



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity
Partner Network



Open Library of Humanities

'An Unconventional MP': Nancy Astor, public women and gendered political culture

How to Cite: Glew, H 2020 In a Minority in Male Spaces: The Networks, Relationships and Collaborations between Women MPs and Women Civil Servants, 1919–1955. *Open Library of Humanities*, 6(2): 15, pp. 1–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.597>

Published: 21 September 2020

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Open Library of Humanities*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

Copyright:

© 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Open Access:

Open Library of Humanities is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

'AN UNCONVENTIONAL MP': NANCY ASTOR, PUBLIC WOMEN AND GENDERED POLITICAL CULTURE

**In a Minority in Male Spaces:
The Networks, Relationships and
Collaborations between Women MPs and
Women Civil Servants, 1919–1955**

Helen Glew

University of Westminster, UK
h.glew@westminster.ac.uk

This article outlines the relationships developed between women civil servants and women MPs between 1919 and 1955. It demonstrates the various ways in which a considerable number of women MPs supported efforts by women civil servants to achieve equal employment conditions with men. Arguing for the importance of networks and organisations embedded in the women's movement, this article contributes new dimensions to our understanding of both the work of women MPs and the operation of interwar feminist campaigning.

Introduction

Although women could enter the Civil Service for several decades before they were granted the right to sit in the House of Commons, their prospects – with only a few exceptions – were confined to the lowest rungs of the service until the post-First World War period. Women clerks in the General Post Office, which employed the most women out of any Civil Service department, had begun a campaign in 1901 to highlight the inequalities in their employment compared to men, and the campaign expanded as women were employed in other departments. There was a small cohort of male MPs who acted as allies and raised issues in Parliament before 1918. However, it was in the interwar years, following the postwar restructuring of the Civil Service, that the unequal position of women became more widely known. After Nancy Astor took her seat in 1919, this article will argue, it was the growing alliance between women civil servants and women MPs – supported by feminist organisations which aimed to make strategic use of women's votes and representation in Parliament – which more widely publicised the issues that women civil servants faced. A solidarity developed between female civil servants and MPs: each formed a minority and were marginalised in their chosen occupations and there was a particular salience, of course, because both were employees of the state and, at their heart, each of their roles was about improving the lives of the public. The article demonstrates that whilst a significant effect of the collaboration was raising awareness of the disadvantages that women civil servants faced, there were tangible effects, most notably around equal pay.

Women MPs, women civil servants, and women's work

Mari Takayanagi (2017) has observed that 'the experience of an MP or government minister was far removed from that of women workers generally. Women Members fought for equal pay for others but never had to for themselves, and although their marital status may have been the subject of discussion, nobody ever suggested that they should resign their job on marriage' (609), as was required of women civil servants. However, due to the desire of women civil servants to work with them and the mutual networks of which they were part, many of the women MPs soon became

familiar with women civil servants' employment conditions, which were starkly defined by gender.

Whilst some male MPs continued their demonstrable support for women civil servants' endeavours after 1919 – and indeed such aid was needed for attempted legislative changes in Parliament – it was women MPs who prominently supported these campaigns precisely because of what their gendered presence could add. This was largely true for women MPs across the three main parties, although the form of support differed at times. In a significant number of instances, female MPs were willing to support the claims of women civil servants for equality, in defiance of their own party line. Crucially, women MPs supported these issues out of all proportion to their numbers. Until 1945, only 38 women were elected (Beers, 2013) and the single-biggest number of women MPs in any one Parliament in the interwar years was fifteen in 1931 (Harrison, 1986; 623), so women MPs remained a tiny minority with an influence well beyond their share of the membership of Parliament.

The exact nature of the individual relationships between women civil servants and women MPs and, for example, the presence or absence of hierarchies, is hard to uncover, but there is plentiful evidence of the range of interactions and instances of collaboration. This article makes use of *Hansard* debates, and records of the Federation of Women Civil Servants (FWCS), the National Association of Women Civil Servants (NAWCS), the Council of Women Civil Servants (CWCS), the Joint Committee on Women in the Civil Service, and the Equal Pay Campaign Committee (EPCC), as well as other organisations and networks. Some of these records, such as *Opportunity* – the publication of the FWCS and later the NAWCS – were public-facing documents which endeavoured to portray the organisations and their endeavours in the best possible light and were in themselves campaigning documents. Others are private or organisational papers which give us both a sense of the level of correspondence between the two parties, and of their strategies, discussions and alliance-building. The article also draws on the personal papers and autobiographies of several women MPs, though as has been documented (see Beers 2016, for example), papers for a number of women MPs have not survived. National and local newspapers are also used, both to offer a different insight into the campaigning and to garner a sense of

the extent to which women MPs' work on behalf of civil servants came into public view.

There is a body of work on women civil servants in this period (Zimmeck, 1984; Jones, 2000; Glew, 2016) which examines the ways that they were systemically disadvantaged in the workplace. There is existent work on women MPs and their principal interests and causes, both individually and collectively (Harrison 1986; Alberti 1996; Pedersen, 1994; Haessly, 2010; Beers, 2016; Berthezène and Gottlieb, 2019; Thane, 2020), but this article constitutes the first sustained examination of the interactions between women MPs and women civil servants, and so contributes to both fields of study. Furthermore, Parliamentary debates about women in the Civil Service explicitly discussed issues of equality and gendered expectations of women more widely. Successive governments insisted, when it suited them, that the Civil Service should be a model employer for private businesses, which also meant that by discussing pay and working conditions for women civil servants, such Parliamentary debates were in effect discussions about women workers more widely. This helps to explain the amount of time that these debates took up, the intractability of successive governments, and the reason that these issues became such a long-term battleground. The fact that government was, in effect, the employer of civil servants also encouraged the women's movement to focus their efforts on the plight of women civil servants, believing this would in turn yield change elsewhere (Glew, 2016).

The three significant issues on which women civil servants campaigned in the interwar years were equal employment and promotion opportunities with men, equal pay, and the end to the marriage bar. In theory, women had been given increased opportunities in the Civil Service as a result of the 1919 reorganisation of staffing grades, but it would not be until 1925 that women were allowed to compete in examinations for the executive and administrative grades, and even then, the numbers of women admitted through this route amounted to only a handful during the interwar years (Zimmeck, 1984; Glew, 2016). Furthermore, the Sex Disqualification Removal Act (SDRA) of 1919 had no real effect on women's opportunities in the Civil

Service. Not only was the Act enabling rather than prescriptive, as Mari Takayanagi (2020) has shown, in August 1921 the government also passed regulations for the Civil Service which superseded the SDRA and effectively allowed the marriage bar and other restrictions on women's advancement to remain in place. Thus, women civil servants faced a long battle throughout the interwar years to improve the opportunities open to them in the service and to argue against the marriage bar (Glew, 2016). The chief organisations to do this consistently were the Federation of Women Civil Servants (FWCS) (the successor to the Association of Post Office Women Clerks (APOWC) and the predecessor to the National Association of Women Civil Servants), which represented women on the clerical grades, and the Council of Women Civil Servants, which represented women on the higher (executive and administrative) grades. Each organisation was formed specifically on a gender equality platform. Other mixed-sex organisations did engage with these issues, particularly equal pay, though their commitment was at times more theoretical than a demonstrable, active campaign, and their focus on issues which particularly affected women was sometimes trumped by other policy campaigns. The Civil Service Clerical Association, which became the mixed-sex rival to the FWCS/NAWCS, did not admit women to membership until 1921, and it was not until the late 1930s that the organisation changed its policy on the marriage bar from support to opposition (Glew, 2016).

The networks with women MPs also became particularly important to the women-only organisations because of their position within Civil Service industrial politics. The FWCS/NAWCS and the CWCS were non-party political, both in the tradition of many women's organisations in Britain in this period and because Civil Service guidelines and the strictures of the 1927 Trades Disputes Act prevented them from overtly political activity. The FWCS and the NAWCS had also decided not to amalgamate or affiliate with any mixed-sex (and therefore male-dominated) organisations in the Civil Service after feeling that their interests were not sufficiently represented, and this decision also meant that they had no representation on the overarching Civil Service Whitley Council – the Civil Service employer-employee negotiation body – though they did have representation on the Councils at the level

of individual departments (Glew, forthcoming). This situation meant that the FWCS' and NAWCS' natural tendency to align with women's organisations and to seek outside support became an indelible part of their strategy.

Although all three campaigning issues mentioned above were taken up by women MPs in the first half of the twentieth century, it was equal pay which was addressed most consistently. This was in part because it carried the most salience beyond the Civil Service: unequal pay was the norm in many other sectors and equal pay could be sold as an important issue to trade unions who might be worried about the possibility of women otherwise undercutting men's wages and being employed in preference to men. In addition, successive governments ruled that the issue could not be resolved by the Whitley Council. In the end, the marriage bar was abolished in 1946, equal pay was granted in 1955 with a six-year implementation period, and although there was some progress on the issue of women's opportunities in the Civil Service by the late 1930s, the issues of unequal opportunities and the 'glass ceiling' facing female employees continues in the Civil Service, arguably, to this day. Although all the victories and milestones were clearly a combination of efforts, the public support and championing of these issues by women MPs was crucial. This article traces the particular shape of this support, and the evolution of the networks and alliances between women MPs and civil servants. It argues that the continued and consistent pressure from the majority of the women MPs to improve the lot of women civil servants made a significant difference in highlighting the unequal conditions that women civil servants faced, keeping these issues in the public eye and pushing for change.

The years after 1919: building and extending networks

In the years immediately after the First World War, when the Civil Service and the place of women within it were being reorganised, there were of course hardly any women MPs. Nancy Astor's 1919 election for the Conservative party allowed her to join forces with male colleagues to push for improvements to women's positions. In August 1921, she spoke in favour of Major John Hills' motion for equal admission regulations for male and female civil servants, telling the House that:

we do not want selection. We want competition and we want a fair chance. I want the Government to carry out their promises on this question, and I do not want them to wait until they are forced to carry them out... I hope hon. Members will realise that they are sent to this House by the votes of thousands of women throughout the country, who ask for no favours, but simply for justice and equal opportunities with men.¹

Her pointed comment about women civil servants as voters highlighted the new era for voters and politicians alike.

The passing of this motion, which seemed to guarantee equality of entry and appointment with men, was at first greeted optimistically with a celebration dinner. It was also deemed symbolically important, as noted by the newspaper *The Woman's Leader*, because '[w]e can now, when a grievance presses hard upon us, turn to Parliament for redress... It is a thing to note and to remember, for what could we have done in this matter before we had votes?'² It was thus seen more widely by the women's movement as a symbol of what could be achieved post-partial enfranchisement. As the 1920s wore on, however, it became clearer that the spirit of these admission regulations was not being adhered to and that the initial optimism had been misplaced. However, the existence of these regulations and the original spirit of the SDRA (and particularly its Labour predecessor, the Women's Emancipation Bill) remained significant parliamentary moments for MPs – women and men alike – to refer to in debate over the intervening years.

As the celebratory dinner and its coverage in a former suffrage paper attests, a fundamental part of the relationship between women civil servants and women MPs was the wider backdrop of the women's movement. As Jessica Thurlow (2014) has remarked, a number of prominent women MPs in the early-mid twentieth century held leadership positions in organisations which declared themselves feminist. In the early years, alliances and connections from the suffrage movement and women's earlier activism helped to form circles of support that included women MPs and civil servants. Given the status of women civil servants and the very small number of women MPs, they were highly unlikely to meet each other in the normal course of

their daily work and so introductions and connection via wider activist networks were all the more important. Significantly, all of the organisations which connected women civil servants and women MPs were also non-party, although in practice some Labour women MPs remained reluctant to join, as discussed below. The multiplicity of such organisations and networks strengthened alliances and ensured that issues could often be approached from more than one angle, or by more than one organisation at the same time, and also ensured increased publicity on a particular issue.

The first of the formal networks to be established was the Joint Committee on Women in the Civil Service (hereafter Joint Committee), formed by the London and National Society for Women's Service (LNSWS), a former suffrage organisation led by Ray Strachey (née Costelloe). As their biographer, Barbara Caine, has noted, Ray and her sister-in-law Philippa (Pippa) Strachey interpreted feminism in the post-suffrage era in terms of women's economic and employment rights (Caine, 2005: 316). The LNSWS as an organisation remains under-researched, though Jane W. Grant (2016) offers an overarching history of the group. Harold L. Smith (1996) has examined the Joint Committee in terms of its activism for equal pay in the mid-1930s, though this remains the only historical assessment of the committee whose focus was much broader than equal pay and whose existence spanned multiple decades. Indeed, the Committee was formed in 1919 as a response to the ramifications of the Sex Disqualification Removal Act (Strachey, 1927: 31–32) and took a leading co-ordinating role in subsequent debates in Parliament in May 1920 and August 1921. The Committee's membership included representatives of the FWCS and CWCS and a whole host of women's organisations, including the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT), and the Women's Freedom League (WFL). Astor was also very involved and served a stint as chair. A number of these organisations were already known to each other via suffrage and other women's movement campaigning, but the focus of the committee on women in the Civil Service was important. It gave the FWCS and the CWCS further support in their endeavours, and the Joint Committee was a co-ordinating presence and sounding board in the background of much activism on

behalf of women civil servants in the interwar years and early 1940s.³ Similarly, the Six Point Group, formed in 1921 by Lady Rhondda, had as one of its eponymous six campaigning points equality of opportunity (though not pay) for men and women civil servants. The FWCS agreed to advise the group on all issues relating to the Civil Service, and the group therefore acted as a further point of connection, publicity and advice.⁴

Ray Strachey was significant beyond her leadership of the LNSWS and the Joint Committee. By the 1910s she had become well-known in feminist circles for her constitutional suffragist activism and her knowledge of parliamentary procedure, having served as the parliamentary secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies from 1915. From the early 1920s she assisted Nancy Astor with correspondence and policy drafting as her unpaid parliamentary advisor (Holmes, 2019: 174, 184; Caine 2005: 242, 316). She gave important evidence to the 1929-1931 Royal Commission on the Civil Service, as discussed below, as part of the LNSWS, and between 1931 and 1935 was Astor's paid secretary, which further facilitated relationships between women civil servants and her employer (Holmes, 2019: 253 ff.).

Another important figure was Ethel Maude White (or Mrs E. M. White, as she appears to have been universally known). From its inception in 1921 White edited the FWCS' journal *Opportunity*, for which Strachey wrote from time to time.⁵ She worked as Astor's paid secretary from 1920–1924 during Strachey's unpaid tenure. From the mid-1920s she worked as Astor's political secretary before returning to the FWCS in 1930, where she again served as editor of *Opportunity* until its cessation in 1940.⁶ White also worked for the Open Door Council and so was well-connected to a number of other women's organisations.⁷ White and Strachey brought with them experience, strengths and collective understanding of the women's movement, politics and Parliament, and this facilitated further connections during campaigning.

In her early years as MP Nancy Astor was, undoubtedly, a minor celebrity, conspicuous in the House and in politics more widely because of her gender. She set up informal gatherings that she referred to as 'At Homes', which, like the suffrage

movement, took the formula of the polite female upper-middle class social gathering and transformed it into a politicised space for women (and, in this case, sympathetic men). The FWCS attended the first gathering in spring 1921, noting that the 'At Homes' had been 'initiated... as a means of bringing representative women in touch with each other and with Members of Parliament' (*Opportunity*, April 1921: 36). A month later they were able to note that '[t]hese At Homes are forming most valuable meeting grounds for professional women who in the past have usually pursued their ideals along a lone track, but who are finding that a discussion of the difficulties that beset one another is most helpful and encouraging' (*Opportunity*, April 1921: 54). In their annual report for 1921–1922, the FWCS noted their 'grateful sense of the debt we owe to Lady Astor, MP, for the opportunities which her democratic hospitality continues to provide for friendly meetings between professional women and members of the House of Commons, Heads of Department and others. The "Member for Women" is always an invaluable champion of our cause.'⁸ As Pugh (2017) and Brehony (2009) have remarked, Astor was widely seen as an MP for all women and not just her constituents, a point both borne out by the FWCS commentary and the image that she projected and cultivated through work like this.

Astor also created more formal organisations. Both types of spaces were important for developing connections and a programme of campaigning. In 1921, she was instrumental in setting up the Consultative Committee of Women's Organisations (CCWO). This brought together a range of existing women's organisations to co-ordinate work on equality campaigns. The FWCS agreed to advise the committee on all Civil Service issues.⁹ Joining the CCWO also allowed the FWCS to broaden and strengthen networks. The future Labour MP Edith Picton-Tubervill served as a Vice President, as would Margaret Wintringham after her tenure as Liberal MP, thus highlighting both the connections between women MPs and the opportunities for campaigning women civil servants to meet them. There is little extant research on the CCWO¹⁰ but the committee seems to have met frequently throughout the 1920s where member organisations could bring motions for debate to determine policy.¹¹ The Committee wound up in October 1928, instigated by Astor's announcement that her commitments prevented her from continuing as President and her feeling that

the committee had achieved its aims.¹² Notably, the FWCS, who wholeheartedly felt that many more changes were needed to equalise women's careers and experiences as civil servants (Glew 2016; 2017b), were not among those submitting resolutions in favour of winding up the committee.

Individual women civil servants, or organisations which represented them, also wrote to women MPs asking for help in acquiring data for campaigns or assistance with individual cases of hardship or poor treatment. Due to the extensiveness of her surviving papers, this type of relationship-building is most traceable for Astor, and her status as 'the women's MP' undoubtedly contributed to the volume of mail that was sent to her. She received letters from, amongst others, the FWCS and CWCS requesting information to support their campaigns, the Civil Service Federation about temporary women staff in the Ministry of Labour, the Union of Post Office Workers about the situation of an individual telephonist, and a letter direct from a former woman civil servant in difficult financial circumstances. In many of these cases, Astor replied and took up the matter in the House.¹³ Margaret Wintringham, too, supported women civil servants in this manner, agreeing to intervene and use her influence in individual cases of mistreatment of women civil servants, and Margaret Bondfield (Labour) attended meetings of women telephonists in the Post Office.¹⁴

Politicising members: the FWCS and NAWCS, women voters, and women candidates

The FWCS joined in the general excitement over the election of Nancy Astor in late 1919. For several months in the early 1920s the FWCS also secured the services of Dorothy Elizabeth Evans, the formerly imprisoned suffragette and WSPU paid organiser.¹⁵ She was paid to assist with FWCS recruiting and branch engagement and brought with her a range of skills honed in the suffrage movement.¹⁶ It is less clear the extent to which she was involved with encouraging newly-enfranchised members to use their vote, but just as the 1919 motion had been deemed an example of how women voters could influence women MPs, the victory of partial enfranchisement and the passage of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act both in 1918 massively expanded the ways in which women civil servants could

engage with the political process and be heard. The FWCS and earlier the APOWC had been explaining to members for many years why the vote was important and what it would mean so their actions in then encouraging women to take their new duties as voters seriously were not remotely surprising (*Association Notes*, 1906–1920). Whilst it is striking that relatively few of the early women MPs had a background in the suffrage movement – notable exceptions were Dorothy Jewson (Labour, 1923–4; formerly WSPU), Margaret Wintringham (Liberal, 1921–1924; formerly WFL), Eleanor Rathbone (Independent, 1929–1946; formerly NUWSS) and Edith Picton-Tubervill (Labour, 1929–1931; formerly NUWSS) – a number of women civil servants inside and outside of the APOWC and FWCS had taken as active a part in the suffrage movement as their position as civil servants would allow, and occasionally, beyond what it would allow. The APOWC/FWCS had also been shaped by the backdrop of the women's suffrage movement and women's activism more widely in the years before 1918, holding public meetings, quoting from the women's press and lobbying sympathetic male MPs (Glew, forthcoming). Just as Astor did, the APOWC and later the FWCS had reappropriated the 'At Home' format and used these as spaces for discussion of women's equality issues.¹⁷

The leaders of the FWCS emphasised the importance of members researching local candidates and particularly getting to know women candidates. For example, before the 1922 general election, the FWCS were represented on a deputation organised by the NUSEC to interview female parliamentary candidates. They reported on a public meeting with Edith Picton-Tubervill, standing for Labour in North Islington, hosted by the LNSWS and chaired by Ray Strachey (*Opportunity*, August 1922: 99) and on the views of Dr Ethel Bentham, standing for Labour in East Islington (*Opportunity*, September 1922: 121). The FWCS made the important point that several male MPs had, in recent years, continued to show their support for women civil servants even when they might make up a tiny minority of their constituents and where supporting them might have been interpreted as turning their backs on ex-servicemen. The FWCS also argued for members to support female candidates where possible:

we particularly want to support those women who for some years have helped us in our fight for equality, who have organized deputations, spoken at public meetings, written articles, lobbied for us, and in a word, done for the women Civil Servants all that publicity work which it is forbidden them to do for themselves (*Opportunity*, November 1922: 126).

Such women included Ray Strachey, who was running in Brentford and Chiswick. The FWCS discussion of voting and elections also connects with what Cairiona Beaumont (2000) has identified as the process of educating women voters for 'citizenship'. The FWCS pushed a rhetoric of duty and service in voting, arguing that MPs had voted late in the evening in August 1921 to offer support for women civil servants, and so women civil servants should vote no matter how fatigued they felt after work (*Opportunity*, November 1922: 126). For this and other elections they also published a 'Whom to Support – and Whom Not' column, detailing the voting records of incumbents and views and intentions of candidates on Civil Service matters (*Opportunity*, November 1922: 133).

The FWCS were realists about the pace of progress and in December 1922 they opened *Opportunity* by paraphrasing Margaret Wintringham's observation that:

it took ten or fifteen years to accustom the British electorate to consider women as normal members of local government bodies (we incline to think that stage is hardly yet reached, by-the-by) and doubtless it will need another general election or two, with all the magnificent spade-work by the women candidates and their supporters thereby entailed, to dispossess the general public of its more rigid sex prejudices (*Opportunity*, December 1922: 141).

In November 1923, they hoped that a woman might be elected by her own name and platform and not, at least in part, because she was standing in her husband's previous seat, as had been the case with Astor, Wintringham and Mabel Philipson (Conservative) (*Opportunity*, November 1923: 139). In the next issue, the FWCS reflected positively on the numerical progress in votes cast for women (*Opportunity*, December 1923:

145). The organisation also called for better representation of women as ministers and cabinet members, and argued in 1924 that Margaret Bondfield should have been appointed Minister of Labour (*Opportunity*, February 1924: 20). When she was appointed to that role in 1929, the FWCS reported that they were delighted for her and for Susan Lawrence, who was Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health (*Opportunity*, June 1929: 83). The issue of women having representation at ministerial level, and counteracting the perception that only men had the right expertise, was important to the FWCS and mirrored their own struggles for greater representation of women in the higher grades of the Civil Service. Ministers were their bosses and the continued appointment of male ministers underlined the notion that women did not belong in the public service. By 1931, when fifteen women were returned to Parliament – the highest number of women after any interwar general election – the organisation wrote that they saw this as a signal that women in politics were becoming more accepted and no longer seen as candidates purely defined by their gender (*Opportunity*, November 1931: 177–8).

It is unclear, however, how many members of the FWCS and indeed the CWCS would have been able to vote before 1928. Complete membership lists do not survive so it is difficult to have a precise picture, but certainly a good number of FWCS members would have been too young, and others over thirty might well have been disenfranchised by the other rules relating to rate-paying, residency and occupancy. Due to the marriage bar, none of the members could, by definition, be enfranchised by husbands meeting the property qualification.

The later 1920s and the Royal Commission on the Civil Service

Throughout the mid-to-late 1920s, women civil servants were trying to gain traction with a number of campaigns to improve their working conditions relative to men's. Whilst the government had promised in 1921 that it would review the question of equal pay within three years, in practice successive Prime Ministers and Chancellors of the Exchequer refused any serious discussion of equal pay. The FWCS, CWCS and allied women's organisations continued to campaign against the marriage bar (Glew

2016). At a CCWO meeting in 1925, they proposed a motion to have a guarantee to end the bar inserted in the forthcoming King's Speech.¹⁸

The most significant moment in Parliament with regard to the marriage bar was the 1927 private member's bill introduced by Robert Newman (Conservative) at the end of April and sponsored by the NUSEC. The bill aimed to abolish the marriage bar in the Civil Service and ultimately did not pass, but the parliamentary debate developed into a full-scale discussion of whether a woman's place was truly in the home or not. Astor was the main female speaker and drew on many of the arguments made by feminist-identifying organisations against the bar in this period. She emphasised the right of married couples to make their own decisions about the wife's employment. She pointed out the class-based nature of the sentiment that women's role was as wife and homemaker, reminding members that '[i]n the case of a charwoman or cook, no one says that a woman's place is in the home.' She made pointed reference to Katharine Stewart-Murray, the Duchess of Atholl, as 'one of the most efficient members of this Government' who was also married.¹⁹ Astor was joined by the Labour MPs Bondfield and Susan Lawrence in voting for the bill.²⁰ Lawrence and Bondfield's votes were notable in that although the women's wing of the Labour party advocated the abolition of the marriage bar – as outlined in the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations (SJCWIO) report on married women in employment in 1922 (SJCWIO, 1922) – the labour movement and trade unions were more ambivalent about the marriage bar (Graves, 1994). Although Bondfield and Lawrence were therefore supporting what was considered to be the official stance of the Labour women's movement, they were at odds with other (male) members of the party and at least elements of the trades union movement more widely. This was emblematic of the handling of many women's issues within the Labour party. As Graves (1994) has shown, there was an ongoing tussle between the feminist movement and the trade union movement over the best way to represent working-class women. This also had implications for female Labour MPs in terms of who they worked with and the rhetorical positions that they adopted when discussing issues such as equal pay, as we shall see below.

The Royal Commission on the Civil Service, which was called in 1929 and reported in 1931, was formative in determining the direction of Civil Service employment policy for women for more than a decade. Its judgements were hugely influential. Significant, too, was the appointment of three women MPs – two sitting and one former – as Commission members. These were Mary Agnes (Molly) Hamilton, Labour MP for Blackburn until the 1931 election, Margaret Wintringham, and the Duchess of Atholl, Conservative MP for Kinross and West Perthshire. Wintringham was well-known to feminist campaigners and women civil servants. Hamilton was an interesting figure in that she had not long been in Parliament. She and Ray Strachey had been contemporaries at Newnham College, Cambridge, and during the suffrage movement, but it was on the occasion of the Royal Commission that the two became friends after Strachey gave evidence on behalf of the LNSWS and attended many of the sessions as an observer (Hamilton, 1944). Whilst it would not be justified to say that the personal connections forged between Strachey and Hamilton had any influence on the line that Hamilton took during the Commission, given her longer history as a suffrage campaigner and supporter of women, it did mean that both Hamilton and Wintringham were women civil servants' allies. Atholl, on the other hand, had been well-known as an outspoken anti-suffragist and was also not comfortable with the idea of championing women's causes in the way that other women MPs were happier to (Atholl, 1958: 138–139). Her BBC broadcast before the 1929 general election mentioned women largely in the context of being wives and mothers and spoke of her party's achievements on that score; there was no outward support of equal rights causes (Atholl, 1929). By her own admission, she did not find the Royal Commission work interesting because 'the questions we had to consider largely concerned salaries' (Atholl, 1958: 178), though the Commission's remit was in fact much wider than pay. It is clear, too, from her subsequent position on the issue that she was one of the Commissioners who opposed equal pay for women.²¹ Writing in 1958, Atholl noted that she was willing to work with women MPs of all parties 'on non-party questions of special interest to women' (138), but evidently she must have perceived the issues that women civil servants faced as party political. Her

questioning of witnesses throughout the Royal Commission process also revealed her Conservative and anti-feminist views, which, along with the questioning of similarly-minded colleagues, did serve the purpose of getting women civil servants' views into the press when the testy and confrontational exchanges were reported in day-by-day snippets. For example, several papers reported her interview with Dora Ibberson of the CWCS on 14 October 1930, when Atholl asked whether there would be a loss of efficiency to the service if the marriage bar were abolished and women were absent for a period due to childbirth. Ibberson's retort that 'I do not think such absence would create more difficulty than, say, the case of an operation' thus made its way into the press, as did the Chair, Lord Tomlin's, facetious follow-up: 'How many operations do you allow to each individual[?]' (*Western Mail and South Wales News*, 15 October 1930; *Daily Herald*, 15 October 1930).

Rhetoric in the House and elsewhere: consolidating the equal pay campaign, 1931–1939

When the Royal Commission reported in 1931, it recommended making more posts and types of work available to women on the same terms as men and some minor amendments to the marriage bar to allow the state to retain experienced women on the higher grades if they chose to marry. Both of these recommendations were put into practice through the Whitley negotiation machinery. In contrast, the Commission was equivocal about the need for equal pay. Although members were on both sides of the argument, their disagreements had not been so stark as to force a Minority report as had been the case with the 1912–1914 Royal Commission, but nonetheless gave proponents of equal pay little new support for their arguments. Moreover, Commission findings made it clear once again that the only way to achieve equal pay was to get the government to agree to it via Parliamentary legislation (Glew, 2016).

From the early 1930s, then, there emerged a coalition of women MPs, amongst a wider group of sympathetic male MPs, who worked for the passage of equal pay. As other historians have noted, women MPs had formed a community of sorts through their status as a minority group in the House and the need to share the physical

space of the Lady Members' room, for example (Cowman, 2013; Thane, 2020). Cross-party friendships had also been formed between Astor and Wintringham, as demonstrated by the CCWO, and Astor and Ellen Wilkinson (Labour) in the 1920s (Brehony, 2009). There remained some hesitancy on the part of some Labour women MPs due to their party's general scepticism of the feminist movement (Graves, 1994), and their wariness of appearing to work with Conservative women. That said, Labour women MPs supported equal pay, even if from the vantage point of 'the rate for the job' or protecting men's wages, rather than arguments about women's rights to equality. Edith Summerskill, elected for Labour in Fulham in 1938, was more ready to identify with the feminist movement and undertook – as we shall see – important cross-party work in the Second World War and beyond. Her 1967 memoirs, titled *A Woman's World* to suggest that gender identities were significant to her, also reveal her understanding of how women civil servants were treated in the institutional hierarchy:

[W]omen are not encouraged in the Civil Service... Prejudice is so widespread that a woman has to be far superior to her men colleagues of a similar grade to be considered for promotion, otherwise a Permanent Secretary may suffer a lapse of memory in compiling a short list for the Minister's consideration... It seems that there must be three desiderata in choosing a Civil Servant for the Administrative grade. He must have an Arts degree, come from Oxford or Cambridge and belong to the male sex (Summerskill, 1967: 107).

This was a bold articulation of many of the attitudes that the FWCS and CWCS had been trying to highlight and change for years.²²

Eleanor Rathbone (Independent) was well-connected with women's organisations as leader of the NUSEC from 1918 to 1929, and was broadly supportive of women civil servants' equality campaigns, but was against equal pay unless also accompanied by family allowances, her flagship policy after 1917.²³ Rathbone's position as an Independent MP, as several of her biographers have noted, meant that she had 'her own sources of information and [was] immune to party discipline' (Pedersen, 1994:

230) and her 'individualism [made] it difficult to work within a group, including with her own women colleagues' (Alberti, 1996: 95). In 1931, when she spoke to the FWCS she was criticised for advocating family allowances as effectively more important than equal pay (*Opportunity*, December 1931: 200–201). The FWCS and its later incarnation the NAWCS, among a number of other women's organisations, argued that family allowances were a distraction from the clear justice of the equal pay argument (*Opportunity*, March 1937).

Other women MPs besides Atholl and Rathbone were also less than helpful on the question of equal pay. In November 1931, for example, the FWCS and the Civil Service section of the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries hosted a meeting at Central Hall, Westminster, to continue to press for a 'fair field and no favour' for women on the clerical and writing assistant grades. Mary Pickford, Conservative MP for Hammersmith North, spoke. She was criticised in *Opportunity* for accusing the FWCS leadership of wanting 'a fair field and a little favour' after the FWCS asserted that women should be chosen for ministerial rank specifically because of their gender. The *Opportunity* correspondent was also less than impressed that Pickford seemed to toe the government line in stating that it was not a problem that women's current wages were less than men's, despite her promise to support women civil servants in the Commons (*Opportunity*, December 1931: 200–201).

As the 1930s wore on and the country's financial position improved, supporters of equal pay for women civil servants began taking steps to launch a more prominent campaign. In the House, this consisted of two debates: one in June 1935 and the other in April 1936. Mavis Tate (Conservative) spoke in the 1935 debate. She disagreed with the line of rhetoric pursued by both Colonel Clifton Brown and George Lansbury in their opening speeches, arguing that equal pay for women was simply a matter of justice. Ellen Wilkinson took Duff Cooper, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, to task for deliberate obfuscation of the comparative sick leave figures between men and women.²⁴

The April 1936 debates would have lasting significance. The debates themselves were the result of a private member's bill and there was a significant amount of

publicity in the build-up. For example, on 17 March 1936 Nancy Astor and Ellen Wilkinson participated in an equal pay meeting at Caxton Hall organised by the Joint Committee on Women in the Civil Service and chaired by Professor Winifred Cullis. The *International Women's News* reported that the crowd was so large that an overflow space had to be found before the meeting could begin. The meeting notably largely steered clear of arguments about justice and equality and instead focused on arguments that might appeal to other audiences. Major Hills introduced the motion and Wilkinson seconded, noting that, contrary to popular belief, many women as well as men had dependents that they needed to support. Astor's contribution focused on the bad example being set by government to industry and she argued that paying women less than men meant that women became the preferable employees – a point that worked on an emotional and symbolic level to press home the need for equal pay, but which actually ignored the vast levels of gendered occupational segregation. She also harked back to the Treaty of Versailles which had included an equal pay clause, but which had been ignored by many governments (*International Women's News*, April 1936: 55).

Thus, on 1 April 1936 Wilkinson was selected to introduce the private member's bill designed to grant equal pay to men and women on what were known as the 'common classes' of the Civil Service – that is, those now open to men and women on the same terms and via the same examinations. Laura Beers (2016: 335) has argued that as Wilkinson won the private members' bill lottery, her introduction of the amendment and the ensuing debate focused more on women's economic responsibilities for dependents and less on equal rights than it might have done had the bill been introduced by another member. However, other members did raise this angle. Rathbone made her customary argument for family allowances. What came to the forefront also were the rhetorical skills of both Wilkinson and Astor. Wilkinson sardonically remarked that one should never doubt Treasury figures, all the while doing so, and during debate about the volume and quality of women's work compared to men's in the Civil Service, she attested to the pressure and expectations on women MPs, arguing:

I do not claim that women Members of Parliament do equal work with the men; they do a great deal more than the men. If the average women here did not do a great deal more – [Interruption]. This, I gather is where I am not being tactful but I want to pay hon. Members the compliment that they not only gave equal pay without question but granted equality to the women Members from the first...²⁵

Thus, Wilkinson was able point out the discrepancy between women MPs having equal pay and women civil servants not having equal pay, whilst also pointing to the volume of work women MPs had to contend with because there were so few of them and there were expectations that women would be represented on a wide range of committees (Takayanagi, 2013).

Referring more widely to women's equality issues, Astor pointed out that:

This question always seems to cause some amusement in the House. Some hon. Members seem to regard any question affecting women as a good joke, just as mothers-in-law used to be regarded as a joke. But I ask them to remember that this question is very far from being a joke.²⁶

Here, Astor was making a plea for marginalised voices – that is, women in all capacities who served the state that was still widely believed to belong to, and primarily serve, men. She drew also on a running thread in the debate – Stanley Baldwin's recent praise of women civil servants as possessing a high level of discretion, and the contradiction that he was not willing to support equal pay – by asserting that '[i]f women were not discreet where would men be[?]'²⁷

The result of the 1 April 1936 debate and subsequent vote was the only government defeat of that Parliament, which was politically embarrassing for Baldwin and his supporters, and significant both for the strength of feeling that it created among Parliamentarians and the potentially explosive issue that it was becoming. Astor, Thelma Cazalet (Conservative), Florence Horsbrugh (Conservative), and Wilkinson all voted against the government. The government called a motion of no-confidence in

itself, which it managed to win only because, as Smith (1996) demonstrates, some of those previously voting against the government now abstained. These events left supporters of equal pay with the moral victory and the knowledge that Parliamentary support existed.

Fighting for women civil servants in the Second World War and beyond

The unprecedented circumstances of the Second World War and the need to very quickly reorient women's employment and mobilise women currently not working necessitated even closer collaboration between female MPs and women's campaigning organisations. The climate of wartime working brought women MPs together more readily than in peacetime, and had a knock-on effect for the equal pay campaign in particular.

Although it remains under-researched, the Woman Power Committee (WPC), for example, chaired by Irene Ward (Conservative), counted numerous female MPs among its members, including Astor, Summerskill, Rathbone, Cazalet-Keir (as she now was), Tate, Frances Davidson (Conservative), and Megan Lloyd-George (Liberal). Later in the war, the secretary Ethel Wood wrote *Mainly for Men* (1943) on behalf of the committee, using data on women civil servants from the CWCS and featuring an account of the ways in which women were disadvantaged in Civil Service employment. As Harold Smith (1981) has remarked, '[t]he Woman Power Committee was a unique experiment in that it was the first time that women MPs from all political parties had combined in order to represent British women' (656). Though it quickly became apparent that it would be too difficult to try to represent women in industry because of potential conflicts with trade unions (Smith, 1981), it is notable that women MPs from Labour joined the WPC, though the wider collaboration of the wartime coalition government likely set the precedent for cross-party working and set aside some of the interwar concerns about working with members of the women's movement.

In early 1941 the Women's Consultative Committee was formed by Ernest Bevin, partly in response to pressure from the WPC as well as the realisation that there needed to be greater mobilisation of women (Smith, 1981). In 1942, Edith

Summerskill founded Women for Westminster, an organisation to promote the idea of more women standing as candidates (Beers, 2013). Thus, there were now several overlapping organisations and networks which included women MPs and fostered an ethos of collaboration. The period from the mid-1930s to 1945 was also one in which all the women MPs who had been the most prominent in equal pay campaigns up to this point – Astor, Wilkinson, Summerskill, Tate, Ward, and Cazalet-Keir – remained in Parliament, and so there was a critical mass of support and experience, which would have lasting effects. Newer MPs also played a part in supporting women civil servants. Jennie Lee, elected in 1945 for Labour in Cannock, established relationships with the CWCS (*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 November 1946) and advocated strongly for the removal of the marriage bar in the July 1946 Parliamentary debate.²⁸ The removal of the bar came later that year, though this was ultimately less to do with Parliamentary influence and more to do with Hugh Gaitskill, the Chancellor, realising this was the only course of action that would be deemed politically and publicly acceptable in these very particular postwar circumstances (Glew, 2017a).

The equal pay campaign committee (EPCC) might be regarded as the culmination of women MPs and women civil servants working together. The EPCC was formed from many of these existing relationships and partnerships and many of the individuals who had featured in earlier strands of the campaign reappeared as part of the committee. The NAWCS had been members of the campaign for equal compensation for war injuries, working closely with the Chair, Mavis Tate, and many of the same organisations came together and switched their focus to equal pay, galvanised by the success of the equal compensation campaign in 1943 and its implication that men and women were equal. As Harold Smith (1981) has shown, the issue of equal pay had gained wider currency during the war with the increase in women working in jobs previously done by men, and pressure mounted publicly and in the House of Commons. The government managed to resist this pressure, ultimately, and hosted a national women's conference to thank women's organisations for their work. It was this that reportedly made Tate determined to launch an equal pay campaign, such was her anger that nothing was said about equal pay (Smith, 1981).

Tate was elected the first Chair of the EPCC in early 1944 and the NAWCS offered meeting room space; their general secretary, Hilda Hart, served as honorary secretary to the Committee.²⁹ Summerskill, Astor and Megan Lloyd-George were also committee members. For the next few years, until her sudden death in 1947, Tate became the figurehead MP for equal pay, taking part in public events and radio debates (*Listener*, 8 June 1944). Within Parliament, she worked with William J. Brown of Labour – also the MP sponsored by the mixed-sex Civil Service Clerical Association – to secure sufficient signatures for an equal pay debate in 1944 (Smith, 1981). She argued in April of that year that equal pay needed to be resolved by the end of the war in order for it not affect demobilisation, reconstruction and post-war employment opportunities (*Evening Despatch*, 19 April 1944). She told a meeting of the British Federation of Business and Professional Women, who were also part of the EPCC, that:

‘[t]hose who are working towards equal pay for equal work do not regard it as a fight for women’s rights, but for right for the sake of right, justice for the sake of justice for the community as a whole, not as a benefit for sex
(*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 19 April 1944).

Such rhetoric, and her argument that the continuation of unequal pay would make the postwar adjustment more complicated, was a further example of billing equal pay as something that would help everyone, not just women. This was, of course, a core strand of feminism – that improving women’s lives helped society as a whole – but it was calculated to work in a public sphere that tended to perceive discourses of feminism and ‘women’s rights’ as old-fashioned, unnecessary and, at worst, anti-men (DiCenzo, 2014; McCarthy, 2008; Bingham, 2013: 99–101). Equal pay remained a prominent issue from this point on. Later in 1944, the wartime coalition government suffered its only defeat when the House voted for equal pay for women teachers as part of the Education Bill. This was a clear echo of the events of 1936. Churchill won the vote of confidence he called in himself³⁰ and appointed the Royal Commission on Equal Pay, which was essentially a delaying tactic.

Although the Royal Commission was instructed to not make a specific recommendation, the contents of the report made it clear that arguments against equal pay were diminishing (Ellis and Mortimer, 1980; Glew, 2016), and indeed in the decade between the delivery of the report and the eventual passage of equal pay for women civil servants, the refusal of successive governments to implement equal pay was on the grounds of cost rather than principle. The eventual passage of equal pay was, as has been noted, the culmination of years of pressure and efforts from a range of different sources (Glew, 2016). In the years following the war – and in part because of the numbers of women employed on work previously done by men and the wartime discourse on equal pay – there was increased campaigning from mixed-sex organisations and alliances. Male MPs, including those backed by trade unions, were also asking questions in the House and introducing equal pay motions. Key among this activism, however, remained the alliance of women’s organisations, including women MPs and the women-only Civil Service organisations, who pushed consistently for equal pay when mixed-sex organisations’ campaigns were not necessarily sustained and continuous (Potter, 1957; Smith, 1992; Glew, 2016).

The period from mid-1945 to 1950 was when many of the women MPs who had been the strongest supporters of women civil servants were out of office – Astor had not run again, and Ward, Tate and Cazalet-Keir had all lost their seats. Thus, elements of the campaign were run from outside Parliament but using former women MPs’ connections and alliances. Tate continued as Chair of the EPCC until her death in 1947 and Ward undertook the role after this. Cazalet-Keir used her personal relationships with both Churchill and R. A. ‘Rab’ Butler to push the Conservatives, both in and out of government, to express their commitment to equal pay in the strongest possible terms (Cazalet-Keir, 1967: 194; Smith, 1992). Although the EPCC did have members from all three parties and was explicitly non-party, the fact that several of the key figures were Conservatives was off-putting to some Labour women. Whilst Summerskill and Barbara Castle served as part of the committee, for example, Elaine Burton and Alice Bacon were against the idea of working with opposition parties (Haessly, 2010). However, Burton published a pamphlet in 1947

titled *But What Is She Worth?*, which responded to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Equal Pay and pointed out many of the shortcomings of the report and its foundational assumptions.

Once Irene Ward was returned to Parliament in 1950 she assumed the mantle of the Conservative female MP leading on equal pay. As Haessly (2010) argues, and Ward's involvement in the EPCC also attests, Ward was deeply invested in equality issues, especially equal pay, and she received voluminous correspondence on the issue. In 1951 she succeeded in securing equal pay for the first permanent female Hansard reporter, Jean Winder, though as Mari Takayanagi (2017) demonstrates, this was presented as Winder's pay scale being moved to be identical with the men's maximum, presumably so as to avoid it being framed as granting equal pay. She was unafraid of criticising her own party's frontbench and was well-known amongst the upper echelons of the Treasury for her feistiness on the issue.³¹ Indeed, Ward and three colleagues put forward a motion in late January 1954 pressuring the Chancellor to include equal pay in the next budget.³² He in fact later did this, announcing as part of the April 1954 budget that the Civil Service Whitley machinery could begin discussions to draw up an equal pay scheme. Whilst Ward and her fellow women backbenchers were clearly not the decisive factor in a situation that had become consumed with attempting to outmanoeuvre a theoretical future Labour government (Smith, 1992; Glew, 2016), it is significant that Butler eventually acted on the suggestion to include it in the budget.

The EPCC had stepped up its activity in the late 1940s and early 1950s, including those current and former MPs who made up its membership. Gertrude Horton was appointed secretary in late 1951 and brought a wealth of experience with her, having held leading administrative positions for a range of women's organisations, including the NUSEC, since the early 1920s (Beaumont, 2019). There is no doubt that Horton would have already forged connections with women MPs. There was a huge publicity drive, culminating with Summerskill, Castle, Tate and Patricia Ford of the Ulster Unionist Party delivering a massive petition of signatures for equal pay collected by the EPCC to Parliament in March 1954. Astor and Summerskill had

also been featured in the film that Jill Craigie made for the EPCC, *To Be A Woman*, released in 1951 with the financial backing of constituent organisations, including the NAWCS. Fittingly, perhaps, the piece of footage selected included Summerskill telling a crowd that although, politically, she and Nancy Astor were ‘poles apart... on these questions of women, we presented a united front.’³³ Arguably, though, the film did women MPs’ work a disservice – one that was probably unintentional on the part of the constituent associations. At the end, as the camera pans across the Houses of Parliament, the narrator asks pointedly if some of the ‘women in there’ have forgotten their fellow women.³⁴ Anyone following the campaigns surely would have known the baselessness of this question, given the intensity of women MPs’ involvement.

Conclusion

Women civil servants were able to find considerable support from women MPs following the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act and throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Naturally, women MPs who had a longer tenure tended to be able to offer more support, having had more time to learn about the issues, establish relationships and work on longer-term elements of the campaigns. There were twenty-seven years between the entry of women MPs into the Commons and the end of the marriage bar, and over thirty-five years until the declaration of equal pay for women civil servants, so the commitment of women MPs was considerable and often in opposition to their party frontbenches. The fact that there were so few women MPs, yet they remained so prominent in these campaigns, attests to their levels of support, and how the issue of equality for women civil servants became a rallying cry for women politicians across parties.

As has been noted elsewhere, there is still much work for historians to do on women MPs, both in terms of writing their life histories but also in terms of thinking about them as politicians, public servants and women in the public sphere. This article contributes to this endeavour by examining how they worked with one specific group of women workers and on a range of issues which ultimately had salience and relevance for society well beyond the group. What emerges, too, is the significance

and multiplicity of women's networks, and the embeddedness of several women MPs within these networks, in promoting and furthering the interests. As the minority gender in their respective professions, women MPs and civil servants both relied on such networks to differing extents and were able to use them to their advantage.

Notes

- ¹ *Hansard*, House of Commons, 5 August 1921, Civil Service, Admission of Women, cc. 1923–1925.
- ² *The Woman's Leader*, 'A Great Victory', 12 August 1921, p.403.
- ³ Women's Library @ LSE, 6JCS, Box FL339, Minutes of the Joint Committee on Women in the Civil Service.
- ⁴ Annual Report of the Federation of Women Civil Servants, May 1921, p.iii.
- ⁵ See, for example, Ray Strachey (1921), 'Women and the Civil Service', *Opportunity*, January, 5–6.
- ⁶ For more on the history, scope and aims of *Opportunity* as a publication, see Glew (2017b), 'Providing and taking the *Opportunity*: women civil servants, print culture and feminist discourse in interwar Britain' in *Women's Periodical and Print Culture in Britain, 1918-1939: The interwar period*, Catherine Clay et al. (eds.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- ⁷ Open Door Council Annual Report, 1927–1928, 20.
- ⁸ Federation of Women Civil Servants Annual Report, 1921–22, 3.
- ⁹ FWCS Annual Report, 1921–1922.
- ¹⁰ However, see Cheryl Law (1997), *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement, 1918-1928*, London: I. B. Tauris for a brief discussion of the CCWO in the context of the 1920s.
- ¹¹ University of Reading Archives, MS 1416/1/1/129, Consultative Committee of Women's Organisations, 1926–1928.
- ¹² University of Reading Archives, MS 1416/1/1/129.
- ¹³ University of Reading Archives, Astor Papers, MS1416/1/1/1464, 1937 Civil Service 2 Women.
- ¹⁴ Modern Records Centre, Records of the Union of Post Office Workers, MSS.148/UCW/2/1/5, minutes of meeting 19–21 April 1922; MSS.148/UCW/2/1/10, report of gathering with telephonists, 29 November 1926.
- ¹⁵ For discussions of Evans' imprisonment and activism, see Krista Cowman (2007), *Women of the Right Spirit: Paid Organisers of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) 1904–1918*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- ¹⁶ Federation of Women Civil Servants' Annual Report, 1922, 5.
- ¹⁷ See, for example, *Association Notes*, April 1911, 96.
- ¹⁸ University of Reading Special Collections, Astor Papers, MS 1416/1/1/129, minutes of 17 December 1925.
- ¹⁹ *Hansard* Married Women (Employment) Bill, House of Commons Debate (HC Deb) vol. 205 cc. 1171–1233, 29 April 1927.
- ²⁰ *Hansard* Married Women (Employment) Bill, HC Deb vol. 205 cc. 1171–1233, 29 April 1927.
- ²¹ *Hansard* Civil Service (Women, Pay), HC Deb vol. 310 cc. 2017–96, 1 April 1936.
- ²² See, for example, Council of Women Civil Servants (Higher Grades), Statement Prepared for the Royal Commission on the Civil Service (1929–1930).
- ²³ *Hansard* Civil Service (Women, Pay), HC Deb vol. 310 cc. 2017–96, 1 April 1936.
- ²⁴ *Hansard*, HC Deb cols. 2018–2019, 1 April 1936.
- ²⁵ *Hansard* Civil Service (Women, Pay), HC Deb vol. 310 cc. 2017–96, 1 April 1936.
- ²⁶ *Hansard* Civil Service (Women, Pay), HC Deb vol. 310 cc. 2017–96, 1 April 1936.

- ²⁷ *Hansard Civil Service (Women, Pay)*, HC Deb vol. 310 cc. 2017–96, 1 April 1936.
- ²⁸ *Hansard Civil Service (Marriage Bar)*, HC Deb vol. 426 cc. 381–8, 25 July 1946.
- ²⁹ The Women's Library @ LSE, Records of the Equal Pay Campaign Committee, 6EPC 01, minutes of first meeting, 26 January 1944.
- ³⁰ *Hansard Education Bill*, HC Deb vol. 396 cc. 207–322, 19 January 1944.
- ³¹ The National Archives, T 215/243, memo by 'AW', undated [likely October 1952].
- ³² *Hansard*, Business of the House, HC Deb vol.522 cc.1205–6, 21 January 1954.
- ³³ *To Be A Woman* (1951), dir. Jill Craigie, 6:02–6:23.
- ³⁴ *To Be A Woman* (1951), 16:30–16:37.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank staff at the University of Reading Archives for assistance with the Astor papers and Corinna Peniston-Bird, Lyndsey Jenkins, and Patrick Stribley for reading early drafts of this article. Thanks also to Daniel Grey and Jacqui Turner and to the two anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful feedback.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

- Alberti, Johanna** 1996 *Eleanor Rathbone*. London: Sage.
- Association Notes** 1906–1920 *Journal of the Association of Post Office Women Clerks*.
- Atholl, Katharine Duchess** 1929 *The Listener* A Conservative Address. 29 May.
- Atholl, Katharine Duchess** 1958 *Working Partnership*. London: Arthur Barker Ltd.
- Beaumont, Caitriona** 2000 Citizens not feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organisations in England, 1928–39. *Women's History Review*, 9(2): 411–429. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612020000200240>
- Beaumont, Caitriona** 2019 Horton [nee Robertson], Gertrude Isabella Morton (1901–1978). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.013.112219>
- Beers, Laura** 2013 'Women for Westminster', Feminism, and the Limits of Non-Partisan Associational Culture. In: *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, Julie V Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137333001_13

- Beers, Laura** 2016 *Red Ellen: the life of Ellen Wilkinson, socialist, feminist, internationalist*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674972711>
- Berthezène, Clarisse** and **Julie V Gottlieb** 2019 Considering conservative women in the gendering of modern British politics. *Women's History Review*, 28(2): 189–193. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2018.1482651>
- Bingham, Adrian** 2013 Enfranchisement, Feminism and the Modern Woman: Debates in the British Popular Press, 1918–1939. In: *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, Julie V Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137333001_6
- Brehony, Kevin** 2009 Lady Astor's Campaign for Nursery Schools in Britain, 1930–1939: Attempting to Valorize Cultural Capital in a Male-Dominated Political Field. *History of Education Quarterly*, 49(2): 196–210. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-5959.2009.00196.x>
- Burton, Elaine** 1947 *But What Is She Worth?* London: Fitzroy.
- Caine, Barbara** 2005 *From Bombay to Bloomsbury: A Biography of the Strachey Family*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cazalet-Keir, Thelma** 1967 *From the Wings*. London: Bodley Head.
- Cowman, Krista** 2007 *Women of the Right Spirit: Paid Organisers of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) 1904–1918*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cowman, Krista** 2013 The Political Autobiographies of Early Women MPs, c.1918–1964. In: *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, Julie V Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137333001_12
- Craigie, Jill** 1951 *To Be A Woman*. Outlook Films.
- DiCenzo, Maria** 2014 'Our Freedom and Its Results': measuring progress in the aftermath of suffrage. *Women's History Review*, 23(3): 421–440. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2013.820598>

- Evening Despatch** 1944 19 April. Service Pay: Statement on Tuesday. 1.
- Glew, Helen** 2016 *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation: women's work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900–55*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Glew, Helen** 2017a Regulating Marriage: Gender, the Public Service, the Second World War, and Reconstruction in Britain and Canada. In: *Gender and the Second World War: Lessons of War*. Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers (eds.) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-52460-7_7
- Glew, Helen** 2017b Providing and taking the *Opportunity*: women civil servants, print culture and feminist discourse in interwar Britain. In: *Women's Periodical and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939: The interwar period*, Catherine Clay et al. (eds.) Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474412537.003.0028>
- Glew, Helen** forthcoming '[A] stronger position as women alone': women's associations in the British civil service and feminism, 1900–1959 *Women's History Review* DOI: 10.1080/09612025.2020.1814511
- Grant, Jane W** 2016 *In The Steps of Exceptional Women: the story of the Fawcett Society 1866–2016*. London: Francis Boutle.
- Graves, Pamela M** 1994 *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918–1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03612759.1995.9949166>
- Haessly, Katie** 2010 British Conservative Women MPs and 'Women's Issues' 1950–1959. Unpublished PhD, University of Nottingham.
- Hamilton, Mary Agnes** 1944 *Remembering My Good Friends*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Harrison, Brian** 1986 Women in a Men's House: the Women M.P.s, 1919–1945. *The Historical Journal*, 29(3): 623–654. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X0001894X>
- Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail** 1944 19 April. The Equal Pay Campaign. 8.

- Holmes, Jennifer** 2019 *A Working Woman: The Remarkable Life of Ray Strachey*. Leicester: Matador Publishing.
- International Women's News** 1936 3 April. Great Britain. 55.
- Jones, Helen** 2000 *Women in British Public Life*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Law, Cheryl** 1997 *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement, 1918–1928*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- McCarthy, Helen** 2008 Service clubs, citizenship and equality: gender relations and middle-class associations in Britain between the wars. *Historical Research*, 81(213): 531–552. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2007.00433.x>
- Mortimer, James A** and **Valerie Ellis** 1980 *A Professional Union: The Evolution of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Opportunity** 1921–1940 Organ of the Federation of Women Civil Servants/National Association of Women Civil Servants.
- Open Door Council** 1927–1928. Annual Report.
- Pedersen, Susan** 1994 *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Potter, Allen** 1957 The Equal Pay Campaign Committee: a case-study of a pressure group. *Political Studies*, 5(1): 49–64. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1957.tb00859.x>
- Pugh, Martin** 2017 Astor [*née* Langhorne], Nancy Witcher, Viscountess Astor (1879–1964). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30489>
- Smith, Harold L** 1981 The Problem of “Equal Pay for Equal Work” in Great Britain during World War II. *Journal of Modern History*, 53(4): 652–672. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1880448>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/242371>
- Smith, Harold L** 1992 The Politics of Conservative Reform: the equal pay for equal work issue, 1945–1955. *Historical Journal*, 35(2): 401–415. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X00025863>

- Smith, Harold L** 1996 British Feminism and the Equal Pay issue in the 1930s. *Women's History Review*, 5(1): 97–110. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029600200102>
- Standing Joint Committee on Industrial Women's Organisations** 1922 Employment of Married Women. London: Labour Party.
- Strachey, Ray** 1927 *Women's Suffrage and Women's Service: The History of the London and National Society for Women's Service*. London: LNSWS.
- Summerskill, Edith** 1967 *A Woman's World: Her Memoirs*. London: Heinemann.
- Takayanagi, Mari** 2013 'They Have Made Their Mark Entirely Out of Proportion to Their Numbers': Women and Parliamentary Committees, c.1918–1945. In: *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, Julie V Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137333001_11
- Takayanagi, Mari** 2017 The Home Front in the "Westminster Village": women staff in Parliament during the Second World War. *Women's History Review*, 26(4): 608–620. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2016.1148509>
- Takayanagi, Mari** 2020 Sacred year or broken reed? The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919. *Women's History Review*, 29(4): 563–582. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2019.1702782>
- Thane, Pat** 2020 Nancy Astor, Women and Politics, 1919–1945. *Open Library of Humanities*, 6(2): 1–29. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.542>
- Thurlow, Jessica** 2014 The 'Great Offender': feminists and the campaign for women's ordination. *Women's History Review*, 23(3): 480–499. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2013.820606>
- Wood, Ethel** 1943 *Mainly for Men*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer** 1946 16 November. Women Civil Servants Congratulated. 1.
- Zimmeck, Meta** 1984 Strategies and Stratagems for the Employment of Women in the British Civil Service, 1919–1939. *The Historical Journal*, 27(4): 901–924. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X0001815X>

How to cite this article: Glew, H 2020 In a Minority in Male Spaces: The Networks, Relationships and Collaborations between Women MPs and Women Civil Servants, 1919–1955. *Open Library of Humanities*, 6(2): 15, pp.1–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.597>

Published: 21 September 2020

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Open Library of Humanities is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

OPEN ACCESS The text 'OPEN ACCESS' followed by a circular icon containing a padlock, symbolizing open access.