suffrage: 'The policeman who passes peaceably along my street wouldn't like to be scratched, and I should not like my window smashed. So ... I sink my personality beneath a safe anonymity, and subscribe myself Madame X.'<sup>38</sup>

The majority of women's letters in the *Journal* and *Free Press* on the subject of the vote originated from Aberdeen and the surrounding countryside. Those letters from further afield are mainly from the headquarters of the various suffrage societies based in London or Edinburgh, and are notable in this context only for the light they throw on the societies' relationship with the provincial press. Most of the letters seem to be standard press releases, explaining the aims of the society or calling for participation at marches and demonstrations, with no reference to the particular town in which the newspaper is published. Some of the letter-writers did attempt to personalise their form letter slightly. A letter from Helen Fraser in October 1908, by that time organiser of the Scottish NUWSS, starts: 'I shall be exceedingly obliged if you will grant me space in your columns to explain the policy and method of working the NUWSS, of which the Aberdeen Association for Women's Suffrage is the local branch.'<sup>39</sup> No other mention of Aberdeen was made throughout her letter and the insertion of the name of the local branch was probably made to make the letter more relevant to the intended readership.

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<sup>37</sup> Harrison, Brian, *Separate Spheres, the Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain*. London: Croom Helm, 1978, p. 152.

<sup>38</sup> 'Madame X', Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 29 September 1909.

<sup>39</sup> Helen Fraser, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 October 1908.



Some letters were, however, sent from the headquarters of the suffrage societies in direct response to articles or other letters in the Aberdeen newspapers. This again highlights the fact that letters to the editor were not fabricated by the staff of the newspaper to create discussion – in fact the majority of letters studied here were responses to previous correspondence. In October 1913, E. C. Philips of the NUWSS in London wrote a letter in response to a male correspondent's epistle on 'Man, Woman and the Vote', while Muriel Scott, writing from the Edinburgh branch of the WSPU, responded immediately to a letter from Mr Cowan, a local MP, attacking a speech she had made earlier in the summer of 1911.<sup>40</sup> Muriel Scott and her sister Arabella were originally members of the Women's Freedom League, but became more sympathetic to the stronger militancy of the WSPU and it is interesting that Muriel signed her 1911 letter as a member of the WSPU. Both sisters became involved in acts of militancy in England from 1909 and experienced periods of imprisonment there and in Scotland. Arabella Scott was one of the hunger-striking suffragettes to be forcibly fed in Perth prison in 1914, marking the end of the Scottish authorities' avoidance of such a response. Muriel led a picket outside the prison gates while her sister was imprisoned there, calling out her support through a megaphone.<sup>41</sup>

Letters such as these suggest that either the local Aberdeen branches were acting as cuttings agencies for their headquarters or the *Journal* and *Free Press* were deemed important enough newspapers for the headquarters and individual members to subscribe in order to keep informed about North of Scotland opinion. Leah Leneman also found evidence of London headquarters staff reading Scottish newspapers: referring to a letter from Flora Drummond submitted to *Forward* in response to its editorial on the woman suffrage movement, she says 'It is of interest that a Glasgow socialist journal was read at WSPU headquarters in London and was considered important enough to warrant a long letter in reply', although it should be noted that Drummond was actually Scottish, from the Isle of Arran.<sup>42</sup> Further evidence that someone at WSPU headquarters was in receipt of editions of Aberdeenshire newspapers comes in a private letter to Agnes Ramsay of the Aberdeen branch of the WSPU from Christabel Pankhurst. This forms part of the Watt Collection, a small collection of correspondence regarding WSPU activities in Aberdeenshire held at the Aberdeen Art Gallery. In a letter dated 11 January 1908 Christabel says:

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<sup>40</sup> E. C. Philips, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 October 1913, and Muriel F. Scott, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 September 1911.

<sup>41</sup> See Leneman, Leah, *Martyrs in Our Midst: Dundee, Perth and the Forcible Feeding of Suffragettes*

<sup>42</sup> Leneman, Leah, *A Guid Cause – The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*, p. 47.



After telegraphing to you this morning I received a marked copy of the *Aberdeen Free Press*. In addition to the very excellent leading article I see a reference to Mr Asquith's candidature and a statement to the effect that the women students are likely to vote against him, and I do hope that this is the case because it would be one more way of bringing pressure to bear upon him.<sup>43</sup>

The candidature in question was Asquith's decision to stand for election to the Rectorship of the University of Aberdeen against the Unionist Sir Edward Carson, and since this was one election in which women did have a vote it became the focus of attention for the national suffrage associations during 1908, and showed once again the difficult choices facing Liberal women who also wanted the vote. The University Woman Suffrage Association was pledged to campaign against the election of Asquith, while the Liberal women students passed a vote of confidence in Asquith in June 1908. In January 1908 a 'Member of the AWLA' wrote to the *Free Press* to suggest that

Even those women students who do not consider woman suffrage a 'minor issue' might be justified in voting for Mr Asquith if his rejection by the students would have imperilled the Liberal programme. As it can not do so, womanly dignity might well suggest, at the least abstention from helping to place the hon. gentleman in the desired position.<sup>44</sup>

Whether women students voted against Asquith or abstained, he was elected to the Rectorship of the University, which he held until 1911. In fact, Scotland, and Aberdeenshire in particular, was Liberal country, with many prominent members of the government, including Asquith, holding Scottish seats. Like the women students, many members of the older Women's Suffrage Society (affiliated to the NUWSS) were also Liberal supporters, which meant divided loyalties, particularly after the advent of the WSPU with its anti-government tactics. As Isabella Fyvie Mayo of the WSPU put it in a letter to the *Journal* in February 1907:

I may remark that the older 'Aberdeen Women's Suffrage Society' has seemed to many, even of its own members – of whom I have never been one – to be singularly effete in its operations. The Society can easily defend itself from this charge by giving a detailed record with names and dates – of any active protest or propaganda in which it has engaged, say, during the last seven years. Its executive, too, is so entangled with that of the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association as to limit its movement, practically, to women of one shade of political opinion.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 31, 11 January 1908.

<sup>44</sup> 'Member of the AWLA', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 January 1908.

<sup>45</sup> Isabella Fyvie Mayo, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 11 February 1907.



Isabella Fyvie Mayo, the writer, had been the first woman to be elected to a public board in Aberdeen. The above letter was written during the controversies of the South Aberdeen by-election of 1907, which brought with it Aberdeen's first taste of WSPU 'tactics'. Leaders of the WSPU, including Mrs Pankhurst, Helen Fraser and Teresa Billington-Greig, arrived in the city to set up a branch of the WSPU and held a series of meetings, some of which were chaired by Isabella Fyvie Mayo. One of the meetings was marred by a platform disagreement about the precise nature of the WSPU demands (Mrs Pankhurst disagreeing with – and over-ruling – Mrs Mayo). In her analysis of suffrage tactics during this by-election campaign, which makes wide use of newspaper accounts and correspondence, Lindy Moore suggests that Isabella Fyvie Mayo's attack on the Aberdeen Women's Suffrage Society was an attempt to defend her support for the WSPU and to turn the press spotlight away from any internal disputes by attacking the record of the existing women's suffrage society.<sup>46</sup> She may also have been hoping to encourage recruits for the newly-formed Aberdeen WSPU branch from the older suffrage society or the Liberal Association; large numbers of members of both associations were reported by the *Journal* to have attended WSPU meetings during the by-election campaign. Interestingly, another of the letters in the Watt Collection by Christabel Pankhurst to the honorary secretary of the WSPU Aberdeen branch, Caroline Phillips, makes it clear that Mrs Fyvie Mayo was not held in particularly high esteem by the WSPU leadership! On 18 November 1907 Christabel wrote in reference to her:

Mrs Mayo not long ago said she would leave the Union – it is a great pity she did not keep her word. She seems to be giving you a great deal of trouble.... I hope you will retain secretaryship. I think you will get on all right in a very short while.<sup>47</sup>

As Leneman and Stanley and Morley have pointed out, at a local level, members of the NUWSS, WSPU and Women's Freedom League (WFL) plus the Liberal Party did co-operate, and might even overlap, particularly in the early years of the WSPU's campaign. For example, in October 1908, Jessie Third, Demonstration Secretary of the Women's Freedom League, wrote to the *Journal* to apologise in print to the local branch of the NUWSS for the fact that a WFL meeting the following day would clash with an NUWSS meeting. She wished to explain that this clash was not caused by any spirit of antagonism

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<sup>46</sup> For a much fuller account of the dispute and the whole suffrage campaign during the by-election, see Moore, Lindy, 'The Woman's Suffrage Campaign in the 1907 Aberdeen by-election'. *Northern Scotland*, 5, No 2, 1983 pp. 155–178.

<sup>47</sup> Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 18, 18 November 1907.



but was the result of a long-standing engagement for a visit from one of the leaders of the WFL, Charlotte Despard.<sup>48</sup>

It is not surprising to find that suffrage organisations such as the WFL, WSPU and NUWSS shared memberships, or that women might attend meetings and demonstrations organised by more than one society since all had the same goal – the achievement of woman suffrage – and both the WFL and the WSPU at least were militant societies. In a small city such as Aberdeen with only a minority of women brave enough, interested enough or with sufficient leisure time to attend suffrage meetings, women must frequently have seen the same faces on and off the platform at different events, and friendships between members of different societies, sharing many of the same values, must have been common. In addition, the example of women such as the Scott sisters and Helen Fraser shows us that women might change their allegiances to different societies over the years, usually as a result of the WSPU's militancy – the Scott sisters moving from the WFL to become more involved in militant tactics and Helen Fraser moving the other way to join the NUWSS. The Watt Collection, mentioned above, is a small collection of correspondence regarding WSPU activities in Aberdeen made by Caroline A. I. Phillips, a woman journalist at the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and the honorary secretary of the WSPU in Aberdeen 1907–08. Most of the collection is made up of letters written by or addressed to Phillips. Her correspondents in the letters include members of the WSPU such as Lady Ramsay, Christabel Pankhurst and Emmeline Pankhurst, but she also corresponded with Helen Fraser, once the organiser for Scotland of the WSPU who had been forced to resign in 1908. Fraser was immediately snatched up by the NUWSS who asked her to organise their own activities in Scotland, but, as the affectionate tone of her letter to Caroline Phillips shows, she did not allow political differences to separate her from her former comrades in the WSPU.

My dear

I have thought of you often lately but have been away 'caravanning' for the cause – and it seems utterly impossible to get letters written when one is leading that simple but strenuous life. The National Union of WSS asked me if I would go and help so I went and we had splendid meetings.... That is Mrs Fawcett's Society and I have promised to work for them for some time later on – I am glad to get working for Suffrage, of course – and am happy doing so. I had a very worrying time before I resigned and felt very tired and ill when I did. I still could do with more rest but feel much better and as if I saw things clearer. It doesn't seem true, even yet, that I am no longer connected with you all – I feel sure some how we shall still work together for Suffrage....

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<sup>48</sup> Jessie W. M. Third, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 16 October 1908.



Una Dugdale has been asking me if I can come up for September 2<sup>nd</sup> (she thinks of having a meeting) and I have written and said 'Yes'. If I come I shall see you and have a talk I hope. Una tells me she thinks of having a stall too and is going to ask Lady Ramsay to preside.

My love to you and kindest regards to Mr and Mrs Webster.

Helen Fraser<sup>49</sup>

The Una Dugdale referred to in the last paragraph of the letter was also a member of the WSPU, which she had joined when in London from Aberdeen for 'the season' in 1907. A young member of the upper classes, whose family kept a town house in London as well as Gordon Lodge in Aboyne, Una Dugdale accompanied Mrs Pankhurst on several tours of Scotland. In January 1912 her marriage to Victor Duval, the founder of the Men's Political Union for Women's Enfranchisement, caused scandal when the bride tried to insist on the removal of 'obey' from the marriage service.<sup>50</sup> Again, the fact that such a radical member of the WSPU was still in correspondence with the outcast Helen Fraser and was inviting her to a meeting shows the inter-connectedness of suffrage activists in Scotland at this time. Incidentally, the caravan referred to in the first paragraph of Fraser's letter was probably the one owned by Louisa Innes Lumsden, which she loaned to various NUWSS members for campaigning purposes during the summer months.

Although the editor of the *Journal*, Robert Anderson, did not approve of Caroline Phillips' involvement in women's politics, he does appear to have allowed her to use the *Journal*'s offices as her correspondence address for such activities, despite complaints. In January 1908 she received a letter from the newspaper's management warning her that she was identifying herself too closely with the woman suffrage movement and thus imperilling her position at the *Journal*.<sup>51</sup> Despite this warning, Phillips continued her association with the WSPU and since she continued to use the *Journal* address and stationery for at least another year it does not seem to have forced her to change her behaviour very much.

One reason that the Watt Collection is so interesting is because of the light it throws on the relations between local political societies in Aberdeenshire and also on their attitude towards the local newspapers. Such information would not necessarily have been picked up by solely reading the correspondence in the Aberdeen newspapers and is another salutary reminder that the public announcements a woman or group of women may choose to make to the

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<sup>49</sup> The Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 44, 20 August 1908.

<sup>50</sup> For more on Una Dugdale and Victor Duval, see Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement* pp. 177 and 181.

<sup>51</sup> The Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 34, 18 January 1908.



world, in the form of the newspaper-reading public, may not always give the full story. The Watt Collection consists of 56 letters plus a few other documents dating mainly from the period 1907 to 1909, when Phillips ceased to be involved in the local suffrage movement. The letters between Phillips and the WSPU leadership in London and Phillips and the leaders of the local Women's Liberal Association show that during the period of her secretaryship she was attempting to negotiate between the official policies of both parties in order to achieve a compromise between the militant acts urged by Clement's Inn and her own desire for a more conciliatory position. However, no suggestion of such behind-the-scenes manoeuvring is given in the letters written to the Aberdeen newspapers by Phillips in her role as honorary secretary of the local WSPU branch. Thus her private correspondence shows a completely different side to the story, which would not be visible to a reader of only the letters in the newspapers.

To an outside observer, the relationship between the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association (WLA) and the local branch of the WSPU did not look amicable. With a Liberal government in power, Liberal women were being urged by the WSPU basically to go on strike – to refuse to raise funds or work for Liberal candidates and MPs in any way until the government had agreed to support a Woman Suffrage Bill. As already been stated, many of the leaders of the Aberdeen WLA, such as Mrs Black the President and Mrs Allan the honorary secretary, were also involved in the campaign for the vote through membership of the constitutional NUWSS. However, while most Liberal women were in favour of some form of woman suffrage, and the Association petitioned the party for some action on this front, the official line was that it was not worth bringing down the government for and that the Liberal government was far more beneficial for women than any Conservative government could be.

One of Caroline Phillips' first letters to the press on the subject of the Liberal women and their timidity in dealing with Mr Asquith was printed in the *Journal* in November 1907. What is particularly interesting is that the Watt Collection contains a draft of this letter, offering a unique opportunity to check a printed version of a letter with an earlier draft and to see how a professional writer approached the composition of a letter to the press. Evidently, Phillips at least wrote a draft of letters she sent to the newspapers. However, we must not assume that other women correspondents did the same since Phillips was one of the only professional writers whose letters appeared in the correspondence columns (Isabella Fyvie Mayo being another). On this occasion, Phillips appears to have almost



entirely re-written her original letter. The draft letter with its crossings-out and underlinings, is as follows:

I am very glad to learn from the columns of your paper that the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association are anxious to make plain to Mr Asquith that they have 'intense interest' in the subject of Women's Enfranchisement. We are further informed that they feel that any effort to get an audience with Mr Asquith will be fruitless which is tantamount to an admission that nothing short of something in the nature of physical force will do job they are to content themselves. With the time honoured process [repeated ad nauseum (crossed out)] of forwarding a communication which we are assured will be more emphatic than usual (one would fain hope they have now reached the swearing stage on their journey). Long experience might have taught them that communication of the sort have outlived their usefulness and only go to swell the scrap heap of washed effusions and blighted hopes. It seems hard to believe that a body of intelligent and experienced politicians like the WL Assn are not deliberately shutting their eyes to the facts of historical experience which all goes to prove that a combination of moral and physical force is required to bring about political reform of this kind. The one without the other in dealing with ---- is ---- forlorn hope.

[To expect an earnest open minded woman to listen to a politician like Asquith preaching about democracy and liberty, which she is denied without making a relevant interjection. It is surely something to be ashamed of that a relevant interjection of disapproval from a woman should be (crossed out)]

A few the are – be going to realise the cowardice and uselessness of ejecting and roughly handling a woman for making a relevant interruption at a minister's meeting; especially when the subject of his discourse is about liberty and democracy, both of which blessings are denied. When a proper sense of perspective should make men and women both see that the so called disorderly occurrences are taken to much from the Mrs Grundy point of view and the fact is persistently ignored [by the vast majority of people (crossed out)] that these are the visible manifestations of a great revolutionary tone in the political relations of both sexes. Admonition and advice from our good liberal friends we have had enough and to spare – we ask their assistance which is infinitely more valuable to us. We ask them no more what they have to say but what they mean to do to help us.

They do not fear for their party, long ere we women all acting on strike principles could seriously damage it the Liberal Party would cave in [on the subject (crossed out)] to our demands.<sup>52</sup>

Interestingly, the letter that was published in the *Journal* on 22 November 1907 entitled 'Women Liberals and the Women's Suffrage Movement' is almost completely rewritten and contains little of the content of the above draft apart from a reference to those whose 'prejudices are stronger than their sympathies in this cause' holding up their hands 'a la Mrs Grundy'.<sup>53</sup> Why Caroline Phillips rewrote her letter so completely is not clear since the printed version is just as damning of the Liberal women as the earlier draft. On the

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<sup>52</sup> The Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No.18, November 1907.



following day Phillips received a letter from Lady Ramsay praising her letter in the *Journal* as 'Capital! The very thing.'

Thus, on the surface, the relationship between Phillips and the WLA appears to have been hostile. However, on 28 November 1908, a few days after the appearance of this letter in the press, Caroline Phillips wrote to Mrs Allan, honorary secretary of the Aberdeen WLA, concerning the proposed visit to Aberdeen that December of the-then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Herbert Asquith. It was planned to hold a Liberal party meeting at the Music Hall, and there were fears that the suffragettes, as they had elsewhere in the country, would disrupt the meeting. For this reason, there were rumours that all women would be banned from the Music Hall, which obviously would not suit the Liberal women any more than the suffragettes. Caroline Phillips wrote to Mrs Allan suggesting that 'Mr Asquith has been dealt with so very effectively by the WSPU in various centres of political activity that our Aberdeen WSPU are in the mood to leave him severely alone'.<sup>54</sup> She admitted that 'I am not speaking with complete authority, but I think that we as a Union will readily agree to keep away altogether, if other women here are to be thus punished on our account.'<sup>55</sup> She most definitely was *not* speaking with complete authority, and a few days later had to defend her actions to the leadership of the WSPU in London.

We agree with the efficacy of Mrs Pankhurst's tactics and we should acting completely under her instructions likely be asked to go to Mr Asquith's meeting and make it impossible for him to speak – a perfectly justifiable proceeding. On the other hand one prefers to regard him, on this occasion, as Mr Murray's guest and we believe that any strong action on our part would be a wanton insult to Mr Murray [local Liberal MP] and might make it difficult for him to help us so openly in the future. We are prepared to take extreme measures like the others but we must, as the independent Aberdeen WSPU be the judges as to when and where that action is politic. We gave Mr Murray – for his whole hearted support and because we believe him to be our sincere friend and helper a unique prestige of being able to say that his influence alone secured for Asquith an uninterrupted hearing so far as we are concerned and that had he come under other auspices he would have had to take his chance, here as elsewhere. ...In London at a distance – local matters cannot be appreciated but they are often the things that matter a great deal.<sup>56</sup>

Rebellion indeed! A letter arrived at the local WSPU branch on 11 December announcing that Mrs Pankhurst would be arriving in the city on 12 December to lead the raid on Asquith's meeting. There apparently was still some agreement that Asquith would be given

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<sup>53</sup> Caroline A. I. Phillips, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 22 November 1907.

<sup>54</sup> The Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 21, 28 November 1907.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> The Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 22, 6 December 1907.



an uninterrupted hearing if Mrs Black, the President of the local WLA, was allowed to put one question to him regarding woman suffrage. In the event, she had difficulty posing her question and was told that she was out of order.<sup>57</sup> However, the main protagonist in disrupting the meeting was an elderly local minister, Alexander Webster – the gentleman to whom Helen Fraser had earlier sent her kind regards via Phillips. An infuriated correspondent, describing herself as a Woman Liberal, wrote to the *Journal* the next day to complain:

I was deeply grieved to see the unseemly struggle in the orchestra, particularly as the individual concerned was an old man, and, had I been near, I should at once have gone to his assistance. I must confess, however, that, while standing on Union Street after the meeting, this kindly feeling received rather a rude shock, when who should pass, looking quite trim, alert and happy, but our friend Mr Webster, hand in glove with the Suffragists. Again, when passing Broad Street, a little later, there was he laying off with great gusto to his female admirers. 'This lets the cat out of the bag', thought I derisively ... It was perfectly obvious to any observant eye that the bulk of the audience really enjoyed the Suffragist affair – and assuredly the ladies (?) themselves did. Their conduct, I am sorry to say, was by no means lady-like; but these tactics seem to pay, thanks to the usual blundering stupidity of the sterner sex. ... The Press, I need hardly say, have greatly magnified the absurd affair. Men again!<sup>58</sup>

This incident unleashed a storm of letters to the editor on the subject to both Aberdeen newspapers. A letter from Christabel Pankhurst to Caroline Phillips in December 1907 stated that she was 'very glad to hear that the correspondence still goes on'<sup>59</sup>. Again, in her public role as honorary secretary of the WSPU branch, Caroline Phillips staunchly defended the actions of the militants, and gave no hint in her letters to the *Journal* and *Free Press* of any disagreements behind the scenes – indeed she stated that the whole event had been stage managed by herself and Mrs Pankhurst.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the events of December, the Watt Collection reveals that Caroline Phillips continued her attempts to co-opt some of the members of the Aberdeen WLA into the WSPU. In January 1908 a letter from Mrs Black, while noting that she could do nothing *officially*, cordially invited Phillips to come to speak to some of the 'more ardent reformers on our committee' at a private meeting in her own home.<sup>61</sup> This was followed by an invitation, which was accepted, for Mrs Black and Mrs Allan to sit on the platform at a

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<sup>57</sup> For more on this incident, see Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, pp. 54–55.

<sup>58</sup> 'Self-respect', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 23 December 1907.

<sup>59</sup> The Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 27, 28 December 1907.

<sup>60</sup> Caroline A. I. Phillips, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 24 December 1907 and *Aberdeen Daily Journal* 24 December 1907.



forthcoming suffrage meeting where Christabel Pankhurst was to speak. The meeting took place on 22 January and Mrs Black and Mrs Allan were joined on the platform by Mrs Milne, the Acting Vice-President for Scotland of British Women's Temperance Association, Lady Ramsay and Mrs James Murray, wife of the Liberal MP. Heated debate about their presence on the same platform as Christabel broke out in the *Free Press* letters column the following day. 'A Reasonable Suffragist, Aberdeen' agreed with the principle of giving women the vote but deplored the tactics of the WSPU and was astonished at the presence of such eminent women on the platform.<sup>62</sup> 'A Woman Liberal' pointed out that 'The suffragists have most successfully materialised the idea of the unsuitability of women in the field of active politics',<sup>63</sup> prompting 'Another Liberal Woman and a Reasonable Suffragist' the following day to regret that she had made a 'sorry joke' of herself.<sup>64</sup> 'A Woman Liberal' immediately demanded to know whether the ladies on the platform had been acting for themselves or for their association, ending her letter with 'Feminine inconsistency and elementary lack of logic is, perhaps, charming in a drawing room, but applied to politics it certainly does not add "sweetness and light" to public affairs'.<sup>65</sup> This last sally prompted a response from Mrs Allan herself. Claiming to presume that 'A Woman Liberal' was really a man in disguise, she defended the decision of herself and Mrs Black to attend the meeting while pointing out that their record of active support of the Liberal party during elections was second to none. However, 'This is a woman's question, and we must be loyal to our womanhood'. She ended by threatening the resignation of both Mrs Black and herself should their actions not have the support of the committee of the Aberdeen WLA.<sup>66</sup>

Despite her strong words in the *Free Press*, Mrs Allan was obviously privately very annoyed at the way the meeting had been run. This is evident from the letter she sent to Caroline Phillips on the subject on 5 February:

I have no hesitation in saying I do not think the WSPU 'played the game' in connection with 'The Suffrage Demonstration'.... I object strongly to Miss Pankhurst taking up the whole hour in a defence of tactics pursued, we went to hear an educative address on Suffrage not to hear the WSPU extolled all the time. It was not courteous. We ought to have had Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, she would convert where Miss Pankhurst only irritates.

I have not taken the stand I have in order to join the WSPU but I have no objection to my reasons being known.

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<sup>61</sup> The Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 31, 11 January 1908.

<sup>62</sup> 'A Reasonable Suffragist', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 25 January 1908.

<sup>63</sup> 'A Woman Liberal, Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 25 January 1908.

<sup>64</sup> 'Another Woman Liberal and a Reasonable Suffragist', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 27 January 1908.

<sup>65</sup> 'A Woman Liberal', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 28 January 1908.

<sup>66</sup> Annie F. Allan, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 29 January 1908.



I have done it firstly because I will not allow any Committee under the sun to curtail my personal liberty, or call me to account for any action I may see fit to take as a private individual.

Secondly – because I put principle before party and I realise that the Liberal women have to show this Liberal government that they are in dead earnest over this great question.<sup>67</sup>

Caroline Phillips responded at once pointing out that Mrs Allan and Mrs Black had heard Christabel speak before and so were perhaps being slightly naïve to expect her to restrict herself to inoffensive generalities. Again, the letters in the Watt Collection help us to construct a more rounded picture of the affair than one seen purely through the letters published in the newspapers. While Mrs Allan was prepared to defend their actions in public, it is clear that in private both she and Mrs Black considered themselves to have been used by the WSPU to make a political point. A short while later, both ladies resigned – probably under force – from the committee of the Aberdeen WLA. A letter to the *Free Press* from ‘Woman Liberal, Aberdeen’ in December 1908 bemoaned the fact that in the six months since their resignation there had not been a single business meeting of the Association and that little active campaigning on *any* issues had occurred. Caroline Phillips did not last as honorary secretary of the WSPU branch for much longer either. In early 1909, as already mentioned, she was ousted from this position by the arrival of Sylvia Pankhurst in Aberdeen. Ties between the London leadership and the Aberdeen branch were reinforced and the independence of action which Caroline Phillips had used to negotiate with the Liberal ladies was removed. From then on, the Aberdeen branch was organised by a succession of activists sent by headquarters and no home-grown leader was allowed the same independence again. Such an ousting of a strong local leader by the Pankhursts had already occurred in their dealings with Helen Fraser, and was to happen again in 1914 when Janie Allan, chief organiser and financier of the WSPU in Glasgow, was removed by the Pankhursts after an attempt at bargaining with the Glasgow Lord Provost. She had promised no militancy during a royal visit to the area if the suffragette prisoners at Perth were not forcibly fed. She was removed and both the militancy and the force-feeding went ahead.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The Watt Collection, Aberdeen Art Gallery, No. 37, 5 February 1908.

<sup>68</sup> King, Elspeth, ‘The Scottish Women’s Suffrage Movement’ in Breitenbach, Esther and Gordon, Eleanor, eds, *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800–1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990, pp. 121–150.



The incidence of woman suffrage letters

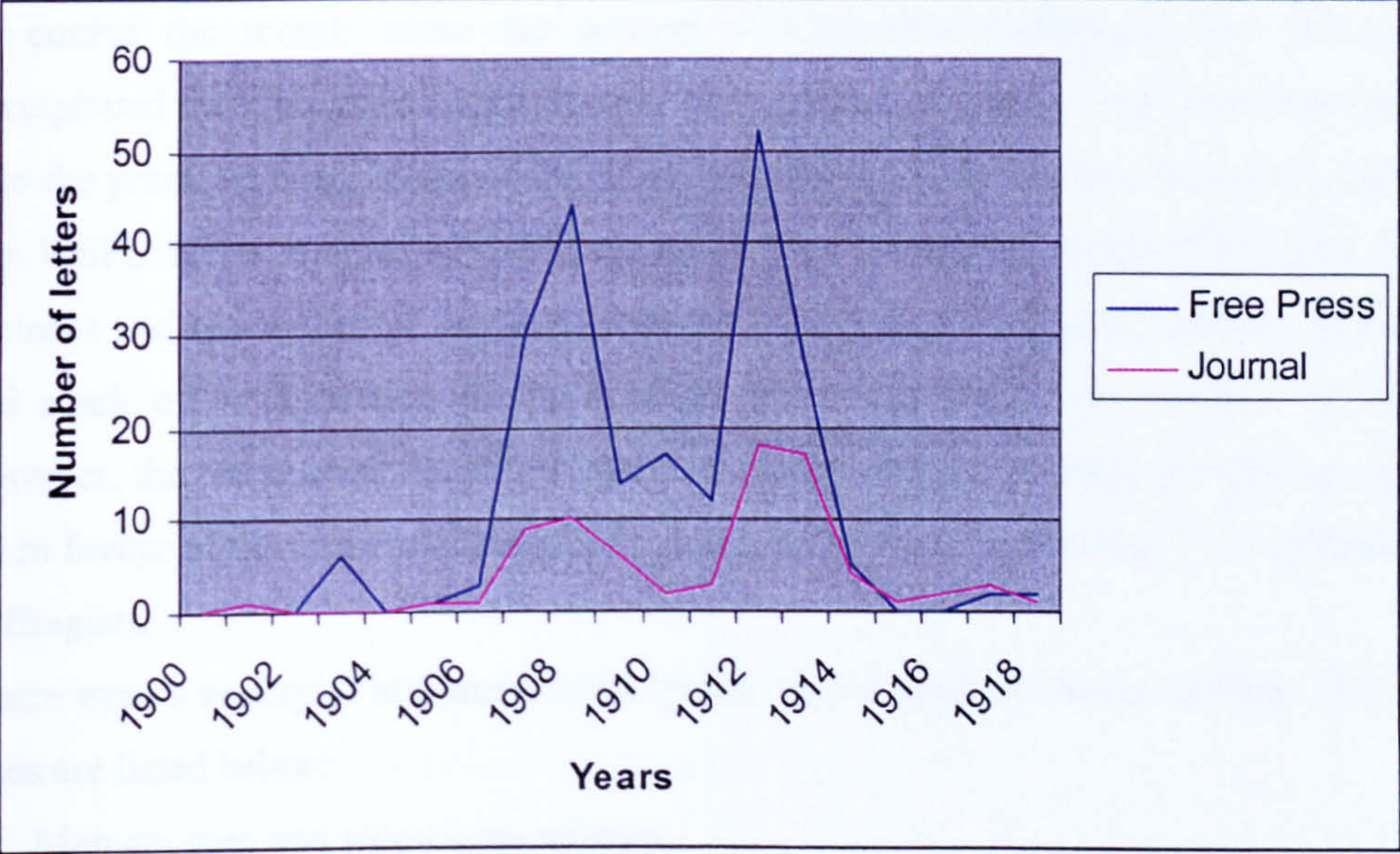


Figure 4.2: The incidence of letters from women correspondents on the subject of woman suffrage in Aberdeen daily newspapers 1900–18

Figure 4.2 shows the incidence of the subject of woman suffrage in women’s letters to the editors of the *Journal* and the *Free Press* between 1900 and 1918. What is very striking about the graph is how similar the peaks and troughs of interest in the subject are in both newspapers. This is not, as may at first be thought, because women were submitting the same letter to both newspapers. In fact, there are only 13 letters from women on woman suffrage that appear in both newspapers during this period. Instead, there are two definite peaks of interest in the subject – in 1907–08 and 1912–13. Apart from a small flurry of letters in the *Free Press* in 1903, the years before 1907 were quiet ones, with only one or two letters a year on the subject in either newspaper. This is also true of the war years, when both constitutional and militant suffragists were involved in war work, although there were a few letters, both for and against woman suffrage, published at the time of the Speaker’s Conference, which was considering the implementation of the enfranchisement of women, and two letters in the *Free Press* at the end of 1918 discussing Christabel Pankhurst’s candidature in the Parliamentary elections which closely followed the end of the War.

While both newspapers printed in August 1901 a letter from the Honourable Mrs Atholl Forbes of Brux protesting at having been named as a supporter of the enfranchisement of



women at a local meeting,<sup>69</sup> no other letters on the subject appear in the *Journal* until 1905. The *Free Press*, however, printed six letters during 1903 on the subject. October 1903 was of course the month when the actions of Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney precipitated the discussion of the demand for woman suffrage and the newly formed WSPU into the press. Although none of the letters printed in the *Free Press* from this year mention the WSPU or its actions, it is interesting to note that three of the letters date from late October and November of the year. It seems likely therefore that the actions of the WSPU did spark off a discussion of the suffrage issue throughout the country. At this stage, however, the 'tactics' of the WSPU were not under debate. Instead, the letters, which were all in favour of the enfranchisement of women, focused on countering the arguments of anti-suffragists.

There were a variety of arguments used by the 'anti's' against woman suffrage, but the main ones are listed below:

1. Men are men and women are women.
2. Voting was unfeminine and it would thus be unnatural for women to be involved.
3. Women lacked the education and political capacity.
4. Women already had indirect influence through their husband and father.
5. Polling booths were not places for women because of the boisterousness of polling days.
6. Men had the vote because they could fight to defend the Empire.
7. There would be a majority of women if all men and women were given the vote.
8. A mandate was needed from the electorate/women before the vote was given to women.
9. Women did not want the vote.
10. Women voting might lead to dissension in the family.
11. The female vote would introduce a hysterical element into politics.
12. The dependent nature of women.
13. Any form of woman suffrage would be the thin end of the wedge to full adult suffrage and women MPs.<sup>70</sup>

Few letters printed on the subject ever attempted to counter all these arguments at once. Instead, correspondents tended to focus on one or two issues, as a closer examination of the six letters from 1903 shows. For example, in February 1903, 'A Would-be Elector' made

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<sup>69</sup> Alice Forbes, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press* and *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 24 August 1901.

<sup>70</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these arguments, see Rover, Constance, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866-1914*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967.



the point that women *did* want the vote and used the Liberal party's old argument of 'no taxation without representation' to justify their position – an argument that became more popular after 1906 with a Liberal government actually in power. However, she was quick to point out that women wished for the vote 'from no conceited idea of superior moral aim or vision to man'.<sup>71</sup> On 7 October 'Dum Spiro Spero' pointed out that nearly one million women were *not* represented by either a father or a husband – having neither one nor the other and argued that women should stop their voluntary work for political parties until they were given the vote. 'A Mere Woman' felt compelled to write to the *Press* on 31 October, not because of the actions of the Pankhursts but in response to a letter discussing woman's position in society by Alexander Burnett of Kemnay House. Mr Burnett, Marian Farquharson's protagonist mentioned earlier and a frequent correspondent to the newspapers on religious subjects, had used Biblical quotations to prove man's innate superiority to woman and again suggested that women had indirect influence through their male relatives. After some discussion of alternative passages from the Bible, and a tendency to prefer Christ over St Paul, 'A Mere Woman' retorted: 'As to politics, a woman may talk herself hoarse in the endeavour to influence male voters; she may write novels till she exhausts herself; but neither of these modes of speech will be so effectual as her silent vote at the poll.'<sup>72</sup> The last two letters, from November 1903, focused on the examples of New Zealand and Australia, where some form of woman suffrage had already been granted, with very little disturbance to the status quo. 'Fairplay' argued:

The question is not – Will women make a good or a bad use of the franchise? If that were the guiding principle in the matter, many men would have to be disenfranchised. The question is – Is it their right? And so long as taxation and representation go together the question must be answered in the affirmative.<sup>73</sup>

As well as their use of a variety of arguments, what should be noted about these letters is that all of them used a nom de plume. Further study of all the letters discussing the issue of woman suffrage from 1900 to 1918 show a definite unwillingness of women to identify themselves in the press – and particularly the *Free Press* – on this subject. 103 out of the 216 letters in the *Free Press* were signed with a nom de plume, and 25 out of 79 in the *Journal*. It should also be noted that the use of nom de plumes *increased* through the period, with the highest incidence in the *Free Press* during 1912 and 1913. Most of the women who were happy to identify themselves as suffragists in the press were either members of the

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<sup>71</sup> A Would-Be Elector, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 3 February 1903.

<sup>72</sup> A Mere Woman, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 31 October 1903.



committees of the various suffrage societies, such as Louisa Innes Lumsden and Alice Crompton of the local NUWSS branch or Una Dugdale and Liliias Mitchell of the WSPU, or wrote from outside Aberdeen. Aberdonian women who were interested in the suffrage movement, in particular those from the more militant end, were happier writing in support of the WSPU's actions while concealing their own identity. Thus we have the use of 'Member WSPU, Aberdeen' 44 times between 1907 and 1918 in the *Free Press*.

The first peak of interest in woman suffrage occurred in 1907–08. The *Free Press* printed 30 letters from women on the subject in 1907 and 44 in 1908, in comparison to three in 1906. The *Journal* printed nine letters in 1907 and ten in 1908, in comparison to one letter in 1906. There are four events that these letters focus on, and all are events that occurred in Aberdeen or the surrounding countryside. Firstly, Mrs Pankhurst and the WSPU arrived in town in February 1907 with the aim of holding meetings and forming a branch of the Union. Secondly, in December 1907 Asquith visited Aberdeen and held the infamous meeting in the Music Hall, the WSPU's disruption of which has already been discussed above. This event was swiftly followed by the meeting in January 1908 to hear Christabel Pankhurst speak that resulted in the resignation of Mrs Black and Mrs Allan from the Women's Liberal Association. Fourthly, in April 1908 the Kincardineshire by-election brought all the main suffrage organisations to town. It can thus be seen that all the events which precipitated correspondence in the Aberdeen newspapers in 1907–08 were local events, but that such events usually involved national figures arriving in the area. The activities of the suffragists or suffragettes outside Aberdeen did not really impinge on the consciousness of the correspondents to the newspapers until they arrived in Aberdeen, and then awareness of their previous activities – and fears or hopes that they would be repeated in Aberdeen – filtered through to the correspondence pages of the newspapers.

The arrival of the WSPU and Mrs Pankhurst in Aberdeen in 1907 prompted some change in the arguments rehearsed in women's letters to the press. Most of the letters printed were in favour of some form of woman suffrage – few, including the leadership of the WSPU, supported manhood suffrage – but now the argument was one of tactics, and in particular the tactics of the WSPU. At this stage, WSPU tactics concentrated on the disruption of political meetings by women standing up and asking questions of the (male) speakers – in other words, heckling, which was an accepted male activity but shocking when used by

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<sup>73</sup> Fairplay, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 27 November 1903.



women. The WSPU retorted that the NUWSS's approach of petitions and politely asking for the vote had got women nowhere, and this argument seemed to be accepted by many moderates. 'A Would-be Elector' pointed out in January 1908 that 'It seems to me that deplorable as is the necessity for such proceedings, the suffragettes are eminently reasonable, for they are taking the apparently only open road to their goal'.<sup>74</sup> It was the WSPU tactic of opposing Government – in other words, Liberal – candidates at elections and by-elections that caused the most debate in the Aberdeen newspapers. Supporters of the WSPU launched several attacks, both in meetings and in the newspapers, against members of the local Women's Liberal Association, saying that if they were truly serious about the enfranchisement of women they would stop their activities on behalf of Liberal candidates until the vote was won, and deriding those members who also belonged to the NUWSS. As a local convert to the WSPU cause argued in the *Free Press* of 12 February 1907:

I yield to no one in respect and admiration for our present Prime Minister, but I think the Government have made a great mistake in not at once enfranchising all tax-payers irrespective of sex. Then when the question of adult suffrage came up it could have been decided on its own merits. However, I think women are as much to blame as men for the delay. For as long as women are content to act as fags at election times, they are just postponing the settlement of the question and rendering it necessary for those really in earnest over the matter to make themselves a thorn in the side of the party in power. As a member of the Women's Branch of the Liberal Association, I along with others have been asked to canvas for Mr Esslemont. Now, with the greatest pleasure I would have voted personally for him, but self-respect will not allow me to canvass for him.<sup>75</sup>

Another letter in the same issue from the Reverend Mackie of Drumoak referred scornfully to the WLA as a 'mothers' meeting'. The Liberal ladies were quick to respond. Annie F. Allan wrote to the *Free Press* the following day happily accepting the allegation that the WLA was an association full of mothers, and pointing out that it was because of their motherhood that such ladies were interested in politics:

Therefore the 'mothers' meeting' is working hard and heartily for Mr G. B. Esslemont, as he is the candidate who is in favour of temperance reform, religious liberty, educational freedom, and last but certainly not least, women's suffrage. The 'mothers' meeting' does not go and hold forth at the street corners, but it is possible they may be doing more solid and effectual good work for the cause they have at heart and for women's suffrage than those who do. We Liberal women object very strongly to the 'suffrage' movement being rushed by the WSPU, with whose tactics we are utterly out

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<sup>74</sup> 'A Would-Be Elector', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 12 January 1907

<sup>75</sup> 'Elm', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 12 February 1907.



of sympathy. There are as keen suffragists in Liberal and Conservative circles as any in the ranks of the WSPU.<sup>76</sup>

The use of their motherhood as a justification for the interest of women in politics was not an argument reserved to the Liberal ladies. It was one of the main arguments used by all suffragists, including the suffragettes, to justify their demand for the enfranchisement of women. Just as it was argued that women ought to stand for election to school boards and parish councils because of their nurturing skills and interest in the social welfare of the women and children under their care, so it was argued that women rate-payers ought to be given the vote in order to ensure that these concerns were also addressed by the national government. Women's difference, rather than their equality, was the reason they should be given the vote, as 'Justice' pointed out on 16 February: 'She [Woman] views things from a different standpoint, and it is this difference that makes it necessary that she should be allowed a voice in solving the social and political problems of the nation'.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, 'Justice' wrote again to the *Free Press* a few days later to continue her argument that the 'moral force of the motherhood of the country' was behind the WSPU but also to reveal her real name – M. A. Robertson. Perhaps having seen her first letter published in the newspaper in support of woman suffrage had given Robertson the courage to reveal her identity to her world when she wrote a second time.

As has already been seen, the attacks on the Liberal women's supposedly anomalous position by supporters of the WSPU continued during 1907 and eventually caused a breach in the local committee of the WLA. With the resignations of Mrs Allan and Mrs Black in the spring of 1908, relations between the women Liberals and the suffragettes continued to sour. Matters came to a head again in April during the Kincardineshire by-election. By this point, Teresa Billington-Greig's Women's Freedom League had split from the WSPU, and so both militant societies arrived in the area to campaign. To make matters more complicated, although the Liberal candidate was a supporter of woman suffrage and the Unionist candidate was not, the WSPU, following its policy of campaigning against the government, campaigned against the Liberal. The eventual result was acclaimed as a victory for both sides. The Liberal candidate retained his seat, but his majority was cut from 2,353 to 1,698. Things were further confused by additional campaigning by the local Working Women's Political Union, which supported the Labour candidate and campaigned for full manhood

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<sup>76</sup> Annie F. Allan, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 February 1907.

<sup>77</sup> 'Justice', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 February 1907.



suffrage – unlike either the WSPU or the WFL. Since all three women's groups hired motorcars to drive around the streets plastered with placards, some confusion on the part of onlookers might have been forgiven.

It was reported in the newspapers that a Miss Craigmyle of the Women's Liberal Association had made a violent attack upon the policy and tactics of both militant associations. Elizabeth (Bessie) Craigmyle was a local German teacher and active Liberal, also involved with the Former Pupils' Club of Aberdeen High School and therefore quite an influential figure among female Aberdonians.<sup>78</sup> Mrs Billington-Greig at once wrote a letter to the *Journal* challenging Miss Craigmyle to a public debate on the topic. Miss Craigmyle made no response, but after further jibes from Teresa Billington-Greig, the Officials of the WLA wrote to the *Free Press*:

Miss Craigmyle has, very properly, referred Mrs Billington-Greig's 'challenge' to her officials, and placed herself in the hands of her committee. We, of course, object to her accepting it, as the Women's Liberal Association exists to help the Liberal cause, not to hold debates on suffragist platforms. Mrs Billington-Greig will forgive us for reminding her that amateurs do not compete in the same class with professionals, and that it is not usual for women in a private station to put themselves on a level with paid female agitators. The customary courtesies of debate differ widely from Mrs Billington-Grieg's energetic methods.<sup>79</sup>

Mrs Billington-Greig wrote once more, offering Miss Craigmyle the possibility of selecting a champion – male or female – and urging her to disassociate herself from the Liberal Association since 'The protection afforded by anonymous officials, who are chiefly remarkable for bad taste and an inability to give a direct answer to a direct challenge, must leave her in considerable discomfort'.<sup>80</sup> She also denied that she had ever been paid for her work for the WLF. Teresa Billington-Greig continued to receive no answer to her challenge and eventually left the city, declaring herself the victor.

It can thus be seen that the newspapers correspondence from women on the subject of woman's suffrage in 1907–08 had undergone a transformation from that published in 1903. In 1903 the focus of the correspondence had been on the refutation of anti-suffrage arguments. Although pro-suffrage arguments were also important to the correspondents of 1907 and 1908, in particular the continuing justification of women's involvement in politics because of their *difference* rather than their equality with men, the focus had shifted to

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<sup>78</sup> I am indebted to local historian Alison McCall for information on the life of Elizabeth Craigmyle.

<sup>79</sup> Officials, Aberdeen WLA, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 22 April 1908.

<sup>80</sup> Teresa Billington-Greig, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 27 April 1908.



discussion of the tactics of the WSPU. This was precipitated by the arrival in the city of the leadership of both the WSPU and the break-away WLF and their attacks on the local Women's Liberal Association members.

Correspondence on the subject of woman suffrage died down during 1910 and 1911. This was coterminous with the 'Truce' declared by the militant societies during the passage of the Conciliation Bill through the House of Commons and shows how correspondence on the subject of woman suffrage in the Aberdeen newspapers was becoming more influenced by events outside the city. This influence continued to grow during 1912-14, when correspondence on the subject peaked again. The *Journal* printed 18 letters on women's suffrage in 1912 and 17 in 1913, while the *Free Press* printed 52 letters in 1912 and 27 in 1913. By this time, the battle between the constitutional and militant suffragists had been firmly joined, and discussion of woman suffrage no longer needed to be prompted by visits from the leadership. Discussion could even flare up about events outside Aberdeen. In the summer of 1912, during Asquith's visit to Dublin, the activist Mary Leigh threw a small hatchet into the carriage in which Asquith was riding with John Redmond, Chief Secretary for Ireland. Later that evening she and another woman named Gladys Evans set fire to the curtains at the Theatre Royal, causing panic although no one was hurt. Leigh was sentenced to five years' penal servitude and immediately went on hunger strike. There were rumours that she would be certified and committed to a lunatic asylum. Correspondence in the Aberdeen newspapers during these years was focusing more and more on the question of WSPU tactics, and actions such as Mary Leigh's and her subsequent punishment were hot topics. Correspondents were firmly divided on the subject, with Helen Jollie of Ballater and the WSPU declaring that such acts should go unpunished since they were made necessary by the treacherous dealings of the Government, while 'Fair Play' deprecated the entire episode: 'We women have felt deeply the disgrace of this violent and prolonged attack of hysteria, largely stimulated by the disease of self-advertisement'.<sup>81</sup>

The theme of the 'self-advertisement' of the suffragettes and the need for newspapers to deny them the oxygen of publicity began to be seen in the letters to the press. On 6 December 1912, 'Non-militant' noted that the *Free Press* and other newspapers animadverted on the antics of the WSPU, yet still gave them publicity:

Might I suggest to you that it is in the power of yourself and your brother-editors to remedy the evil to a very large extent. Militant suffragettism can only flourish in the glare of the footlights; it basks and grows in the sunshine of continuous newspaper advertisements. Respectable young women, who

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<sup>81</sup> Helen Jollie and 'Fair Play', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 12 August 1912.



would otherwise be occupying the useful but comparatively humble spheres of shop-women or domestic servants, are fascinated by the opportunity of posing as martyrs in the public eye, and having their foolish speeches and stupid actions reported at full length in the daily papers, with criticisms of their appearance and description of their costumes.<sup>82</sup>

However, the tactics of the WSPU continued to give publicity to their campaign for the vote – publicity which, in the opinion of some, was now beginning to harm the cause. Letters from members of the NUWSS during this period attempted to make the public aware of the differences between the constitutional and militant approach to the campaign. In the *Free Press*, debate was frequently joined between Alice Crompton, who wrote from the NUWSS's Suffrage Shop in Union Street, and Liliias Mitchell, the paid WSPU organiser in Aberdeen, with Mitchell denouncing the NUWSS's conciliatory approach and Crompton deprecating the damage the WSPU was doing to the cause. Yet even at the height of the violence of the militants' campaign, with letters in support of their actions being signed by noms de plume such as 'One of thousands of indignant women' and 'An Honest Bomb', their argument continued to focus on the need for a feminine touch in politics. 'A Homely Shrewd Mother' wrote from Aberdeen in April 1913 to deplore Lord Roberts' appeal to the mothers of Britain to encourage conscription into the army, which 'is surely strangely inconsistent in teeth of the cruel ostracism of women from all National questions'<sup>83</sup>. The following month, 'Member WSPU, Aberdeen' agreed that that 'the first duty of home-possessing women is to arrange wisely for the comfort and well-being of its inmates'<sup>84</sup>, but argued that this was in no way incompatible with an interest in national politics. She further pointed out that one of the aims of the woman's movement was to ensure an equal justice for 'fallen women' and the men who had caused their fall. In this, she was picking up on an issue that, as has been seen, was frequently discussed in the correspondence columns of the two Aberdeen newspapers – the sexual double standard. However, the timing of this letter from 'Member WSPU' was probably linked to a series of articles by Christabel Pankhurst which had just been published in the *Suffragette* on prostitution, the white slave trade and venereal disease and which she would later publish as *The Great Scourge, and How to End It*. Crawford suggests that Christabel launched this attack on the morals of men during 1913 in order to rejuvenate a suffrage campaign which was becoming dulled with repetition.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> 'Non-militant', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 6 December 1912.

<sup>83</sup> 'A Homely Shrewd Mother', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 22 April 1913.

<sup>84</sup> 'Member WSPU, Aberdeen', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 5 May 1913.

<sup>85</sup> For more on this campaign, see Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p. 497.



An analysis of the letters on the theme of woman suffrage published in the two Aberdeen newspapers therefore shows how the focus of correspondents continually changed between the years 1900 to 1914, when the advent of the First World War immediately stopped all discussion of the matter. At the beginning of the period, attention was focused on putting across to a wider public the arguments in favour of the enfranchisement of women and defeating the arguments of the anti-suffragists. By 1907, the focus had shifted to the activities of the militants in the WSPU and also the WFL, who were just as active north of the border. However, the focus was on the activities of the militants when they were in Aberdeenshire. As Jonathan Rose has pointed out, such localised interest was not a phenomenon restricted to women. His analysis of working men's memoirs from this period, for example, suggests that workers were mainly indifferent to imperial politics. He quotes the memoirs of Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century*, emphasising 'Except in periods of national crisis or celebration, industrial labourers, though Tory, royalist and patriotic, remained uninterested in any event beyond the local, horse racing excepted' and points out how localised the very titles of workers' autobiographies are, for example, *Lark Rise to Candleford*.<sup>86</sup>

The 'provincialised' approach to women suffrage in Aberdeen changed as the militant campaign became more and more violent in 1912 and 1913, resulting in more publicity for the suffragettes in the newspapers and more correspondence discussing the differences between constitutional and militant suffragism. Whereas in 1907 the arguments had been between the Liberal ladies and the suffragettes, by 1912 and 1913 they were between the NUWSS (to whom many Liberal women belonged) and the WSPU. However, throughout the period the core argument for the need for the enfranchisement of women was based on women's *difference* from men rather than their equality with men. It was necessary for the nation to give properly qualified women (by which was meant tax-payers) the vote because this would impel the Government to improve the social welfare of all.

### Campaigning against the Government

The majority of this chapter has focused on women's increasing involvement in politics, whether on a local or national basis. Women were beginning to be represented on the boards of local government and were campaigning to be given more direct influence in the conduct of national government. Women who wrote letters to the Aberdeen press on such subjects

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<sup>86</sup> Rose, Jonathan, 'Rereading the English Common Reader'. In Finkelstein, David and McCleery, Alistair, *The Book History Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, pp.324-339.



were keen to involve themselves in politics, at least at a local level, and argued that they had special skills to bring to government.

However, the letters columns of the *Daily Journal* also demonstrate the increasing involvement of another group of women in the wider world of politics, outside the demand for sexual equality. In 1911–12, at the same time that the letters columns were flooded with letters on the suffrage question, another subject mobilised a new group of women to letters of protest – the Insurance Bill. Apart from persistent correspondents like Marian Farquharson, who had tackled subjects such as tariff reform, few women before this date wrote letters to the Aberdeen newspapers on ‘hard’ political subjects apart from those related to the suffrage. The Insurance Bill was to change that.

The Insurance Bill was an attempt by the Liberal Government to introduce a scheme of contributory health insurance for workers and meant that employees and employers were now obliged to contribute payments to a fund set up for this purpose. Whilst there were a few letters to the *Journal* from employees, worrying about the implications of this new ‘tax’, as it was seen, the majority of the storm of protest that followed the announcement of the bill came from employers – and, in particular, from women. Upper and middle-class women identified themselves as the ‘employer’ affected by this bill because they were the ones responsible for paying the servants of the household. Indeed, many of the letters at this time referred to the ‘Servant Tax’. ‘A Farmer’s Wife’ wrote in December 1911:

It will not only mean unemployment in towns, but likewise among farm and domestic servants; and especially ... the inefficient class will suffer, as neither master nor mistress will be willing to pay wages and pay insurance, and still have to teach them everything in connection with their work.<sup>87</sup>

What is so interesting about many of the letters from female correspondents objecting to the Insurance Bill is that they wished to make it quite clear that this issue alone had stirred their interest in politics and that they were in no way in favour of women receiving the vote. ‘Not a Suffragette’ wrote in June 1912 to encourage more women to involve themselves in the anti-Insurance Bill cause:

Many women have spare time in which to help. If they are in earnest, let them volunteer themselves for districts wherein to get signatures, not to be paid work, but to be done gratuitously, after the necessary printed forms have been supplied. For myself, I am a businesswoman and have very little spare time, but I would do my share were such a thing set on foot.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> ‘A Farmer’s Wife’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 12 December 1911.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Not a Suffragette’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 28 June 1912.



A Servants' Tax Resisters Defence League was formed, and the Dowager Lady Desart chaired a huge meeting of women in the Albert Hall who chanted in turn, 'Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief' (a clear reference to Lloyd George) and 'We won't pay!'.<sup>89</sup> A branch of this league was formed in Aberdeen and the honorary secretary of the association, Miss Margaret Douglas, travelled from London to address them in October 1912. As she explained in a letter to the *Journal*, she saw herself as a perfect example of the type of woman pushed into political protest by this bill. In response to an attack by the Reverend Mackie of Drumoak she wrote:

That I am a female, I must admit, but even Mr Mackie must have enough sense of justice to recognise that this is my misfortune, not my fault.

As regards his delightful epithets, I challenge him to produce any speech of mine of the 'suffragist firebrand type' and here inform him that until the Insurance Act came into my house and tried to interfere between me and my servant, I have not taken any part in any political work or agitation of any kind.<sup>90</sup>

While letters such as that from 'Not a Suffragette' and Margaret Douglas made direct denials of any wish for political rights for women, there were a few correspondents who made the connection between lack of the franchise and lack of a voice to complain about such attacks on women's domestic sphere. On 30 November 1911, Euphemia R Cowan pointed out bitterly:

We are told to send our papers of protest against the servant tax to our representatives in Parliament, but we women who are widows or spinsters have no Parliamentary representative, seeing we have no vote.

We are still capable of paying taxes, for which privilege we should be duly thankful, but we are reckoned, I believe, along with imbeciles in connection with voting for members of Parliament.<sup>91</sup>

However, Euphemia Cowan was amongst a minority. Most women correspondents who wrote in protest against the Insurance Act made no connection between their political impotence and their desire that the Government stop 'interfering' in their domestic affairs, despite the fact that their letters were often printed in the same column as letters on the subject of woman suffrage. These women did not come from the traditional, liberal, feminist elite who were happy to contribute their thoughts on political issues to newspapers. They came from the broader section of the female population who had hitherto refrained from political comment. It is possible however that, although such women scorned the idea of

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<sup>89</sup> Thompson, Paul, *The Edwardians*, p. 260.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret Douglas, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 28 October 1912.

<sup>91</sup> Euphemia R. Cowan, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 30 November 1911.



woman suffrage, the ongoing debate *by* politicised women and *about* women's politics prompted them to offer their own opinions when a Governmental policy threatened to affect them personally.

It is interesting that the debate about the Insurance Act was confined to the *Daily Journal*. Only one letter, from Margaret Douglas, the honorary secretary of the Tax Resisters' Defence Association, was printed in the letters columns of the *Free Press* on the subject. However, once the Insurance Act became law and a variety of women's insurance societies sprung into being the debate moved on to the pages of the *Free Press* where it involved the women who were actually paying the insurance money themselves – who were both more working class and more politicised than the ladies who had protested in 1911–12. In comparison to the suffrage debate, where the majority of correspondents wrote to the *Free Press*, the Insurance Act attracted the attention of the woman readers of the *Journal*, showing once again the differences between the female readerships of the two newspapers. To put it in crude terms, the woman correspondent to the *Free Press* wanted the vote so that she could change the way Government legislated, in particular for women and children, while the woman correspondent of the *Journal* just wanted the Government to stop legislating in a way which affected her adversely. One wished to redefine the domestic sphere to include involvement in national politics, the other wanted the Government to keep out of her domestic life.

### Summary

A study of the correspondence columns to the *Daily Journal* and *Free Press* for the period 1900 to 1918 reveals the political issues that women felt strongly enough about to write to the newspapers – in other words, the issues that generated 'heat' amongst the women readers of these newspapers. Such a study indicates female grassroots opinion on national political issues such as women suffrage and the Insurance Bill, but also more local issues such as the record of local Members of Parliament.

Considering that women had been given the vote in local elections for school boards and town councils relatively recently, there was surprisingly little correspondence from women dealing with such subjects. There is evidence of a concern for some sort of female representation on such boards since women were considered to supply certain female, domestic skills to the mix. Throughout the period, correspondents emphasised the different approach and special skills women could bring to politics, either as local councillors, electors or purely through their influence on men. However, it was not merely an issue of



any woman bringing the right sort of female influence to bear. The 'right sort' of woman needed to stand for election, and women putting themselves forward for election could be suspected of trying to score political points or even of attempting to use political power for personal ends.

Many of the women who wrote to the Aberdeen newspapers on political issues might be described as New Women, eager for the suffrage and keen to be involved in national politics, although still justifying their claims for the vote with the argument that there was a need for a 'woman's touch' in the affairs of state. Apart from Marian Farquharson, few women correspondents tackled hard political subjects, and overall women's discussion of politics was focused on women's issues such as the suffrage or the peculiar contribution women could make to either local or national politics.

Scotland was an important Liberal stronghold, with members of the cabinet holding seats in the country. Many members of the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association were also members of the NUWSS-affiliated Aberdeen Association for Women's Suffrage, and thus open to accusations of collusion and indecision from the newly formed WSPU, who were themselves accused of wrecking any chance suffrage bills might have with their violent 'tactics'. Studies of local, provincial approaches to the woman suffrage campaign have proved useful in showing new dimensions to the movement, away from the leadership based in London. The Aberdeen newspaper correspondence and related evidence show how the different suffrage associations interacted and even co-operated at this grass-roots level. The letters and evidence such as the Watt Collection indicate that membership of different associations was no barrier to close friendships, and that members of the different associations would meet and mingle at suffrage meetings and in other social events. Aberdeen was a small town, and there were a limited number of women with the leisure and interest to attend such meetings. The Watt Collection also reminds us, however, that letters published in newspapers were only part of a woman's public face and do not necessarily reveal her entire persona. Women's letters to the newspapers, in particular when they are writing as officials of an association, might put across a point of view with which they did not necessarily wholly agree.

The letters also shows how the London leadership reacted to events outside London, including challenges such as Caroline Phillips' moves towards rapprochement with the Aberdeen Liberal Women's Association. Staff at the headquarters of all the major suffrage associations, the WSPU, WFL and NUWSS, were keen to encourage their members to become involved in correspondence in local newspapers, and would respond themselves to



both correspondence and other editorial in the newspapers when necessary, showing that headquarters either subscribed to the newspapers or used a press cuttings agency to keep them fully informed. However, while responding to this encouragement to write letters concerning woman suffrage to their local newspapers, women in Aberdeen tended to hide their identity with a pen name when discussing subjects, such as woman suffrage, that might potentially open them to criticism from family and friends.

At first, women correspondents' interest in politics, in particular woman suffrage issues, tended to be restricted to local events, such as the visits of suffrage leaders to the area. However, by 1911–14, women correspondents were happy to discuss the implications of political events outside Aberdeenshire, and even outside Scotland – and the New Women had been joined in political discussion by non-suffragettes, determined to oppose what they saw as government intrusion into their domestic sphere with the Insurance Bill. For these women, government initiatives can, perhaps, be seen as a turning point, focusing their attention on overtly political matters. Regardless of their personal views on women's rights, when suddenly confronted by a particular piece of legislation which they felt threatened their domestic peace, they felt able to commit themselves in print to a political debate.

Overall, women correspondents' discussion of political issues during this period is distinguished by a series of shifting foci. Initially, discussion was limited to local events – local elections to the town councils and school boards, and refutation of anti-suffrage arguments. With the arrival of the leaders of the WSPU and WFL in the city during a series of by-elections, discussion moved on to WSPU tactics and the invidiousness of the position of women Liberals in Aberdeen. Later discussion moved outside this provincialised approach to women's politics, to include the activities of suffragettes in England and Ireland and the impact of government policies such as the Insurance Bill. An initially local approach to women's involvement in politics lead to a more general interest in national politics, although still within the confines of a discussion of the difference of women's possible contribution. As shall be seen in the next chapter, this move from local and provincial to national was repeated in women's response to the First World War.



**CHAPTER V**  
*The First World War 1914–1918*



## Introduction

In August 1914 the British Government declared war on Germany and its allies in response to Germany's invasion of Belgium. This chapter focuses on the response to the war of the women correspondents to the Aberdeen daily newspapers and its effect on their lives and goals. In particular, the chapter focuses on themes which recur in the women's letters throughout the war years: the resurgence of the established middle- and upper-class woman involved in charitable good works; the personalisation and localisation of war work; the changing foci of charitable ladies during the four years of the war; and women's paid war work.

While certain issues can be seen to run throughout the war years, the letters to the editor in these newspapers also offer evidence that the priorities of women correspondents continually changed during the period, just as the position of women was changing. In *Women at War, 1914–1918*, Arthur Marwick suggests that the First World War can be seen as a series of stages, with women's roles changing with each stage. Marwick calls the first stage of the war 'War Emergency', followed quickly by the need for 'Business as Usual'. This lasted from August 1914 until the early summer of 1915. Marwick suggests that, during this time, women's roles did not change greatly although voluntary activities were undertaken by upper- and middle-class ladies. The new Coalition Government of May 1915 set up a separate Ministry of Munitions, under Lloyd George, which encouraged the recruitment of women into factories. This was followed by the introduction of universal military conscription for men in May 1916, which formed the impetus for the full-scale employment of women in many occupations to replace them. Finally, Marwick sees the final 18 months of the war as characterised by still more efficient organisation of the war effort by the Lloyd George Coalition Government established in December 1916, during which time the Women's Auxiliary Military Services were set up.<sup>1</sup> This chapter asks how well such a model of women's war-time experience fits the evidence of the Aberdeen daily newspapers' letters columns.

## War-time letters

When writing of the events of late summer 1914 in *Testament of Youth*, the young Vera Brittain described the preparations for war in the little town of Buxton:

Few of humanity's characteristics are more disconcerting than its ability to reduce world events to its own level, wherever this may happen to lie. By the end of August, when Liege and Namur had fallen, and the misfortunes of the British Army were extending into the Retreat from

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<sup>1</sup> Marwick, Arthur, *Women at War 1914–1918*. London: Fontana, 1977, p 12.



Mons, the ladies of the Buxton elite had already set to work to provincialise the War.<sup>2</sup>

Brittain continues with some humorous comments on these ladies' attempts to teach each other bandaging and basic first aid. This condescending and belittling attitude towards the activities of middle-class, middle-aged ladies determined to 'do their bit' is characteristic not only of Brittain but of many of the commentators and historians who have followed her. Again and again in histories of the home front during the First World War we read:

One very widespread female response to the outbreak of war was the knitting of 'comforts' for the troops: socks, waistcoats, helmets, scarves, mitts and bodybelts. It was said that many men in the trenches used these unwanted and often unsuitable items for cleaning their rifles and wiping their cups and plates'<sup>3</sup>

In recent years much has been written about the role of women in wartime, but this material has tended to focus on the younger and more active section of the population, who worked in munitions factories, nursed at various fronts or visibly took over men's jobs, whether as bus conductresses or in the Land Army.<sup>4</sup> There has been little consideration of the role of the type of

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2 Brittain, Vera, *Testament of Youth*. London: Virago, 1978, p 101.

3 Marwick, Arthur, *Women at War 1914-1918*, p 35. For further comments on knitters and the quality of their knitting see also Turner, E. S., *Dear Old Blighty*. London: Michael Joseph, 1980, p. 31 and DeGroot, Gerard J., *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*. Harlow: Longman, 1996, p. 68. Dakers, Caroline, *The Countryside at War*. London: Constable, 1987, p. 38 quotes *Punch* being satirical on the subject of ladies' sewing of pyjamas.

4 For example, see Gould, Jenny, 'Women's Military Service in First World War Britain', in Higdonnet, M. R., Jenson, J., Michel, S. and Weitz, M. C., eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987, pp.114-125, and Robert, Krisztina, 'Gender, Class and Patriotism: Women's Paramilitary Units in First World War Britain. *The International History Review*, XIX, 1: February 1997, pp.52-65 which look at the establishment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) in Britain from 1917; Thom, Deborah, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, London and New York: I B Tauris Publishers, 2000 and Woollacott, Angela, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*. Berkeley: Berkeley, 1994, which discuss the experience of women workers in munitions factories, as does Braybon, Gail, *Women Workers in the First World War*. London: Croom Helm, 1981. Braybon specifically states that her research has concentrated on working-class women. Levine, Philippa, 'Walking the Streets in a Way no decent woman should, Women police in World War I'. *Journal Of Modern History*, 1994, 66, pp. 34-78; Woollacott, Angela, 'Khaki Fever' and its control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29, 1994, (2), pp. 325-347 and Bland, C, 'In the Name of Protection: Policing Women in the First World War', in Brophy and Smart, eds., *Women in Law*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985 all discuss the introduction of a woman's police force during the First World War. Some recent research has looked at women in terms of their roles as wives and mothers, such as Lomas, Janis, '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*, 9 (1), 2000, pp. 123-147 or Zeiger, Susan, 'She Didn't Raise Her Boy to be a Slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War'. *Feminist Studies*, 22, No. 1,



woman that Brittain dismissively refers to as the ladies of a small-town elite. Possibly this is because of a perceived lack of material evidence for their activities during wartime. However, the letters columns of the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press* offer an abundance of relevant material for such a study.

Between the outbreak of war in August 1914 and the end of 1918 the *Daily Journal* printed 388 letters from women in its letters columns while the *Free Press* printed another 352. There are therefore over 700 letters forming a body of evidence concerning the wartime activities, worries and campaigns of a group of women mostly based in Aberdeen and the surrounding county. Despite the fact that 'there was a war on', there is still little evidence of editorial gatekeeping or censorship in the letters columns of either the *Press* or *Journal* during this period. The correspondence pages contain no mention of any type of editorial choice; letters continued to be printed as soon as received – or when there was space. Occasional editorial comments apologise for a particular letter's non-appearance through lack of space and promise to print it the following day. The policy continued to be one of full publication of all letters, as long as accompanied by a name and address. Indeed, in September 1914, in response to a correspondent criticising the newspaper for publishing a particular letter the day before, the editor of the *Free Press* wrote: 'We do not consider it desirable to suppress opinions expressed by a correspondent merely because these run counter to the prevalent and almost universal feeling of the country.'<sup>5</sup> The main impact of the war on the letters columns appears to have been a lack of space caused by paper and news rationing. Caroline Dakers in *The Countryside at War* explains that, although in the first few weeks of war newspapers attempted to give full details of the progress of war, publishing interviews with soldiers on leave and letters from the front, the imposition of censorship meant that 'instead of being packed with war news, many local newspapers shrank to less than their pre-war size'.<sup>6</sup> During 1917 and 1918 the Aberdeen newspapers shrank visibly, sometimes to just four or five pages, and this obviously affected the amount of space available for letters. On 24 January 1918 a note appeared in the Letters column requesting 'Will correspondents kindly limit letters to the Editor to 300 words or under?'. However, there seems to have been little response to this request on the part of correspondents, most of whom, as will be seen, continued to write long letters if they felt their case required detailed explanation.

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Spring 1996, pp. 7–39, but there is little research on the voluntary efforts of middle-class women on the home front.

<sup>5</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 5 September 1914.

<sup>6</sup> Dakers, *The Countryside at War*, p. 110.

The immediate impact of the war on the letters columns is indicated by the fact that, in the first three years of the war, more women than ever allowed their names and usually their addresses to be printed at the end of their letters. For example, between the outbreak of war in August 1914 and the end of that first year, 44 women gave full details of their name and some indication of an address in the *Daily Journal*, compared to 8 who chose not to. That is, 85% of female correspondents clearly identified themselves in their letters to the more conservative daily newspaper. In comparison, of the 21 women letter-writers to the *Journal* in 1914 before the outbreak of war, only 13 chose to identify themselves, or 62%. Again, before the outbreak of war in August, 62% of women letter-writers to the *Free Press* fully identified themselves (8 out of 13), while after the outbreak of war this figure rose to 84% (49 out of 58). However, this trend, of over 75% of women letter-writers fully identifying themselves, did not continue to the end of the war, as figures 5.1 and 5.2 demonstrate.



Year	Identified themselves	Hid identity	Percentage of those who identified themselves
Peacetime 1914	13	8	62%
Wartime 1914	44	8	85%
1915	93	17	85%
1916	64	23	74%
1917	48	29	62%
Wartime 1918	20	23	47%
Peacetime 1918	5	9	36%

**Figure 5.1: Number of women correspondents to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* 1914–1918 who chose to identify themselves or hid their identity**

Year	Identified themselves	Hid identity	Percentage of those who identified themselves
Peacetime 1914	8	5	62%
Wartime 1914	49	9	84%
1915	95	8	92%
1916	59	13	82%
1917	46	14	77%
Wartime 1918	25	15	63%
Peacetime 1918	4	6	40%

**Figure 5.2: Number of women correspondents to the *Aberdeen Free Press* 1914–1918 who chose to identify themselves or hid their identity**

Of course, there was a purely practical explanation behind the need for identification in the earlier years of the war. Whereas the majority of letters published before the war were *reactive*, commenting on other letters in the newspapers or other parts of the editorial, and therefore it was not necessary for the women writers to reveal their identities if they did not want to, most of the letters published in the newspapers during the first years of the war were *proactive*. Writers asking for donations, whether of money, time or the ubiquitous socks, needed to give their names and addresses so that people would know where to send their contributions. In the last years of the war, letters grew less proactive as war work settled into an established routine. Instead, there was a growing number of letters commenting on or complaining about the organisation of some aspect of the war. Many of these letter-writers chose to hide behind noms de plume. Some of these noms de plume indicated the writer's lower-class background, which, as we have seen, might also have contributed to the writer's desire to remain anonymous. For example, in 1918 the *Free Press* received letters from 'Countrywoman' regarding the arrangement of war-time cookery demonstrations; 'Housewife' on the short opening hours of butchers' shops; 'Country Lass' and 'Munitionette' defending dances in wartime; 'Crofter's Wife' on the coating of cheese; 'A Mother' on the treatment of prisoners of war in Germany and 'Gamekeeper's Wife' on the low wartime wages paid to estate workers.<sup>7</sup>

### **'Doing their bit'**

Female letter-writers in the last year of the war were thus proportionally less willing to identify themselves and more likely to be complaining about some aspect of wartime organisation, in contrast to the writers of the first three years of the war, who were more likely to be proactively seeking aid with war work that they were organising. Since these organising women needed to give their names, and in most cases their addresses, we are able to identify the status of most of them. It is no surprise to discover that the majority of the women who were confident enough either in themselves or in the importance of their subject-matter to write to the newspapers can be identified as middle or upper class. As far as location is concerned, the woman correspondents during the war fall into two distinct groups – those living locally and writing from Aberdeen or Aberdeenshire, appealing directly to the readers of the two newspapers, and those living further afield, usually in Edinburgh or London, who can be presumed to have sent duplicate letters to newspapers all over the country. As we have seen, many of those located in the city wrote from well-to-do addresses based in the West End of the city or around the university. There was also a

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<sup>7</sup> 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 January 1918; 21 February 1918; 1 April 1918; 16 April 1918; 29 April, 1918; 1 June 1918; 20 September 1918.



large group of letters from women of the gentry and aristocratic families in the surrounding countryside. Indeed, the First World War is often seen as the last flowering of the ideal of such ladies leading the way in charitable good works. Caroline Dakers comments:

It was to be a characteristic of the First World War that landed society, the 'upper ten thousand', took the lead not only in going 'over the top' first, but also in organising relief for refugees, offering their homes as hospitals and convalescent homes (after all they owned the biggest houses), training as nurses, setting up work parties in villages and towns to provide extra clothing for soldiers at the front and occupation for wives left behind.<sup>8</sup>

Lady Stewart and the two Misses Stewart, wife and daughters of Sir David Stewart of Banchory House, wrote to the Aberdeen newspapers frequently with appeals for donations for Lord Roberts' fund for Indian troops, for which Miss Julia Stewart and her sister bravely sold flowers in the streets of Banchory. The redoubtable Ishbel, Lady Aberdeen, wrote majestically from wherever her husband's career had taken her in support of the Aberdeenshire Red Cross War Fund, while Lady Forbes of Castle Forbes assured readers of the able administration of the Aberdeen Prince of Wales Fund. Two of the most frequent female correspondents to both newspapers during the war years were Lady Sempill, of Fintray House, and Lady Lumsden, of Murdan, who attempted to use their family connections and influence to raise money for a variety of causes.

Lady Sempill was without doubt an indefatigable fundraiser. In January 1915 she was pleased to announce the success of her campaign to raise money to send motor ambulances to the front in France. She had managed to raise £1,321, enough to purchase and equip four ambulances, to be known as 'Aberdeenshire' numbers one to four. In May of that year she turned her attention to raising money for an 'Aberdeenshire' bed in Queen Mary's Convalescent Hospital for amputees, and in September launched an appeal to provide a launch – to be called the 'Aberdeenshire' Launch – to transport wounded men from the beaches at the Dardanelles to the hospital ships. Possibly because of her position as wife of the one of the foremost landowners in Aberdeenshire, who was also a war hero wounded at the battle of Loos in September 1915, and possibly because of her own complete conviction that where she led others would follow, Lady Sempill's fundraising tended to be successful. Neither was her war-work restricted to fundraising. In March 1917 she passed on to readers the instruction she had already given to churchgoers in the village of Echt to 'knit during the sermon'<sup>9</sup> and, also in that year, reported on her efforts to encourage her tenants' moss gathering and cleaning:

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<sup>8</sup> Dakers, *The Countryside at War*, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Lady Sempill, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 27 March 1917.



It may interest your readers to hear that I started a two-hour Saturday afternoon class here (of course attending regularly personally) last September gathering moss whenever weather permits and drying it in a laundry loft in cricket nets. So popular was this meeting, resulting in one bag weekly cleaned moss, that I started an evening class, 7 to 9 (we have about 60 workers), where all classes meet with the greatest regularity, the result being fully two cleaned sacks weekly. Several workers, including children, are so keen that they attend both classes.... It is merely a matter of getting someone to take the trouble to start the movement, and he or she will be as ably supported as I have been. An occasional tea party, marks for attendance, and home work brought in, with little prizes, all help to stimulate interest.... All parishes will work if they are organised and led.<sup>10</sup>

Sphagnum moss gathering was an important part of women's war work in Aberdeenshire. The moss, which was found to be usefully absorbent, was gathered, dried and used to make hospital dressings. There are several descriptions of the collection of sphagnum moss in Aberdeenshire to be found in autobiographies from this time, such as Amy Stewart Fraser's description in *In Memory Long*:

There was a great demand for sphagnum moss which had been found to be an excellent absorbent when placed on wounds. Country folk everywhere gathered it and sent it to centres for processing. My mother and I gathered great quantities at the Milton when it was golden green and moist, spread it on the barn floor and picked it clean of twigs and leaves, then packed it in sacks and sent it to Ballater where it was prepared for dressings in hospitals. When gathering we used liberal applications of oil of citronella in a vain attempt to protect our faces, hands and arms from the ferocious midges, but invariably a plague of the detestable insects drove us home.<sup>11</sup>

The extract from her letter above shows that Lady Sempill considered it just as much part of her duties as a member of the upper-class elite to organise and lead the women of the locality in such war work as the male members of her family would have seen it their duty to organise and lead their men on the battlefield. The fact that Lady Sempill was so successful in her endeavours points to the fact that such a role was also seen as appropriate by those she proposed to lead – both the villagers knitting and cleaning moss at her bidding and the middle-classes and gentry subscribing to her funds.

However, while such a role came comparatively easily to the aristocratic Lady Sempill, Lady Lumsden, widow of Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Lumsden of Belhelvie Lodge, appears to have bitten off more than she could chew. Possibly this is a result of her loss of status on the death of her husband, necessitating her removal to a house on the Deeside Road, many miles from her

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10 Lady Sempill, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 29 January 1917.

11 Fraser, Amy Stewart, *In Memory Long*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 210.



former home in the northern village of Belhelvie. In contrast to Lady Sempill, in her forties, Lady Lumsden was an elderly widow (she died in 1919) whose letters have a querulous rather than commanding character. Certainly, during the Boer War, Lady Lumsden's Penny All Round Tobacco Fund, raising funds to provide cigarettes and tobacco for local convalescent hospitals, had been a resounding success (according to Lady Lumsden any way). However, when she tried to resurrect this and other forms of fundraising for the war effort in 1915 and 1916, she had to report less success:

*The Daily Journal*, 7 August 1915, 'I am so sorry to find there has been no response to my appeal to get a complete motor ambulance to bring up cot cases when the trains arrive... from the Dardanelles to Oldmill [the local military hospital]'

19 July 1916, 'I am sorry no more school children have collected even pennies for this [the French hospital at Arc en Barrois]'

29 December 1916, 'I am sorry to have to tell you that I still require £20 to complete the Aberdeenshire Bed in the Arc en Barrois Hospital'.

It also seems that Lady Lumsden did not have the energy or strength needed for large-scale fundraising since she was fond of suggesting that others do it for her. In May 1916 she felt that a whist and bridge drive could be usefully held for war funds, and asked 'would kind people with fine houses get one up at home?'<sup>12</sup>

It is evident that, even though the Edwardian age had passed, the power of Aberdeenshire's landed aristocracy and their innate belief in their right and duty to lead meant that, as money became tighter as the war moved into a third and then a fourth year, donations could still be found to support the fundraising of a Lady Sempill, if not a Lady Lumsden.

Another reason for the success of the grander ladies in this kind of fundraising is hinted at in the letters they sent to the newspapers. Every letter asking for donations of whatever sort ended with an assurance that all donations would be personally acknowledged by Lady Sempill, or Princess Louise or Countess Roberts, or whoever. One can imagine the attraction of sending one's carefully knitted socks or balaclava to the cause with the most prestigious president in order to receive a personally signed thank-you letter. In fact, when reading all these promises of personal acknowledgements, one begins to wonder how some of the poorer ladies of lower status ever managed to afford to run their collections, with the continual expense of postage and packing. In her letter to the *Free Press* of July 1915, Julia Stewart thanked all who had contributed to her collections for Lord Roberts' Fund for the Indian Troops: 'Specially I wish to thank those who, doubtless out of consideration for myself, refrained from attaching their names and addresses to

huge parcels of knitting, and thereby prevented my acknowledging the sacrifice of all their unselfish labours otherwise than now; also to those who thoughtfully repacked their sweets in tins, thereby saving endless extra trouble.'<sup>13</sup> In fact, in February of that year, Julia Stewart had attempted to close this fund 'as I have found the enormous amount of correspondence, combined with the packing and dispatching of the garments almost more than I could overtake'<sup>14</sup>. At the time she reported that she had packed and dispatched (presumably at her own expense) 705 pairs of socks; 208 cummerbunds and belts; 113 knitted pugarees, caps and helmets; 60 blankets; 53 shirts and three quilts, plus handkerchiefs, soap, tobacco and sweets. A letter later that month indicated that the fund would remain open until further notice due to plea for more socks from the commander of the Indian Expeditionary Force in France.<sup>15</sup> Julia Stewart closed the fund on 14 July 1915, having by then sent out 1,002 pairs of cuffs, mitts and gloves; 1,674 pairs of socks; 633 mufflers and numerous other knitted comforts, but was forced to re-open it again the following July, this time to send comforts to Indian prisoners of war. Similar lists and amounts of knitted comforts occur frequently in the letters pages of both newspapers, and one does begin to feel that the soldiers at the front were being buried in a deluge of knitted socks. However, each lady starts her appeal by saying she is collecting in response to a particular appeal for more comforts, especially socks, and it must be remembered that there were few washing facilities in the trenches. A man would wear a pair of socks until they simply rotted away and would then require a new pair. Hence the enormous amounts of socks being sent to the front *were* needed, and appeals to continue to knit recur frequently throughout the war. What is particularly noteworthy about the collections of Miss *Julia* Stewart is that, at the same time that she was amassing, packing and posting thousands of woollen goods, her sister, Miss Mabel Stewart of the same address was also making a collection. On 27 October 1915 Mabel was pleased to announce that her collection for the Gordon Highlanders had been a great success and that she had so far dispatched 86 parcels of Oxo, bovril, cafe au lait, cocoa, refreshlets, alodine, health salts, shirts, mufflers, 'and particularly socks'.<sup>16</sup> One presumes that Banchory House was a large establishment.

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12 F. Lumsden, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 May 1916.

13 Julia Stewart, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 July 1915.

14 Julia Stewart, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 12 February 1915.

15 Julia Stewart, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 27 February 1915.

16 Mabel Stewart, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 27 October 1915.



### A provincialised approach

With all their differences, Lady Sempill and Lady Lumsden did have something in common – which can be linked to Vera Brittain's accusation that such ladies' immediate reaction to the war was to 'provincialise' it. Throughout women's correspondence to the Aberdeen newspapers during the war there is evidence of a desire – or perhaps a need – to localise or appropriate the war. Both Lady Sempill and Lady Lumsden raised money for 'Aberdeenshire' beds, ambulances and launches. Throughout the war, charitable ladies' letters were full of urges that Aberdeen or Scotland or Scottish women show how well *they* could respond to the war effort. Mary Duff, sending warm jackets and mufflers to the 1<sup>st</sup> Gurkha Rifles, assured readers 'with each parcel we enclose a paper stating that the work is the gift of Scotch women'<sup>17</sup>; while Elena Miller made a direct 'appeal to the Aberdeen public' and 'the generosity of Aberdonians' on behalf of the Scottish Women's Hospitals<sup>18</sup>. Both of these letters appeared in the early days of the war. By 1917, Aberdeenshire had contributed many Aberdeenshire ambulances, launches and beds to the front, including a 'Bon Accord' motor ambulance – Bon Accord is the city's motto – which was sent to a hospital in France run by the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry.

The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry – or FANY as they tended to be known – had been established in 1907 as a voluntary force of 'adventurous upper-class ladies who could afford to provide their own mounts'<sup>19</sup> and would act as a link between front-line fighting troops and field hospitals. The FANY set up soup kitchens, field hospitals and troop canteens during the war. The directrice of one hospital, Mrs Gracie McDougall, wrote frequently to the Aberdeen newspapers stressing her hospital's links with the city:

I myself... am from Aberdeen. My four-stretcher ambulance was made by an Aberdeen firm and for three months driven by an Aberdeen man, and when in January he left to take a commission in an English regiment, an Aberdeen lady came out to act as chauffeur in his place. This lady, Miss Thompson... has just been decorated with the Order of Leopold for bravery in the trenches.<sup>20</sup>

Mrs McDougall was also not above fomenting civic rivalry in her quest for money for her hospital. During a few days' leave from the front in 1917 she wrote to the *Daily Journal*: 'I want to go back with £300 so that we can face the spring and summer without worrying as to ways and means. Thanks to the generosity of friends in Newcastle, almost £100 has been raised in a week,

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17 Mary Duff, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 November 1914.

18 Elena Miller, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 10 November 1914.

19 Marwick, Arthur, *Women at War 1914–1918*, p. 21.

20 Gracie McDougall, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 5 April 1915.



and I hope Aberdeen will help me with the remainder'.<sup>21</sup> Such blatant appeals to local pride and a spirit of local one-up-man-ship pervade many of these letters. It was easier to raise donations by urging prospective donors to focus on the reputation of the city, or 'their' boys at the front or a particular group with local connections than to ask for aid for the more amorphous 'war effort' or 'the front'. It was easier to conceive of the war in such localised, familiar terms.

This might also be done by mentioning family connections. Many ladies were drawn into fundraising for a particular battalion by letters from family members on the staff. Constance Malcolm, wife of Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm, commanding the London Scottish, appealed for comforts for the troops while on active service,<sup>22</sup> while Mary Duff was encouraged by her nephew, Captain B. O. Duff, in her collections for his regiment, the 1<sup>st</sup> Gurkha Rifles. Again, we see the application of the principle of 'noblesse oblige' – the family connections of serving officers were expected to co-ordinate collections of money and comforts for the men in their care. However, such an approach might lead to some battalions missing out because of poorly connected officers, while others enjoyed an over-abundance of comfort, as a letter from Flora Uniacke, wife of Colonel Uniacke commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders, makes clear:

In view of the confusion which must arise through my special appeal for gifts for the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders appearing in the same issue of the paper with Mrs Gordon Duff's announcement that she had forwarded to it a sufficient supply for the present, and still had a good reserve store, I wish to say that the error arose through my never having been informed that this lady was making any collection for the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and my being requested by a very good authority to take charge of the forwarding of their comforts. As I now learn, however, that Mrs Gordon Duff has undertaken this work, I shall, of course, leave it in her hands. I may, however, say that her statement that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions Gordon Highlanders have had insufficient care is totally incorrect as, since the beginning of the war, when I publicly appealed for gifts, I have sent out to each battalion over 1000 pairs of socks, some hundreds of scarves, belts, shirts, helmets and endless small comforts.<sup>23</sup>

In Scotland, such familial connections might also include appeals to the clan, although this was a romanticised notion even at this time. Both the clan Macrae and the clan Menzies appealed for donations to send comforts to clan members at the front, although the subsequent appeal by the clan Macrae for a clan ambulance 'which would be a most useful contribution towards the

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21 Gracie McDougall, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 2 March 1917.

22 Constance Malcolm, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 22 September 1914.

23 Flora Uniacke, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 30 January 1915.



welfare and comfort of our fellow-clansmen who have the misfortune to be wounded on the field of battle'<sup>24</sup> suggests a certain naivety about the organisation of the battlefield. Presumably the envisaged ambulance would be able to 'home in' on wounded clansmen while barring its doors to any casualties of inferior birth.

Another example of this piecemeal, personalised approach was the 'named' hospital beds and ambulances. This was not a particularly Aberdeenshire or even Scottish phenomenon, and letters came from women all over the country aimed at raising money to support a bed or an ambulance in one of the many hospitals, either at the front or at home. The first example to occur in either of the Aberdeenshire newspapers came on 11 December 1914 and is typical of the genre:

With the approval of the Red Cross Committee I write to request the 'Margarets' in Scotland to provide a motor ambulance for use at the front to be named in honour of Saint Margaret, Queen of Scots.

Subscriptions, sent to Mrs A. Stuart at the address below, will be acknowledged privately and from time to time in the press.

Margaret Stuart, Lochrin House, Craiglockhart Terrace, Edinburgh<sup>25</sup>

This particular letter did make some appeal to readers' patriotism by emphasising a Scottish saint, but, as usual, the name chosen for the ambulance was also the first name of the lady organising the collection. An ambulance was an ambitious project – requiring a collection of around £400. The majority of these letters concentrated on raising money to support a bed in a hospital for either a year or six months. The going rate appears to have been £25 for six months and £50 for a year. There was rarely any acknowledgement of the fact that the war could last for more than another year. The first example of an appeal for a named bed – again stressing the Scottish-ness of the undertaking and appealing to local pride – occurred on 15 December 1914:

*Beds in the Rouen Hospital: Appeals to Marys*

With the permission of the Scottish Red Cross we are appealing to our Scottish 'Marys' to raise £50 for our Scottish Hospital at Rouen. If all the 'Marys' who read this will send me something, however small, we shall very soon have the sum required, for we feel certain that the 'Mary' of Aberdeenshire will wish to be represented very largely. Subscriptions, however small, will be gratefully received by Miss Mary Simson, 51 Manor Place, Edinburgh.<sup>26</sup>

During the period of the war, the two newspapers received letters appealing for beds in the following names: Mary; Helen; Elizabeth; Alice and Alison; Jessie and Janet; Florence and Flora; Stuart or Stewart (as a surname or first name); and Ruth and Patricia. It was evidently realised

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24 Clan Macrae, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 20 August 1915.

25 Margaret Stuart, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 December 1914.

26 Mary Simson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 15 December 1914.



that bearers of less common names needed to work together to achieve their goal. There were also appeals for ambulances for the names Margaret, Laura, Elizabeth and Clementine and Cecilia. Most of these appeals were based in Scotland and appealed to 'Scottish Margarets or Marys, etc' but some, such as Lady Clementine Waring of Coldstream<sup>27</sup> or Mrs Elizabeth Ford of Wimbledon Common<sup>28</sup> came from further afield. Mrs Ford made reference in her letter to a 'named ambulance fleet' which had been suggested by a Lady Bushman, although it seems probable that Lady Bushman was using an idea that had already been used elsewhere in the country – the letter regarding the Margaret ambulance predates this one by several months.

While Lady Sempill had apparently found it remarkably easy to collect over £1,000 for four 'Aberdeenshire' ambulances, other ladies – again perhaps without her aristocratic standing or forceful personality – found it much more difficult. The first indication of a problem comes in August 1915 with a further letter on the collection for the 'Margaret' ambulance. Margaret Stuart had to report:

I regret that the response to that appeal has not been sufficient to defray the cost of such an ambulance. After consideration I have resolved to hand the sum collected – £256 15s 2d – to the Edinburgh Branch of the British Red Cross Society, who have undertaken to supply an ambulance, to be named 'St Margaret of Scotland' for the use of the wounded soldiers at home.<sup>29</sup>

At least Margaret Stuart managed to raise a comparatively respectable sum and was able to convince the Red Cross to supply the rest of the money needed to achieve her goal of a named 'St Margaret' ambulance. As the war continued, other women organising such named ambulance collections found it ever more difficult to follow suit. Mrs Ford acknowledged as much in her initial letter asking for funds of an Elizabeth ambulance by ending the letter, 'If I do not receive the £400 necessary I will give the money to Lord Rothschild's fund for 'running' expenses of other ambulances'.<sup>30</sup>

Collecting £25 or £50 for a named bed appeared to be an easier task, although even then some appeals needed to be repeated before this sum was achieved. On 28 March 1916, Lady Russell (Ruth) and Mrs Patricia Mackenzie of Edinburgh had to repeat their appeal for £50 for a Ruth and Patricia bed at the Red Cross Hospital at Rouen, originally made on 16 March 1916. At the same time, Mrs Alice Wemyss Methuen and Miss Alison D. McCulloch, both of Bellevue Crescent, Edinburgh, made a last appeal for the £7 5s still outstanding to continue to endow an Alice and

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27 Lady Clementine Waring, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 19 February 1915.

28 Elizabeth Ford, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 12 February 1915.

29 Margaret Stuart, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 August 1915.

30 Elizabeth Ford, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 10 February 1915.



Alison Bed at the same hospital. They had successfully endowed the bed the previous year in the first flush of enthusiasm for the war, but found it much harder going to raise the necessary £50 for a second year, despite being able to quote from a postcard sent to them from the bed itself which reinforced the Scottish and patriotic nature of their appeal:

'Dear Friends — Just a PC to you which I have much pleasure in writing. I —, 2<sup>nd</sup> Seaforth Highlanders, happen to be in your bed, which is very comfortable, and I think it very kind of you to have helped the Scottish section of the Red Cross, so much. I being Scotch am glad that Scotland has such people as form the staff of this hospital, for they tend us like fathers and mothers, and you never get us grumbling. I belong to —, and wish you good luck. With my best wishes.'<sup>31</sup>

Appeals for named beds seem to have been a popular fundraising goal for the women of the middle-class elite of Edinburgh. One of the most indefatigable ladies involved in such activities was Miss Lucy Soutar of Golspie Tower, Greenbank Crescent, Edinburgh. Her first essay into this area was in the company of her niece, Miss Frances Jean Simpson, of Golspie (Sutherland). Unlike the other ladies of Edinburgh, however, they did not fundraise for named beds. Instead, they specialised in commemorating anniversaries and birthdays. In July 1915 they encouraged those who had a birthday in January to send money towards a 'January Birthday Bed'.<sup>32</sup> Again, their fundraising was not plain sailing, and they had to repeat their request in September when they had only received £27 6d from '96 boys and girls who have January birthdays'.<sup>33</sup> This repeated appeal was apparently a success since by October 1915 Miss Soutar was appealing for a 'December Bed of Memories', although her niece was not involved in this appeal and Miss Soutar had down-graded her ambitions to £25 to maintain a bed in the Scottish Women's Hospital at Troyes for six months. Miss Soutar remained a loyal supporter of the Scottish Women's Hospitals wherever they were established throughout the war, and her fundraising skills appear to have improved with practice. By November 1915, not only had she raised the £25 necessary for the bed at Troyes, but was able to carry a balance of £3 over to a new appeal for a December bed for the new Scottish Women's Hospital in Serbia.<sup>34</sup> By January 1916 she could report the achievement of £75 for the beds in France and Serbia and launched another appeal to equip a 'Bed o' My Lady Nicotine' in the new Scottish Women's Hospital in Corsica, which was opening to care for Serbian soldiers and refugees. Men and women were encouraged to curtail their 'smokes' in order to subscribe small sums for this bed. Miss Soutar continued to raise money for

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31 Mrs Alice Wemyss Methuen and Miss Alison D. McCulloch, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 9 February 1915.

32 Lucy Soutar and Frances Jean Simpson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 27 July 1915.

33 Lucy Soutar and Frances Jean Simpson, 'Letters to the Editor' *Aberdeen Free Press*, 13 September 1915.



each of her beds on an annual basis throughout the war, although her niece only joined in her efforts for the January bed.

The Scottish Women's Hospitals were of course established by Dr Elsie Inglis, one of the founders of the Scottish Women's Suffrage Federation before the war.<sup>35</sup> At the outbreak of war, Inglis immediately offered to head up a women's ambulance unit at the front and was infamously advised by the War Office 'My good lady, go home and sit still'. Having refused to take this advice, Dr Inglis offered her services to the French and later the Serbs, who were pleased to accept. The first Scottish Women's Hospital was established by 1915 at Royaumont in France and was followed by the end of the war by 13 other medical units serving in France, Serbia, Corsica, Salonika, Romania, Russia and Malta. Not only was Inglis herself a native of Edinburgh, but the Scottish Women's Hospital Committee was also based in Edinburgh under the direction of Miss S. E. S. Mair, President of the Edinburgh branch of the NUWSS. The Hospitals could therefore call upon the support of women who had been supporters of the NUWSS before the war and also focus its fundraising activities around a specifically Scottish cause. Of all the war-time fundraising undertaken by correspondents to the two Aberdeenshire newspapers, the cause of the Scottish Women's Hospitals was the most frequently mentioned recipient. The *Free Press* carried 24 letters appealing for funds for the Scottish Women's Hospitals during the war years, compared to 14 fundraising for the British Red Cross hospitals and 4 for the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry. Whilst the letters for the Red Cross and the FANY were mainly written in 1915 and 1916, the last being 20 September 1916, letters asking for support for a wide range of Scottish Women's Hospitals continued until 31 August 1918. This included a letter from Mrs A. Douglas Walker of Edinburgh appealing for help in setting up a 'May' bed in the new Elsie Inglis Memorial Hospital for Serbs suffering from tuberculosis being established in the Haute Savoie, Elsie Inglis having died in November 1917 on her return from Russia. The *Daily Journal* carried a similar spread of letters for the Scottish Women's Hospitals (17) compared to two for the FANY and four for the Red Cross hospitals. Around 50% of these letters were duplicates of the ones published in the *Free Press*. Further analysis of the letters published in the *Free Press* shows a heavy bias towards Edinburgh origin. 20 out of 24 letters were written in Edinburgh, but interestingly, the first four letters to be published about the Scottish Women's Hospitals did not. The first two letters

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34 Lucy Soutar, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 13 November 1915.

35 For more on Dr Elsie Inglis, see her biographers, Balfour, F., *Dr Elsie Inglis*. London, 1918 or, more recently, Leneman, Leah, *Elsie Inglis*. Edinburgh: NMS Publishing, 1998. For more on the work of the Scottish Women's Hospitals, see Crofton, Eileen C, *The Women of Royaumont: A Scottish Women's Hospital on the Western Front*. East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997 or Ross, Ishobel, *Little Grey Partridge First World War Diary of Ishobel Ross who served with the Scottish Women's Hospitals Unit in Serbia*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988.



regarding fundraising for the Hospitals appeared in the *Free Press* on 10 November and 1 December 1914. They were written by Elena Miller of Old Aberdeen, previously identified as the daughter of the Bulgarian Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and appealed for money and goods to stock the first of the hospitals, to be sent to Royaumont. Miller's letters were followed by one from Mrs E. C. Llewellyn Hacon of Dornoch,<sup>36</sup> calling for subscriptions to support an 'Elizabeth' bed at this hospital (suggesting that the E in her name was for Elizabeth) and another from Winnifred Soddy of Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen, requesting funds for the Serbian unit.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting that no other letters regarding the Scottish Women's Hospitals originated from outside Edinburgh for the rest of the war. This suggests that the cause became inextricably linked with the capital or the NUWSS leadership based there. It might at first have been suggested that Elena Miller, in particular, felt the necessity to remove herself from the limelight of the press once Bulgaria joined Germany's side in the war, which happened in November 1915. However, a further examination of the letters collection shows that Elena Miller continued to contribute to Aberdeen's war effort and sign letters to the press as Superintendent of Garments of the Ladies' Needlework Guild while Winnifred Soddy wrote letters on behalf of the University Work Party. It therefore must be concluded that the Scottish Women's Hospitals, whilst attracting geographically diverse support at the beginning of the war, soon became an Edinburgh-dominated enterprise, although it was still seen as worthwhile for letters requesting support to be sent to newspapers outside the capital. Men and women of Scotland were willing to contribute to the funds of the Scottish Women's Hospital throughout the war, but the organisation of such fundraising became associated with Edinburgh while provincial ladies focused on their own particular local war work, which for example in Aberdeen focused on the gathering, cleaning and utilisation of sphagnum moss.

### Khaki fever

Another concern of the first year of the war, which Marwick does not mention but is mentioned by other commentators, was what was described as 'Khaki fever'. Both Philippa Levine and Angela Woollacott have worked on this subject in recent years and place the phenomenon in the first year of the war, when women did not have a concrete role in the war effort themselves and there had also been economic dislocation, with thousands of women thrown out of work from trades such as lace-making, millinery, dressmaking and laundries.<sup>38</sup> 'Khaki fever' was seen as

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36 Mrs E. C. Llewellyn Hacon 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 1 January 1915.

37 Winnifred Soddy 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 25 March 1915.

38 Woollacott, Angela, 'Khaki Fever' and its control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29, 1994, (2), pp. 325-347



particularly affecting young, working-class girls, who hung around the training grounds and camps of the new army. Woollacott quotes *The Englishwoman* of 2 November 1916, describing such girls:

Headstrong, impressionable, undisciplined girls, hardly more than children, have made themselves a nuisance by running after soldiers without any thought of more than silly or perhaps vulgar flirtation, and, by turn tempters and tempted, have often ended by entangling themselves and their soldier friends in actually vicious conduct.<sup>39</sup>

Woollacott suggests that such girls were attracted to the idea of a soldier-lover because they feared being 'left out' of the war, and that once women were given their own roles within the war effort – some of them were even given their own uniform – such 'Khaki fever' subsided. She also suggests that the authorities were mainly concerned about such girls because of their 'amateur' status. They were not professional prostitutes who could be easily controlled and knew how to protect themselves. These 'amateurs' could pose a threat to the army's health through venereal disease and to its discipline through 'khaki babies'.

The *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Free Press* echo such concerns in their letters columns during 1914 and 1915, and in particular in the first half of 1915. A letter from the Scottish Division of the Young Women's Christian Association, printed in the *Free Press* on 15 March 1915, warned that:

With the abnormal conditions now prevailing, more especially in neighbourhoods which have for the time being become military centres, we are faced with new problems which call for immediate and effective action.... Little imagination is needed to picture the evils which may arise when a girl in the state of mental restlessness produced by the war, finds herself perhaps unemployed or under-employed. With so much free time on her hands, and with a sudden and absorbing interest thrust upon her through the presence of a large number of troops stationed in her town.<sup>40</sup>

The YWCA planned to open temporary clubrooms and arrange social and educative recreation for such girls, to 'turn their thoughts and energies into healthy channels'. There was an immediate response to this letter the following day as readers were informed that there were already efforts being made in Aberdeen to provide such facilities under the aegis of the Women Patrols' Committee. 'Clubs for Girls' were being organised where the girls might occupy themselves in knitting, sewing or other light occupations and also benefit from the guidance of voluntary

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and Levine, Philippa, 'Walking the Streets in a Way no decent woman should, Women Police in World War I', *Journal Of Modern History*, 1994, 66, pp. 34–78.

39 Woollacott, Angela, 'Khaki Fever' and its control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', p. 331.



workers.<sup>41</sup> The Women's Patrol Committee comprised local representatives of the Aberdeen Union of Women Workers, the YWCA and the Scotch Girls' Friendly Society, with the Union's Vice-President, Maria Ogilvie Gordon, as the main guiding force. Again, the response to a nationwide problem was formulated at a local level, with Aberdeen women organising to 'rescue' Aberdeen girls.

It has been suggested by Woollacott and Levine that women both inside and outside the National Union of Women Workers used the excuse of 'Khaki fever' to campaign for the introduction of some type of women police force into Britain, arguing that women needed to be morally guided by other women. The patrols were non-uniformed and voluntary. Although they did not have any right of arrest, the patrolwomen, who walked through the town in pairs, adopted an interventionist policy, warning girls and soldiers that they met about their behaviour and suggesting that they would be better off at the clubrooms. 'Any citizen of Aberdeen who walks along Union Street in the evening, or penetrates some of the side streets, will see that much good might be achieved if women patrols were moving about and caring for the girls.'<sup>42</sup> By 30 June 1915, the Women Patrols' Committee was appealing for funds for its new War Club for Girls at 23 King Street, where there was a hall for music and games as well as smaller rooms for writing and sewing – and where girls' soldier-friends would also be made welcome.<sup>43</sup>

Thus 'khaki fever' was tackled in Aberdeen by local women who had been involved in social work amongst other women before the war. Girls and their soldier-friends were encouraged off the streets and into well-lit clubrooms where they could be supervised by middle-class matrons and encouraged in 'healthy' pursuits. Since no more letters regarding the Women's Patrol Committee or the care of young girls in this context were printed in the newspapers, we can assume that the problem was solved to correspondents' satisfaction by mid-1915, or that other problems became more pressing. Any letters concerning young girls after this time focus on nurses or munitions workers travelling to their place of employment and reinforce Woollacott's and Levine's theory that 'Khaki fever' was a temporary phenomenon that disappeared once women were given their own place in the war effort.

As has already been stated, concerns about 'khaki fever' can be linked to a general concern about the unemployment suffered by many working women because of the dislocation of war. This was again a temporary problem, solved by the mobilisation of women into munitions and other war

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40 Young Women's Christian Association 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 15 March 1915.

41 Women Patrols' Committee, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 16 March 1915.

42 Women Patrols' Committee, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 6 February 1915.

43 Women Patrols' Committee, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 30 June 1915.



work. During the first year of war, workrooms were set up in all parts of the country, usually under the aegis of the 'Queen's Work for Women' Fund, to provide some kind of employment for these women. As Arthur Marwick and Deborah Thom point out, such schemes were only open to women formerly in employment and themselves thrown out of work by the war, not the wives of men who had been thrown out of work, and family income was taken into account when calculating the amount of hours women were allowed to work so that they did not profit from it. 'The women in them were explicitly neither trained nor made self-supporting. They were removed from the labour market for 15 weeks and, thereby, it was hoped, from the "abyss of destitution".'<sup>44</sup> Nothing in the schemes was allowed to interfere with ordinary trade and the 'useful' items made by the women were not to be offered for sale. Instead, they were used to provision poor law hospitals and maternity hospitals.<sup>45</sup> The emphasis throughout was on making the women useful and retraining them, rather than seeing the workrooms as a form of charity, as a letter from Mary M. Paterson, Honorary Secretary of the Scottish Committee on Women's Employment, was keen to stress:

The chief aim of the workrooms is not so much the production of large quantities of work in a given time as the encouragement of neat workmanship and the giving of a thorough training in cutting out, making and mending, which will not only serve to tide the workers over a season of unemployment, but will be of lasting benefit to them in after-life.<sup>46</sup>

#### Non-charitable concerns in the early years of the war

Letters addressed to the editor during the first year of the war did not entirely concentrate on charitable fundraising and social work. Two other topics were of immediate importance to the correspondents to the Aberdeen daily newspapers: the encouragement of young men to volunteer and the question of enemy aliens. At no time during the war years did any correspondent published in the two newspapers write an anti-war letter, although there was one letter in October 1916 signed by 'Woman Pacifist' urging the government to accept the United States' offer of mediation.<sup>47</sup> The overwhelming tone during the war was one of encouragement of young men to 'do their bit' and join the armed forces, although in later years there was plenty of discussion of young men who were perceived not to be 'doing their bit'. DeGroot reports that, in May 1914 the regular army was nearly 11,000 men short of the size prescribed by the Army Order of 1907, but that on the outbreak of war, the army was swamped by recruits too numerous to be processed.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 30.

<sup>45</sup> Marwick, Arthur, *Women at War 1914-1918*, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Mary M. Paterson, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 16 January 1915.

<sup>47</sup> 'Woman Pacifist', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 5 October 1916.

<sup>48</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 31.



Temporary camps were set up all over the country, becoming almost immediately overcrowded. Despite the numbers pouring into the armed services, the country as a whole was alive with a need to encourage recruitment, and many ladies handed white feathers to acquaintances (and total strangers) who were perceived to be 'slackers'. Caroline Dakers describes some of the ways in which the more reluctant young men in England were encouraged to enlist – Lord Wemyss, Lord Rothschild and the Earl of Lonsdale all threatened single men working on their estates with notice if they did not enlist; while celebrities such as Rudyard Kipling toured the country giving rousing speeches.<sup>49</sup> It was in the first 12 months of the war that the most enthusiastic and encouraging letters from women correspondents were published. A good example of this type of letter comes from the *Daily Journal* of 4 September 1914:

With your permission I would like to speak a few words to our young men who have not yet enlisted in either of our forces.

Young men, the honour and liberty of our nation is at stake; what are you doing to avert this great calamity?

Everywhere about us we see young men, some working as usual, but the majority lounging about, or enjoying themselves on a cricket or football pitch. Is that a way to help your country?

I was in Aberdeen lately and saw recruits being drilled, while all around were young men watching, never thinking they, too, ought to have been there swelling the ranks. Also, as I passed along the streets, the tramcars and taxis were flying on as plentiful as before, all under the hand of stalwart young men. In the shops, too, men are there in abundance. Surely older men, and even women, who can't go and fight, can take on these jobs and set the men free. I see no reason why not.

One word also to our women. Especially among young women we hear this remark – 'We can't let all our men go. What is the use of them all going?' Well, my fellow-country-women, my verdict is, no able-bodied young man who can go at all is worth the name of a man if he does not go, and these women who hold them back are unworthy of the name of women.

True, it is hard to part, but then when they come marching home victorious we will have men to honour and be proud of and if, indeed, some do not return to us, we know they have done their duty and died an honourable death.

Oh, young men, go, go now, before it is yet too late.

And may all the gods go with you;

On your sword sit laurel victory,

And smooth success by strewn before your feet.

Bella, W. Cults<sup>50</sup>

The woman who was preventing 'her' man enlisting was a frequent image in such letters. She was usually assumed to be a mother and, as Susan Zeiger points out, was the negative side to the

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<sup>49</sup> Dakers, *The Countryside at War*, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> 'Bella', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 4 September 1914.



image of the 'patriotic' mother. The patriotic mother sacrificed her sons willingly to the army, but the unpatriotic mother was 'selfish' and overly – probably unhealthily – attached to her children.<sup>51</sup> Such a mother was described in a letter to the *Free Press* by 'One Who Has Given Each of Her Sons':

Again, I regret to say, there have been mothers so utterly selfish that they have put their trifling individual interests in the balance against a nation's. They said – 'My boy cannot join; it would interfere with his studies or his ambitions in life'. Therefore we rejoice that for these has come the Derby scheme.

Another mother, of puny, disloyal soul, has said – 'My boy could not join because he could not get a commission.' We thank God that many a man and youth of good name and fame has joined the ranks, sometimes, perhaps, feeling his incapacity or inexperience for leadership, knowing nothing of that snobbery which is ashamed to serve.<sup>52</sup>

This letter-writer also attacked young women who consorted with 'slackers'. For the most part, however, the mothers depicted in the letters to the Aberdeen newspapers were of the 'patriotic' sort, who encouraged their sons to enlist, supplied them with comforts, worried about them when they were prisoners of war, and proudly mourned them when they died. As has already been noted, fewer and fewer female correspondents felt the need to use noms de plume, particularly during the first three years of the war. However, the most popular nom de plume in use during the war years was that of 'A Mother'. Between August 1914 and November 1918, the *Free Press* published letters from five correspondents signing themselves 'A Mother', plus the following variations: 'Mater Familias', two 'Mater's', 'A Patriotic Mother', 'A Worried Mother', 'One Who Has Given Each of Her Sons', 'A Mother of Soldiers', 'A Prisoner's Mother', and 'A Mother in Israel'. In addition, the *Daily Journal* published letters from four 'Soldier's Mother's', 'Mater', 'Lad's Mother', 'A Worried Mother', 'Widowed Mother of An Only Son Lying Ill in France', 'A Prisoner's Mother', 'A Gordon Prisoner's Mother', 'A Mother' and 'An Indignant Mother'. The 'patriotic mother' was a well-known and admired image in British and American iconography during the war, and it seems that those women who did not wish to reveal their identity to the newspapers' readers used their motherhood as a useful role. Their motherhood bestowed on them the right to question or complain about some aspect of the army or government's policies which affected themselves or their sons. It legitimised their concerns and gave them a status without which they may not have had the courage to write to the newspapers.

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51 Zeiger, Susan, 'She didn't raise her boy to be a slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War', *Feminist Studies*, Spring 1996, 22(1), pp. 7–39.

52 'One Who Has Given Each of Her Sons', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 11 February 1916.



For example, in December 1915 'A Patriotic Mother' attacked the government for allowing soldiers access to alcohol in their camps:

Since the outbreak of the war, mothers have sent their sons from sheltered homes to fight for freedom and righteousness. They give them up to Government guidance. The hard training undergone by them proves to be beneficial. But there is another side. The temptation of drink is never absent from the men. Women are patriotic, and are unwilling to complain. They realise to some extent how difficult is the task our country has to face. They are asked to exercise thrift. Are they to sacrifice their comforts as well as their sons? They send them to fight the Germans, not drink and devilry. What do we find going on just now? Everywhere the drink traffic is restricted except in soldiers' camps. Is it the case that these wet canteens exist?

That soldiers can obtain drink at any hour?

That men have to take their turn at the bar?

That the profits do not all go to the Government?

These are but a few of the questions that are being put by thinking people. What is to be done? Are dividends of more account than the well-being of our sons and the fitness of our army? What can we do but cry aloud of this iniquity. If the mothers do not, methinks the blood of their slain sons will cry from the ground and witness against their leaders. I trust more skilful pens than mine will come to the help of those lads who are preparing for the fight.<sup>53</sup>

Later in the war, mothers attacked the government again for its policy of allowing 'maison tolerees' (officially recognised and patrolled brothels) for the men at the front. The patriotic mother, who was sacrificing her sons for the greater good, was a role which enabled women to question official policy throughout the war without being accused of unpatriotism or mischief-making.

Slightly less popular as a *nom de plume*, but still an important role which women were happy to utilise in their letters to the press was that of 'Soldier's Wife'. The image of the soldier's wife was in the main a positive one, and could again legitimise a woman's complaints, for example over army pay or housing:

There seems to be a considerable divergence of opinion among the wives of soldiers over the question of whether a prisoner of war will receive when the war is over, the amount of pay, in bulk, he would have received had he gone through the whole of the campaign on active service. Perhaps your readers will be able to answer this question, as some of the wives of soldiers are building up hopes on this.<sup>54</sup>

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53 'A Patriotic Mother', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 25 December 1915.

54 'Soldier's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 27 January 1915.

However, as some women found, there were still pockets of society which looked askance at the wives of ordinary soldiers and were quick to condemn their behaviour:

I wonder why the soldier's wife is looked down upon in Aberdeen. Arriving in this city a few weeks ago, I had to search for a house with immediate entry. Seeing one advertised in the paper, I went to the agent. He was most gracious to begin with, and explained about the house. He asked the question – what was my husband. I said – 'A soldier'. Can anyone imagine my feelings when he said quite abruptly – 'We don't let houses to soldiers' wives'.... I have been, through my husband, in the Army eight years now, and have never come across a bad debtor yet. I know there are good and bad in every class, but I myself have never tasted drink in my life. Because one or two do so, I suppose we are all tarred with the same stick.  
Regular Soldier's Wife<sup>55</sup>

As Janis Lomas<sup>56</sup> points out in her article on class and respectability in government policy towards wives and widows of British soldiers, in the century before the First World War, the vast majority of ordinary soldiers were not officially permitted to marry at all. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century only single men were allowed to enlist in the army and, if a soldier wished to marry, he was required to request the permission of his commanding officer. The Army allowed around 4–6% of its soldiers to marry, although many more married without permission. These unofficial wives (a distinction was made between wives 'on' and 'off the strength') were not recognised by the Army and were therefore not eligible for any sort of welfare benefits or pensions if their husbands died. Their unofficial position also affected their position in society. However, with the need for volunteers at the beginning of the First World War, followed by the introduction of conscription during 1916, it became impossible for the Army to continue to disregard army wives and widows. In 1885 the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (SSFA) had been founded to assist both official and unofficial wives and families. Lomas explains that, on the outbreak of war in 1914, Asquith announced provisions extending the minimum level of separation allowances and war widow's pensions to unofficial wives and the wives of all volunteers, although there was at first no machinery in place for the administration of such monies and delays in the payment of allowances caused terrible hardship. During 1914 and 1915, the government was forced to turn to the SSFA for assistance in administering allowances and pensions. However, as Lomas points out, although soldiers' families were in theory entitled to some form of compensation for the temporary or permanent loss of the main wage-earner, the use of a charity's volunteers as

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55 'Regular Soldier's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 13 November 1914.



administrators meant that servicemen's families were dependent on the personal judgement of these volunteers, who were used to judging cases – and withholding funds – on moral issues.

Any widow who was judged profligate, drunken, dirty, lazy or immoral was not thought to be worthy of assistance... [T]he SSFA operated on principles of self-help, which had been set out by the Charity Organisation Society, and harboured a similar dread of encouraging dependency and idleness.<sup>57</sup>

Such a dread of dependency and idleness has already been seen in the provisions for aid for women who had been thrown out of work at the beginning of the war. Throughout the war there were rumours and scare stories about soldiers' wives who drank their allowances, despite increasing legislation controlling access to alcohol. The Women's Advisory Committee of the Liquor Control Board cited excessive drinking among soldiers' wives as the cause of a rise in crime, reckless procreation, infidelity and improvidence, all leading to 'race suicide'.<sup>58</sup> Again, the connection was made between the immoral behaviour of working-class women and poor mothering skills, meaning that the imperial nation was weakened by a dwindling pool of healthy, intelligent and moral young citizens. Such images, plus the judgmental tendencies of SSFA volunteers, meant that some families found it hard to establish their entitlement to separation payments or pensions, which in the letter quoted below seem to be used more as a maximum guide than an official entitlement:

*Dependants' Allowance Grievance*

I have four sons on naval and military service, and I wish to complain of the manner in which some pension officers entrusted with the investigation of claims by dependants of service men carry out their duties. Under the new scale of allowance, the mother of a soldier would be entitled to 12s 6d if there were no children; but the official comes and asks if 8s or 9s would do. If a protest is made to the effect that the sacrifice the mother has made in permitting her son to join the colours entitles her to more, the officer advances the proposed allowance of 10s. On the mother remarking that that is not much coming into a house from which the breadwinner has gone on service, she may be offered 11s, and obliged, as, it is said, others have been, to accept this curtailed payment. Such treatment does much to keep men from enlisting, when otherwise, I think, they would be more ready to serve.  
Soldier's Mother<sup>59</sup>

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56 Lomas, Janis, '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*, 9 (1), 2000, pp. 123–147.

57 Ibid, p. 126.

58 Quoted in DeGroot, Gerard J., *Blighty*, p. 237.

59 'Soldier's Mother', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 12 March 1915.

There was one set of wives who were not allowed even this measly amount, and about whom little discussion can be found in histories of the war – British wives of German soldiers. Two letters, which were mentioned earlier, outlining their plight can be found printed in the *Daily Journal* during the first months of the war. Both letters were written by J. E. Coutts, Secretary of the Women's Corps and Bureau, War Emergency Workers' Committee, based at 173a Union Street. She protested against the local decision that no money was to be given to these women and their children from national charities. Instead they were to go to the poorhouse if they could not support themselves. Coutts asked: 'How can we regard ourselves as better than the merciless destroyers of Belgium if we let our own townswomen suffer thus?'<sup>60</sup> While Coutts wrote that she was sure 'men and women in Aberdeen... will not let this stain fall on the city', her confidence appeared to have been misplaced since no more correspondence appeared on this matter.

Aberdeen's attitude towards aliens in its midst can probably better be judged from the correspondence on the subject of Herr Hein, which dates from the same period. Hein was a teacher of German at the Aberdeen Girls' High School and at the outbreak of war was met with demands in the press from both men and women for his dismissal. Letters from former pupils also alleged that 'Herr Hein often lectured a class of girls against England and her laws, and also prophesised that in two years' time Britons would all be speaking German'<sup>61</sup> although a couple of brave former pupils attempted to defend him, while assuring their readers that they were not pro-German. Hein had not helped his case by being a frequent correspondent to the letters columns himself in the years before the war and making inflammatory anti-British and pro-German remarks in his letters. However, despite the calls in the press for his dismissal, Hein continued to teach at the Girls' High School during the war, although no more letters from him are evident in the press. Such anti-German feeling was common in First World War Britain. As DeGroot reports, newspapers warned about the 'enemy in our midst' and 'stories circulated about German waiters and butchers poisoning food, German watchmakers constructing bombs, German barbers cutting customers' throats'. The most prominent 'German' in Britain was the First Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg, born in Austria to a German prince. Hounded from office in October 1914, he changed the family name to Mountbatten.<sup>62</sup>

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60 J. E. Coutts, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 13 October 1914.

61 'An Aberdeen Matron', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 28 October 1914.

62 See DeGroot, Gerard, *Blighty*, p. 191.



### A more centralised approach

It can thus be seen that, apart from the success of large national organisations such as the Red Cross and the Scottish Women's Hospitals, the immediate response of Aberdeenshire women to the outbreak of war was, as Vera Brittain suggested, largely a provincialised one. This also accords with Marwick's contention that during the first year of the war, women's roles did not change greatly although voluntary activities were undertaken by upper- and middle-class ladies. Fundraising and other forms of war work were organised by the provincial elite of Aberdeen and its county and construed in terms of local battalions or regiments, family connections, and Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire or Scottish ties. By the end of 1915, however, there was a recognition – at government level if nowhere else – that, however well meant or patronised, an approach to the provision of ambulances, hospital beds, comforts and even socks based on family and local ties was essentially piecemeal and no way to run a war. Battalions at the front were receiving differing amounts of comforts (a term which covered everything from socks and shirts to writing paper, pencils, chocolate, Christmas puddings and soap); hospitals were dependent on the whims of small groups of workers for their supply of moss dressings; and prisoners of war received or did not receive food and clothing depending on the efficiency of their regiment's support group. The recognition of the need for more governmental intervention grew from the end of 1915 throughout 1916, and can be seen as part of the growing influence of Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions, at the expense of Asquith, the-then Prime Minister, until the replacement of Asquith by Lloyd George in December 1916. Marwick states that the ousting of Asquith, and the establishment of the Lloyd George Coalition Government in December 1916, 'marked a definitive stage towards direct State control of all aspects of the war effort in place of the mixture of Government and voluntary action which had characterised the earlier part of the war.'<sup>63</sup>

Describing the approach of Asquith's government to the war, Gerard J DeGroot comments:

The war was managed according to the principle of the squeaky wheel.....  
When the government intervened, it first asked for voluntary compliance  
with stated goals then gently cajoled and only regulated as a last resort....  
The absence of comprehensive planning caused inequalities of sacrifice  
among the population, to the detriment of morale.<sup>64</sup>

Lloyd George is seen by posterity as the more dynamic war leader, more able to conceive of government intervention into people's lives – he was after all the pre-war Chancellor who had introduced the idea of pensions and some form of health insurance. However, DeGroot cautions

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<sup>63</sup> Arthur Marwick, *Women at War 1914–1918*, p. 83.

<sup>64</sup> DeGroot, Gerard J, *Blighty*, pp. 79–80.



against a too-simplistic view of the leadership style of the two men: both were leading the same Houses of Parliament after all.

The name Asquith has often been taken to imply ineffectual *laissez-faire* war management, that of Lloyd George assertive intervention. In fact the difference between the two is not so distinct. Asquith had his successes, Lloyd George his failures. Asquith occasionally intervened, just as Lloyd George was often content to place his trust in voluntarism. The progress from one war leader to the other was not a radical departure but a slow evolution. Failures evident under Asquith paved the way for remedies proposed by Lloyd George to gain acceptance. Lloyd George did assume a more dynamic approach to the war, but dynamism should not be confused with method. Though he might have believed in co-ordinated state control, he had to work with colleagues determined to resist state expansion.<sup>65</sup>

The letters columns of the two newspapers show evidence of this slow movement towards more Government intervention during 1915 and 1916 and supports DeGroot's contention that this movement began under Asquith and increased under Lloyd George rather than indicating a complete change of policy in December 1916. Throughout this period, the Government and local authorities became aware that a piecemeal and local system of support for the war based on voluntary efforts was inefficient; however, as will be seen, their first efforts to change such a system still stressed a voluntarist approach. Lloyd George set up five new departments of state to oversee shipping, labour, food, national service and food production. A. J. P. Taylor suggests that these new departments evolved a system of 'war socialism', although still based on voluntary principles: 'Though they had almost unlimited powers by statute, they preferred to enlist the co-operation of producers and owners, who thus largely ran war socialism themselves for patriotic motives.'<sup>66</sup> Looking at the situation from the view of the farmers, Caroline Dakers takes a less positive view of the situation, which she describes as 'a new government with a strong interventionist policy and a new President of the Board of Agriculture able to enforce the cultivation of land, to guarantee minimum prices and wages and to make farmers submit to state control.'<sup>67</sup> Whichever view of the situation is the more correct, it is clear that the new Coalition government of Lloyd George signalled a move towards a more interventionist policy in the running of the home front, from the regulation of agriculture and food supply to the provision of knitted comforts for prisoners of war.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid p. 80.

<sup>66</sup> Taylor, A. J. P., *English History 1914-19145*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 114.

<sup>67</sup> Dakers, *The Countryside at War*, p. 146.



The first indicator of change in the columns of the Aberdeen newspapers comes with a series of letters concerning Mrs Niven's Prisoners of War Fund. Mrs Charles Niven, wife of the Professor of Natural Philosophy at Aberdeen University and another of the daughters of Sir David and Lady Stewart of Banchory, established a fund early in the war to assist prisoners of war from local regiments. We learn from a letter dated 19 October 1916 and signed by her husband (there are references to Mrs Niven's ill-health throughout all letters concerning the fund) that the local authorities had sought to centralise such funds and therefore Mrs Niven was refused exemption from registration as an official charity by the Magistrates. Since she did not wish to register, with all the paperwork that would entail, all donations should then have been diverted to the Prisoners of War Bureau. Despite this, Mrs Niven evidently continued to collect money and send parcels as before. Professor Niven offered the excuse that 'Subsequent donations to her for the prisoners have been refused and the donors informed that they should be sent to the Bureau; she has only accepted them in cases where the givers expressly stated that they wished her to take charge of the money'.<sup>68</sup> A few months later, Mrs Niven's daughters wrote to the *Daily Journal* to point out the foolishness of the bureaucratic attitude of the authorities which, they claimed in a somewhat dramatic manner, meant that a cheque that had just arrived that morning from America for Mrs Niven's fund would simply have to be torn up.<sup>69</sup> It is evident that Mrs Niven's fund continued to attract money away from the faceless Prisoners of War Bureau because of the personalised touch she was offering. 'A Prisoner's Mother' wrote in defence of Mrs Niven's fund in January 1917:

When anything went wrong in Germany the first thing one did was to write to Mrs Niven, and never once did she fail one. By return would come the kindly and sympathetic letter saying that she had taken the matter up and was writing about it. Only those who have appealed to her know the help and comfort she has been in many a dark hour.<sup>70</sup>

It was not only Mrs Niven's Prisoners of War Fund that fell foul of the new centralising tendency. Mrs Marian Chapman, the Convenor of the Perth and Perthshire Prisoners of War Association, also wrote to the newspapers in October 1916 in protest against the new orders. Before this time, her organisation had sent food and comforts to any prisoners of war who came from the Perthshire area, regardless of which regiment they had joined. Now, however, she had been told that her association should only supply prisoners from Perthshire battalions, despite that fact that many Perthshire men – including her own sons – had joined or been transferred into other

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68 Professor Niven, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 19 October 1916.

69 L. B. and M. S. Niven, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 23 January 1917.

70 'A Prisoner's Mother', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 26 January 1917.



regiments. Again, her letters stress the personalised nature of the organisation's work, which was of benefit not just to the prisoner but to his family:

As soon as a name comes through, we personally see the prisoner's relatives. His mother, or wife, is invited to attend our packing days and help. She sees the parcel packed, she buys something to add to our contribution, she feels she is doing something to help her son or husband in the greatest trial of his life. She looks forward to these days; her most sacred feelings are satisfied; it is the joy of her present-day existence; she talks of it to her neighbours; she thinks of it in her most troubled moment; and her painful thoughts are relieved by the mental picture of her loved one opening a useful and welcome parcel from home.<sup>71</sup>

In comparison to the local services offered by women such as Mrs Niven and Mrs Chapman, is a letter printed in the *Daily Journal* on 8 December 1915 from Edith Grant Duff, herself a member of a prominent North East family from Eden near Macduff. At this time Edith Grant Duff was Honorary Secretary of the British Section of the Bureau de Secours aux Prisonniers de Guerre, based in Berne. Her letter does show the less personal touch necessary for such a large and expanding organisation:

1. We cannot accept requests from England for the despatch of special Christmas parcels to prisoners in Germany, as we wish to adhere as much as possible to our original scheme of standardised parcels and bread. The chief object of this Bureau is now the sending of bread, for which purpose we have special facilities in that our bread parcels are sent in direct vans from Berne to Frankfurt, with no transhipments at the frontier. These special facilities are not granted for ordinary parcels, which go by post.
  2. In future anyone wishing to send bread to a friendless prisoner in Germany is requested to apply for the name of such to any Regimental Committee in England, or to the 'Prisoners of War Help Committee', 5 and 7 Southampton Street, Strand, London and not to this Committee, which has decided, in order to avoid overlapping, regularly to transmit to England the friendless names on its lists.
  3. Private subscribers renewing their subscriptions, or notifying changes of address, must repeat the full name, with Christian name, number, regiment and camp of the prisoner in whom they are interested.
  4. Subscribers are urgently requested to forward their subscriptions by cheques or postal orders only. Endless delay is caused by money orders. There is no difficulty in cashing English cheques and postal orders in Berne.
  5. As regards sending home the prisoners' acknowledgements for bread received, special arrangements are made for those for Regimental Committees and Associations.
- Private subscribers wishing to have the prisoners' acknowledgements sent to them must add fourpence to each month's subscription to cover

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<sup>71</sup> Marian Chapman, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal* 8 October 1916.



postage, stationery and the necessary increase in administrative expense. It must be remembered that in the case of the first subscription the acknowledgements for four sendings cannot reach England under eight weeks from the time of writing. After that they will be forwarded once a month.<sup>72</sup>

This centralisation of services for Prisoners of War continued to attract criticism throughout the war. In May 1917, two letters, from 'A Gordon Prisoners' Mother' and 'M. G.', whose husband had been a prisoner since the battle of Mons, complained that their son and husband had not received any bread at all through the Bureau and were starving, while privately sent parcels had been stopped because of fear that it would add to food shortages in Britain. As 'A Gordon Prisoner's Mother' wrote bitterly: 'When the change in the parcel system was first spoken about, I wrote to the papers, but no one seemed to realise then what the change would really mean. Now it seems like putting a latch on the gate when the harm is done.'<sup>73</sup>

Both Mrs Niven and Mrs Chapman were frustrated because the 'provincialised' and personal service they were offering local people was being forced to change by a government which needed a more efficient and focused war effort. They were not the only ones to feel this frustration. During 1916 and 1917 the newspaper columns printed other letters from the organisers of local charities and organisation who were fighting against this impersonalised centralising tendency. Under the War Office Organisation Scheme early in 1916, a national Director-General of Voluntary Organisations (DGVO) had been appointed and the County of Aberdeen War Work Association formed. A letter outlining the role of the new Association was published in the *Journal* on 11 January 1916. It explained that the association had been formed because of the amount of 'overlapping' that was evident as far as voluntary organisations were concerned. Instead, a Central Depot for the whole county would be instituted for the receipt of comforts, and, while individual organisations were encouraged to continue to meet and work for the war effort, they would now be told what to make or collect, how much was needed from them, and would have no say in where their products went. 'It will not be possible under [the scheme] to earmark goods for any particular unit; that must be left to the discretion of the Director-General.'<sup>74</sup> It must be noted, however, that much of the collecting for beds, ambulances, and so on continued under the various headings of family, name, etc, as previously. The Association was

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<sup>72</sup> Edith Grant Duff, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 8 December 1915.

<sup>73</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 17 March 1917.

<sup>74</sup> County of Aberdeen War Work Association 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 11 January 1916.

primarily concerned with co-ordinating and streamlining the provision of comforts to the troops at the front:

It cannot be too clearly understood that there is no desire to interfere with any existing work parties, but merely to gather them into the Association in a way that will increase their power by co-ordination and direction. A recognised work party need not undertake to give its whole output to the Association; it may work for the Red Cross or local units too, provided a proportion of its work goes to the Association.<sup>75</sup>

Thus the personal and localised response to the war of the women correspondents of Aberdeen daily newspapers was forced to conform to a more centralised approach in order to become more efficient. While the individual groups – the Rothienorman Ladies' Needlework Guild; the university war dressings depot; the flower-sellers in Banchory – were encouraged to continue, they were no longer able to dictate to whom their work would be sent. The local response which had been adequate for the Boer War was, by 1916, proving far too inefficient for the Great War.

#### **Working with a centralised authority**

Interestingly enough, not all organisations fought against the imposition of a country association. For example, a letter in December 1915 from the honorary secretary of the Aberdeen War Dressings Depot, Constance Ogston, obviously welcomed the association and the direction of the DGVO as a necessary antidote to the domination of the local Red Cross organisation.<sup>76</sup>

I have received from the Director-General of the Voluntary Organisations a copy of a letter which was sent by him upon the 7<sup>th</sup> inst to the Convenor of the County of Aberdeen, and shall be very much obliged if you will kindly publish it, as it bears out the statement which I made a few days ago in a letter to the Red Cross Commissioner for the North-Eastern District, which you were good enough to publish, and which was written at the direction of my committee.

The Director-General's letter clearly states that the War Office scheme for voluntary organisations will include many societies which supply hospital requirements, and that it is not limited to those providing comforts for the fighting troops.

I maintain, therefore, that the meetings called in each county under the voluntary organisation scheme do concern all those who are interested in the provision of clothing, dressings, etc, for hospitals (but who are not affiliated with the Red Cross Society), as well as those who work for combatant troops or for the 'accessory agencies' mentioned by the Red Cross Commissioner for supplying stamps to wounded soldiers, for arranging motor drives for sick or wounded, or for providing entertainments and concerts.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.



It seems that the ladies involved in the provision of war dressings preferred to retain some autonomy under the county association rather than be subsumed into the larger organisation of the Red Cross. The collecting and cleaning of sphagnum moss and its transformation into war dressings was, as has been seen, an important part of women's war work in Aberdeenshire, and from its beginnings, showed a strong element of co-operation between the different organisations. This may be because concentrated work on producing moss dressings did not really start until after the county association of voluntary organisations was formed in early 1916, although there is evidence of work by small groups working alone before this date. In May 1916 a letter to the *Journal* announced the formation of a Sphagnum Moss Joint Committee, to be made up of the existing City of Aberdeen War Work Association, the County of Aberdeen War Work Association, the Aberdeen War Dressings Depot and the University War Dressings Work Party. Headquarters and the sphagnum moss store were based in Robert Gordon's Technical College in the middle of Aberdeen, and Aberdeen was recognised as a sub-depot by the Edinburgh Central Sphagnum Moss Depot. Thus the county association and the authority of the Director-General of Voluntary Organisations were used to protect these small groups from the threat of incorporation by the Red Cross organisation. From this time on, all letters regarding sphagnum moss collection and cleaning were signed by representatives of all four groups, including Winnifred Soddy and Constance Ogston.

The four groups repaid the DGVO and the county association for their protection by rallying round when increased provision of dressings was required later in the war and also – and possibly more difficult – bowing to the diktats of the association by agreeing to support other organisations' needs when necessary. Almost immediately, on 8 September 1916, the Joint Committee appealed to 'patriots' to collect, if possible, even larger amounts of moss than usual since it was feared that 'the coming months will far exceed anything yet known'<sup>77</sup> They reported that the DGVO had requested the Committee to supply 8000 to 10,000 moss dressings each week, while the Committee also had a commitment, which they wished to continue to honour, to supply another four or five sacks of cleaned moss to the Ladies' Needlework Guild every week for provision of dressings to the 1<sup>st</sup> Scottish General Hospital in Aberdeen. Overall, the Committee calculated that they would require 300 sacks of raw moss every week, which would be a three-fold increase on the amount they had dealt with hitherto.

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<sup>76</sup> Constance Ogston, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 18 December 1915.

<sup>77</sup> Sphagnum Moss Joint Committee, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 8 September 1916.



A description of work at the Aberdeen Depot can be found in the autobiography of Lyn Irvine, *So Much Love, So Little Money*. Since she refers to the Depot as the Red Cross Depot, it may be seen why the Joint Committee were so eager to stress their independence:

I gathered sphagnum moss in sacks upon the moors during our summer holidays, and sent it off to the Red Cross Depot in Aberdeen. Then during the rest of the year I went to the Depot on Saturday mornings to pick the heather and grass and leaves from piles of dry moss, always of much inferior quality to any that I had gathered. Other workers packed the clean moss into gauze bags. Others sewed the bags up, and they were sent to France as swabs and dressings for the wounded. The moss is very absorbent and was said to have healing virtues.<sup>78</sup>

By November 1915 the Depot was forced to appeal for funds which were urgently needed to support this kind of output. It was pointed out that:

The Depot was the first to recognise the value of the moss dressings now so generally used, and over 75,000 dressings have been issued since May 1915. The expenses of the Depot are naturally very heavy, since some of the materials used are expensive. Since the beginning of September, 20,000 yards of muslin for moss dressings have been ordered at a cost of £250.<sup>79</sup>

It seems that the Joint Committee hit the demanding targets set for them by the DGVO. So much so, that in December 1916 he was able to ask them to give up their voluntary workers' time to supply much needed woollen goods for the men in France:

In your issue of November 28 a letter appeared from the Director General of Voluntary Organisations suggesting that, on account of the existence of a small surplus of surgical dressings, workers shall transfer their energies for the next fortnight to knitting mufflers, mittens and helmets, as otherwise the demand for these comforts cannot be met at the proper moment.

In response to this suggestion, the Aberdeen War Dressings Depot and the University War Dressings Work Party have arranged to suspend to a large extent the making of surgical supplies during the next fortnight. They have decided, however, to continue the production of sphagnum moss dressings in the same quantities as formerly. Both societies feel that they dare not reduce the weekly output of these dressings, on account of the very great demand, and the difficulty of sterilizing or sublimating large quantities on short notice.

It is most urgent, also, that the supply of cleaned moss from the Sphagnum Moss Store should not only be maintained, but greatly increased, and the demands on the Store will be in no way lessened by the DGVO's latest request.

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<sup>78</sup> Irvine, Lyn, *So Much Love, So Little Money*, p. 163.

<sup>79</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 9 November 1916.



We must also remind our readers that this 'knitting fortnight' is only a temporary arrangement, and must especially draw their attention to the DGVO's announcement that 'it is most essential that after the knitting fortnight the hospital workers should revert to their own specialised work'.<sup>80</sup>

Such flexibility on behalf of the war effort shows that, by the end of 1916, at least one group of ladies had accepted that the war needed to be waged as a national, centrally organised effort, rather than a collection of disparate local groups. It is nice to be able to record that the ladies of the Joint Committee were rewarded for their hard work and loyalty by the eventual provision of one of only three moss-cleaning machines in Scotland, able to clean up to 200 sacks of moss a day, thus meaning that in one winter approximately 60,000 sacks of raw moss would be required. Unfortunately, it was not decided to install the machine until September 1918.<sup>81</sup>

### Changing foci for fundraisers

A new problem for the voluntary fundraisers, which grew up through the war years, was that of permanently disabled soldiers and sailors. Again, as has been seen with the problem of unemployed women and soldiers' families, the note is one of utility rather than charity. Despite the fact that these men had sacrificed their health and their ability to work for the sake of their King and country, it was considered important that they did not rely on charity and sink into idleness for the rest of their lives. Far better to instruct them in some useful employment. For example, the President of the Incorporated Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society, Princess Helena [Princess Christian], wrote to the press in March 1915 appealing for funds, but keen to stress the educative value of the society's workshops:

In these workshops we take in men who have been partially disabled on active service, and teach them various trades, such as basket-making, carpentering, carving, gilding, polishing, framing, metal work and electric fitting, and our ten years' experience since the South African War, during which time we have paid out £38,687 in wages at Union rates, have convinced us that our scheme is the most practical one available for benefiting these men, not only pecuniarily, but also morally and physically, by keeping their minds and bodies regularly employed.<sup>82</sup>

New charities for disabled servicemen sprang up throughout the later years of the war, but they added to rather than displaced the other war charities. As has already been seen, women who had

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80 Sphagnum Moss Joint Committee, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 1 December 1916.

81 Sphagnum Moss Joint Committee, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 13 September 1918.

82 Princess Helena, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 20 March 1915.



successfully raised funds for beds or ambulances during 1914 and the early years of 1915, found it more difficult to raise repeat subscriptions as the war continued for a second, third and fourth year. War weariness became a real factor in voluntary activities, as a series of letters from one of the ladies involved in organising the cleaning of moss in the city confirms. Helen G. Troup was the organiser of the Carden Place Moss Sub-Depot, one of the many sub-depots around the city which supplied cleaned moss to the Central Depot for making into dressings. During 1918 she wrote frequently to the newspapers calling for new volunteers to join her band of willing workers at Carden Place. This was not exciting war work, as she had to admit herself, and she was fighting a tide of rising war weariness: 'I have heard it said, by some that they are 'fed up', tired of the monotonous working at war dressings, etc.'<sup>83</sup>

Marwick's model of changing roles for women focuses predominantly on working women. However, in the letters to the Aberdeen press, it is the voluntary sector that shows most evidence of such change. The beginning of the war brought concerns about women thrown out of employment and the behaviour of young girls, plus the need to provide comforts for soldiers at the front and dressings and equipment for hospitals both abroad and at home. Local and national voluntary organisations were formed to meet these challenges. From early on in the war, there were also organisations devoted to the care of prisoners of war and their families. New concerns for voluntary workers grew up as the war continued – the provision of moss dressings and the need to provide for disabled servicemen are two examples of this. From late 1915 onwards, all these organisations were affected by the changes that came from the Government's need for a more efficient organisation of the war.

Perhaps Vera Brittain was right in her description of a middle- and upper-class elite 'provincialising' the war, but what she apparently did not understand was that this response was the necessary precursor to a more centralised organisation of the home-front's war effort, which simply did not exist in 1914. The good ladies of Buxton and Aberdeenshire stepped into a vacuum. Their voluntary efforts and provincial, localised approach to war work managed to fill it quite well at the beginning of the war, when it was expected that the voluntary approach – whether in good works or for the provision of troops – was all that was needed to win. It took two years to recognise that such a piecemeal approach was not enough. In the early days of the war, it was not sufficient to appeal for aid for an amorphous war effort; it needed to be personalised and localised in order for it to be embraced by the organising ladies of provincial Scottish society.

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83 Helen G. Troup, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 2 April 1918.



### Women's paid war work

Marwick's model of women's changing roles during the war years, plus work such as Levine's and Woollacott's, theorises a change in the role of women from mid-1915 onwards as more and more become involved in war work, either in munitions factories, as nurses or releasing men for the front. What is interesting about the letters to the Aberdeen newspapers is that such a change in roles is rarely visible. There are very few letters concerning the employment of women in paid war work in contrast to the amount of letters concerning voluntary war work, such as providing comforts for troops, moss gathering and cleaning, raising funds for war charities, etc. Indeed, there are two letters to the *Daily Journal* which bemoan the lack of paid war work available for women in Aberdeenshire – although Marcella Alexander, who wrote in October 1916, noted sourly that married women – 'perhaps drawing separation allowances' – were preferred over single women for work on the trams.<sup>84</sup>

One reason for the omission of a discussion of munitions work would be the comparative lack of munitions factories in the area. As Deborah Thom notes, 'Women in war were predominately urban'.<sup>85</sup> There is only one letter that mentions the possibility of munitions work in Aberdeen. This discussed a meeting at the Robert Gordon College for those desirous to enrol in munitions classes. According to the writer, there were many women at the meeting, but few who would be able to undertake a full day's work because of their home duties, and she asked whether part-time munitions work could be organised.<sup>86</sup> Women may have been drawn to the meeting by the prospect of good pay. The high pay and frivolous spending of the 'munitionettes' was a source of much scandal in First World War Britain, although few in Aberdeen would have had any first-hand evidence of such alleged behaviour. This did not stop Amy Stewart Fraser of Ballater reporting in her autobiography:

Among young girls in Ballater, as elsewhere, the acquisition of silk stockings had become an urgent necessity, worn with care and mended neatly when necessary, unlike munition-workers who, we were told, never mended a stocking but simply threw it away, and bought more.<sup>87</sup>

It is interesting that there are very few letters concerning other aspects of women's paid war work, which we know were occurring in Aberdeenshire. The *Journal* printed 12 letters during the war period on the subject of women's war work. The employment areas covered were mainly agricultural, including women farm workers, fruit-picking and land girls. The *Free Press* printed

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84 Marcella Alexander, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 12 October 1916 and 20 June 1917.

85 Thom, Deborah, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 16.

86 'Pro Patria', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 28 October 1915.



six letters, none of which mentioned agricultural work. Its letters focused on nursing, at home and abroad and the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). Many of these letters have a hostile or hesitant tone, showing that women usually only wrote to the newspapers concerning paid war work when they had a complaint or worry. The tone is rarely fully confident that women should be doing such work at all – 'Women's Auxiliary Corps' wrote to the *Free Press* regarding the Government's campaign to encourage women to join the corps, worried that 'One sometimes hears it suggested that this [the housing] is not very comfortable, that the food is insufficient or of poor quality, that rules are very stringent.... Circumstances might crop up which would make it desirable for the woman to return to her home. This, I understand, she could not do.'<sup>88</sup> There is none of the confidence associated with the letters appealing for comforts for the troops or help in cleaning moss. The tone is troubled and questioning and the underlying assumption of letters such as the two quoted above is that women's true place is at home undertaking voluntary war work. This is borne out by a letter from Lady Sempill printed at the end of the war on 8 November 1918 discussing the role of women now the war was over: 'I urged women, when hostilities ceased, to return to their homes and make our war-weary men comfortable, and rear healthy families, of which our country stands in such dire need.'<sup>89</sup> Such letters chimed in with the policy of the Government, which emphasised throughout the war that women's war work was a temporary solution to a particular problem and that, once the men returned home, women would return to their primary concerns of homemaking and raising children. As Thom states: 'Motherhood was emphasised, described as their primary activity, whether they were actually engaged in it or not. It was both the discipline of women's behaviour outside the home and the lure to make the home seem more desirable.'<sup>90</sup>

The one role a woman could undertake during war-time without much heart-searching was nursing. As has already been seen, organisations such as the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry and the Scottish Women's Hospitals were well supported throughout the war. Individual nurses could also seek charitable support – in November 1914 Marjory Walker of Banchory appealed for funds to send fully trained nurses to the front. As another example of the initial 'voluntary' approach to the war, her letter reports that the authorities could only pay such nurses' expenses but could offer no salary. Mrs Walker suggested that a fund be started to raise a small salary for a nurse –

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87 Fraser, Amy Stewart, *In Memory Long*, p. 218.

88 'Women's Auxiliary Corps', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 10 October 1917.

89 Lady Sempill, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 8 November 1918.

90 Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 164.



perhaps of £15 for six months.<sup>91</sup> The question of recompense for nurses remained a sore topic throughout the war. In August 1915, correspondence in the *Free Press* centred around the question of whether those nurses working at the local hospital for wounded servicemen at Oldmill should be given allowances to cover their transport to and from the hospital. While several nurses pointed out that they had given up good jobs and salaries to undertake such war work, 'Another Nurse' preferred the popular image of the nurse as noble saint with no thought of financial reward:

My idea of nurses always has been that they as a class were noble women who gave up their lives for the sake of helping their fellow creatures. I wonder did Florence Nightingale write to the papers about the authorities not providing her with a carriage or find fault with them for not giving her a soft bed? No! She faced all dangers and privations to minister to the poor wounded soldiers – giving her best to them and asking nothing in return.<sup>92</sup>

The issue of whether women should be financially compensated for their war work remained live throughout the war – a letter to the *Daily Journal* on 30 September 1918 raised the vexed question of pay for land girls. Signed by 'A Mother' rather than the land girl herself – again a much-used and legitimised way of raising a complaint during the war years – the letter complained that the land girls were being exploited by rich farmers:

My girl gets 16s a week on paper. Out of that she has to pay 12s for food and 2s 6d for fuel and light, leaving her 1s 6d in cash at the end of the week. She was supposed to receive an outfit. That outfit consist only of one pair of boots, two overalls, one pair of breeches and one hat – her underclothing, etc. I have had to purchase myself so that she (or rather I) have to pay the piper to provide cheap labour in order that the farmers may add to their banking accounts.<sup>93</sup>

The farmer as evil exploiter was not a new image to the readers of the Aberdeenshire press. From 1916 onwards, there were frequent letters to the press on the subject of the non-enlistment of farmers and their sons in the military services, and the overall feeling seems to have been that this section of the population was using their agricultural duties to avoid volunteering. 'A Farmer's Wife' wrote in March 1916 that she was proud of her sons, who had enlisted, but that many of their contemporaries had claimed to be indispensable because of their work. Had her sons acted in such a way, she remarked, 'in my secret soul I should have been ashamed of them'.<sup>94</sup>

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91 Marjory Walker, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 16 November 1914.

92 'Another Nurse', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Free Press*, 30 August 1915.

93 'A Mother', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 30 September 1918.

94 'A Farmer's Wife', 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 7 March 1916.



The Military Service Act of January 1916 introduced conscription for men aged 18 to 41, although men employed in essential work could not be conscripted. Farmers were exempt from conscription, but their sons and labourers were not. The government left it up to local tribunals to decide what was and was not essential work – a system which was easily open to abuse. As ‘Widowed Mother of an Only Son Lying Ill in France’ pointed out bitterly, it was not surprising that farmers and their sons were being given ‘wholesale exemption’ by the tribunals in Aberdeenshire ‘seeing they are as to three-fourths composed of farmers, with factors as chairmen’.<sup>95</sup> Caroline Dakers reports that some farmers ‘ostensibly retired from business and announced that their sons had taken over the farm’ in order to persuade the tribunals that theirs was essential work.<sup>96</sup> Not only were farmers’ sons being exempted from service, but they weren’t even working hard on the farms. On 25 December 1916, ‘One of Buchan’s Daughters’ reported that the previous August she had seen ‘a few of our gallant young farmers’ engaged in a game of tennis when they should have been in the fields harvesting<sup>97</sup> while ‘A Soldier’s Wife’ asked: ‘Why should the young bucks of farmers be allowed to trot about as they do, clothed in fine linen, when the only son of a poor widow is in khaki and fighting hard for life and for his country’s liberty?’<sup>98</sup>

It is noteworthy that few farmers or their sons dare to write in to defend their behaviour, although there were a few letters of defence written on their behalf by their womenfolk. ‘A Farmer’s Daughter’ pointed out that farmers were ‘putting forth all their energies to keep their bushels brimming to feed their country’<sup>99</sup> while another ‘Farmer’s Daughter’ wrote to the *Free Press* in December 1917 with a long list of all the sons sacrificed to the war by farmers in the Banffshire area.<sup>100</sup> Again, the majority of the women who participated in this controversy did so using noms de plume that emphasised their familial links. As has been already mentioned, the last year of the war saw a rising number of women correspondents using noms de plume, mainly as mothers, wives or daughters. Their letters tend to be critical, of the war effort, the government or individual groups in society that were not adequately ‘doing their bit’, and such pen names gave their users legitimate grounds for entering into the dispute. The women were not criticising war policy as individuals but using their God-given roles of mothers and wives to question and dispute.

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<sup>95</sup> ‘Widowed Mother of an Only Son Lying Ill in France’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 14 April 1916.

<sup>96</sup> Dakers, *The Countryside at War*, p. 138.

<sup>97</sup> ‘One of Buchan’s Daughters’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 25 December 1916.

<sup>98</sup> ‘A Soldier’s Wife’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 4 November 1916.

<sup>99</sup> ‘A Farmer’s Daughter’, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 11 October 1917.

<sup>100</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 14 December 1917.



## Summary

The letters from women correspondents to the *Aberdeen Free Press* and *Daily Journal* during the First World War form a completely separate body of evidence from the letters that have previously been studied, and should be approached with this in mind. The war years of 1914 to 1918 changed the lives of most women in Aberdeenshire. For many, the war meant separation from male members of their family, perhaps for ever. It also brought with it hardship in the shape of food shortages, which affected the housewife more than any other member of the household. Issues which had been of such burning importance in the months and years before the war, such as woman suffrage, were dropped from the correspondence columns immediately, and rarely make an appearance, despite the fact that it was during this period that the first steps were made towards universal suffrage.

Instead of discussion of the sort of issues in which the New Woman might be interested, the letters of women correspondents reverted to subjects which might be seen as more in the domestic sphere such as charitable fundraising; knitting comforts, child care and cookery on a budget. The war, it seems, made men of men and women of women. Women who had never written to the newspapers before wrote countless letters, giving their name and address, in their need to communicate their fundraising to the outside world. In contrast, women who had written frequently in the years before the war, disappeared almost entirely from the letter columns, possibly because their war work took them away from Aberdeenshire. There is an almost complete change in both subject matter and letter-writers between the years before the war and 1914–18.

The predominant subject matter for women during the war years was that of voluntary fundraising for the many charities and associations connected with the war. Such charities were often suggested to the women through personal or local ties – family members at the front; local regiments or Scottish connections. These women perceived their war work in localised or provincialised terms, and were led by the local elite, in both the city and the surrounding countryside. Whilst this approach did eventually lead to inequalities in provision for the men at the front, the hospitals and the prisoners of war, at first this voluntary approach was the only one which existed – and was part of the government's own approach to the war until late 1915. After this time, and with the growing power of Lloyd George, the government and local authorities began to impose a more centralised and less personalised organisation to the voluntary war effort, personified by the new positions of Director-General of Voluntary Organisations and President of the Board of Agriculture. While this approach was at first resented by many of the charitable

ladies affected, it was necessary in order to provide a more uniform approach to the provision of comforts and necessary medical items to the ever-increasing number of men and women in need. Marwick's model of change can be usefully applied to the evidence from these letters, although perhaps not in the way originally meant. The change that is seen here comes from the changing foci of these fundraising organisations. Each stage of the war brought with it a new problem to be solved by voluntary effort – from the women thrown into unemployment at the beginning of the war to the disabled soldiers and sailors in need of permanent aid at its end. Whereas Marwick sees such voluntary activity as static and predominantly a phenomenon of the first stages of the war, the letters to the Aberdeenshire newspapers offer evidence of such activity continuing and growing throughout the war, changing in response to new needs and adapting itself to new structures imposed from above.

There is less evidence of women's paid war work in these letters. In contrast to the confident tones of the letters connected with voluntary fundraising, those correspondents who discuss paid war work did so with more hesitant tones, questioning whether women should be undertaking such work and complaining about their working conditions. Even those areas of work universally deemed part of the women's sphere because of their caring nature, such as nursing, brought their own share of problems – particularly the issue of whether the true woman would need financial recompense to undertake such war work.

One thing is obvious – the overall tone of the women correspondents is one of patriotism. Few if any questioned the need for the war or the sacrifice of so many of the country's men. Whilst correspondents in the last year of the war might be critical of other's 'slackness' (a favourite word) they themselves were as determined to 'do their bit' as ever. And the correspondence columns of the newspapers helped these women identify such a 'bit'. Few of them were able to volunteer as nurses and there was no large-scale munitions work in the area. However, a female reader of the letters columns of the newspapers would have seen a vast array of ways in which she could be useful to the war effort – by knitting; collecting money; making her own jam; encouraging young men to enlist; or simply staying positive and patriotic. In this way, the letters columns of the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Free Press* were of great value for the average woman reader and offered suitable and practical models for her to follow during the troublesome and strange years of the First World War.



## **CHAPTER VI**

### ***Conclusions***

This research aimed to provide an insight into the motivations and agenda of women correspondents to Aberdeen local newspapers during the period 1900–18. In order to do this, a content analysis of all printed letters to the editor identified as being by women correspondents to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press* was undertaken. Women correspondents were identified by their signatures, feminine noms de plume or the content of their letters. Whilst it is accepted that this method must of necessity have excluded some women correspondents who did not wish to reveal their gender, this research focused exclusively on correspondents who were willing to be identified as female in their correspondence to the newspapers. In this way, it was hoped to identify the issues which impelled women out of their domestic and private sphere and into the more public sphere of newspaper debate.

The two Aberdeen newspapers were chosen for this research because they offered an opportunity to study the reactions of a geographically separate group of women to both local events and politics and those which developed elsewhere, primarily in Edinburgh or London. The recent contribution of such localised or regional studies has been a very positive one, and this study adds to a growing body of evidence regarding the local history of the North-East of Scotland and, in particular, women's experience therein. In the area of women's history, such local studies have primarily been limited to a discussion of local women's role in the suffrage movement or reassessments of women's history from a whole-Scotland perspective. Therefore a study focused on a well-defined geographical area away from the central belt of Scotland offered the opportunity to assess the impact of wider issues on a smaller, more remote community and to widen the subjects studied to include much more than the fight for the vote. The two Aberdeen newspapers were also ideal for this research because of their lack of editorial gatekeeping. Little evidence was found of any censorship of letters, even during wartime, and it seems that women could expect their letters to be published in the newspaper provided that they at least revealed their name and address to the editor. Outside wartime restrictions and paper rationing it was also unusual for women's letters to be heavily edited, particularly if they were willing for their identity to be published. Women correspondents to the two newspapers therefore faced few editorial barriers to publication, even when they wished to write on topics contrary to the editorial viewpoint of the newspaper. Thus suffragettes could explain their policies in letters to the *Journal* without the fear of editorial censorship – although they might expect to have a disapproving editorial comment attached to the end of their letter. In this way, the women correspondents identified differed from other female writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They did not need to use male noms de plume in order to break into print, and neither were they limited to a female readership. In contrast to the majority of women writers of the period who – whether they



produced short stories for women's magazines or New Women novels – were primarily aiming their words at a female audience, women correspondents to newspapers were writing for a readership which would be more male than female.

However, a lack of editorial censorship did not mean that women correspondents faced no barriers to the publication of their opinions in the newspapers. The assumption of other correspondents that any correspondent of unidentified gender was male, plus a reluctance among male correspondents to debate with female correspondents, shows that women were not supposed to publicly canvass their opinions in this way. Thus women correspondents had to overcome social conventions, including possibly the disapproval of friends and family, in order to enter the world of public debate. The disdain of Marian Farquharson's step-daughter and her wish to disassociate herself from her step-mother's 'peculiar views' may have been replicated throughout Aberdeenshire.

### **Permissible correspondence**

A disapproval of women's correspondence to the newspapers, however, was not necessarily total. This research has identified particular issues about which it was acceptable for women to correspond with the newspapers and particular women who were allowed to debate these issues. To begin with, the engagement of women from the middle and upper classes in charitable and philanthropic endeavours was accepted as part of their role in life. Involvement with charities aimed at the poor and needy or children, as long as on an honorary and non-salaried basis, had long been established as an extension of these women's domestic sphere. There was therefore no disapproval of women's correspondence on such topics to the two newspapers. Correspondence from women asking for donations for particular charitable works was continuous throughout the period, and often letters on such subjects were duplicated in both newspapers. While this correspondence made up a small proportion of letters to the press each year until 1914, from the outbreak of the First World War, letters concerning women's voluntary work for the war effort dominated women's correspondence to the newspapers and it was in fact rare to find women writing on any other topic. The tone of such letters is overwhelmingly confident – in contrast, for example, to letters discussing women's paid employment during the war years, which are more tentative in tone, questioning whether women should be paid for such work, and sometimes even whether they should be undertaking it at all.

Women also justified correspondence to the newspapers on certain matters by claiming that they came under woman's jurisdiction in the domestic sphere. Hence matters pertaining to the family or the household, such as school hours, the price and quality of food or the well-being of their



children were acceptable topics for women to debate in the newspapers. Many women further justified their correspondence on such matters by using pen names which emphasised their domestic and maternal role, such as 'Mother' or 'Wife'. Women correspondents might even use these familial roles as justification for their criticism of the policies of local or national authorities in areas that could be linked to the domestic sphere.

Women correspondents' use of noms de plume throughout the period studied is very interesting. While it might be supposed that, as women became more used to entering the public sphere of newspaper debate they would feel less need to hide their identities behind a pen name, in fact the use of noms de plume increased from 1900 until the outbreak of the First World War. Figure 1.1 on page 17 shows a steady increase in the number of letters from women published in the two newspapers during the period, peaking in 1916. However, Figure 2.4 on page 65 shows a coterminous increase in the proportion of women correspondents who used a pen name until the outbreak of the First World War. The first two years of the war saw little use of pen names, but by the last years of the war their incidence was once more increasing. As has already been mentioned, one section of women correspondents used noms de plume to justify their discussion of certain issues; extending their domestic sphere to incorporate newspaper debate on household and familial subjects. Their roles as wives and mothers were given as the justification for their rightful concern in these areas.

Other women correspondents used noms de plumes in a much more straightforward way – in order to protect their identity while writing on contentious subjects. Whether they were disgruntled maids complaining about their conditions of service, wives discussing domestic violence or anti-suffragists afraid of retaliatory attacks, such women hid their identities because they were afraid of the repercussions of their entry into public debate in the newspapers. As the subjects that women wished to discuss in the newspapers became more contentious, for example as the woman suffrage campaign became more militant, women correspondents on such subjects utilised pen names more frequently. Thus we have 'Member WSPU' as one of the most frequently used pen names in the Aberdeen newspapers. This may have been the nom de plume of one woman or a group of women – it was used from 1907 until 1918 – but the fact that it appeared 44 times in this period demonstrates that even the most fervent supporter of the militants was happier to preserve her anonymity in the Aberdeen newspapers.

As has been stated, the use of noms de plume decreased dramatically at the outbreak of war. The reason for this is simple. The vast majority of letters from women in the first two years of the war were appeals for donations of money, comforts or aid for the many charities and voluntary



services which were set up during this time. Obviously such correspondents needed their full names and addresses to be published. It was only in the last years of the war that the use of the pen name re-emerged, as women began to criticise publicly the conduct of the war and related organisations. Again, many of the pen names used at this time emphasised the correspondent's familial, domestic connections – 'Soldier's Mother' or 'Soldier's Wife' – which once more justified their criticisms of authority. In particular, the image of the patriotic mother, who willingly sacrificed her sons for the good of the nation, was implicit in many of the noms de plume chosen, for example 'One Who Has Given Each of Her Sons'.

### Ladies of letters

What sort of woman wrote to the Aberdeen newspapers? Analysis of the letters, and in particular those from correspondents who allowed their names and addresses to be published, suggests that the female correspondence printed in both newspapers was overwhelmingly middle class. The addresses given by Aberdeen correspondents were frequently from one of the middle-class enclaves in the city – around the university or in the west end. Apart from a few particularly grand ladies, such as Ishbel, Marchioness of Aberdeen, the majority of female correspondents from Aberdeenshire were farmer's wives, minor gentry or local aristocracy. This middle- and upper-class source necessarily dictated the subjects discussed by women on the letters' pages. Hence the correspondence studied dealt with issues such as charitable and philanthropic fundraising; the woman suffrage issue; the servant problem and access for women to leisure activities. These were subjects in which middle- and upper-class women were interested.

Outside Aberdeenshire, correspondents came from the same social circles – or even higher. National appeals tended to use royalty or major aristocrats as figureheads, even if the actual day-to-day running of the charities was in the hands of less exalted women. For example, during the First World War, competing charities used the lure of a personally signed letter of thanks from a member of the aristocracy or royalty when appealing for donations. Outside the field of charitable endeavour, many of the letters from England and the rest of Scotland appear to be form letters submitted to correspondence pages all over the country. These might be letters explaining the policies of the national suffrage associations or letters from individual women on a topic close to their hearts, for example vivisection or the threatened union of Ireland. Again, the evidence of addresses and occupations points to middle and upper-class correspondents.

In addition to such geographical evidence, it must be remembered that middle and upper-class women were more likely to have access to newspapers plus the necessary leisure time to develop interests outside the home and the confidence to address a letter to the newspapers. While there is



evidence of some working-class correspondents, such women tended to write on subjects such as the price of food, the salaries of their husbands or their own working conditions, issues about which they had personal knowledge, and many of these correspondents chose to hide their identity behind a pen name. The most frequent working-class correspondents were domestic servants, who again would have had better access to newspapers filtering down from above-stairs than many other working-class women.

Close analysis of the addresses given by women correspondents has also suggested that a distinction can be made between the geographical coverage of the two newspapers. During the period in question, more letters from women in England or even further afield, for example in the colonies or the United States, were printed in the *Journal*, while the *Free Press* published comparatively more letters from women correspondents based elsewhere in Scotland. This applies to both individual women writing about experiences such as emigration or in support of particular causes and women representatives of national or local charities. It appears that the *Journal* had a far higher profile as an Aberdonian newspaper outside Scotland, possibly because it was longer established – in fact one of the longest established newspapers in Europe – and also because of the ambitions of its editors, in particular William Maxwell, editor from 1910 and prior to this a member of staff at the *London Evening Standard*.

It has been possible to learn more about the opinions and activities of a small number of correspondents from other records, for example, Marian Farquharson, Maria Ogilvie Gordon, Caroline Phillips and the Lumsden sisters. However, such evidence has underlined the limitations of the evidence of correspondents' letters to a newspaper column for the construction of a rounded picture of the woman behind the letter. Women letter-writers chose to present a particular image of themselves to the readers of the newspapers, which might not necessarily be the whole picture. For example, Marian Farquharson's letters gave no indication of her disability while Louisa Innes Lumsden's letters to the newspapers show little of the personality revealed by her autobiography. Further evidence of Lumsden's possible lesbian relationships, not mentioned even in her autobiography emphasises once again how women writing for publication would construct particular images of themselves for their readers. In addition, the evidence of the Watt Collection has shown that women correspondents acting as officials of an association, for example the Women Liberals' Association, could pen official statements from the association which were actually directly opposed to their own personal opinions.



### **Motivations for letter-writing**

Chapter I noted that previous research into correspondence to newspapers had identified three possible motivations for letter-writers to newspapers: the prompting by articles and correspondence within the newspapers themselves; the 'safety valve' theory; and the request for the newspaper to act as a type of ombudsman. How far can such motivations be identified in the women correspondents who addressed the Aberdeen newspapers?

There is certainly evidence of women's letters being prompted by editorial or other letters in the newspapers. Many of the letters began with the words 'I read your report today...', 'I see in this morning's issue' or 'In response to Mr so-and-so's letter'. It has been seen that newspaper articles could prompt letters from women based far outside Aberdeenshire. Leaders of the women suffrage associations wrote to contribute to debates from headquarters in Edinburgh and London; women wrote from as far afield as America to correct misleading information given in the newspapers and authors wrote in response to reviews of their latest books, suggesting that some women followed Marian Farquharson's example of using press cuttings agencies. Correspondents on contentious issues were frequently caught up in long-running debates with other correspondents, for example the correspondence between Liliias Mitchell of the WSPU and Alice Crompton of the NUWSS during 1912 and 1913, or Marian Farquharson's debates with her many protagonists on the subjects of religion or tariff reform. Such debates were usually ended by editorial diktat, although on occasion a male correspondent could refuse to continue a dialogue with a female correspondent on the grounds that women did not know how to debate properly. It can therefore be seen that many of the letters written by women did conform to a responsive model, being reactive in character. In addition, it has been noted that some letters, in particular those written by women using noms de plume, looked to others to take up the issue discussed, sometimes plainly requesting that someone 'more able than I' would write in support.

However, there was one type of letter from women that was nearly always proactive – the letter appealing for support for a charitable or philanthropic enterprise. Linked to the confidence that women correspondents felt about corresponding to newspapers on these issues outlined above is the fact that such letters were rarely stimulated by on-going discussion in the newspaper. Thus when there was a dramatic increase in the number of such fundraising letters during the first years of the First World War, the responsive, reactive letter almost entirely disappears from women's correspondence. Other letters written from within the domestic sphere might also be proactive – those complaining about the price of foodstuffs or the quality of butter, for example, although a single letter on the butter question would usually provoke several others in response. Thus women writing from securely within the domestic sphere, whether on issues connected with the



home and family or in relation to a philanthropic endeavour did not necessarily follow the first motivation outlined by previous researchers, that of prompting by other editorial or correspondence. This finding is in direct contrast with the work of previous researchers into the motivations of contemporary newspaper correspondents, which suggested that the vast majority of such correspondence was in reaction to editorial or other letters in newspapers. Possibly this is because such research was more narrowly focused on male correspondents and the subject of politics. It is true that such proactive correspondence mainly occurs in the Aberdeen newspapers during the early years of the war, but wartime conditions also existed in the United States during the 1970s, when much of the research alluded to above was undertaken.

The second motivation suggested is the 'safety valve' theory: that correspondents submitted letters to a newspaper in order to 'blow off steam' about a particular issue. Linked to this is the suggestion that many letters tended to be negative in tone. Again there is some evidence of such motivation in many of the letters studied. Letters of complaint, for example about the state of the churchyard at Strichen or the behaviour of various school boards, are frequent in the newspapers. Such letters tended to be signed by noms de plume, in particular where retribution might be visited upon the author, for example in the cases of domestic servants complaining about their mistresses or wives about violent husbands. The many letters for and against the activities of the suffragettes or Marian Farquharson's campaign against the introduction of tariff reform might also be seen in the light of a need to 'blow off steam'. While the majority of commentators suggest that the use of such a 'safety valve' was a positive exercise, Byron Lander's research into such letters following the shooting of the Kent State students led him to conclude that such letters could actually be dangerous, creating an atmosphere in which further violence could be condoned. It might be suggested that the torrent of letters to the press throughout Britain surrounding such militant actions as the hatchet-throwing incident in Dublin spurred WSPU activists on to further violence, particularly in view of the fact that the whole basis for WSPU militancy was based on the reaction of the press to the initial intransigent behaviour of Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney. On the converse side, concern expressed in letters to the press about the activities of the suffragettes may also have helped to construct an atmosphere of alarm around particular local events. For example, the meetings at the Aberdeen Music Hall to hear Asquith and later Lloyd George prompted letters from both male and female correspondents speculating on possible actions to be taken by the suffragettes, thus whipping up a certain amount of hysteria even before the events came to pass.



The third motivation for letters to the press was suggested by British researchers studying local Merseyside newspapers in the 1960s. Cox and Morgan noted that the editorial staff at these newspapers felt that many correspondents looked to their local newspaper to act as a type of ombudsman in matters of dispute. There is evidence of a similar attitude on the part of the correspondents studied here, in particular in regard to issues such as food pricing or quality. Women who called for someone 'more able than I' to take up their campaign against such problems might in fact have been looking to the local newspapers to step in. During wartime there was certainly an expectation that newspapers would respond to requests for recipes, explanations of the new rationing laws or even Lady Lumsden's demands for the newspapers to start fundraising for her particular pet projects, although both the *Journal* and the *Free Press* declined to become involved in her plans.

Overall, therefore, it can be seen that the motivations of women correspondents to the two Aberdeen newspapers were mixed. No one motivation predominates, although there is more evidence of the first two motivations mentioned – a response to other editorial and the need for a 'safety valve' – than the third one of looking to the newspapers to act as an ombudsman. Little difference between the motivations of correspondents to either newspaper can be discerned, both were willing to publish complaints and aggrieved responses to other correspondents as long as the law of libel was observed. However, the editor of the *Journal* was more likely to edit offensive passages from letters of women correspondents who sought to remain anonymous. These findings suggest that the conclusions drawn by the more focused research into contemporary letter-writers in the United States are too simplistic. When the subject of correspondence is widened to include more than political issues, a more complex picture of correspondents' motivations emerges.

### **Similarities and differences between correspondence to the two newspapers**

While the *Journal's* editorial slant was conservative, in particular after the appointment of William Maxwell, the *Free Press* was more liberal in tone, continuing to support the Liberal party even in its darkest moments. It is therefore not too surprising to find that the *Free Press* attracted more correspondence from liberals, with a small and capital letter.

During the pre-war years, the *Free Press* published more letters than the *Journal* dealing with the issues of woman suffrage and the wider campaign for women's equality with men. It also published more letters dealing with such New Woman subjects as women's access to male-dominated leisure activities and the sexual double standard; and more letters from women concerning political issues, whether local or national. In this area, however, it must be remembered that the prolific output of Marian Farquharson skews the sample slightly and that



few other women followed her into discussion of such hard political issues as tariff reform and Chamberlainism. There were, however, more *Free Press* correspondents willing to follow Marian's example in taking on church ministers in disputes concerning religion and the leadership of the Church. When considering issues relating to women's education and employment, only on the subject of the pay of women teachers during 1918 did the *Journal* publish more letters than the *Free Press*, and it has been suggested that this might have had something to do with the audience such women correspondents were aiming at – conservative members of the school boards. In addition, this example, coming so late in the sample, might indicate the beginning of a blurring of the distinctiveness of the two newspapers, which led in 1922 to their amalgamation.

In comparison to the *Free Press*, the *Journal* published more letters on the subjects of household management, domestic servants, food and children. The most popular noms de plume used in the *Journal* included 'Farmer's Wife', 'Farmer's Daughter', 'Housewife' and 'Only A Woman' in comparison to the *Free Press*'s 'Member WSPU', 'A Would-be Elector' and 'A Woman Liberal'. It has also been noted that more letters from women living on farms, whether as servants or mistresses, were printed in the *Journal* than the *Free Press*, and that such letters tended to be on subjects related to farming, such as butter production or their conditions of work. Such women would have less access to, and less time to attend, meetings at which other women, predominantly from the middle classes, had their consciousnesses raised regarding issues such as woman suffrage.

A distinction can therefore be made between women's correspondence to the *Journal* and the *Free Press*, although such a distinction was nowhere near complete. There were letters printed in the *Journal* concerning issues such as woman suffrage or women's access to the swimming baths (although it was one of the *Journal* correspondents who made the specific distinction between her demands and those of the suffragists), just as there were letters concerning bad butter or school hours in the *Free Press*. Any difference that may be distinguished between subjects tackled by the women correspondents to the two newspapers was certainly not total. However, since editorial censorship of letters has been ruled out, it can be assumed that it was the women themselves who decided to which newspaper they would submit a letter, and they obviously saw a difference between subjects to be discussed in the correspondence columns of the *Journal* and those of the *Free Press*.

Such a distinction faded during the war years as the incidence of duplicate letters rose, in particular in the first two years of the war. Both newspapers published appeals from women correspondents for donations of time, comforts and money. Any distinction that still existed was



more to do with geography than subject matter of the letters, with the differences between the location of correspondents already discussed. Again, this loss of distinctiveness between the two newspapers may have contributed to the ease with which they amalgamated in 1922. Such findings contribute to the broader history of the media in the North-East of Scotland. With the 'P and J' still playing such an important role in the life of the region, it is important to remember that the current newspaper is actually the product of a union between two very different rivals, who appealed to different sections of the local, national – and international population.

### **Within their sphere?**

This thesis set out to investigate how far outside their domestic sphere women correspondents to the two Aberdeen newspapers were prepared to venture. By the very act of writing a letter to the newspapers, they were entering a more public sphere and sharing with strangers their thoughts on the subjects of the moment. We can therefore use such newspaper correspondence to measure the 'heat' generated by a variety of subjects amongst the women correspondents of Aberdeen.

While there was some disapproval of women writing letters to the newspapers, and thus leaving the domestic sphere, and an assumption that any letter published by a correspondent of unidentified gender was from a man, women correspondents found the courage to write to the newspapers on a wide variety of topics. They were particularly confident in writing on subjects which could be seen as part of the woman's sphere, such as charitable and philanthropic activities or the care of the household and children. Both newspapers published a good amount of letters on such topics, in particular during the war years when the nation's entire efforts were focused on the war effort. In these areas, women's movement into the public sphere of letter-writing could be justified because they were writing about domestic concerns.

Some women also justified their correspondence on other, related issues by identifying themselves as wives or mothers. Such letters were still firmly placed inside the domestic sphere, which was expanded to include criticism of the authorities; these letters were not written to benefit the woman herself but on the behalf of her children or husband. Only once were such women roused to write to the newspapers on a political issue – when they perceived the government interfering in their homes with the introduction of the Insurance Bill in 1911. Even then, few made the connection between their powerlessness and the fight for the suffrage.

There was a small but growing group of women correspondents who ventured outside women's traditional sphere in their correspondence to the newspapers. In their discussions of the sexual double standard, women's equality with man and, in particular, their demand for a voice in local and national politics, they might be described as sharing some of the attributes of the New



Woman. However, even these women justified many of their demands by arguments about woman's 'special nature'. 'Equal but different' was the cry of even the most advanced suffragist. Woman should be given a say in national government precisely because she was different to man and would bring her special feminine characteristics and skills to bear. Hence even these correspondents based their arguments inside a women's sphere, which was an expanded version of their sisters' domestic one.

What is noteworthy about these women's correspondence is the many issues they do not address. Apart from Marian Farquharson, there is little mention of national politics apart from the fight for the vote, and even Marian tended to have tunnel vision on the subject of tariff reform, seeing, for instance, the Liberal government's problems with the House of Lords purely in terms of how it would affect this one issue. Apart from three letters from Lady Catherine Milnes Gaskell seeking to raise funds for Irish unionists, the burning question of home rule for Ireland was not touched on at all. Despite the fact that the newspapers published many letters from both the committee of the Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association and individual supporters of the Liberal party, there was little discussion of Liberal party policies outside the issue of woman suffrage or the record of individual MPs apart from their support or antagonism to this one issue. On a wider scale only one woman correspondent mentioned socialism and there were few references to any events apart from suffrage ones happening outside the UK, or even outside London.

Placing the wider conclusions of the study into a local context, we can construct a picture of the concerns and interests of middle-class women in the North-East of Scotland during the period. For the most part, their focus was a local one. Discussion of the woman suffrage movement, party politics, the servant problem, or, later, the conduct of the war, was primarily constructed in local, provincialised terms. However, this local focus was forced to undergo a change during the period 1900 to 1918 as outside forces became more dominant. This widening of interest has been noted in both women's discussion of the suffrage campaign and their contribution to the war effort, in the former case caused by the reporting and discussion of events outside Aberdeen – and even outside Scotland – in the newspapers, and in the latter imposed to a certain extent from above by a centralising Government. Again, such findings add to the local history of the North East of Scotland, indicating a broadening and nationalising of interest throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and suggesting the beginning of a concomitant weakening of local, regional links.

In conclusion, it can be said that the women correspondents to Aberdeen newspapers during the period 1900 to 1918 were beginning to venture outside their domestic sphere. They felt most confident, however, when writing letters to the newspapers on issues which could be identified as



being within their purview as wives and mothers, and attempted to extend their domestic sphere to justify their correspondence on other subjects. Even on contentious issues such as women's suffrage, the arguments used stressed women's difference from men. It might therefore be said that these correspondents attempted to extend their woman's sphere into the wider public sphere of newspaper debate to include discussion of subjects connected to the well-being of women. However, such an extension of the women's sphere did not stretch to include issues that were not seen as immediately impacting on the well-being of women or their families.

In terms of the public/private sphere debate, this presents a more complex picture than might at first be assumed. All women correspondents to the Aberdeen newspapers were in some way stepping into the public sphere by participating in public debate within the newspaper correspondence columns. However, the majority of correspondents, including many of those debating issues such as woman suffrage or the sexual double standard, placed themselves firmly within the private sphere of their home and family at the same time by either concentrating on issues linked to the 'domestic' sphere or justifying their intervention in public affairs by emphasising the importance of the women's point of view. There can be no easy distinction made between the public and private spheres in a discussion of women's correspondence to newspapers since closer examination of these women and their correspondence suggests a blurring of such boundaries by both the correspondents themselves and the society in which they lived.

### ***Plus ça change, plus c'est le même choix...***

The achievement of full manhood suffrage was only the beginning of women's campaigns for full equality with men, whether in terms of access to government, education, employment, or the public sphere, which continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and continues into the new millennium. According to the letter below, originally printed in the Letters column of *The Times* on 21 January 2002, women correspondents to newspapers remain very much in the minority at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – and continue to choose to publicly debate subjects with which the Edwardian ladies of Aberdeen would have been familiar: home and family, the impact of war and the education of children.

#### **Men of Letters Still Hold Sway**

Sir, I became aware that most of the Letters to the Editor in *The Times* were from men. I decided to count the letters in 100 consecutive issues of the paper. Between September 18, 2001 and January 12, 2002, you published 1,942 letters on this page; 244, that is 12.5 per cent, were from women.

I classified by subject 100 letters from ladies which appeared between October 3 and November 21, 2001. The top three topics were: home and family, 18 letters; terrorism and the war, 17; education, 12. Next, with five letters each, came social questions and the arts.

I turned to my copies of the two anthologies, *The First Cuckoo*, scope 1900-1975, contained 271 letters; 26, that is 9.6 per cent, were from women. *The Second Cuckoo*, drawing on 1900 to 1982, contained 458 letters of which 68, that is 14.8 per cent, were written by women.

The figures are surely significant. The male dominance may be much as our Victorian ancestors would expect, but after all that has been said and done in the past century it may surprise many of our contemporaries.

DESMOND HARTLEY, Ghyll Bank, Brook Road, Windermere,  
Cumbria  
January 13.



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**Appendix 1**  
***Identified women correspondents from Aberdeen and the  
surrounding area***



The following table gives the names, addresses and other known details of some of the women correspondents to the letters columns of the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* and *Aberdeen Free Press* 1900-1918.

The women named here are those from Aberdeen and the surrounding counties of Aberdeenshire, Kincardineshire, Banffshire and Morayshire for whom it was possible to identify an address or some other identifying information.

Information taken from Post Office Directories is identified within the table. Where a married woman's name was given in the Directories instead of a male name, it is suggested that this implied a widow.

<b>Surname</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Occupation/relation's occupation</b>	<b>Associations/Societies</b>
Aberdeen	Ishbel, Lady Aberdeen	Haddo House; The Lodge, Tarland		
Ainslie	Mrs M. E.	Logierieve, Ellon		
Allan	Annie F.			Hon Secretary, Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association
Anderson	Alice	254 Holburn Street, Aberdeen	Brother - sergeant in Imperial Light Infantry, Boer War	
Anderson	Mrs B.	2 Great Western Road, Aberdeen		Treasurer, Women's Adult School, Aberdeen
Anderson	Jane	Crombie Cottage, Skene		
Anderson	Mrs M. J.	543 Holborn Street, Aberdeen		Deaconess, Church of Scotland
Baird	Nina			President, British Red Cross Society (Kincardineshire Branch) Stonehaven
Barclay	Helen	387 Union Street, Aberdeen		
Barker Bayly	Annie S. Rosy L.	Strichen Stonehaven	School teacher, Strichen Great-niece of Joseph Farquharson, who built the Lochnagar Distillery	
Black	Mrs B. T.			Hon Secretary, Aberdeen Women's Liberal Association
Blizard	Alice	200, Market Street, Aberdeen		Temporary Superintendent, RNMDSF
Bloxham	Emily E.	Ellangowan, Rothienorman, Aberdeenshire		
Boyd	A. B.	Eye Institution, Aberdeen	Matron	Scottish Society of Trained Nurses
Bowie	Catherine	40 Commerce Street, Lossiemouth	Returned Australian emigrant, domestic servant (?) Housemaid	
Boyne Brooke	Ina Patricia			Hon Secretary, Aberdeenshire Centre of the British Red Cross Society, Fairley
Brown	Evelyn M.			Joint Superintendent, City House-to-House Collection for Sick Children's Hospital



Bruce	Agnes	Westbourne House, Aberdeen		
Bruce	Isabella M.		Employment Exchange, Aberdeen	
Burnet	Mary Wardlaw	59 Queen's Road, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory 1900-01, G W Burnett, Advocate (Sheriff-substitute)	Convenor, Emigration Committee, Aberdeen Union of Women Workers
Burnett	Mary G.	Crathes Castle, Crathes		
Cairney	Miss Rosanna	Crescent Villa, 1 Jute Street, Aberdeen	c/o Rev R M Cairney	
Carter	Mrs F. M.	Migvie House, North Silver Street, Aberdeen		Hon Secretary, The City of Aberdeen War Work Association
Chaplain Christie Clark	Constance Elizabeth R. Mrs S.	27 Albyn Place, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory 1900-01, Mrs P. M. Clark, Robert M. Clark, BSc at this address	Hon Secretary, Aberdeen Union of Women Workers
Collie	Annie W.	Glengairn School, Ballater	School teacher, Glengairn	
Coltman	Grace	Tillypronie, Tarland		
Comper	Frances M. M.	Auchlossan, Lumphanan		
Cook	Janet	27 Forest Avenue, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory 1914-15, Mrs A. S. Cook	
Copland Coutts	Kate Jean	173s, Union Street, Aberdeen		Secretary, SDF
Coutts	M. M.	126 Osborne Place, Aberdeen		1913 – ex-member WSPU
Cowan Cowan	Euphemia R. Miss H. E. L.	South United Free Manse, Banchory		
Crawford	Mrs	24 Forest Road, Aberdeen		
Croll	Jean	45 Albert Street, Aberdeen		Hon Secretary, Mothers' and Babies' Clubs
Crompton	Alice	474 Union St; 214 Union St; 130 Crown St, Aberdeen	Suffrage Shop	Organising Secretary, Aberdeen Association for Women's Suffrage

Cruickshank	Edith A.			Convenor, Penny War Fund
Davidson	Mrs	Balnagask Road, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory, 1914-15, Colonel Davidson of Balnagask House, Balnagask Road	
Davidson Davidson	Jeannie M. B. A.	Strichen 44 Rubislaw Den South	School teacher, Strichen Post Office Directory, 1914-15, C. J. Davidson, advocate (of Lumsden and Davidson)	Secretary, Women's Patrols for Aberdeen
Davidson	Margaret	Balnagask, Aberdeen		Hon Treasurer, Mothers' Guild of the Aberdeen Day Nursery
Davidson	Violet	Inchmarlo, Banchory		
Dugdale	Una S.	Gordon Lodge, Aboyne		Member WSPU
Dunn	Miss M. A.	5 Queen's Road, Aberdeen		
Esslemont	Clementina			President, Aberdeen Day Nursery
Esslemont	Mary	King's Acre, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory, 1900-01, George B. Esslemont (of Esslemont & Mackintosh department store), King's Acre, 16, King's Gate	
Farquhar	Jean	Norham, Aberdeenshire		
Farquharson	Maria O.	Haughton, Alford		
Farquharson	Marion S., FLS	Netherton, Meigle; Tillydrine, Aberdeenshire		President of the Scottish Association for the Promotion of Women's Public Work
Farquharson-Kennedy	Mrs C.	Bryanston, Kirk Brae, Cults		
Ferguson	Grace A.	21 Desswood Place, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory, 1914-15, Mrs Ferguson of this address	
Ferguson	Marguerite	343 Union Street; Head Office 11a Dee Street, Aberdeen		Secretary, Associated Women's Friendly Society
Ferrier	Mrs Jean	Parkhill House, New Deer		
Fleming	Muriel	16 Rubislaw Den South, Aberdeen		
Foggo	E. M. C.	Suffrage Shop, 474 Union Street, Aberdeen		



Forbes	Mrs	Governor's House, Grampian Place, Aberdeen	Husband - Governor of H M Prison	
Forbes	Alice	Castle Forbes, Alford		
Forbes	Alice (Hon Mrs Atholl Forbes)	Brux Lodge, Forbes, Alford	Brother - late Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, died Boer War	Vice-President for Aberdeenshire, Soldiers and Sailors' Help Society
Forbes	Emma Theodora			Aberdeen Sphagnum Moss Joint Committee
Forbes	Eveline M.	Glasgoego Cottage, Kinaldie, Aberdeenshire		
Forbes	Louisa M.	64 Queen's Road, Aberdeen		Secretary & Treasurer, Bulgarian Relief Fund
Forbes	Mary	Freshfield, Cults		
Forgan	Mary Grace	32 Carden Place, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory 1900-01, Rev Robert B D Forgan (Gilcomston FC), same address	President, Women's Foreign Mission
Fraser	Annie E.	Strichen	School teacher Strichen	
Fussell	Emily V.			Organiser, WSPU
Fyffe	Marian A.	Corsindae, By Aberdeen		Hon Secretary, Aberdeen Branch, WSPU
Gammell	Alice T.	Countesswells, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory 1914-15, Sydney James Gammell, landowner, Countesswells House, Bieldside	
Gordon	Mrs	Newton, Inch		Hon Secretary, Aberdeen Society for Women's Suffrage
Gordon	Elizabeth	Garthdee, Aberdeen		
Gordon	Mrs Maria M. Ogilvie, DSc, PhD, FLS	1 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory 1900-01, John Gordon MD, CM, physician and surgeon	
Gordon	P.	Rhynie		Vice-President, National Union of Women Workers; President, Associated Women's Friendly Society
Gray	Kirsty			University War Dressings Work Party
Harrower	Rachel Blanche	50 College Bounds, Aberdeen		

Hector	Gertrude M.	29 King's Gate, Aberdeen	Post Office Directory 1914-15, Rev J. Hector, MA, DD, 29 King's Gate	
Henderson	Mrs M. S.	29 King's Gate, Aberdeen		
Hill	Evelyn		Lady Superintendent, Sick Children's Hospital, Aberdeen	
Hind-Evans	Elizabeth	12 George Street, Aberdeen		
Hosain	Maude Kazim	Aberdeen		Aberdeen Working Women's Political Association
Hunter	Mrs W. A.	c/o 34 Golden Square, Aberdeen		
Hutcheon	Bella	9 Conveth's Place, Laurencekirk		
Ingram	Jemima J.	590 Holburn Street, Aberdeen (ex of Kintore)		Hon Secretary, Scottish Women's Hospitals, Edinburgh
Jack	Caroline M. A.	Drumoak		Hon Secretary, Scottish Branch, The National Anti-Vivisection Soc
Jackson	Dorothy Grierson	Aberdeen		
Jamieson	Jessie U.	The Shaw, Birse, Aboyne		
Jollie	Helen	7 Bon Accord Street, Aberdeen		Secretary, British Women's Temperance Association (Scotland) WSPU, Ballater
Keith	E. G.	5 Argyll Place, Aberdeen		
Laing	Mrs	Marine Villa, Balnagask Road	PO Directory 1914-15, James Laing, consulting engineer and ship surveyor, 12 Regent Quay, home Marine Villa	
Legge	Mrs Jeannie	Errolbank, Turriff		Hon Treasurer, Scottish Women's Hospitals, Edinburgh
Leith Leith-Hay	Mary C. J. Henrietta	Westhall Leith Hall, Kennethmont		
Lewis	Ada	Palace Hotel, Aberdeen		
Lloyd	Georgina			Hon Treasurer, Scottish 'Shilling' Queen's Fund Appeal
Lockhart Lumsden	Leonora Mrs	Clova, Lumsden		



Lumsden	E. S.	Ladybank, Blairs		
Lumsden	Lady Fanny, of Belhelvie	Murdan, Murtle; also Belhelvie Lodge		Hon Treasurer, 'Penny All Round' Tobacco Fund (Boer War)
Lumsden	Katherine M.	Amalinda, Morningfield Road; 7 Richmondhill Place	Hon Superintendent, Sick Children's Hospital, Aberdeen; PO Directory 1914-15, 6 and 8 Castle Terrace; private residence Glenbogie, Rhynie	
Lumsden	Louisa Innes		Certificated student in Classical Honours, Girton College; college principal	
Lyons	Mrs	Beaulieu, Bielside		
Main	Jane C.	Woodside Cottage, Fetternear 118		
Mackenzie	Muriel	Rosemount Place, Aberdeen		
MacIntyre MacWilliam	Elizabeth T. E.	Aberdeen Inverdee, Cults	P O Directory, 1914-15, Professor John A MacWilliam, MD, Inverdee, Cults	
Maitland	Mrs Adam	Rubislaw Den House, Aberdeen	P O Directory, 1914-15, Adam Maitland (of J and W Henderson, Ltd) Rubislaw Den House	
Mason	Mrs A.	72 Queen Street, Aberdeen		
Mayo	Isabella Fyvie	College Bounds, Old Aberdeen		
McDougall	J. G.	Maternity Hospital, Aberdeen	Matron	
McLeod	Mrs	17 St Peter Street, Peterhead		Vice-President, Scottish Society of Trained Nurses
McKenzie	Anne M.	Rosslynlea, Cults	P O Directory 1914-15, William McKenzie, Rosslynlea, Cults	
McRobbie	Annie	259 Union Street, Aberdeen		
Menzies	Mrs Margaret	The Station Hotel, Aberfeldy		Secretary, Associated Women's Friendly Society Society, Aberdeen

Miller	Elena	2 Chanonry, Old Aberdeen	P O Directory, 1914-15, Hugh M Miller, 2 Chanonry; nee Dimitrova, daughter P Dimitroff, Bulgarian Permanent Under-Sec Foreign Affairs	Joint Superintendent, City House-to-House Collection for Sick Children's Hospital
Milne Mitchell	Annie Lilias	Aberdeen WSPU Rooms, 7 Bon-Accord Street, Aberdeen		Parliamentary Superintendent, President of Aberdeen branch, British Women's Temperance Association; President, North of Scotland Women's Insurance Society
Moir	Miss Mary	22 Belmont Road, Aberdeen	P O Directory, 1900-01, James R Moir, seedsman, 22 Belmont Road	
Morrison	Agnes	Fyvie Girls' School		
Morrison	E. J. D.	Marischal College, Aberdeen		
Murray	Elizabeth M.	1 Marine Place, Aberdeen		Hon Secretary, Victoria Infirmary of Glasgow Dorcas Society War Committee
Murray	Isabel	5 Rubislaw Den South, Aberdeen	Certified physical instructress, trained at Aberdeen Physical Training College	
Murray	Susan	1 Marine Place, Ferryhill	P O Directory 1914-15, Mrs Murray, 1 Marine Place	Hon Secretary, Aberdeen Society for Women's Suffrage
Murray Murray	Susan Susan	Inverdon Braehead, Bridge of Don		
Nicol	Miss Margaret Titler	3 Gladstone Place, Aberdeen	P O Directory 1914-15, A Tytler Nicol, Advocate (of Fraser and Duguid), 3 Gladstone Place	
Niven	Mrs	6 The Chanonry, Old Aberdeen	P O Directory, 1900-01, Charles Niven, MA, Professor of Natural Philosophy, University of Aberdeen, 6 The Chanonry	
Ogston	Constance E.	5 Bon Accord Square, Aberdeen		
Ord	Mary B.	Knowehead, Gamrie	School teacher, Slains	Hon Secretary, Aberdeen War Dressings Depot



Osborne	Mrs Alice Todd	Rysland, Newton Mearns; Northfield, Whitecraggs, Giffnock, Glasgow		
Philip	Mary I.	Strichen	School teacher, Strichen	Assistant Convenor, Penny War Fund
Philips	Caroline A. I.		Journalist, Aberdeen Daily Journal	
Pirie	Miss Margaret F.	39 Albyn Place, Aberdeen		Hon Secretary, Aberdeen WSPU
Polgreen	Gwendolen	21 Rose Street, Aberdeen		
Pyper	Mrs	15 Bon Accord Square, Aberdeen	P O Directory, 1914-15, Mrs W. Pyper	
Ramsay	Agnes M. (Lady)	11 College Bounds, Aberdeen	Husband, Sir W M Ramsay, Regius Professor of Humanity	
Reid	Jane C.	123 Desswood Place, Aberdeen		
Riddell	Katherine	Ryedale, Rubislaw Den South, Aberdeen	P O Directory, 1914-15, W. J. Riddell (of W. Riddell & Co), Ryedale, Rubislaw Den South	
Robertson	Mrs A.	82 Broomhill Road, Aberdeen		
Ross	Miss Margaret	12 Forbesfield Road, Aberdeen	P O Directory 1900-01, John Ross Jun, fishcurer, 5a Albert Quay, home 12 Forbesfield Road	
Russell	Miss Irene	The Deeside Hydro, Murtle		
Russell	Philippa A. M.	Aden		
Sceales	Mrs M. M. McD.	Murdan, Murtle		Member of executive committee of charity organising help for Belgian refugees
Schofield	Alice	2 South Esplanade East, Torry		
Sempill	Lady Gwendolen	Fintray House, Aberdeenshire		WSPU
Skinner	Mary J.	Westfield, Inverurie		
Slorach	Jamesina	Strichen	School teacher, Strichen	

Smith	Miss H. Birnie	238 Midstocket Road, Aberdeen	P O Directory 1914-15, Miss Birnie Smith, teacher (Sunnybank Primary School), 238 Midstocket Road	
Smith	Margaret Grant	17 Richmondhill Place, Aberdeen		
Smithson	Charlotte	Commercial Hotel, Turriff		Hon Secretary, Aberdeen Homes for Widowers' Children
Soddy	Winifred M.	14 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen		
Spark	Mrs M. S. Sinclair	Fernbank, Banchory		
Spence	Miss M. L.	42 Fountainhall Road, Aberdeen	P O Directory 1914-15, Miss Spence, 42 Fountainhall Road	
Stevenson	E. A.	Bay View, Johnshaven, Kincardineshire		
Stewart	Julia Charlotte	Banchory House, Banchory-Devenick	P O Directory 1900-01, Sir David Stewart, LLD, Banchory House, on South Deeside Road, one mile beyond Bridge of Dee	Hon Secretary and Treasurer, Scottish Society of Trained Nurses
Stewart	Mabel	Banchory House, Banchory-Devenick	P O Directory 1900-01, Sir David Stewart, LLD, Banchory House, on South Deeside Road, one mile beyond Bridge of Dee	
Stewart	Mary	Banchory House	P O Directory 1900-01, Sir David Stewart, LLD, Banchory House, on South Deeside Road, one mile beyond Bridge of Dee	
Stewart	Rachael M.	13 Crown Terrace, Aberdeen		
Sutherland	Mary E.	Nether Anguston, Peterculter		
Third	Jessie M.	173a Union Street, Aberdeen		
Thomson	Violet Leslie	2 Bon Accord Street (Crescent?), Aberdeen	P O Directory 1900-01, George L Thomson (of G Thomson and Sons), 2 Bon Accord Crescent, Aberdeen	Demonstration Secretary, Women's Freedom League



Tollie	Helen		Scottish Society of Trained Nurses Aberdeen WSPU Organiser Vice-President, Aberdeen Association for Women's Suffrage
Trail	K. E.		
Troup	Catherine M.	3 Queen's Gardens, Aberdeen	
Tweedale	Violet	Balquholly, Turriff	
Walker	Marjory (Hon Mrs H. Walker)	Riverston, Banchory	Superintendent, Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute of Nurses, Edinburgh
Wallace	Agnes G.	11a Dee Street, Aberdeen	
Watson Wolton	Anne Mercer Agnes S.	Aberdeen 7 Bon Accord Street, Aberdeen	Hon Secretary, Queen's Work for Women Fund