Love and marriage in Labour and Conservative party cultures, 1918-1970

Eleanor Lowe
Selwyn College

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Abstract

This thesis looks at the importance of marital relationships for men and women engaging in electoral politics and political activism in twentieth-century Britain. It argues that marital status is an underappreciated category of analysis, particularly for women, in understanding access to political worlds post-suffrage. It provides a unique perspective that the majority of politically active women were married, and they were often married to another political activist. Particularly in local government, it shows that many husbands and wives stood for their local councils and ran their local parties together.

The thesis asserts that the importance of family and relationships did not disappear with the arrival of mass democracy. Instead, they needed to be accommodated into new forms of political party cultures. The thesis charts a change over the course of the twentieth century, from a wide acceptance of 'seat inheritance' between husbands and wives, to a turn against such overt political dynasticism later in the period. However, the proportion of married women in elected politics grew over the period. While seat inheritance declined, politically supportive marriages went from strength to strength.

This thesis provides new insights into the motivations and realities of living a political life. Politics was the cornerstone of their relationship for numerous couples and they lived lives that were organised around political work. It emphasises the importance of grassroot political organisations as sites of sociability, where many would meet their future spouse and within this, argues that political parties adopted active processes for incorporating the political involvement of husbands and wives. For many, these understandings of love and politics were difficult to untangle. This thesis asserts the social functions of marriage in the history of the Labour and Conservative party, but also provides an intimate analysis of how it felt to be political in twentieth-century Britain.

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List of Abbreviations:

ODNB – Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

ILP – Independent Labour Party

LCC – London County Council

GLC – Greater London Council

CPA – Conservative Party Archive

YC – Young Conservative

Introduction

> "The women I am thinking of, the woman I believe you are Joan, may find their mate, and they may choose to be his mate…To their husbands they would bring fulfilment and the peace that passeth understanding. These men could do great things for the world. They would express not merely themselves but the inspiration of their union. Does that seem a narrow life to you, Joan, a choice not worth reckoning in the scale with Parliament or leading movements?'[1]

This was the dilemma faced by Joan, the fictional protagonist in the novel *Clash*, by real-life Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson. At the start of the novel, Joan is swept off her feet by the charismatic, handsome, and middle-class journalist Tony Dacre, whom she meets during the 1926 General Strike. On the picket lines, their love blossoms but when Joan is offered the chance to become the MP of a northern mining town, Tony presents her with his ultimatum: will she marry him and bear his children or follow her own political career? Their relationship crumbles as she decides she cannot leave politics. But the life of a spinster politician was not the end for Joan. She finds a resolution with the novel's competing love interest: war-wounded socialist Gerry Blain. Gerry is unsophisticated but 'soaked in the Labour movement.'[2] He finds it difficult to talk to women and prefers to socialise in the men's sections of the Labour party. But their comradeship ultimately trumps the passion that Joan felt for Tony. Gerry respects Joan's ambition and wants her to 'go all out on your job like me…and we'll fit in together because we're both keen.'[3]

This thesis sets out to demonstrate that love and marriage were integral to political lives in twentieth-century Britain. It uses marriage as a lens through which to consider the role of intimate heterosexual relationships between men and women, together with wider networks of kin, into the history of political parties. It analyses the importance of marital relationships for men and women engaged in party-political activism and explores the role that marriage played for politicians and those aspiring to elected office. Instead of an understanding of politics that centres on ideas, this thesis emphasises the importance of relationships and networks. Focusing on the two largest parties of the twentieth century, the Labour and

[1] Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (London: Virago, 1989), p.181.
[2] Wilkinson, *Clash*, p.85.
[3] Wilkinson, *Clash*, p.400.

Conservative parties, it offers a new perspective on the ways that marriage underpinned their organisational structures. Marriages were made within political parties, and marriages were the making of political parties.

In investigating this central contention, this thesis seeks to bring together what have been comparatively disparate lines of historical enquiry focussed on women's political engagement. Historians studying periods before the twentieth-century have found agency for women in the role of 'social politics' as spouses, hostesses, confidantes, sisters and daughters, but the examination of how newly enfranchised women might navigate the porous boundaries between 'social' and 'formal' has been less considered.[4] Previous histories of the early engagement of women in formal politics have often taken a deficit approach: why was women's political representation so slow or so limited? This thesis examines the positive political advantages conferred by marriage for women's political involvement and, importantly, attempts to re-assert the agency of spouses whose political successes have been traduced by contemporaries and historians alike. The period in question is also one in which the dominance of the two-party system becomes entrenched. In the interwar period, both parties wrestled with the challenges posed by international crises, the threat to their identities from coalition governments and the expansion of the franchise, but by the end of the period there was greater continuity - though both parties remained ideologically broad churches. The role marriage – which was, as this thesis reveals, so often politically endogamous – plays in establishing coherent cultural identities for political parties should not be overlooked. This thesis, in looking at the period after 1918, emphasises that the importance of family, and spousal relationships in particular, did not disappear with the expansion of women's formal political rights, including the parliamentary vote and the opportunity to stand for elected political positions. Instead, these intimate ties were crucial to the processes of accommodating women into new forms of party-political culture.

This introductory chapter sets out the key research questions of the thesis, which are situated in existing historiography, including longer histories of marriage and politics prior to 1918. It locates the main contributions of this thesis in three historiographical areas:

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[4] See Pat Jalland, *Women marriage and politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), ch.3; Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline citizens: women, gender and political culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); K.A Lynch, 'The Family and the History of Public Life', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* vol.24, no.4 (1994), pp.665-684; Elaine Chalus, *Elite women in English political life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), K.D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic women and political society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Jennifer Davy, *Mary, Countess of Derby, and the politics of Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

women's and gender history, histories of political party cultures and histories of love and marriage in the twentieth century. Finally, the introduction sets out the methodology and overall structure of the dissertation.

Historiography and Research Questions

Women, Marriage, and Politics

In existing scholarship, women's political roles and marriage have been framed as women moving from possessing 'informal' influence through their marital and social networks, to gradually becoming incorporated into electioneering and political processes. This informal influence has been considered important to women's political worlds in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries where historians have used a broad definition of political participation to demonstrate the agency and influence of elite and middle-class women.[5] Sarah Richardson notes that many of the women she studied in the nineteenth century were single or widowed, which enabled them to have some access to the political sphere. But nearly as many were married, and it was here that their political influence was found through their husbands' political and social networks.[6] Richardson adopts a broader interpretation of political participation that shows the ways in which middle-class women were able to have influence, with less division between ideas of 'hard' and 'soft' politics.[7] Marriage was essential in the way it created opportunities for women to exert political influence.

Moving into the late nineteenth-century, Pat Jalland's *Women, Marriage and Politics* is a crucial text for understanding married women's expanding role as political campaigners and growing involvement in electoral processes on behalf of their husbands. She argues that women's political roles increased in the second half of the nineteenth-century with the growth of democracy.[8] The changes in democratic processes meant that women's roles were more

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[5] Some of this work was prompted over two decades ago as a push back against trends in feminist historiography that had promoted the history of women's political participation as only achieved through the fight for equal suffrage. Instead, the authors sought to emphasize the ways in which women, particularly elite women, had participated in political cultures and exercised power, even when excluded from the franchise. See 'Introduction' in Amanda Vickery ed., *Women, privilege, and power: British Politics, 1750 to the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[6] Sarah Richardson, *The political worlds of women: gender and politics in nineteenth century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.2.

[7] ibid, p.14.

[8] Jalland, *Women, marriage and politics*, p.190.

important, both in electioneering and in their roles as hostesses and confidantes. She notes that in the coalitions and fluid party systems in the decades after 1846, a skilled political hostess was an essential asset for male politicians, as a wife could hold together many relationships and social networks tactfully.[9] After the widening of the parliamentary franchise in 1867, wives often became confidantes to their husbands, advising, for example, on political appointments, and participated in election campaigns and political associations.[10] With the advent of 'modern' forms of political participation, the political wife often enthusiastically took up new forms of campaigning, such as door-to-door canvassing.[11]

With this greater establishment of women's symbolic and practical political roles, historians have analysed how women used their marital and familial networks to campaign on certain causes. At this time there was a rapid expansion of women's voluntary, philanthropic and educational organisations that allowed women more independent agency in the political sphere. Women's position as 'political wives' became more formalised and increasingly important in the late nineteenth century, when women actively used these roles and their influence to campaign for political and social causes that they believed in. In the nineteenth century, petitioning Parliament had a resurgence as a form of political engagement, with the petitions of the Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law Leagues leading to millions of women signing petitions.[12] Women-only petitions were commonplace as women were keen to address and organise their own petitions to Parliament, organising on issues such as the Corn Laws, anti-slavery campaigns and the repeal of the Poor Law Amendment Act.[13] This increased independent political activity for women included work within the suffrage movement. Susan Pedersen's recent work on the Balfour family traces how, through marriage into an elite political dynasty, Frances Balfour's involvement in suffrage campaigns in the 1880s and 1890s allowed a transition in her role and to become 'not a political wife but a woman politician—a woman with an independent place in political life.'[14]

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[9] ibid p.193.
[10] ibid p.231.
[11] ibid p.205.
[12] Matthew Roberts, Women and Late Chartism: Women's Rights in Mid-Victorian England, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 136, no. 581(2021), pp. 918–949.
[13] See Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, *Women in Politics, c. 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke, 2000); Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2007); Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009).
[14] Susan Pedersen, 'Ben Pimlott Memorial Lecture 2018 The Women's Suffrage Movement in the Balfour Family', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2019), p.306.

This transition was not easy. Marriage was a highly contested issue within suffrage debates. Ben Griffin has shown that 'arguments about women's rights were also arguments about marriage and the domestic sphere'.[15] Questions about the status of married women's political rights dominated suffrage debates in the late nineteenth century. Many of the leading anti-suffrage campaigners argued that female suffrage was unnecessary since women's representation was already found in the familial vote cast by their husbands. These campaigners believed that husbands and wives should harmonise their politics, with the wife deferring to her husband's views as they disliked the idea of political parties intervening between their union. They argued that if women voted with their husbands, the need to possess their own vote was redundant, but if they voted against their husband, then their vote was cancelled out anyway.[16] This was also true within local politics. The Vestries Act (1818) allowed women to vote in some vestries but denied married women the opportunity, claiming their husbands would vote on their behalf.[17] The local franchise for women was extended further in the Municipal Franchise Bill (1869), but a subsequent court case established that only single women could vote and excluded the wives of ratepayers.

There continued to be differences applied to the voting rights of married and unmarried women. In 1872, courts intervened to define the position of married women and ruled that women gave up their personal right to be classed as ratepayers and voters when married.[18] The ruling in the case of *Regina* vs *Harrald* (1872) decided that women could not vote in municipal elections, since 'by the common law, a married woman's status was so entirely merged in that of her husband that she was incapable of exercising almost all public functions.'[19] In 1893, Henry Fowler, President of the Local Government Board, proposed that women ratepayers should be able to vote for both parish and district councils, including women who owned property distinct from their husbands. There was significant opposition but Fowler did succeed to some extent and the franchise was extended to some unmarried and married women in local elections in the Local Government Act (1894). Any woman, whether

[15] Ben Griffin, *The politics of gender in Victorian Britain: masculinity, political culture, and the struggle for women's rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.23.
[16] Brian Harrison, *Separate spheres: the opposition to women's suffrage in Britain* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), p.70.
[17] Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *Local elections in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 22. For the role of women before 1918, see Patricia Hollis, *Ladies elect: women in English local government 1865-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).
[18] Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), pp.166-7.
[19] Quoted from Kathryn Rix, 'Women and the Municipal Franchise', *History of Parliament*, 2019, https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2019/08/02/women-and-the-municipal-franchise/(last accessed 20 February 2024).

married or single, was also eligible to stand for the school boards (which women were allowed to be candidates for from 1870).[20]

Although there were these gains, women continued to be barred from candidacies to the London County Council (LCC). The County Councils Act (1888) created both opportunity and unrest in regards to women's candidacies. The new act created ambiguity as it stated that 'every person shall be qualified to be elected and be a councillor who is qualitied to elect the office of a councillor.'[21] Women were indeed qualified to elect due to the 1894 Local Government Act. Some women took advantage of this lack of clarity to claim their rights to sit on the LCC. In 1889, Lady Sandhurst and Jane Cobden won their seats and began their work on committees enthusiastically.[22] Election petitions were immediately lodged against the women by their anti-suffragist rivals. The judge ruled that the women were not qualified to be elected and would face being in contempt of court if they continued to attend meetings. There were no further attempts to bring women onto the LCC until 1907. The Representation of the People Act (1918) extended the vote to those aged 30 and over, but married women still qualified to vote through their husband's status as a ratepayer and their husband's occupation. It was not until the 1928 Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act that universal adult suffrage was established.

After 1918, women could stand in Parliamentary and local elections, but there were many tensions in this transition. For some privileged women, obtaining the vote actually locked them out of political roles and influence that they had previously enjoyed through family and marriage. Reflecting again on Frances Balfour, Susan Pedersen argues that the suffrage campaigns actually diminished the type of influence that some elite women had previously possessed. As suffrage changed the political landscape, women such as Frances Balfour found it harder to have influence by button-holing ministers and lurking behind the grille in the House of Commons. They needed to find a new role now that there was a greater importance attached to the party system. This was a political landscape that they were now formally allowed to enter, but was still built for men.[23] Suffrage campaigners such as Frances and Betty Balfour were *not* amongst the first women MPs – their previous methods of accessing politics were denied to them. Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye also warn of the teleology of seeing the acts of 1918 and 1928 'as symbols of the termination of a heroic

[20] Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.357.
[21] Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp.306-7.
[22] Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.10.
[23] Pedersen, 'Balfour family', p.319.

struggle'.[24] Rather, these transitions were part of wider negotiations for women about their place in the public sphere post-suffrage.

The political role of wives did not, however, disappear after the partial equalisation of suffrage. Particularly within the Conservative Party, wives' roles grew and there was an increasing importance attached to male candidates having a presentable and co-operative wife.[25] There was a continued expectation that the wife accompanied the prospective parliamentary candidate on the election trail, hoping to woo female voters.[26] The Tories were also notable for using photogenic young women in election literature and publications to entice young men in with their 'glamour'.[27] As will be discussed in chapter two, political parties instigated formal training programmes for the wives of politicians and candidates. Whilst there was a continuation in roles for wives, there was also a new paradigm for how women could take their space in electoral politics. One of the earliest ways in which this took place was through what historians have termed the 'halo effect'.[28]

The first woman to take her seat in the House of Commons, Nancy Astor, found her way to Parliament through this method in 1919. Her husband Waldorf had been elected as the MP for Plymouth Sutton in 1910 and had proved himself as an active and politically ambitious member. The death of his father meant elevation to the peerage as Viscount Astor, disqualifying him from sitting in the House of Commons. Although he investigated the possibility, he could not relinquish his peerage. His wife Nancy was well-known and well-liked within the constituency and in 1919 was now eligible to stand as an MP. Nancy maintained that it was Waldorf who first suggested the idea of her going into Parliament, with Nancy saying: 'So it seemed that it was best … to keep it in the family, and for me to try for it, which I did.'[29] Wives standing in seats previously held by their husbands became an incredibly successful route for women to enter parliament prior to 1945. Eleven women

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[24] Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye eds., *The aftermath of suffrage: women, gender, and politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.2.
[25] Martin Pugh, *Women and the women's movement in Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.158.
[26] Ball et al 'Elections, Leaflets and Whist Drives' in Matthew Worley ed., *Labour's grass roots: essays on the activities and experiences of local Labour parties and members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p.19.
[27] David Jarvis, 'Behind Every Great Party: Women and Conservatism in Twentieth-Century Britain', in Vickery ed., *Women, Privilege, Power*, p.304.
[28] See Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House: A Study of Women Members of Parliament* (London: Athlone, 1979), p. 29. The term 'halo effect' was used more widely in the disciplines of psychology and business studies; it refers to the idea that people tend to 'think of a person in general as rather good or rather inferior and to color the judgment of the qualities by this general feeling'. Edward Thorndike, 'A constant error in psychological ratings.' *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 4, No.1 (1920), pp. 25-29.
[29] Adrian Fort, *Nancy: the story of Lady Astor* (London: Vintage Digital, 2012), p.159.

contested seats previously held by their husband, and ten of them were elected.[30] This meant that almost a third of all women MPs elected before 1945 won a seat previously held by their husband. The term 'halo effect' seems to have been first used in this historical context by Elizabeth Vallance to describe women taking over a seat that their husband had vacated.[31]

This has been interpreted by some historians as a process whereby husbands legitimised women's political aspirations and their role as a candidate was an extension of their acceptable role as wives.[32] Brian Harrison argued that this 'male equivalence' allowed wives to present themselves as replacements for acceptable but unavailable men.[33] It was not only legitimacy that was important, but also the practical benefits of being the wife of an MP. By inheriting a seat from a husband, they bypassed what were often difficulties with selection procedures. Inheriting a seat gave them a chance at a winnable seat and they were already well-known and liked within their constituencies. Vallance argues that over time the 'legitimisation' process became less significant.[34] This trend is discussed in greater detail in chapter two, which problematises the framework of 'male equivalence', and argues that these women had an important, and independent, place within political cultures.

The importance attached by historians to the prevalence of this method has led to a related historiographical narrative which portrays Conservative and Liberal party women as typically married, whilst Labour women are presented as spinsters, what Martin Pugh calls the unmarried 'battleaxe' who was 'married to the party'.[35] Brian Harrison echos this party distinction by claiming that 'Labour women often entered parliament because they had married their party, Conservative women often entered because they had married their husbands.'[36] This thesis refutes these claims, demonstrating that women standing for elected office for Labour were more frequently married than their Conservative or Liberal peers. Crucially, for political women of all parties who were married, they were very commonly married to other politically active men. Historians studying the interwar Labour Party have acknowledged the presence of married couples.[37] In Pamela Graves' interviews of 100 men

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[30] A further three, Alice Lucas, Juliet Rhys Williams and Kitty Wintringham, stood in seats previously contested but not won by their spouses.
[31] Vallance, *Women in the house*, p. 29.
[32] Vallance, *Women in the house*, p. 27.
[33] Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House the Women M.P.s, 1919–1945', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 29, no.3 (1986), pp.625-626.
[34] Vallance, *Women in the House*, p.28.
[35] Martin Pugh, *Women and the women's movement,* p.163.
[36] Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House', pp.626.
[37] See, for example, Pamela Graves, *Labour women: women in British working-class politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge:

and women active in the interwar Labour party, 28 women and 21 men married fellow Labour activists.[38] But few have investigated further this prevalence, and its significance within the development of the Labour party, or systematically analysed the Conservative party too.

Whilst there have been comparatively few academic studies of marriage and politics, there has been a thriving popular history interest in publishing books on political spouses and relationships.[39] This includes two popular histories on being married to politicians, one co-authored by Cherie Booth (Blair) which explores her experience of living in 'the goldfish bowl'. In the last few years, Sasha Swire, the wife of Hugo Swire (a former minister of State for the Foreign Office and Northern Ireland) published a 'tell-all' diary account of her life within the inner circles of the 2010-15 Conservative-Liberal coalition.[40] This popular interest in the stories of the wives of powerful men suggests that the 'political wife' still has strong contemporary resonance, alongside a broader popular interest in the ways that social and personal networks hold such importance at the top levels of government.[41]

Reflecting on these contexts prompts the central research question of this thesis - which is to ask how marital status can be deployed by historians as a 'useful category of analysis' for understanding the political lives of men and women in the twentieth century.[42] As Holden, Froide and Hannam note in their work on singleness, 'whilst scholars have paid increasing attention to power relations surrounding class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and empire, relatively few similar analyses have been made of singleness or marital status.'[43] By looking not just at gender, but how the practical and symbolic meanings of marriage

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Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 64-67; Karen Hunt, 'Rethinking activism: lessons from the history of women's politics', *Parliamentary Affairs,* Vol. 62, No. 2 (2009), pp. 216-218; Karen Hunt, 'Making politics in local communities: Labour women in interwar Manchester' in Matthew Worley ed., *Labour's grass roots : essays on the activities and experiences of local Labour parties and members, 1918-1945 (*Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 84-85; June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s-1920s* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p.82; David Neville, *To make their mark: the women's suffrage movement in the north east* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1997).

[38] Graves, *Labour women*, pp.64-67.

[39] See Cherie Blair and Cate Haste, *The goldfish bowl: married to the Prime Minister, 1955-1997* (London: Chatto and Windus 2004); Sonia Purnell, *First Lady: the life and wars of Clementine Churchill* (London: Aurum Press, 2015); Mark Hichens, *Prime ministers' wives--and one husband* (London: Peter Owen, 2004). For the American context see Kati Marton, *Hidden Power: Presidential Marriages that Shaped our History* (Thorndike Press, 2002).

[40] Sasha Swire, *Diary of an MP's wife: inside and outside power* (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2020).

[41] Although not written by a politician, another recent bestseller about elite political circles has been a biography of the cabinet secretary Jeremy Haywood written by Suzanne Heywood his late wife. Suzanne Heywood, *What does Jeremy think?: Jeremy Heywood and the making of modern Britain* (London: William Collins, 2020).

[42] For the use of this phrase, see Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', in *Gender and the politics of history* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp.28-50.

[43] Katherine Holden, Amy Froide and June Hannam, 'Introduction', *Winners or Losers? Single Women in History 1000–2000, Women's History Review,* Vol. 17, No.3 (2008), p.314.

impacted on politics, we gain a much richer picture of the dynamics of living a political life in modern Britain.

Women's and gender histories

There have been contrasting historiographical approaches to the study of women's history within the Labour and Conservative party. Gottlieb and Berthezène suggest that Conservative women have been under-researched in this period (pre-Thatcher) as they have been neglected by both 'androcentric historians' of the Tory party *and* women's historians.[44] For example, no equivalent book to Pamela Graves' *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939* exists for the Conservative party.[45] More attention has been paid to Labour women, but this focus, particularly on female Labour MPs, has sometimes come with an emphasis on the unique or 'trailblazing' characteristics of individuals who did manage to succeed within politics.[46] The literature on women in politics, and particularly for female MPs, have often centred on the question of why progress has been so slow and the impact of women MPs so minimal. Pamela Brookes, in her study *Women at Westminster,* labels the period of 1918-1929 as one of 'heirs and warming pans' finishing with 1945-66 as 'slow

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[44] Clarisse Berthezène and Julie Gottlieb eds., *Rethinking right-wing women: gender and the Conservative party, 1880s to the present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p.2.

[45] For the Labour party see Matthew Worley ed., *Labour's grass roots : essays on the activities and experiences of local Labour parties and members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), Duncan Tanner, *Political change and the Labour party 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Sam Davies, *Liverpool labour: social and political influences on the development of the Labour party in Liverpool, 1900-39* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996); Michael Savage, *The dynamics of working-class politics : the labour movement in Preston 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Tanner, Thane and Tiratsoo eds., *Labour's First Century*; Matthew Worley, *Labour inside the gate: a history of the Labour party between the wars* (London: I.B Tauris, 2005). For the Conservative party see David Jarvis 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: the Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.5, no.2 (1995), pp.129-152; Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska eds., *The Conservatives and British society*, 1880-1990, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press: 1996); G E Maguire, *Conservative women: a history of women and the Conservative party, 1874-1997* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998); David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the democratic age: Conservative cultures and the challenge of mass politics in early twentieth-century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) p.6; Stuart Ball, Andrew Thorpe and Matthew Worley, 'Researching the grass roots: the records of constituency level political parties in five British counties, 1918-40', *Archives*, vol. 29, no. 110 (2004), pp.1-23.

[46] See for example Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: the life of Ellen Wilkinson socialist, feminist, internationalist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). For the Conservative party see Alistair Cooke, *Tory heroine : Dorothy Brant and the rise of Conservative Women* (Eastbourne: Sumfield & Day, 2008). This focus can also be seen in the recent popular interest of Labour party activists and politicians in contributing to women's political history. See for example: Rachel Reeves, *Women of Westminster: the MPs who changed politics* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2019); Rachel Reeves with Richard Carr, *Alice in Westminster : the political life of Alice Bacon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017); Nan Sloane, *The women in the room : Labour's forgotten history* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018); Jacqui Smith and Iain Dale eds., *The honourable ladies. volume 1, Profiles of women MPs 1918-1996* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2018); Mary Honeyball, *Edith Summerskill : the life and times of a pioneering feminist Labour MP* (London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2022); Graham Taylor, *Ada Salter : pioneer of ethical socialism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016).

progress'.[47] Brookes, Vallance and Stobaugh have written comprehensive, but largely narrative and celebratory, accounts of the entry of women from all parties into British electoral politics.[48] Brian Harrison argues that although the numbers of women MPs were low, the impact of what they did was significant as they succeeded into entering male spaces and contributing in debates, on what Harrison feels are 'women's issues', believing that there is an inherent difference in the work and contribution of women MPs. These works create a separate category of women MPs, through both their sex but also the type of contributions that they made in the House of Commons.

This thesis tries to create a new lens distinct from either of these approaches, by finding commonality rather than difference in the political lives of men and women. Implicit in much of the work on women MPs is also an inherently teleological assumption that once they had been granted equal suffrage, women ought to assume equal representation in formal politics and, when this was not the case, causes must be sought. Morally laudable as that assumption may be, there was no abstractly equalising mechanism in place. Rather than seeing great difference in the role and contribution of women MPs, looking at marriage allows us to also see many commonalities with the political pathways to power that men had also used – namely political and social networks.

This focus on the exceptionalism of women MPs has led to some historiographical trends that have – intentionally or otherwise – privileged the experience of women who did *not* benefit from marriage and family networks over those who did. In her biography of 'Red Ellen' Wilkinson, Laura Beers praises her subject for being a 'self-made woman' in an 'era when several of her female parliamentary colleagues – including Lady Nancy Astor and Lady Cynthia Mosley – entered parliament on their husbands' coattails'.[49] This suggests an uncritically negative view of women accessing parliament through the networks of marriage. Similarly, in her study of Conservative women, Lori Maguire deems there to have been 'something rather pathetic' about women's methods of accessing political circles through their roles as hostesses and spouses, as they were dependent on men for their political power and involvement.[50] Instead of seeing these candidates as the undeserving, but fortunate,

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[47] Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An account of women in the British Parliament 1918-1966* (London: 1967), p.4.
[48] Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House*; Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House'; Beverley Stobaugh, *Women and Parliament 1918–1970* (New York: Exposition Press, 1978).
[49] Beers, *Red Ellen,* p.2.
[50] G.E Maguire, *Conservative women: a history of women and the Conservative Party, 1874-1997* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 25.

recipients of seats in the House of Commons, this thesis argues that it is more productive to understand marital status as a category of analysis which illuminates the factors leading to success for women with political aspirations.

This thesis moves away from this focus on the 'exceptionalism' of political women and instead sees their politicisation as embedded more widely in their domestic lives and localities. There has been much important work in understanding the political contributions that women made, particularly for the interwar period, that has emphasised the importance of grassroots political activism and the 'local'.[51] This research employs Hunt and Hannam's concept of 'a new archaeology of women's politics', which suggests that women's political activity needs to be situated within local political cultures and histories of women's neighbourhood activism.[52] This thesis argues that the greatest sites of politicisation and influence were domestic and social environments. It is essential to look beyond men and women's status as party members, MPs or councillors, and question how these roles and identities intersected with their domestic and personal lives.

This thesis also contributes to the body of scholarship, particularly for the interwar period, which explores how political parties sought to accommodate gender within their existing structures.[53] By looking at marital status, we can add a new dimension to how political parties grappled with questions of women and gender. This was a difficult process for all parties. David Jarvis describes how the Conservatives perceived the new female electorate after 1918 and created new discourses in party literature directed at women.[54] Using the characters of Mrs. Maggs and Betty from the Tory publication *Home and Politics*, he

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[51] Krista Cowman, 'Municipal Socialism and Municipal Feminism: Women and Local Labour Politics From the 1900s to the 1980s', in Nathan Yeowell ed., *Rethinking Labour's past* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022); Graves, *Labour Women*; Pat Thane, 'Women in the British Labour Party and the Construction of State Welfare, 1906-39', in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel eds., *Mothers of a new world: maternalist politics and the origins of welfare states* (London: Routledge, 1993); Pat Thane, 'Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-1945', in Harold L. Smith ed., *British feminism in the twentieth century* (Aldershot: Elgar, 1990).

[52] Karen Hunt and June Hannam, 'Towards an archaeology of interwar women's politics: the local and the everyday' in Gottleib and Toye eds., *The Aftermath of Suffrage*, pp.124-125

[53] Martin Francis, 'Labour and Gender', in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's first century* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp.191–220; June Hannam, 'Women as Paid Organizers and Propagandists for the British Labour Party Between the Wars', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, vol. 77, no.1 (2010), pp.69–88; David Thackeray, 'Home and Politics: Women and Conservative Activism in Early Twentieth-Century Britain.' *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 49, no. 4 (2010), pp. 826–48; David Jarvis, 'The Conservative Party and the politics of gender, 1900–39' in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, eds., *The Conservatives and British society* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 172–93; For the later part of the period see Amy Black and Stephen Brooke, 'The Labour Party, Women, and the Problem of Gender, 1951–1966' *Journal of British Studies*, vol.36, no. 4 (1997), pp.419–52.

[54] David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: the Conservative appeal to women voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.5, no.2 (1994), p.13.

explores the model of Conservative womanhood that emerged from this series of short stories. 'Above all,' Jarvis concludes, 'these reminded readers that a shared sense of homely values and the very prospect of marriage and motherhood ensured that within every potentially irresponsible young woman a drop of civic duty and Conservative sentiment could be found.'[55] Jarvis argues that marriage and motherhood were integral to Conservative femininity. True womanhood for the Conservative party involved marriage, home, and domesticity, making women natural bedfellows for the Tories. Jarvis does also believe that these constructs of gender cause problems for the fortunes of the Conservatives, as it pens them into 'a conflation of 'women' as a gender construct in party ideology with the identity and experiences of Conservative women in practice.'[56] Jarvis, however, does not do enough to interrogate what the experiences of Conservative women in practice were. As he notes 'we do need to know more about the experience of women organisers, female candidates and candidates' spouses.'[57] Although Jarvis' analysis is persuasive on the formation of Conservative ideas about womanhood, he is mostly focused on the feelings of Conservative men about women, rather than the feelings and experiences of women.

This thesis problematises these ideas in two ways. Firstly, it questions how great the levels of resentment faced by women were by male colleagues who disliked their intrusion into a previously masculine domain.[58] The findings in this thesis of political cooperation between husbands and wives complicates the picture of outright male hostility to women's political involvement. The second is a questioning of the Conservative values systems presented by Jarvis in the characters of Mrs Maggs and Betty. This thesis does so by showing that the reality for the Conservatives was a predominance of *un*married women as stalwarts of local parties, municipal councils and parliamentary candidates. How does the representation of the ideal image of the Conservative woman as a married, homely and wise 'chancellor of the home' fit with the ubiquity of unmarried women active in the party grassroots? It denigrates any assumption that Conservative women were more likely to be married because of its adherence to 'traditional' attitudes and highlights the tension present in the Conservative party that there was an idealisation of traditional family life in which women were predominantly in the domestic or private sphere and a need for women to

[55] Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty', p.142.
[56] David Jarvis, '"Behind Every Great Party": Women and Conservatism in 20th century Britain', in Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power*, p.312.
[57] David Jarvis, 'The Conservative Party and the Politics of Gender', p.188.
[58] ibid.

undertake roles in public life.[59]

There was uniformity across both parties in the way that domestic expertise was a key part of successful political femininities for women. Particularly for the first women standing as MPs, they drew upon their domestic experience and 'special knowledge' of issues on home and social reform to counter hostility to the ideas of women's candidature.[60] But these political femininities changed over this period. June Hannam has argued that the first Labour women MPs sought to legitimate their activism in mixed-sex politics by presenting their dedication to the party as an all-consuming passion which substituted for the emotional fulfilment usually associated with marriage.[61] After the Second World War, this 'celibate' identity became less appealing. In her biography of the unmarried MP Alice Bacon, who was elected in 1945, Rachel Reeves claims that one of the problems for Bacon was that she represented an 'old-fashioned' type of MP more akin to an interwar figure like Margaret Bondfield, a serious-minded and childless spinster.[62] Reeves argues that Alice Bacon found it difficult to compete with colleagues like Barbara Castle who were the antithesis of her. Castle was glamorous, married, and fully prepared to take men on in a way that she was not.[63] Barbara Castle marked a watershed moment for female politicians in the 1950s by creating a 'housewife superstar aesthetic' that Margaret Thatcher would later adopt as a Conservative.[64] These trends will be explored further and contextualised in changes over time in chapter one.

This work largely focuses on the role of marital status for political women rather than men. The rationale behind this is that marriage was a more crucial determining category for women's political activism. However, this does not mean that this dissertation does not pay attention to men and masculinities. It addresses political masculinities in two ways. The first is looking at how men navigated being married to women with public profiles through their political work. Whilst there has been a cultural understanding of the role and representation of political wives for centuries, there are fewer templates for a political husband. Whether it was possible to 'incorporate' husbands in the same way as wives is discussed later in this chapter. Secondly, it looks at whether being married was integral for

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[59] Joni Lovenduski, Pippa Norris and Catriona Burness, 'The party and women', in Anthony Seldon ed., *Conservative century: the Conservative party since* 1900 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.611.
[60] Lisa Berry-Waite, 'The 'woman's point of view': women parliamentary candidates, 1918–1919' in David Thackeray and Richard Toye eds., *Electoral pledges in Britain since 1918: the politics of promises* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
[61] Holden, Froide and Hannam, 'Introduction', p.323.
[62] Rachel Reeves, *Alice in Westminster*, p.147.
[63] Reeves, *Alice in Westminster*, p.149.
[64] Rachel Reeves, *Women of westminster*, p.107.

men in performing political masculinities. Ben Griffin has also shown that familial links were important for men in their constructions of distinctly male political identities. He describes how articulations of fatherhood could allow male politicians to speak with authority in the House of Commons.[65] Looking at the Victorian era, Griffin has also noted how there could be a gap between public statements and private lifestyles and that 'parliamentary performance offered a way for men whose own masculine status was uncertain to claim the authority of the culturally dominant normative masculinity.'[66] The absence of marriage for men is also highly relevant and this thesis looks at how those who were bachelors or homosexual navigated political life. These ideas are explored further in chapter five which addresses the 'alternative intimacies' of those who were not married.

Party political cultures

The contribution of this research rests in wider questions about democratic engagement in the twentieth century, and the themes of inclusion and exclusion in political spaces. In looking at the decades post-1918, this thesis traces the themes of women's greater involvement in new party structures and some of the inhibitors to democratic engagement in this era of universal suffrage. If suffrage was meant to open the doors to women's full political citizenship, how problematic was it for participation and representation to remain dominated by women with access to familial and kinship networks? What does it tell us about the limits of mass democracy that politicians were still coming from small groups of interconnected activists?

The political party cultures that this thesis chooses to focus on are the two largest parties of the twentieth century: the Labour and Conservative parties. Material relating to the Liberal party and other smaller parties is frequently touched upon in the wider analysis of the thesis, and some of the detailed case studies feature politicians who switched between political parties. The decline of the Liberal party was key in these shifting alliances and coalitions for both Labour and Conservatives. The historical narratives of Labour's

[65] See Ben Griffin, 'Masculinities and parliamentary culture in modern Britain' in Sean Brady, Christopher Fletcher, Rachel Moss and Lucy Riall eds., *The Palgrave handbook of masculinity and political culture in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.405; Michael Roper and John Tosh eds., *Manful assertions: masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991); Martin Francis, 'The domestication of the male? Recent research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century British masculinity', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 45, no.3 (2002), pp. 637-652; Jon Lawrence, 'Class and gender in the making of urban toryism, 1880-1914', *English Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 428 (1993), pp. 629-52; Matthew McCormack ed., *Public men: masculinity and politics in modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[66] Ben Griffin, *The politics of gender in Victorian Britain,* p.167

expansion and the Liberal's demise have usually been explained with reference to class, but Duncan Tanner has also argued that Labour created its own expansion after 1918 by representing people's needs in a way that enabled class political loyalty to grow.[67] This was a gradual and uneven process and there was an effort from all the parties to 'open their doors' and offer a political home to all who wished to participate in popular politics.[68]

These party identities, however, can be complicated. This thesis will broadly draw comparisons between the experiences of Labour and Conservative married couples between 1918 and 1970, but those identities changed over time. This was particularly the case in the turbulent interwar period where there were coalition governments as well as party splits. The Labour party had always been formed of various political interests and had to negotiate tensions with other left wing groups (such as the Independent Labour Party, the Fabians, the Co-operative Party, and the Communist Party). This diffusion of interests continued throughout this period with, for example, the coalitions of Liberals and socialists in the 1920s and the Labour party split of 1931. Although the Conservative party remained in power for all but three years of the interwar period, David Jarvis argued that this was a party that 'coexisted with considerable foreboding and disquiet at all levels of the party.'[69] The Conservatives were fractured by their experiences of coalition government and the creation of the National Government further challenged party identities.

All of the above can make it problematic to talk about coherent Labour and Conservative political identities. At times, this thesis will categorise some individuals into the larger political categories of Labour and Conservative party cultures, even if there is greater nuance about the exact nature of their political allegiance. In places, this thesis does approach both parties with an encompassing umbrella rather than an interrogation of granular political identities. This is because this research is attempting to describe overall political cultures. One opportunity of this work is that it can offer a close examination of how these processes of shifting allegiance happened on an intimate level. It allows us to see how party identity was continually being made through some of the activities that will be described in this thesis: by founding local party branches together, campaigning for family

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[67] Duncan Tanner, Class voting and radical politics: the Liberal and Labour parties, 1910–31', in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), p.106.
[68] Ball et al., 'Whist Drives', p.7.
[69] David Jarvis, 'The shaping of the Conservative electoral hegemony, 1918–39', in Lawrence and Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society,* p.131.

and friends, supporting each other with childcare, and giving countless hours of time to the party. However, a strength for the arguments of this thesis is that any changes in party identification, as will be seen in chapter three, often happened in concert with their spouse. Using these wider categories of Labour and Conservative party cultures, even if the reality was more complex, allows us to see these processes of party formation and decline.

With these overlapping identities, it is regrettable that the Liberal party isn't included for equal consideration. Yet the constraints of researching a doctoral project meant that choices needed to be made, and the Labour and Conservative parties have been prioritised due to their electoral dominance during the period covered, together with the richness of the source material available. It is to be hoped that future scholars could extend the approach of this thesis by applying marriage as an analytical lens to other parties.

The direct comparison of the Labour and Conservative party also allows this thesis to comment more widely on associational cultures in this period. In the early twentieth century the artificial segregation of men and women was increasingly seen as not healthy, and mixed sex clubs and environments were triumphing over single sex institutions.[70] Within both parties, although there were still homosocial structures – women were active in distinct sections with their own female organisers - women still worked together with men. An analysis of husbands and wives is an interesting lens through which to understand the interactions between men and women in these environments. Historians looking at other civic and associational groups have stressed the importance of taking this approach. Helen McCarthy has demonstrated how men and women in the League of Nations Union constructed different meanings around the ideology of the organisation, influenced by their differentiated experiences of family, work and gender discourses.[71] By looking at the areas of confluence as well as difference in the work of political husbands and wives, this thesis argues that social factors were essential in the building of political associational cultures, and that men and women could participate in the same spaces but in different ways.

A focus on marriage also sheds new light on our understanding of grassroots political parties. Work on local Conservative Associations in the twentieth century has often emphasised their social and associational roles more than has been done for the Labour party. Ross McKibbin has characterised differing approaches of the parties, describing the

[70] Marcus Collins, *Modern Love* (London: Atlantic, 2001), p.167.
[71] Helen McCarthy, 'Service clubs, citizenship and equality: gender relations and middle-class associations in Britain between the wars', *Historical Research,* vol. 81, no. 213 (2008), p.551.

Conservative party developing an 'apolitical sociability', whilst the Labour party 'dragged 'politics' into everything'.[72] The Primrose League was a key part of Conservative sociability and was founded in the 1880s as an organisation with a cross-class and cross-gender appeal which aimed, through the packed calendar of fetes, garden parties and concerts, to spread Conservative values.[73] The Primrose League continued to be active in the early twentieth century, still seeking to provide a space for men and women to work together in a 'non-confrontational atmosphere'.[74] The aim of the League was the merging of the public and the private in the creation of a 'social sphere' where politics was 'conducted subtly… and absorbed almost unconsciously.'[75] Pugh argues that the League was not a 'quaint curiosity' and it was a very effective contribution to the 'modernisation of right-wing politics in Britain'.[76] This theme continued within Conservative politics later in the century, notably in the postwar youth wing of the Young Conservatives. Lawrence Black's research presents the public conception, and the reality, of the Young Conservatives, as a 'middle-class marriage bureau' where 'barely a branch report went by without some nuptial notice'.[77] Many young Tories joined the YCs hoping to find a partner, or enjoyed the fringe benefits of meeting someone there.

This thesis argues that this perspective of sociability is perhaps even more prevalent in the Labour party than has so far been acknowledged. The 'marriage-bureau' found within Labour constituency politics was just as strong as for the Tories. The arguments in this thesis build, for example, on the work of Stephanie Ward for the 1930s, showing that the Labour party also offered opportunities for friendship and sociability, and, furthermore, was a site for romance where relationships were routinely celebrated.[78] It also extends beyond Cathy Hunt's work on Coventry Councillor, Alice Arnold, who was shut out from informal socialising and networks that women who were married to other Labour councillors were able to enjoy.[79]

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[72] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and cultures: England 1918*-1951 (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1998), p.98.
[73] Diane Elaine Sheets, 'British Conservatism and the Primrose League: The Changing Nature of Popular Politics 1883-1901' (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Columbia University 1986); Linda Walker, 'Party Political Women: A comparative study of Liberal women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914' in Jane Rendell ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800– 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies Why Do Women Vote Tory*, (London: Virago, 1987), ch.1.
[74] Matthew C. Hendley, 'Conservative women and the Primrose League's struggle for survival, 1914-1932', in Gottleib and Bertheneze eds, *Rethinking Right Ring Women*, pp.66-67.
[75] ibid.
[76] Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880-1935* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p.19.
[77] Lawrence Black, 'The Lost World of Young Conservatism' *The Historical Journal*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2008), p.1008.
[78] Stephanie Ward, Labour Activism and the Political Self in Inter-War Working-Class Women's Politics, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 30, no.1 (2019), pp.29–52.
[79] Cathy Hunt, "Everyone's Poor Relation': the poverty and isolation of a working-class woman local politician in interwar Britain", *Women's History Review*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2007), p.425.

Whilst Arnold could be involved through the formal party structures of committee meetings and official party social events, as a single woman she had limited access to the informal sociability that took place in pubs and clubs after meetings. This research develops our understanding of how marriage could offer resources of this kind to politically ambitious women within both Conservative and Labour local political cultures.[80]

A more nebulous concept that this study grapples with is the extent to which political ideology shaped the ways that political couples understood, and lived, their marriages. The relationship between socialism and feminism has often been framed as a 'problem' for women in the Labour party.[81] Historiography has offered two explanations for the obstacles to Labour women's activism. Some historians have emphasised the structural and organisational barriers to women being able to play a full role within the party.[82] Others, such as Brooke and Black, have suggested it was ideological concerns that made it so difficult for women to be involved in socialist politics. Hunt and Hannam agree that the overwhelming problem was that there was a gap between the rhetoric of equality and the practice of socialist organisations. They align with Brooke and Black, agreeing that socialist theory was masculinist and based on the interests of the male waged worker, making the place of women unclear.[83] The doctrines adopted by the Labour party were ones where class rather than sex held central importance.[84]

This research offers new perspectives into these arguments. Using marital status as a category of analysis can help explore how Labour women did indeed traverse the identities of marriage, motherhood and domesticity with socialist feminism. The focus on the ideals of the Labour marriage, particularly in chapter 4, suggests new interventions into this argument. The Labour marriage was underpinned by class solidarity and adhered to masculine working class cultures, but at the same time supported and promoted women's activism within the

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[80] See also Daniel Weinbren, 'Sociable Capital: London's Labour Parties 1918-45', in Worley ed., *Labour's Grassroots*, p.196; Daniel Weinbren, 'Local Labour politics - roots or branches?' in Colin Barker ed., *Popular protests and alternative futures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[81] Amy Black and Stephen Brooke, 'The Labour Party, Women, and the Problem of Gender, 1951–1966' *Journal of British Studies*, vol.36, no. 4 (1997). See also Lyndsey Jenkins, and Stephanie Ward, 'Women and the Labour Party: Gender and the Writing of British Political History' *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 94 (2023), pp. 251-257.

[82] See for example Harold Smith, 'Sex vs. Class: British Feminists and the Labour Movement, 1919–1929', *The Historian* vol. 47, no. 1 (1984), pp. 19–37; Pamela Graves, *Labour Women*, ch. 3.

[83] June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women : Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 200), p.202.

[84] Smith, 'Sex vs Class', p. 19. See also Martin Francis, 'Labour and Gender', in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century*, pp. 191–220; June Hannam, 'Women as Paid Organizers and Propagandists for the British Labour Party Between the Wars', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, vol. 77 (2010), pp. 69–88.

party. This is similar to Zoe Strimpel findings, in looking at the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s, which found that the majority of women defined themselves as socialist feminists and 'their socialism was critical in setting the terms of their relationships with men.'[85] This focus on the place of heterosexual love and relationships finds that shared socialist politics were essential for many political marriages on the left, but moving beyond traditional gender roles was often difficult. For women engaging in Labour politics alongside their husband, class concerns were the central feature of their shared politics, but this did not mean that they were not also attuned to questions of sex. As will be seen throughout this thesis, it was often practical and domestic strictures, rather than ideological concerns, that more greatly inhibited Labour women's activism.

Rather than simply reinforcing the tensions and lack of progress, one way historians have attempted to argue for a greater levels of agency and success for women in Labour politics has been their contributions at a local level. Krista Cowman has shown the continued importance of local politics as a site for feminised, socialist politics even if this was not possible within the national party.[86] Pat Thane has similarly argued that within the interwar Labour party, there was a vision for Labour women where men and women lived in mutually supportive partnerships and mothered children, but were not only confined to their domestic role.[87] This thesis agrees with Thane that Labour women were 'not traitors to the feminist movement', and offers a more positive understanding of the ways in which feminism and socialism could intersect within the Labour party.[88]

For the Conservative party, the ideological underpinnings are also complex. Before the predominance of Thatcherism, historians have considered the Conservative party to possess a 'non-ideological ideology', that 'the party's claim to be non-ideological is in itself an aspect of Conservative ideology.'[89] The beliefs of the Conservatives were rooted in everyday experience and 'common sense' politics.[90] The way that women were brought into party

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[85] Zoe Strimpel, 'Heterosexual Love in the British Women's Liberation Movement: reflections from the Sisterhood and After archive', *Women's History Review*, vol. 25, no.6 (2016), p.906.
[86] Krista Cowman, 'Municipal Socialism and Municipal Feminism: Women and Local Labour Politics From the 1900s to the 1980s', in Nathan Yeowell ed., *Rethinking Labour's past* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).
[87] Pat Thane, 'The Women of The British Labour party and feminism, 1906-1945' in H L Smith ed., *British feminism in the twentieth century*, p.131.
[88] ibid.
[89] See Ewen H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism the Politics, Economics, and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London: Routledge, 1995); Clarisse Berthezène, *Training minds for the war of ideas : Ashridge College, the Conservative Party and the cultural politics of Britain, 1929-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.5.
[90] ibid, p.4.

structures was rooted in this understanding, using language that positioned them as preserving traditional family values against socialism. Women were seen to be offering service and performing their duty to their nation and to their families.[91] This thesis argues that we can see this within the roles of political wives, and that the ideas of duty, service and traditionalism exhibited within these marriages were ideological. This thesis argues that Conservative marriages were more marked by conservative gender roles than Labour ones, and reads this as part of the ideology of Conservative marriages, rather than an absence.

Scholars have been increasingly interested in looking at the rise of 'anti-politics'. The political scientist Nick Clark has argued that there was a rising, anti-political sentiment towards politicians and political parties, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. In *The Good Politician*, one explanation offered is that this was due to increased expectations of what a politician should be like, and that the professionalisation of politics had made politicians into an 'homogenous class'.[92] One of the themes explored further in this work is to what extent the presence of marital relationships within political parties could have contributed to this increased distrust of politicians. Peter Mandler has argued that from 1900 the rise of democracy went hand-in-hand with the rise of meritocracy, or 'equality of opportunity'. Whilst Mandler is analysing this in relation to the emergence of mass education, the expansion of meritocratic ideas, particularly after 1945, is a useful consideration in these debates over 'good' politicians.[93] If meritocracy held greater currency as an idea within society, the dominance of family and relationships within politics became increasingly problematic. Chapter two, in particular, considers this transition of political familial dynasties from a lauded and trusted concept, to one of suspicion and disdain.

Love and marriage in the twentieth century

Marriage rates grew enormously during this thesis' time period. Between 1891 and 1931, well over a third of adults never married. By 1961, this had fallen to one in five.[94] Marriage rates

[91] Clarisse Berthezène, 'The middlebrow and the making of a 'new common sense': Women's voluntarism, Conservative politics and representations of womanhood' in Berthezène and Gottlieb eds., *Rethinking right-wing women,* p.107.
[92] Nick Clarke, *The Good Politician : Folk Theories, Political Interaction, and the Rise of Anti-politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p.218.
[93] Peter Mandler, *The crisis of the meritocracy : Britain's transition to mass education since the Second World War* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2020), ch.1.
[94] Katherine Holden, *The shadow of marriage : singleness in England, 1914-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.26.

would reach their peak in the 1960s before beginning to fall from the 1970s.[95] Although the 'permissive' cultures of the 1960s and 70s facilitated greater focus on non-monogamy and sexual liberty, there was still a great value attached to marriage. Zoe Strimpel, in her analysis of the rise of 'the single' in modern Britain, demonstrates that 'conjugality' – in which the couple 'is the standard for all intimate relationships' – was not in fact considerably weakened either by greater sexual freedom or the heightened ethic of individualism in the late twentieth century.[96] This also remained the case in politics, and although there were some examples of less 'traditional' forms of relationship (as will be discussed in chapter five), heteronormative coupledom continued to dominate politics.

Whilst heteronormativity endured, important changes relating to marriage, divorce and family structure justifies this thesis' periodisation ending in the early 1970s. This study begins in 1918 after the partial equalisation of the franchise and ends in 1970, when Claire Langhamer argues that a 'new landscape for emotional intimacy began to emerge'.[97] Alana Harris and Timothy Willem Jones use the same periodisation for their history of love and romance in Britain, framing the end of the 1960s as a moment where there was a 'gradual distancing of love, sex and marriage in popular expectations'.[98] 1970 has also been chosen as the end point as it marked a significant watershed in political parties as well as in patterns of marriage. From this point onwards, the post-war spike in party membership (for all parties) began to decline.[99] Ending the thesis at this point does not suggest that the place of love and marriage in political parties disappeared. In this post-1970 period, the dynamics of love, commitment and attraction continued to be fundamental to how people experienced politics, but the contexts were significantly changing alongside less deferential attitudes to politicians.[100]

This thesis uses a number of analytical frameworks to explore the internal dynamics of political marriages. One of the most important is the concept of the 'companionate

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[95] Single people, categorized as neither married, divorced nor widowed, accounted for 21 per cent of the population of England and Wales in 1970, rising to 30 per cent in 2000. Zoe Strimpel, *Seeking love in modern Britain : gender, dating and the rise of 'the single'* (London: Bloomsbury Academic: 2020), p.36.
[96] ibid p.30.
[97] Claire Langhammer, *The English in love: the intimate story of an emotional revolution.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2013), p.4.
[98] Alana Harris, Timothy Willem Jones, and Stephen Brooke eds., *Love and romance in Britain, 1918-1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.16.
[99] Richard Keen, 'Membership of UK Political Parties', House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, August 2015, SN05125.
[100] Florence Sutcliffe Braithwaite, *Class, politics, and the decline of deference in England, 1968-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

marriage.' The 1930s and 1940s saw a rise in 'companionate' marriage with an emphasis on 'romantic love, sexual attraction, and mutual interests'.[101] Szreter and Fisher characterise this as a relationship of 'sharing and caring' and an idea of persistent 'working at love in a marriage'.[102] This research on political marriages, set out in the following chapters, broadly confirms but also complicates existing historical accounts of the 'rise' of companionate marriage. One of the most important empirical contributions of this research is enumeration of the number of husbands and wives who took part in politics as a shared activity. Emma Griffin in her monograph *Bread Winner* has noted forms of early companionate marriage that were adopted by couples interested in politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. From the working class autobiographies that she surveyed, Griffin found that men ascribed the beginnings of their political journeys to the workplace, but as women did not have access to these same spaces, they often looked towards the home and families for their politicisation.[103] But there were significant problems with this proto-companionate marriage. For all the talk of 'marriage as comradeship', women still faced very traditional views about the division of resources and labour within the home.[104]

Looking slightly later in the twentieth-century, Marcus Collins argues that intimate relations between men and women moved away from the 'separate spheres' model and towards 'mutuality' - that intimate equality was established between men and women through mixing, companionate marriage and shared sexual pleasure, with the peak of 'mutuality' after the Second World War. [105] Claire Langhamer, however, argues that the unfulfilled promises of companionate marriages were a key reason for the rise in divorce rates in the 1970s and 80s.[106] Langhamer argues that whereas in the first half of the twentieth-century 'to love' might mean 'to take care of' a partner, in the second half, it meant understanding them and cultivating their self-development and, crucially, expecting them to do the same for you.[107] Essential to cultivating this self-development was having similar outlooks and alignment of

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[101] Marcus Collins, *Modern Love*, p.4.
[102] Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, 'Love and Authority in Mid-Twentieth Century Marriages: Sharing and Caring', in Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills eds., *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.133; Langhamer, *The English in love*, p.48.
[103] Emma Griffin, *Bread Winner: An Intimate History of the Victorian Economy* (Yale University Press, 2020), pp.275-6
[104] ibid, p.285.
[105] Marcus Collins, *Modern Love*, p.4.
[106] Langhamer, *The English in love,* p.179; See also Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, 'Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945–59', in David Clark ed., *Marriage, domestic life and social change. Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne (1944–88)* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.7–32.
[107] Claire Langhamer, 'Love, selfhood and authenticity in post-war Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, vol.9, no.2 (2012), p.292.

fundamental world views.[108] Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson echo this in their findings about vernacular discourses of gender equality in post-war Britain. They argue that this new discourse of gender equality, which working-class women in Britain constructed from the late 1950 onwards, suggested that 'even if women took primary responsibility for home and children, they had the right to be seen as equal with men; to have a voice, autonomy, individuality and respect.'[109] These tensions around companionate marriage are explored and developed throughout this thesis.

Other analytical frameworks that have been useful for describing and explaining the dynamics of political marriage are the sociological concepts of 'dual-career marriage' and the 'incorporated spouse' model. The rise of 'dual-career' marriages in the 1960s, in which husbands and wives both pursued careers, has been explained by some sociologists as a product of more 'democratic' or 'companionship' forms of family life.[110] Shared political activism between spouses can be seen through this lens. The counterpoint to this model could be seen within another sociological concept of the 'incorporated spouse'. Developed by feminist scholars in the 1970s, this describes the processes by which the wife is subsumed by the professional role of her husband and the effects this has on her consciousness and identity.[111] These concepts have been helpful in considering the changing role of the 'political wife', but also whether it was possible for husbands to become 'incorporated' into women's political work. This research broadly accords with Helen McCarthy's assessment that husbands who followed their wives' diplomatic careers were far more resistant to being 'incorporated' into their wives' jobs than women were into their husbands' roles.[112] This thesis develops research on the formal efforts that were taken by political parties to incorporate the husbands and wives of MPs, councillors and others within political movements, finding that even as women's political influence grew, the public role of their husbands remained ambiguous.

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[108] Langhamer, *The English in love,* ch.3.
[109] Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Vernacular Discourses of Gender Equality in the Post-War British Working Class', *Past & Present*, Vol. 254, no. 1, (2022), p.309; see also Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, 'National Women Against Pit Closures: gender, trade unionism and community activism in the miners' strike, 1984–5', *Contemporary British History*, vol.32, no. 1 (2018), pp.78-100.
[110] Rhona Rapoport and Robert N. Rapoport, "The Dual Career Family: A Variant Pattern and Social Change." *Human Relations*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1969), p.5.
[111] Hilary Callan, 'Introduction' in Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener eds., *The incorporated wife* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p.2. See also, Janet Finch, *Married to the job: wives' incorporation in men's work* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).
[112] Helen McCarthy, 'Women, marriage and work in the British diplomatic service', *Women's History Review*, vol.23, no.6 (2014), p.6.

The 'emotional turn' has been powerful within the discipline of history, and there are numerous applications and theoretical frameworks that have been used by scholars looking at political history.[113] A recent special edition of the journal *Parliamentary History* attempts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the history of emotions can be used in Parliamentary and political history. The authors claim that 'parliament, parliamentarians and parliamentary politics offer fertile ground for exploring emotions such as passion (as well as others including anger, jealousy, fear and happiness).'[114] The authors here are using emotions, in both their linguistic and causal forms, to enrich an institutional history.

This thesis does not engage with much of the recent cognitive, neurological or philosophical work on the history of emotions, but will explain two approaches that have been useful to thinking about the issues in this thesis. One popular area of investigation has been the ways in which emotion changes over time, and of treating emotion itself as the subject of historical enquiry.[115] This linguistic and cultural approach has often been used to trace individual emotions, such as love, anger and fear across different time periods and locations.[116] This methodology has been useful to chapter four in particular, which looks at the ways that ideas about love were communicated in official party publications and left-wing novels. Looking at this body of fiction together also gives insight into what Barbara Rosenwein calls the 'emotional communities' where groups of people 'adhere to the same norms of expression and value – or devalue – the same of related emotions.'[117] There were common forms and language of expression of how love was communicated within the Labour party. The language and forms of the expression of love is also explored in the private correspondence found in chapter three.

Another approach taken by this thesis is how emotion itself can be used by historians as a 'useful category of historical analysis', allowing political, economic, social and cultural histories to be reframed.[118] This approach places emotion as active causes of events and 'richly

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[113] Emily Robinson, 'The authority of feeling in mid-twentieth-century English conservatism.' *The Historical Journa*l vol. 63, no. 5 (2020), pp.1303–24; Martin Francis, "Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951–1963." *Journal of British Studies*, vol.41, no. 3 (2002), pp. 354–87.

[114] Natalie Hanley-Smith and Sarah Richardson, 'Dangerous or Goodly Passions: The Role of Emotion in Parliament and Politics', Special Issue: Passion, Politics and Parliament, *Parliamentary History*, vol.42, no.1 (2023), p.1.

[115] Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), ch.1.

[116] Claire Langhamer,, 'An archive of feeling? Mass observation and the mid-century moment', *Insights*, vol.9, no.4 (2016), p.3. See, for example, Joanna Bourke, *Fear: a Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2006).

[117] Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.2.

[118] Langhamer, 'An archive of feeling', p.3.

enhance historiographical theories of causation.'[119] The work of this thesis is also in the way that it questions how intimate feelings impacted the choices that men and women made within politics. Particularly in how sharing feelings about politics, or about each other, could change what they were able (or not able) to do in their political lives.

However, there are also ways in which this thesis doesn't engage with the history of emotions. The primary way that this work uses the emotion of love is in its connection with the institutional form of marriage and it primarily embeds the experiences and functions of love within social environments. Hannah Charnock, in researching teenage girls and the sexual revolution in Britain, has shown how romance should be understood as a social phenomenon as much as a product of interior selfhood. It was influenced by individuals' relationship with their communities and immediate social network.[120] This thesis considers how ideas of love could be influenced within the networks and spaces of political parties. Marriage as a social institution is more important to this thesis than emotion.

The other way that this thesis uses the concept of love is in exploring the tensions between love, pragmatism and politics. For many of these couples, love was seen as a vehicle for a better social order and for changing the world.[121] But, as will be seen throughout all of these chapters, many couples found it difficult to disentangle their feelings about their marriage from their feelings about politics. This finding develops Langhamer's argument that 'the distinction between the love match and the practical choice was not always so clear cut. The way in which love was subjectively 'felt' was rooted in material and cultural, as well as emotional, considerations: pragmatism could itself inform narratives of 'falling in love'.[122] Particularly for women, their partner choice was often a practical decision that allowed them to pursue political lives. But this entwining of love and politics could make it difficult to weather turbulence and change.

Methodology

This section looks at the thesis methodology, describing how it substantiates a broad context of marital trends, but also provides intimate studies of lives and marriages. George Morris has

[119] Boddice, *The history of emotions*, p.5; William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling : a Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[120] Hannah Charnock, 'Teenage girls, female friendship and the making of the sexual revolution in England, 1950-1980', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 63, no.4 (2020), pp. 1032-1053.
[121] Langhamer, *English in love*, p.28.
[122] Langhamer, 'Love, selfhood and authenticity', p.286.

recently written about how historians can use 'intimacy' as a category of historical analysis, describing how we can see intimacy as both an analytic tool and as a feature of historical praxis. As an analytical tool, Morris suggests that it is 'something like what scholars in the digital humanities call a 'macroscope', capable of simultaneously taking in big pictures and zooming in on intricate detail.' [123] He also describes how historical research has elements of intimate practice, with scholars 'prying into the private lives of others, reading through deeply personal material never meant for academic attention'.[124] This thesis uses this analytic framework of intimacy, zooming in on intricate detail and the intimate practice of decoding relationships, but also provides a broad view of the trends and experiences of political marriage.

This thesis has purposefully set out to combine a range of methodological approaches to provide the fullest, richest picture of political marriage. It does this by combining quantitative and archival research with cultural history methods. The discussion of methodology below is organised into three approaches: statistical analysis of election results, analysis of published and archival material relating to the Labour and Conservative parties, and memoir, biography and the private papers of individuals.

Statistical analysis

This thesis employs this idea of the 'macroscope' mentioned above to situate this research within a wider social context. As part of this methodology, it zooms out by assessing the marital status of large cohorts of political women from sets of published election data. This was made possible by digitised election databases and published records, but also by the availability of census records, electoral rolls and marital records published on genealogical websites. As Julia Laite suggests, while digitisation projects have usually been considered a facilitator of what has been called 'big' history - showing larger trends and changes over time - individual and granular records can also be used to bring 'human complexity' into historical analysis.[125] Particularly in the first chapter of the thesis, but also throughout, this thesis uses these 'small histories' to provide an insight into those who took part in political activity but left few traces of their activism, as opposed to more prominent figures who have left archives or memoirs.

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[123] George Morris, 'Intimacy in modern British history', *The Historical Journal,* vol.6 4, no. 3 (2021), p.797.
[124] ibid.
[125] Julia Laite, 'The Emmet's Inch: 'Small' history in a digital age', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 53, no.4 (2020), p.964; see also Julia Laite, *The disappearance of Lydia Harvey : a true story of sex, crime and the meaning of justice* (London : Profile Books, 2021). Other recent uses of microhistory are Christopher Hilliard, *The Littlehampton Libels: A Miscarriage of Justice and a Mystery about Words in 1920s England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Chapter one uses published election data for the period 1918-1970 to establish the empirical foundations for this analysis of marriage and politics. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the absence of this kind of detailed evidential study of the marital status of, in particular, female candidates for office has underpinned a tendency in the historiography to overemphasise the few prominent parliamentarians to the exclusion of this whole. To this end, chapter one employs a study of election results for all parliamentary elections and several studies of selected local areas. Its primary aim is to use this information to analyse a large cohort of very active political women, assess their likely marital status and analyse how this status intersected with political activism.

This methodology shows that 10-20% of women candidates in municipal elections were married to a politically active spouse, which this thesis argues is a surprisingly large number. The methodology taken by this thesis, which focuses on published electoral records is likely to understate the political engagement of many spouses whose roles were not visible from this methodology. It is likely that many of the women candidate's husbands *were* party members, even if they were not identified by this approach. The intent of this thesis is to establish a paradigm that could be investigated further with different methodology, for more specific time periods or parties, for example by tracing the familial patterns found in political party membership records.

A more detailed description of the quantitative methodology is found in chapter one. The selection of local boroughs for study, rather than parish councils, for example, has been driven by the availability of source material. Digital databases, produced by The Elections Centre, were available for the council election results in London and Birmingham.[126] This created a foundation for the deeper archival research that was necessary to assess marital status. An attempt was made to recreate this methodology in Rural District Council areas, but the unevenness on reporting in local newspaper reports made the approach too unreliable. This does have implications for how representative the quantitative research can be, and would be an worthwhile project for further study.

Within this statistical analysis there is also the difficulty that the Conservative party often distinguished between activism for the Municipal Reform party and as Conservatives. This distinction is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. However, the purpose of this analysis is to understand the wider trends in who was engaging in political activity. It is

[126] L. Ware, C. Rallings, M. Thrasher, 'British Local Election Database, 1889-2003', SN: 5319, 2006, UK Data Service, (date last accessed 13 April 2023), http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5319-1.

likely that pursuing other methods, such as membership lists from political parties, may be a more accurate sense of the intra-marriage rates within local parties. However, for feasibility purposes, this thesis has used this method of published electoral data. Whilst there may be differences in how those standing under the Municipal Reform label as opposed to the Conservative party perceived of their political activism, the intention behind this study is to assess the likely agreement of political activity between married couples and assess its prevalence, which this methodology goes some way in so doing.

As discussed earlier in the section on masculinities and femininities, this work largely focuses on marital status for political women rather than men. This is both because marriage was a more crucial determiner of women's political activity but also because, from a methodological perspective, it was far easier to identify women's marital status due to the inclusion of 'Miss', 'Mrs' and very occasionally in this period, 'Ms' in the written records. This is obviously not definitive proof of marital status, but by cross referencing with other archival sources such as newspapers, census records, electoral rolls and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, a fair estimate can be drawn out these larger trends. Any woman whose marital status has not been verified with a high degree of certainty through these sources has been marked as 'unknown'. In this analysis, each woman's candidature has been treated separately even if they stood multiple times during the period. This is to account for changes in women's marital status over the course of election cycles.

This methodological focus on candidacies is also impacted by the candidate selection procedures of the political parties.[127] The processes of selection for both the Labour and Conservative party had a similar structure, with the selection of parliamentary candidates vested in extra-parliamentary organisations.[128] Constituency associations made of rank-and-file party members selected the candidates, but these are subject to formal controls by national party committees. Therefore, conflicts over candidatures have often involved national vs local tensions. Stuart Ball argues that selecting candidates for General Elections was the 'single most important function and power of a Conservative Association'.[129] Due to this importance, the associations also 'jealously defended this aspect of local autonomy' from Conservative Party Central Office.[130] Before 1945, there were rarely rules setting out the processes that should be

[127] See Michael Rush, *The Selection of Parliamentary Candidates* (London: Nelson, 1969).
[128] Austin Ranney, *Pathways to Parliament* (London: Macmillan, 1965), p.269.
[129] Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.198.
[130] ibid.

followed in selecting candidates. Sometimes a formal selection sub-committee might be formed, but normally it operated on a basis of personal contact and recommendation.[131] After a list of candidates had been sought, they would then be judged by a selection sub-committee or the full executive. The Central Office maintained a list of approved candidates, admission to which was made by an application report, a regional report on the candidate and an interview. The greatest challenge to women in being selected for seats was that local constituency parties had great hostility towards them, often including the women serving on the selection committees themselves.[132]

For the Labour party, the role of the constituency was similar and there were also similar difficulties for women in obtaining selection. However, one difference useful to this research, is Labour's approach to local government selections. Matthew Worley has suggested that there were more sophisticated selection procedures for local government for the Labour party which originated from the London Labour party. The Labour party was more interested in politicising local government and so the party executives and committees took a greater interest in the adoption of local candidates than the Conservatives or Liberals.[133] Women often faced hostility from these male controlled executives, as council seats were often considered 'stepping stones to Parliamentary seats' in the Labour party, and so were fiercely contested in urban areas.[134] However, in others areas local selections were often uncontested and there were long incumbencies.[135] The focus on the case studies of London and Birmingham municipal elections in this thesis means that the women analysed here are being chosen by local parties that were normally engaged and interested in the candidates for local governments, again suggesting different findings than may have been found for rural district or county council elections.

Published and archival material from political parties

Chapter four in particular uses cultural history approaches to political questions. It looks at representations of marriage in official publications from the Labour and Conservative party, such as the *The Labour Woman*, *Home and Politics*, and various magazines of the Young

[131] ibid, p.202.
[132] Maguire, *Conservative women*, p.167.
[133] Worley, *Labours grassroots*, p.16.
[134] Graves, *Labour women*, p.160.
[135] Anne Baldwin, 'Progress and patterns in the election of women as councillors, 1918 – 1938' (University of Huddersfield, unpublished doctoral thesis, 2012), p.75.

Conservatives. This chapter also uses a selection of novels written by politicians and activists on political themes. These sources have been used as an attempt to access emotions and feelings within political marriages, which were difficult to find within archival records. The historian Steven Fielding has been a proponent of using fictional sources in the study of British political history. He claims that 'its power is more subtle and harder to quantify than that of newspaper or television news, fiction does, however, play a role in shaping views of politics. Qualitative research suggests fiction can inform how people think about themselves politically and influences how they understand political issues.'[136]

As well as biographies and autobiographies, research into the latter time period has been aided by collected and archived oral histories from the History of Parliament Trust. These interviews have been conducted using a life story approach. That is, they are not just focused around the time of their subject's political career, but on their wider life both in and outside of politics.[137] This has been very useful for insights into the personal lives of Members of Parliament, who often also spoke about their time in local government and wider party organisations. Although oral histories are never definitive accounts and encounter problems with memory, they have been useful for thinking about how politicians have spoken about and reflected on their marriages, often with hindsight about their success or failures. Other oral history collections, such as the Labour Oral History Project, have had a greater focus on the culture of Labour party rather than individual lives.[138]

Clearly, one has to be reflexive when considering how to use oral history testimony. As a methodology it has opened up new lines of inquiry for historians, such as in the way it allowed for investigation into areas difficult to hear in the archive, such as the dynamics of the internal family. [139] In a recently published guide to the archive of the Oral History of Parliament project, the authors acknowledge the various problems with the oral history methodology – namely with problems of memory, but also that their subjects have large amounts of media

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[136] Steven Fielding, *A state of play: British politics on screen, stage and page, from Anthony Trollope to 'The Thick of It'* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p.8.
[137] Emma Peplow and Priscila Pivatto. *The Political Lives of Postwar British MPs: An Oral History of Parliament* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp.2-7.
[138] Examples of historians of using oral histories to research political cultures see Daniel Weinbren, *Generating socialism: recollections of life in the Labour Party* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997); Special issue on 'Political Lives' *Oral History*, vol.21, no.1 (1996); 'From the Grassroots: An Oral History of Community Politics in Devon', last accessed at 7 June 2016 http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/from-the-grassroots/).
[139] Paul Thompson, 'What makes oral history different' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

experience and an impetus for 'legacy building', affecting how they remember their lives, including their marriages.[140]

There are similarities with one of the other key methodologies of this thesis, autobiography and memoir, discussed below. Transcripts are one of the most common ways of accessing oral history, and provide a source quite similar in character to autobiography.[141] Leading oral historian Alessandro Portelli argues that historians should focus on the orality of the sources rather than transcription.[142] Doug Boyd agrees and believes that the digital humanities can aid in tempting researchers away from the ease of the transcript by investing in technology to make greater possibilities to 'click and listen'.[143] The History of Parliament Trust have indeed followed this call and have invested significant effort in making many of their interviews available to listen online. The interviews are summarised rather than transcribed, and therefore the listening process was important to how these interviews were used in this thesis. In some places the interviews have been used as autobiographical sources but in others, particularly the interviews with Janet Fookes and Peter Jackson, the nature of the interviews and its incipient pauses, tensions and tone have been an essential part of the historical analysis.

Memoir, biography and private papers

Biography and memoirs are used extensively as sources throughout this thesis. These were published by the more notable figures of the period who had normally been elected politicians. Grouping together sets of published biographies for analysis, for example, the memoirs of all female MPs or the genre of the 'spousal memoir', has proved highly fruitful for the study of political marriage. They allow us to access both factual information about individuals, but also, in the case of autobiography and memoir, to better understand the ways that authors wrote about and remembered their political lives and relationships. The *ODNB* has been very useful, particularly for less well-known figures who have not been the subject of as much research. The small, scattered insights that can be gained about their

[140] Peplow and Privatto, *The political lives of postwar British MPs*, p.5.
[141] Paul Thompson, 'What makes oral history different', p.36.
[142] Alessandro Portelli, 'Popular memory : theory, politics, method' in Perks and Thomson eds., *Oral History Reader*, p.56.
[143] Douglas Boyd, 'I Just Want to Click on it to Listen: Oral history archives, orality and usability', in Perks and Thomson eds., *Oral History Reader*, p.153

relationships, when composited with the stories of other political figures, can build a rich picture and reveal trends of politics and marriage in this period.

Other research that has looked at marriage and politics has normally interrogated the dynamics of marriages through case studies of notable couples.[144] One recently published example is *Forgotten Wives: How Women Get Written Out of History* written by the sociologist Ann Oakley. Oakley takes the stories of four women married to well-known academic and political men (Charlotte Shaw, Mary Booth, Jeannette Tawney, and Janet Beveridge) to show how their achievements have been forgotten. She suggests that that the obscuring of women's roles in their position of 'wifehood' is a systematic and deliberate phenomenon, and her work is an attempt to places the roles of wives back into the public achievements that have been attributed to their husbands.[145] However, it is not a simple process to locate women's agency through her husband's published works. Phyllis Rose, in her classic work *Parallel Lives*, had shown this task to be problematic. She argued for the need to be critical of how we consider ideas of authorship, demonstrated through the example of Victorian philosopher John Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet Mill. Although Mill himself claimed that Harriet was an equal partner in their work, Rose suggests that we understand his claims as representing 'the strength of his feelings rather than to portray accurately the object of them.'[146] Ann Oakley does acknowledges towards the end of the book the difficulty of disentangling what a wife does from a husband, but this does not stop her engaging in this task.[147] These are some of the limitations of writing a history of marriage and politics through case studies. There is the problem of how the 'work' of husbands and wives can be separated from each other, but also how representative these relationships are within wider social and cultural settings. This research aims to remedy some of these problems through its range of methodologies.

Some women wrote memoirs about their time in active politics alongside their husband. Jennie Lee wrote *My Life With Nye* (1980) twenty years after Aneurin Bevan's death.[148] Edna Healey wrote *Part of the Pattern: Memories of a wife at Westminster* (2006) about her experiences in the Labour party as Denis Healey's wife. Edna had met Denis whilst at

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[144] Some work has been conducted on political partnerships, particularly within the suffrage movement. See: Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); June Marion Balshaw, *Suffrage, solidarity and strife: political partnerships and the women's movement 1880-1930* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Greenwich, 1998).
[145] Ann Oakley, *Forgotten wives: how women get written out of history* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2021), p.176.
[146] Phyllis Rose, *Parallel lives: five Victorian marriages* (London: Daunt Books, 2020), p.137.
[147] Oakley, *Forgotten Wives,* p.172.
[148] This was the second part of Jennie's autobiography, as she also wrote *This Great Journey* (1963) which covered her life until 1945.

Oxford in the Labour club and Denis Healey had a long political career as a Labour MP, with his most senior position being Chancellor of the Exchequer. Other women who published memoirs were brought into political worlds by their marriages. Edith Morrison, the second wife of Labour grandee Herbert Morrison, wrote *Memories of a Marriage* (1977) only seven years after his death. She was a Conservative-voting, golf-obsessed businesswoman who unexpectedly found herself relishing the job of a political wife to Morrison. Betty Maxwell was also a fervently committed, but deeply unhappy, political wife. She was married to Robert Maxwell, the Labour MP, publishing and media tycoon who stole millions of pounds from his companies' pension funds. Betty Maxwell published *A Mind of My Own: My life with Robert Maxwell* (1994) three years after Robert was found dead. The last political spousal memoir of a couple active in this period is *Smile Though Your Heart Is Breaking* (2010) by Pauline Prescott. Pauline was married to John Prescott, a union leader and parliamentary candidate in the 1960s who eventually became Deputy Prime Minister in the New Labour government.

This idea of marriage as a subjectivist fiction was one felt and acknowledged within some of these memoirs. Betty Maxwell, Edna Healey and Jennie Lee all explain in part the rationale for writing their memoirs by including the quote attributed to Aneurin Bevan of: 'This is my truth; what is yours?'[149] These women all shared that they felt passionate about rewriting what they feel to be public misunderstandings and injustices about their private lives.[150] Betty Maxwell wanted 'to set the records straight concerning several key areas of Bob's life'[151] and Jennie Lee sought to 'bury for good some of the vicious nonsense written about Nye during his lifetime in order to discredit all he stood for.'[152] There were no Conservative women who wrote such memoirs in this period, all of these spousal political memoirs are from the wives of Labour MPs.[153] This fits with wider findings from this thesis

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[149] Betty Maxwell, *A mind of my own : my life with Robert Maxwell* (London: Pan, 1995) p.xv; Jennie Lee, *My life with Nye* (London: J Cape, 1980) p.11; Edna Healey, *Part of the pattern: memoirs of a wife at Westminster* (London: Headline Review, 2006), p.287.

[150] Other political memoirs written by family members often follow this theme of telling the inside family story on notorious public figures. The son of Oswald and Cynthia Mosley wrote *Rules of the Game: Sir Oswald and Cynthia Mosley* (London: Fontana, 1983), which was an account of his parent's marriage in his efforts to understand his father and shed more light on his complex character. David Profumo, the son of disgraced politician John Profumo, wrote *Bringing the house down: a family memoir* (London: John Murray, 2006) to 'restore his mother's story' (p.4) to the events poured over by the world's media.

[151] Maxwell, *Mind of my own,* p.x.

[152] Lee, *My life with Nye,* p.11.

[153] Just outside of the time period, Christine Hamilton penned *For better for worse: her own story* (London: Robson Books, 2005) about her time working in politics and marriage to Neil Hamilton. Edwina Currie later published

of the cross-party differences between the Labour and Conservative party. There were more married Labour candidates, and higher rates of intra-political marriage, as well as the emotional connection forged through socialist ideals was seen in chapters three and four.

All of the memoirists took seriously their roles as 'memory keepers' for their husbands, a subject Cherish Watton has looked at for both political and diplomatic wives.[154] All women were mindful throughout their husbands' political careers of saving documents and keeping records. Betty Maxwell noted the important role, and particular insight that she had, given her role as the informal family archivist. She collected thousands of papers and other items for her scrapbooks which she viewed as her comprehensive personal archive. She claims that 'these unique archives have enabled me to review many original documents and then write with authority and in detail on a wide range of subjects; through them, I was also able to ascertain the literally hundreds of incorrect facts that have already appeared in the various published biographies about Bob Maxwell.'[155] Jennie Lee also looks to the authority of documents that she kept, saying that they 'mirror the world as it appeared to me through many stormy decades.'[156]

Analysis from these memoirs are used throughout the thesis, but considering the genre of the 'spousal memoir' as a whole is also useful throughout the thesis. There is also the methodological problem of writing histories of marriage from fragments of correspondence, diaries, memoirs and biographies. This is a question which runs throughout the thesis: the problem of getting inside other people's marriages and analysing close personal relationships, especially when they are often being narrated by the participants in autobiographical texts. Not only are personal lives sometimes difficult to access, but the nature of relationships is that they are dynamic – the balance and emotion is forever shifting and can be difficult to capture within archival material.

Although there are problems with a case study approach, as noted above, chapter three does make assessments about the nature of political marriages through case studies. This thesis focuses primarily on couples who carried out politics as a shared practice rather than political

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her political diaries, but she also starred in a 1984 documentary called "The Other Half" which looked at the romantic relationship of successful couples. The political couple featured were Edwina and Ray Currie. See also Margaret Cook, *A Slight and Delicate Creature : the Memoirs of Margaret Cook* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999).

[154] Cherish Watton, 'Turning the pages of women's scrapbooks: the scrapbooks of Florence Horsbrugh, Adeline Hankey and Theodosia Cadogan', https://archives.chu.cam.ac.uk/online-resources/online-exhibitions/womens-scrapbooks/(Accessed on 12 April 2023).

[155] Mawell, *Mind of my own,* p.x.

[156] Lee, *My Life with Nye,* p.11.

spouses who mainly played a supportive role. Whilst there are large numbers of politicians' personal papers archived, there are smaller numbers that provide sufficient evidence for both spouses.[157] The choice of material from archives has been based on the best collections for hearing the voices of both partners and the collections that are discussed are some of the few examples found with enough material for productive analysis.

Although there are politicians in the twentieth century who have been identified as homosexual or bisexual by historians or contemporaries, accessing material that gives insight into their intimate same-sex relationships, as for heterosexual couples, has been difficult.[158] The primary focus of this thesis is on heterosexual relationships, as this allows more thorough consideration of marriage as a social institution within political parties. Chapter five, however, considers those who, for whatever reason, did not or could not marry, and so arranged their lives around 'alternative intimacies'.

Thesis Structure

This first chapter creates the quantitative underpinning of the thesis by assessing the marital status of female candidates for national and municipal elections, suggesting cross-party and localised geographical differences in marital status. This chapter analyses the marital status of all female candidates at the general elections of 1918-1970 and the local election candidates of selected boroughs. Through analysis of the marital status of thousands of women who stood for election, the chapter builds the empirical foundations for themes that will be traced throughout this thesis. Chapter one provides the evidence for three key claims: that the majority of women standing in elections were married, but unmarried women were overrepresented as compared to the population; that Labour party women were more commonly married than Conservative party women; and that there were hundreds of husbands and wives engaged in political activity together during this period.

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[157] For an interesting perspective on the archiving women's political papers see: 'A Collection of Her Own: The Diaries of Mary Agnes Hamilton', https://archives.chu.cam.ac.uk/collections/research-guides/hmtn/ (last accessed at 23 September 2022).

[158] Michael McManus, *Tory Pride and Prejudice : The Conservative Party and Homosexual Law Reform* (London: Biteback Pub, 2011); Michael Bloch, *Closet queens: some 20th century British politicians* (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2015); Lucy Robinson, *Gay men and the left in post-war Britain: how the personal got political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

Chapter two provides detailed analysis of questions raised by chapter one. It assesses the three findings described in chapter one by looking at the phenomenon of the 'halo effect', whereby wives 'inherited' parliamentary seats from their husbands. The chapter charts the rise and fall of the 'halo effect' and suggests that it was an effective vehicle for parliamentary representation for women because through marriage, women could overcome many of the obstacles that they faced in winning parliamentary seats. This chapter investigates the processes through which political parties sought to incorporate husbands and wives, analysing the Half Circle Club for Labour, the various Conservative Training colleges and the Young Conservatives.

Chapter three presents case studies of political partnerships, analysing the relationships of Bessie and Jack Braddock (Labour), Juliet and Rhys Rhys-Williams (Liberal/Conservative) and Evelyn and Thomas Emmet (Conservative). It presents three typologies of political marriage: the public partnership, 'weather house' partnerships and emergent partnerships. Although it is structured around the stories of these three couples, the chapter also integrates examples found from research in chapter one, including couples active in local government. This chapter explores how politics intersected with their marriage and the areas of lifecycles, children and family size, marital breakdown and widowhood.

The fourth chapter looks at representations of love and marriage within party-political cultures. It argues for the existence of a genre of fictional political romance where left-wing authors presented models for how women could combine both marriage and politics – by marrying fellow political activists. This chapter analyses the short stories and serials found in *Labour Woman* magazine and shows how they pressed the genre of romantic fiction into the service of socialism. These fantasies of love and marriage were rooted in political settings which became erotic and sexual spaces. The chapter considers the striking absence of romance in Conservative publications, arguing that the Conservative party had less need to provide new models of marriage to their readers, as the party adhered to purportedly 'non-political' ideals of traditionalism and duty.

The final chapter looks at how those who were *not* married navigated political life, providing a counterpoint to the wider claims of thesis, namely that political marriage was a sustaining and enabling force for men and women. As a point of contrast, this chapter explores those whose personal relationships were organised around alternatives intimacies, including bachelors, spinsters, and individuals who were separated or in non-heteronormative relationships. The first part of this chapter investigates some of the

difficulties and prejudices that were faced by the non-married, and in doing so reinforces the core claims of this thesis – that having a political partner really mattered. The second section looks at some of the alternative intimacies and networks of support that were formed in the absence of marriage. It looks at political relationships, or 'quasi-marriages', where one partner would take the role of a 'political wife', whether or not they were a woman or married. The relationships analysed encompass parents and children, brothers and sisters, 'companionate' female friendships, and assesses how effectively these alternative intimacies could stand in for marriage in terms of offering practical and emotional support.

Chapter One

Married to the party?: marital status as a category of analysis in parliamentary and municipal elections

This thesis begins in an unusual place for research that examines intimate stories of political marriage, love, and relationships. It starts with databases of election results for parliamentary and local elections, more commonly used by psephologists and political historians to track voting patterns and political alignment. Yet within these lists of thousands of names of candidates, we can stitch together fragments of information to learn about the connections of marriage, family, and politics in twentieth-century Britain.

Using published election databases and archival research, this chapter helps to put on a sound empirical basis the prevalence of marriage and singleness for women standing in parliamentary and local elections in Britain between 1918 and 1970. It establishes the marital status of women candidates for elections in as exhaustive a manner as possible, and, where possible, identifies how frequently these women were married to male candidates. It focuses mainly on the marital status of women, as this was more easily researched from the inclusion of marital titles in the primary and secondary literature. Although the thesis goes on to address party activism more widely, this chapter's focus on candidates for election provides a large and comparatively well-documented cohort of activists about whom clear conclusions can be drawn. It is also the first analysis to look exhaustively at election candidates rather than just those who were elected.

This analysis builds the evidence for three key findings that will be crucial to the rest of the thesis. Firstly, that while the proportion of unmarried women standing in elections was higher than the proportion of unmarried women in the population, the majority of women standing for election *were* married. Secondly, that there were clear differences between the Labour and Conservative parties, with Labour women more likely to be married than Conservative women, particularly towards the end of the thesis' time period. Finally, that married female political candidates were commonly married to men who also stood for elected office.

This chapter is structured around these three findings, with the final section bringing these ideas together with analysis of grassroots political cultures. These conclusions challenge some of the historiography discussed in the Introduction, especially the tendency to look at

political women through the lens of their difference or exceptionalism. By contrast, the evidence presented in this chapter reveals the important place of married women in political life and the incorrect assumptions that have been made regarding Tory wives and Labour spinsters.[1] By conducting large-scale analysis of the marital patterns of women engaged in political activity, we can move away from a reading of women's political activism that focuses on prominent individuals and instead the place of activism within the 'local and the everyday.'[2] Whilst it is true that single women were over-represented in electoral politics, a narrow focus on these comparatively few women does a disservice to the lives and motivations of the majority who *were* married. By analysing unsuccessful, as well as successful candidates, this chapter deepens our understanding of the political landscape of modern Britain and allows us to recover the stories of those who have been underrepresented.

In bringing together election results from both parliamentary and municipal elections, it is also useful to observe the intersections of marriage and politics operating across the national and the local. Although, for clarity of organisation, the findings here are disaggregated between local and parliamentary elections, many women stood in both contests. Some women were only active in local government, but as we will see here, many who stood for Parliament also had experience as local councillors.[3] It is useful to consider these cohorts of women together, as an exclusive focus on the national picture of women standing to be MPs skews our understanding of women more widely within local parties.

Chapter Methodology

For identifying the marital status of women standing in parliamentary elections between 1918 and 1970, two databases were available from the UK Data Service and Harvard Dataverse: *British Electoral Data 1885-1949* and *UK House of Commons Election Results at Constituency Level* for the later part of the period.[4] These data sets provided candidate names and party

[1] Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999. 2nd ed* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p.158.
[2] Karen Hunt and June Hannam, 'Towards an archaeology of interwar women's politics: the local and the everyday' in Gottleib and Toye eds., *The Aftermath of Suffrage*, p.1.
[3] On women in local government see Anne Baldwin, 'Progress and patterns in the election of women as councillors, 1918 – 1938' (University of Huddersfield, unpublished doctoral thesis, 2012); Krista Cowman, 'Municipal Socialism and Municipal Feminism: Women and Local Labour Politics From the 1900s to the 1980s', in Nathan Yeowell ed., *Rethinking Labour's past* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).
[4] W. Field, 'British Electoral Data, 1885-1949' SN:5673, 2007, UK Data Service (date last accessed 13 April 2023), http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5673-1; R. Umit, 'UK House Of Commons Election Results At

affiliations, but did not contain details of whether the candidates were women, or their marital titles. For this information, the reference works *British parliamentary election results, 1918-1949* by F.S Craig and the *Times Guide to the House of Commons* helped in identification.[5] The *Times Guide* was particularly useful as it published short biographies for all candidates standing in the elections, although the general election years 1922, 1923 and 1924 were not published.[6] Marital status was verified as far as possible using the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and Pamela Brookes' book *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament 1918-1966*.

For local elections, this research draws on Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher's *British Local Election Database 1889-2003*, a digitised compilation of election results covering municipal and county council seats across England, Scotland and Wales, although only the London Municipal Boroughs and the Birmingham City Council results are complete for the period covered by this thesis.[7] The Rallings and Thrasher databases do attempt to identify female candidates but, as the authors themselves have noted, there are numerous errors.[8] Other published sources of local election data include the volumes by Sam Davies and Bob Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919-1938: A Comparative Analysis.* This series was designed to cover all the county borough election results from 1919-1938. However, there have been no publications beyond the first four volumes, which cover 38 of the 83 County Boroughs.

The publication of the marital title of candidates in these and other publications, including contemporaneous newspaper reports, has been crucial in determining the familial

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Constituency Level' version 1, 2022, Harvard Dataverse, (date last accessed 13 April 2023), https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/S83HOA.

[5] The *Times Guide to the House of Commons* was republished in 2003 with amalgamated volumes. Peter Riddell in his introduction to the work also champions the utility of the study as being able to see the 'richness of family links' in the House of Commons. Iain Dale ed., *The Times House of Commons : with full results of the polling and biographies of members and unsuccessful candidates and a complete analysis and statistical tables* (London: Politico's Pub., 2003), p.ix.

[6] Marital status was verified to identify widows, those separated or standing for election under their maiden name. A few women's marital status was unable to be identified by their title (predominantly doctors) so have been marked as unknown. *The Times Guide* does not contain results for years 1922, 24. Other sources that were useful include: Michael Stenton, *Who's who of British members of parliament. Vol. III, 1919-1945* (Sussex: Harvester, 1979).

[7] L. Ware, C. Rallings, M. Thrasher, 'British Local Election Database, 1889-2003', SN: 5319, 2006, UK Data Service, (date last accessed 13 April 2023), http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5319-1;The London boroughs and *Birmingham* City Council results have also been published in print form Alan Willis and John Woolard, *Election Results for the London County Council 1889-1966 and London Metropolitan Boroughs 1900-1928* (Plymouth: University of Plymouth, 2003).

[8] The names of many women who stood for election have been missed. Rallings and Thrasher are aware of these errors and a reporting system for mistakes is active.

connections between candidates. By combining the sources available, we can go a good way towards reconstructing the marital relationships of election candidates. Taking Bermondsey Borough Council as an example, the list of all candidates standing in the municipal elections, published in the *British Local Election Database 1889-2003*, shows numerous candidates with the same surnames but different initials. The report of the statement of persons nominated in the local newspaper *The Bermondsey and Southwark Gazette* helps to provide further evidence of their relationships. Here, women candidates can be identified because their names include their title of 'Miss' or 'Mrs'. One surname that was seen multiple times in the Bermondsey elections was Mallandain. Between 1919 and 1939, there were three different Mallandains standing in the municipal elections: W. Mallandain, A. Mallandain and J. Mallandain, all in St. Olave ward. The *Bermondsey and Southwark Gazette* reveals that Mrs. Jessie Mallandain was a married woman living at 131 Tooley Street.[9] We also learn that W. Mallandain was William Mallandain, and that his occupation was the Chairman of the City Waiters' Provident and Pensions Society.[10] The last Mallandain was Albert Mallandain, who lived just down the street at 58 Jamacia Road, working as a newsagent and tobacconist.[11]

The next stage was to work out if, and how, these three Mallandains were related to each other, which was possible from digitised genealogical records. Using information from census returns, it appears that William was 59 when he first stood for election in 1919.[12] His first wife Emma had assisted him in the family's tobacco business for their 31 years of marriage, but she died in 1911.[13] He remarried in 1918 to a widow, Jessie Yarnold, who became Jessie Mallandain.[14] William had five living children with his first wife, the youngest of whom was Albert Edward Mallandain, also working in the family business.[15] From these matching surnames and a few details, we can reconstruct the relationships of the local politicians who won seats in St Olave's ward for nearly two decades. Without knowing much more about who these people were, we know that they were related to each other by marriage. William was the first to stand in local elections, initially for the Electors Alliance

[9] 'Borough Council Elections', *The Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder and South London Gazette*, 17 October 1919, p.6.
[10] ibid.
[11] ibid.
[12] "William Mallandain", 1911, *Census Returns of England and Wales*, (The National Archives of the UK (TNA), class: RG14), http://www.ancestry.com.
[13] "Emma J Mallandain", 1911, *England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915*, (Whitechapel, London, volume: 1c, page: 269), http://www.ancestry.com.
[14] "William Mallandain and Jessie Yarnold", 1918, marriage certificate dated 10 February 1918, Parish of S.Olave, Southwark, , reference ID: it 44 p22, http://www.ancestry.com.
[15] Mallandain, *Census Returns of England and Wales*, 1911.

and then for the Municipal Reform party (Conservative).[16] Jessie and Albert joined him on the council at the same time in 1928.

This story of marital and familial connections in politics is one that is replicated again and again in our evidence. This multi-stage methodology has been made possible due to advances and accessibility in digital history. Through digitised genealogical sources such as the website Ancestry.com, it was possible to trace census records, electoral rolls, and other records for individual people. By compositing these 'individual and granular records', as Julia Laite has called them, we build a rich picture of how marriage and family underpinned political lives.[17] This chapter uses these 'small histories' to provide an insight into those who took part in political activity but left few traces of their activism, as opposed to more prominent figures who have left archives or memoirs. In so doing, we get a picture of political activism closely situated in local cultures and familial networks.

In these sources, 'Mrs' has generally been used to designate women who are, or have been married, and 'Miss' an unmarried woman. However, the title alone does not allow us to discern those who may have been widowed or divorced. The chapter, therefore, draws upon the collection of 'Electoral Records 1832-1965' held at the London Metropolitan Archive to cross-reference names for the London boroughs with census and marriage records. The digitised records in this collection are the primary reason for the main focus on the London boroughs. These electoral records are particularly useful, as up until 1928 women's qualification to vote was usually through their husband's occupation, and this qualification is noted on the electoral registers. [18] Even when this qualification is no longer applicable, these registers can be used to identify the name of their spouse and then can be verified using the Civil Registration Marriage Index accessible in Ancestry.[19] Any woman whose marital status has not been verified with a high degree of certainty has been marked as 'unknown'. In this analysis, each woman's candidature has been treated separately even if they stood multiple

[16] The names that political parties adopted locally is described in more detail below, but the Electors Alliance and Municipal Reform party in Bermondsey were both names for Conservative party aligned candidates.
[17] Julia Laite, 'The Emmet's Inch: 'Small' history in a digital age', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 53, no.4 (2020), p.964.
[18] *The collection of* Electoral Registers from the London Metropolitan Archive have been digitised and are available on ancestry.com. The Register contained the names in street order of all persons entitles to vote as parliamentary and as local government electors. The index letters in column 2 headed 'Parliamentary' or 'Local govt' of the Register show the nature of the qualification of an elector were as follows from 1928. For men: R = residence qualification, B = business premises qualification, O = occupation qualification, D = Qualification through wife's occupation. For women, Rw = residence qualification, Bw = business premises qualification, Ow = occupation qualification, Dw = qualification through husband's occupation.
[19] From 1928 husbands could also qualify to vote through their wife's occupation.

times during the period. This is to account for changes in women's marital status over the course of election cycles.

Women, Marriage, and Electoral Politics

This first section of this chapter looks at the marital status of women standing in parliamentary and local elections between 1918 and 1970, examining national and local trends in turn. Where made possible by the overall number of women candidates, this data is presented as a time series, in order to demonstrates change over the course of the period.

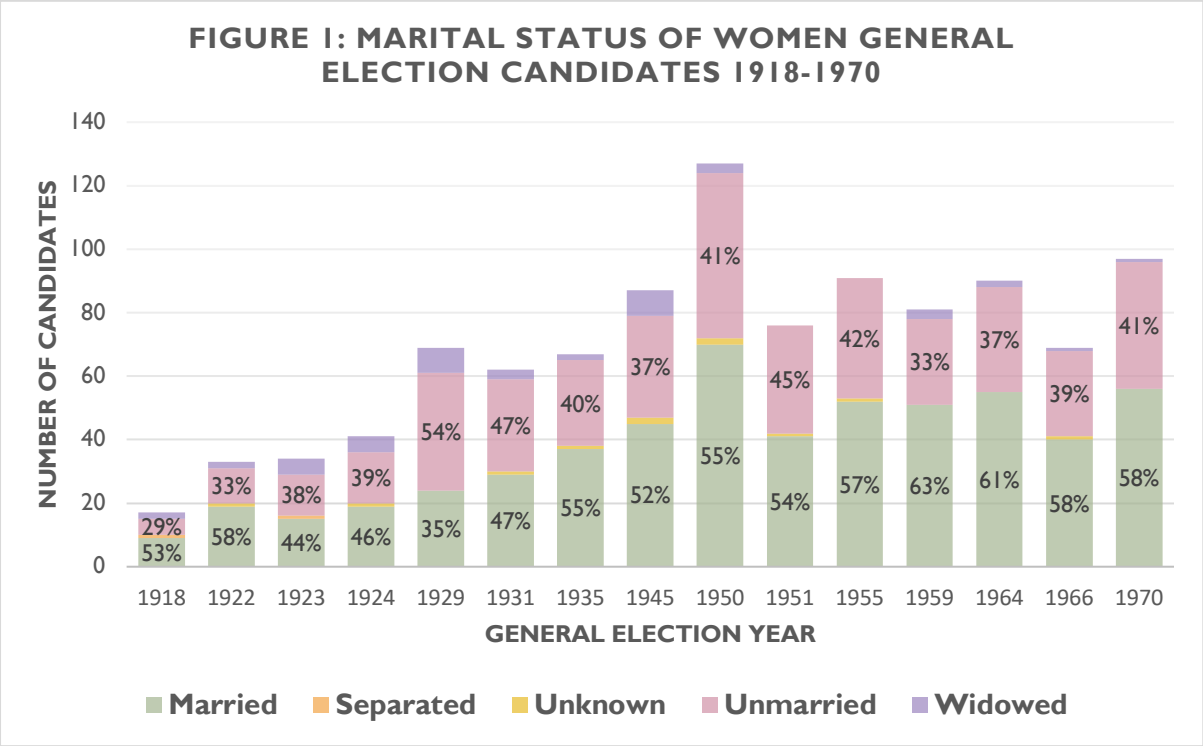


Figure 1 shows the marital status (married, separated, unmarried, widowed, unknown) of all women who stood as candidates for parliamentary constituencies. As discussed earlier, every effort has been made to identify marital status beyond the given title of these women, but there may be a few widows or separated women who have been included as 'married'. In the early years (1918-1924), the small numbers of women candidates make it hard to be confident in the prevailing patterns, but from the 1930s onwards the larger numbers of candidates allow for more robust analysis.

In only one general election, 1929, across this period did unmarried women

outnumber married. This is likely because 1929 saw a sudden surge in the number of women candidates standing for the Liberal party, with 25 women (the most the party would field until 1950) standing. Only six of these women were married. Elizabeth Vallance suggests that the high numbers of Liberal female candidates in 1929 was because of the declining electoral fortunes of the Liberals. This meant that there were fewer attractive seats and so local parties were more amenable to women (and here, it seems, to unmarried women) being selected. [20]

After 1945, when there was an increase in the number of women standing for Parliament, the gap between the proportion of married and unmarried female candidates widens, peaking in 1959 at a 30 percentage point gap, before falling back again. Post-war, the average gap between the two groups was 18 percentage points. This rise may reflect a wider societal growth in the marriage rate in this period. From 1945, marriage rates increased and became 'near universal' by the peak in 1970s.[21] 1945 is also the fulcrum for a change in the proportion of widowed candidates, with widows making up 9% of female candidates up to 1935, but only 3% from 1945 onwards.

[20] Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House: A Study of Women Members of Parliament* (London: Athlone, 1979), p.33.
[21] Pat Thane, *Happy Families? History and Family Policy* (The British Academy: London, 2010), p.24

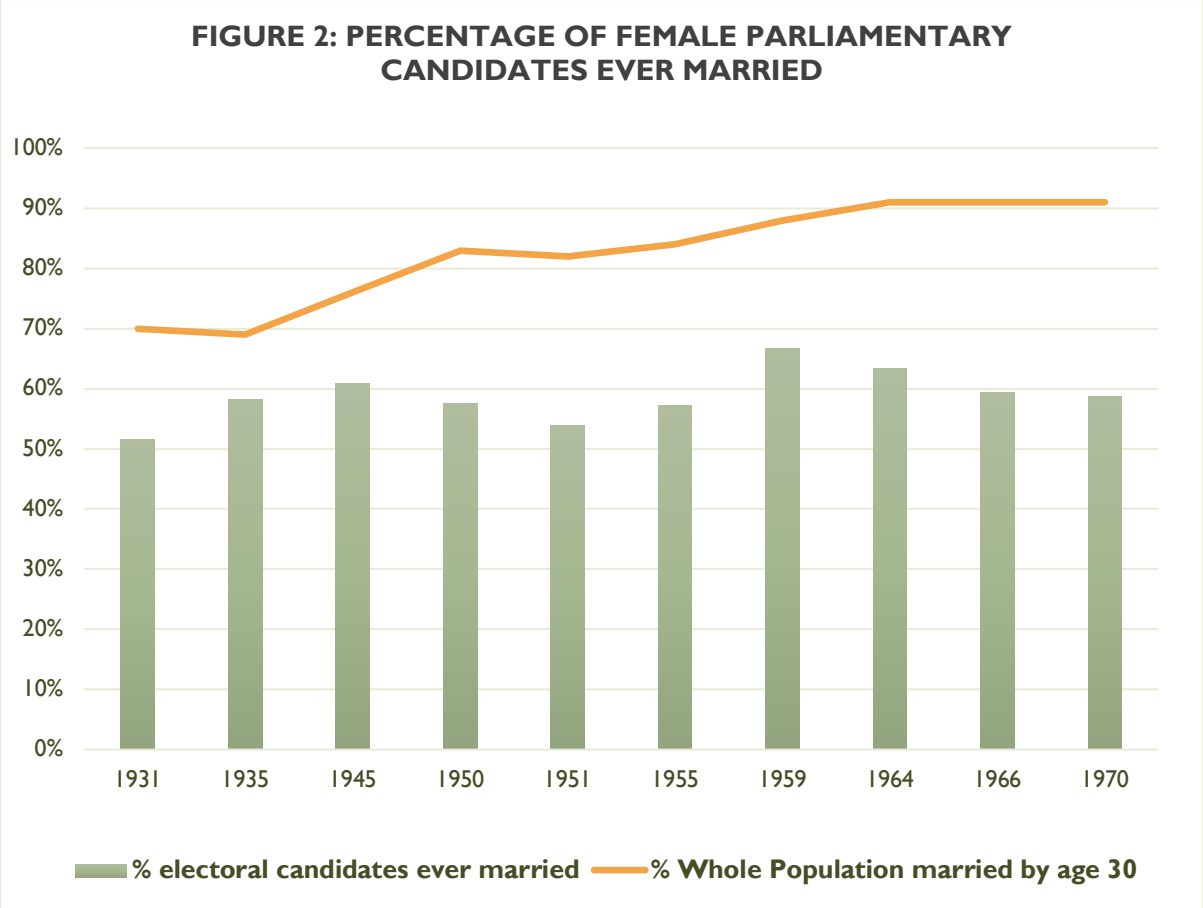


Figure 2 shows the percentage of women parliamentary candidates who were ever married, discounting elections prior to 1929, when comparatively low numbers of women stood for parliament. Overall, as the linear trendline shows, there was a slight increase in marriage rates of female parliamentary candidates in this time period. From 1931, by using ONS data, we can map the percentage of women aged 30 who had ever been married in the whole population.[22] As discussed in the introduction, the post-war period saw a marked increase in the marriage rate, which meant that by 1970, just over nine in ten people were married by the age of 30.[23]

To demonstrate the continued high prevalence of married women in municipal elections, I conducted further analysis - lasting until 1962 - for two council areas: St Pancras and Birmingham. These were chosen both for the availability of the necessary source

[22] The ONS publish details of the proportions of women who had ever married by certain ages, for birth cohorts, England and Wales, 1900 to 2003. The graph uses the age of 30 to calculate the percentages that had ever married, but this means that that the data is only available from 1931 for this time period.
[23] For those 1970, 909 women per thousand were married by age 30. See Faiza Mohammad, Nina Mill and Kanak Ghosh, *Marriages in England and Wales: 2019* (19 May, 2022), Office for National Statistics, (last accessed on 13 April 2023), https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriagecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/datasets/marriagesinenglandandwales2013

material and diversity in terms of political and economic profile. St Pancras and Birmingham both had sufficient source material to verify the marital status for women candidates throughout the period, unlike other boroughs with either low numbers of women candidates or a lack of standardisation in the reporting of results. St Pancras and Birmingham also had a good balance of Labour and Municipal Reform (Conservative) candidates, with overall control of the councils frequently changing hands, rather than being heavily dominated by a single party. This means that it was possible to capture something of the dynamics of marital status and political culture for both major parties of the era.[24]

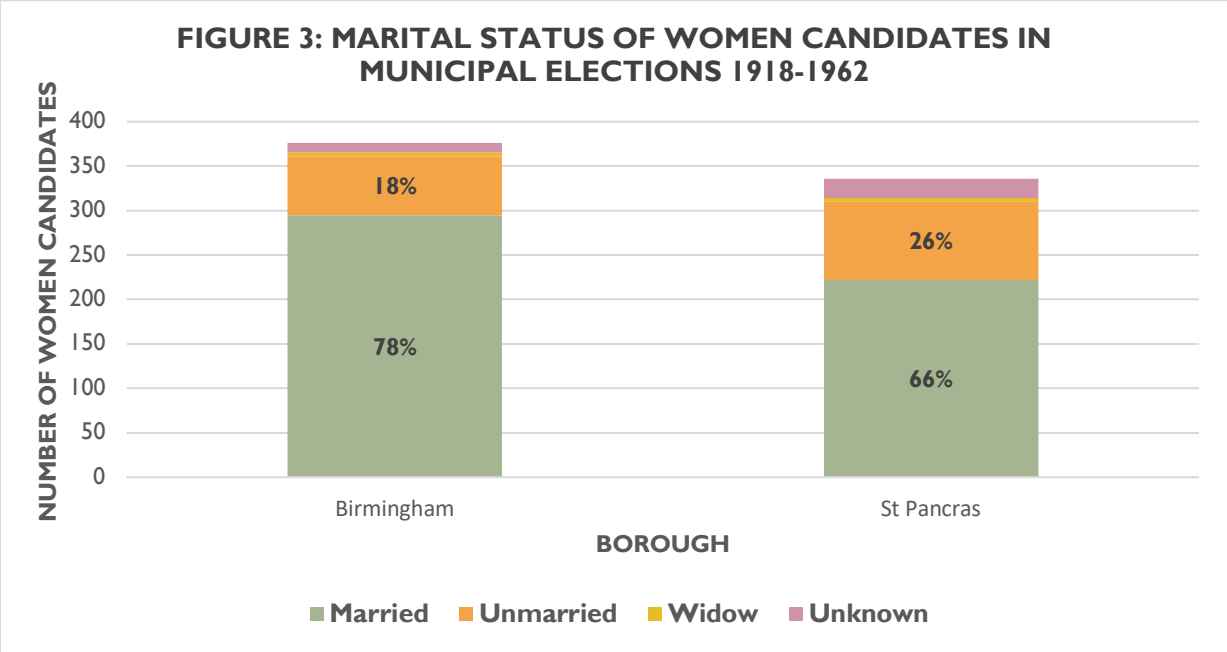


Figure 3 shows the total proportion of married women candidates in municipal elections from 1918-1962. Here, echoing the trends established above in national elections, we see that the majority of political women were married, but to an even greater extent. In Birmingham, 78% of women candidates were married or had ever been married, and the figure in St Pancras was 66%. This is compared to an average percentage in parliamentary elections of 54%. From the selected boroughs in this chapter, Birmingham was the borough with the highest number of female candidates standing for election. 377 women stood for

[24] Detailed analysis of four additional London Boroughs - Bermondsey, Poplar, Kensington and Hampstead - up to 1939 can be found in the appendix one. These four boroughs were chosen alongside St Pancras and Birmingham for their socioeconomic and political diversity across London. Some reference may be made to these results in the body of the text but have not been included in the full analysis for brevity of discussion.

election between 1918-1962 in Birmingham, and 336 in St Pancras.

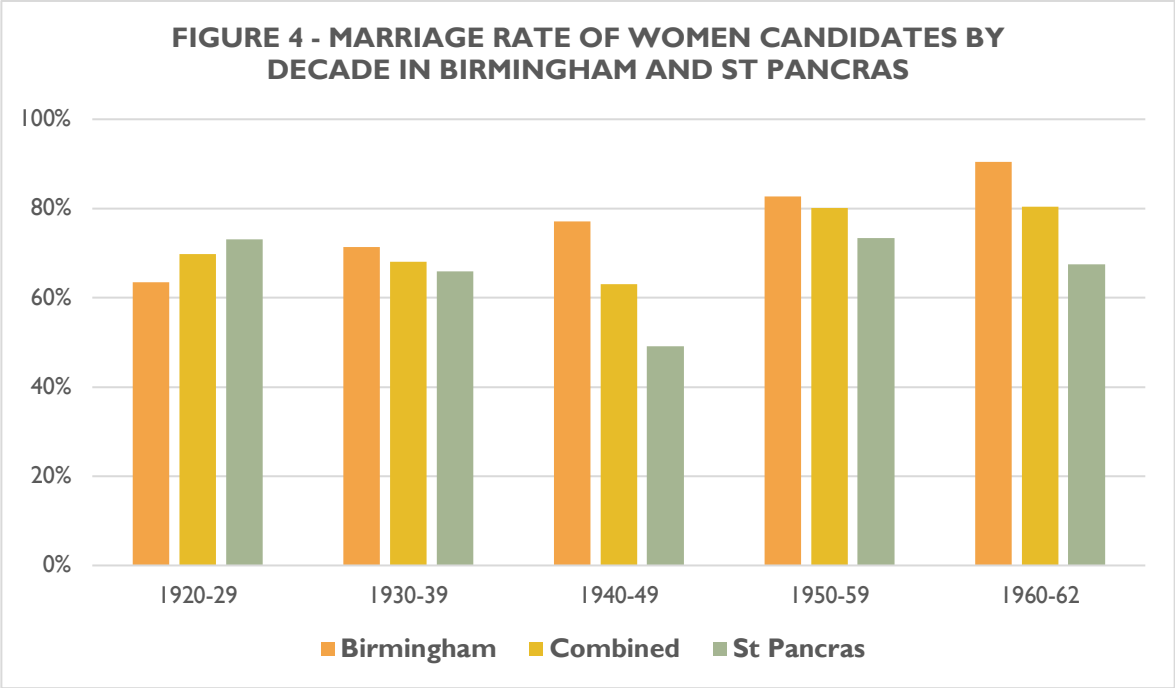


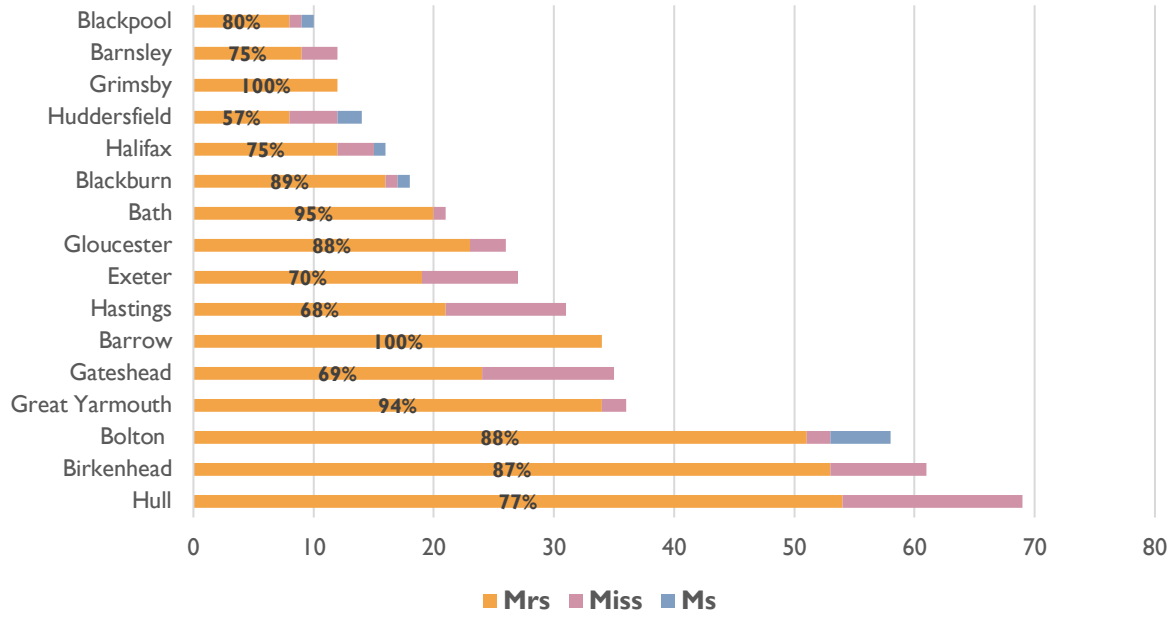
Figure 4 shows a similar trend to parliamentary elections, with the proportion of married women candidates rising after 1945. This figure combines candidates from both boroughs in order to ensure a significant number of candidates for analysis. This shows that, by the early 1960s, the average marriage rate for women candidates was at 80%, rising above the average in the 1960s and 1970s. Birmingham, with a greater number of women candidates and more frequent elections, shows this steady increase clearly. In both national and local elections, then, throughout the time period of this thesis, married women predominated amongst women candidates.

It is important to point out, however, that while married women were, often by some margin, the majority amongst candidates, unmarried women were still over-represented in the body of women running for elected office compared to the population. What is clear from this analysis is that while married women almost always constituted an absolute majority of those standing in elections, they were under-represented compared to the population as a whole. By 1970, women candidates for parliament were married at a rate 32 percentage points lower than the population. Looking at local election results, there is a smaller but still discernible gap. In the early 1960s, the marriage rate in the population at the age of 30 was 91%, the marriage rate of Birmingham's women candidates was 90%, but St. Pancras' rate was much lower at 68%. At both national and local level, unmarried women

were more common in parliament or local councils than they would have been amongst the population at large.

Whilst it has not been possible to replicate this same level of detailed analysis over the whole time period for other boroughs, the high marriage rates can be substantiated further using Morley and Davis' *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919-1938: A Comparative Analysis* to enumerate the titles of all the women who stood in country borough elections between the wars. This produces a wider national picture as it gathers data for a range of locations around the country.[25] Figure 5 shows the proportion of married female candidates in a selection of boroughs between 1919 and 1939, arranged in ascending order of the overall number of women to stand. Overall, 83% of female candidates in the sixteen county boroughs shown in this chart were married. Although the sample size for some of these boroughs is small, we can see a high variation in the marriage rates of female candidates in different areas across England. This is helpful in illuminating some of the broader trends that will feature throughout this thesis.

FIGURE 5: MARITAL STATUS IN COUNTY BOROUGH ELECTIONS 1919-1939



[25] For this part of the research, in trying to give a broad overview, I have not verified marital status in as great detail as for the other elections and have used the titles of Mrs, Miss and Ms to give an indication of marital status which is already provided in these volumes.

Women's employment, for example, may have been a determining factor in women standing for election. Historians have noted the strong correlations between patterns of female employment and activism in local party politics, within both membership and the holding of electoral office. Assessing three authorities in Lancashire, Jane Mark-Lawson finds that in Nelson, the municipal authority spent ten times as much money on maternity and child welfare than its counterpart in Lancaster. Mark-Lawson argues that the type of work being performed and the gender relations between men and women impacted on the nature of women's political activity. In Nelson, men and women worked together in the same weaving industry, doing the same jobs, for almost equivalent pay. Gender relations were marked by lower levels of patriarchal domination or female subordination. This in turn meant that women's political mobilization was higher and more effective in prompting municipal authorities to act on issues such as maternal health and infant welfare.[26] Sex segregated industries with more patriarchal attitudes, created less 'progressive' political environments within the political parties themselves.[27]

This analysis may help account for the high numbers of women standing for election in Birkenhead and Bolton. In Birkenhead, significant numbers of women were employed in the processing of goods coming into the docks, whilst in Bolton women comprised over 37% of the total workforce, most of them in the textiles industry. Looking at the boroughs where *only* married women stood for election such as Grimsby and Barrow, they were characterised as having an overtly 'masculine' character to its economic, social and political life.[28] There were limited employment opportunities for women in Barrow, and Sam Davies describes Barrow's women as 'confined to home and hearth'.[29] The variations in the number of women candidates amongst the boroughs meant that it was not meaningful to track this data with the prominent employment industries. However, the idea of 'masculine' cultures leading to higher numbers of married women is useful for this chapter and will be linked to married women's political participation. In Grimsby, the role of political marriages was clearly discernible. A third of these candidacies were made up by the Labour candidate Mrs

[26] Jane Mark-Lawson et al eds., 'Gender and local politics' in *Localities Class and Gender* (London: Pion, 1985), pp.209-13.
[27] Neville Kirk, 'Traditional' Working-Class Culture and 'The Rise of Labour': Some Preliminary Questions and Observations', *Social History*, vol.16, no. 2 (1991), p.213.
[28] Sam Davis and Bob Morley, *County borough elections in England and Wales, 1919-1938. Volume 1, Barnsley - Bournemouth : a comparative analysis* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.14.
[29] Morley and Davis, *Volume 1*, pp. 72-73.

Clara Marklew, the wife of Councillor Ernest Marklew, who in 1935 became the MP for Colne Valley.[30]

There are some important mitigations to set out from the figures presented thus far. From a data perspective, we know that in 1951, the earliest year for which records are available, the median age of a parliamentarian was 47 (it is not possible to disaggregate this figure by gender) and remained at this level until the end of the period in question.[31] Politics, at least at a national level, was an undertaking which many began comparatively late in life. Any societal increase in the rate of marriage is likely to present more quickly amongst younger people and therefore there is likely to be a lagging effect in seeing this increase in parliamentary data. A candidate in her 50s at the 1970 election should in effect be properly judged by the marriage rate twenty years earlier, but the time limits of the data published by the ONS make this hard to apply for the whole period.

The period covered by this thesis also predates the significant increases in married women's labour market participation. In 1931, married women were just 16% of the female labour force and, although this rose quickly following the Second World War, it was 45% by the mid-50s.[32] Until after the Second World War, a marriage bar was in place in most professions which greatly limited married women's opportunities.[33] There were, by contrast, no formal restrictions on married women standing in local or national elections, making the job of MP or local councillor more open to married women than other forms of work. It can be problematic to equate elected office with paid work, yet for Parliamentarians, at least, there are clear similarities with professional occupations in terms of the commitment required. Indeed, the greater time commitment to Parliamentary service compared to the more limited and often unpaid service as a borough councillor may go a good way towards

[30] 'The Districts: Grimsby', *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 November 1929, p.1. Clara was in fact Ernest's second wife. In his obituary it was reported that they lived with a stepson. He petitioned for divorce from his first wife after accusing her of misconduct with two men. She made counter allegations of misconduct. 'The Marklew divorce. Allegations of a double life.', *Preston Herald*, 19 April 1913, p.7 and 'The late Ernest Markew', *Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph*, 15 June 1939, p.1.

[31] Richard Cracknell, Elise Uberoi, Matthew Burton, "UK Election statistics: 1918-2022, a long century of elections" (research briefing, House of Commons library, 2023), p.35.

[32] Helen McCarthy, 'Social Science and Married Women's Employment in Post-War Britain', *Past & Present*, Vol. 233, no. 1 (2016), p.269; see also Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), ch3.

[33] Helen McCarthy, *Double lives: a history of working motherhood* (London : Bloomsbury, 2020), p.81. Helen Glew, *Gender, rhetoric and regulation: women's work in the civil service and the London County Council, 1900-55* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), chps 1-2; Selina Todd, *Young women, work, and family in England 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.158-9; Marie Hicks, *Programmed inequality : how Britain discarded women technologists and lost its edge in computing* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), p.49-50.

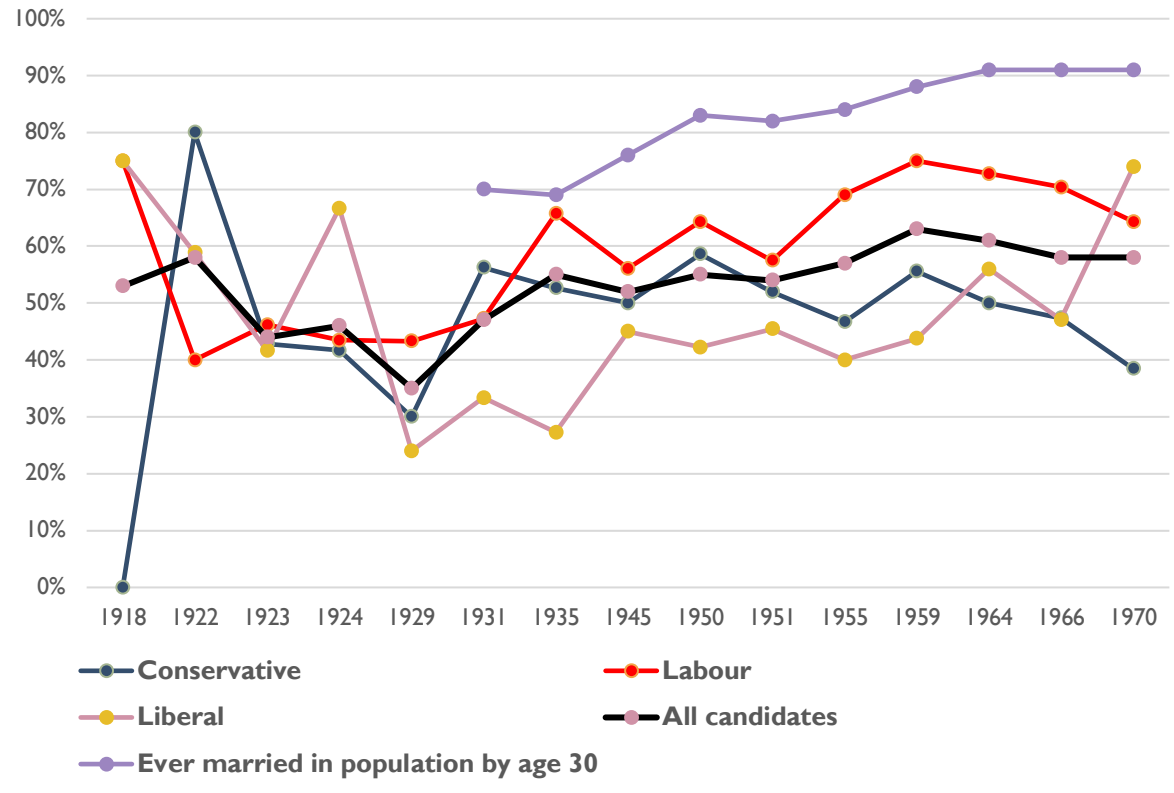
explaining the differential marriage rate between national and local candidates.

Notwithstanding either of these qualifications, the significant role that 'singleness' played in British politics in the twentieth century will not be ignored, and chapter five of this thesis looks in closer detail at the ways in which unmarried men and women negotiated their political engagement. However, the fact remains that, throughout the period, most women participating in electoral politics were married. The reasons why this was the case and the impact it had on women's political engagement will be explored further in the course of the study.

Cross-party differences

Having established the predominance of marriage amongst women candidates, this next section considers the differences in women's marital status between political parties. Throughout the period, the political fortunes of the parties fluctuated, with the Liberals gradually fading away over the course of the twentieth century. As such, this section focuses principally on the differences between the Conservative and the Labour party. As discussed in the Introduction, historiography has delineated between Labour 'spinsters' and Tory

FIGURE 6: PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES MARRIED BY PARTY



wives. This section tests these claims through statistical analysis.

Figure 6 shows the trend in the percentage of women candidates who were ever married in parliamentary elections, showing the figures for the Conservative, Liberal and Labour parties. The black line shows the percentage of all female candidates who were married (as set out in the preceding section) and the purple line the marriage rate in the population at large (also as previously discussed). As discussed earlier, the data is erratic for the early years of parliamentary elections owing to the low numbers of female candidates, but as the numbers of candidates increased, a smoother trend emerges. However, despite this early unevenness, we can clearly see that there is little evidence to support an assertion that interwar Labour women candidates were more likely to be unmarried. In fact, in five of the seven elections prior to 1939, Labour candidates were more likely to be married than their Conservative peers. Across all elections between 1919 and 1935, Labour fielded marginally more married female candidates than the Conservative party.

From 1955, this marginal difference stabilises and then widens. In the 1951 general election, there was comparatively little difference in the marriage rate amongst candidates of the three major parties, with Labour marginally ahead on 58% to the Conservatives on 52%. From then on, however, the marriage rates of Conservative and Liberal women candidates remain steady, whilst the number of married women for the Labour party increases. From 1955 to 1970, there is a 19 to 22 percentage point gap between the marriage rate of Labour and Conservative women candidates.

The fluctuating successes and fortunes of the parties provide further context for understanding these marital trends. On the whole, being married across the period correlates only marginally with increased chance of electoral success. Between 1918 and 1974, 54% of all women candidates were married, compared to 58% of women MPs. However, this broadly similar ratio masks some important variations by party and over time, which were particularly pronounced during 'exceptional' political events: landslides and by-elections.

Taking two points where the Labour party and the Conservative party won landslide majorities – 1931 for the Tories and 1945 for the Labour party – there is a difference in the predominant marital status of the women who were elected. In the Conservative party, the first successful female candidates elected between 1918 and 1931 were all married. However, after the Conservative party's landslide victory in 1931, 40% of its women MPs were unmarried. For the Labour party, the trend was in the opposite direction. In their early electoral successes, the women that won were more likely to be unmarried. In their 1945

landslide, 80% of the female Labour MPs elected were married.

These landslide years suggest something about the practises within the parties concerning the selection of candidates. Prior to 1931, many of the barriers to women being selected as parliamentary candidates in the Conservative party came from the uneasiness of local parties in selecting a woman if there were male candidates available.[34] Of those women elected in 1931, including the sudden influx of unmarried women, many were 'unexpected visitors in safe Labour seats'.[35] Marjorie Graves surprisingly unseated Herbert Morrison in Hackney South and Mary Pickford had previously only fought unwinnable seats before contesting and winning the slightly more marginal North Hammersmith in 1931.[36] However, there is little to suggest that unmarried women were placed in more unwinnable seats by design. Of the nine Conservative women to win a seat from Labour at this election, the majorities that married women needed to overturn were all higher than those of unmarried women.

What is particularly interesting about both of these landslide elections is that they mark a turning point in the electoral successes of unmarried and married women in the Conservative party. In elections before 1931, the Conservatives fielded 12 unmarried women candidates, none of whom were successful. Of the married women candidates who stood, two-thirds were elected. From 1931 onwards, however, the success rate of unmarried Conservative candidates was 44%, 12 percentage points higher than the rate of success of married candidates. Unmarried women outperformed married women in every election for the rest of the period bar three (1945 and 1970, with 1955 a dead heat). For Labour, the reverse is true. Prior to 1945, they had put forward a broadly similar number of married (69) and unmarried (63) female candidates, but only three married women were elected in comparison to 11 successful unmarried women. From 1945 onward, we observe both the increase in the number of married women standing, detailed above, and married women being more successful than unmarried women by 12 percentage points. Only in 1959 and 1970 would unmarried Labour women be elected at greater rates than their married peers.

By-elections are the other important exception to the minimal differential success of married women in winning elections. The proportions of married (46.7%) and unmarried

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[34] Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.323

[35] Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, p.326.

[36] Many of the women elected in 1931 were not in Parliament for very long - Ida Copeland, Marjorie Graves, Norah Runge, Helen Shaw and Sarah Ward all failed to hold their seats in 1935.

(41.7%) women standing in by-elections was similar, but the number of unmarried women who managed to win their seats fell to 29.6%. Widows also enjoyed strong success in winning their by-elections, a finding that owes much to the informal practice of seat inheritance discussed more fully in chapter two. The tipping points in electoral success highlighted above go some way to exploring the difference between unmarried Labour and married Tory political activism. Historians who have focussed only on the political fortunes of elected female candidates have formed a picture which is not reflective of the broader experience of women active electorally within either the Conservative or Labour parties. Once Labour married women and Conservative unmarried women had turned the tide, they predominated amongst female candidates for their parties for the rest of those period.

It is not surprising that writers have been drawn towards studying the women parliamentarians who achieved the greatest political impact in the early years of women's suffrage, many of whom were unmarried.[37] The Labour women who were elected as cabinet ministers in this period, Margaret Bondfield and Ellen Wilkinson, were both unmarried. As was the first female parliamentary private secretary and first female chairman of the Labour Party, Susan Lawrence. Mari Takayanagi also found that Lawrence was most prolific contributor by far to standing committees of the women MPs.[38] The first and only independent woman MP, Eleanor Rathbone was unmarried.[39] Only a third of female MPs in the interwar period were unmarried, but they made up more than half of the women who spoke over 1000 times in the House of Commons.[40] The unmarried women MPs who made little recorded contribution to parliamentary debate (often Conservatives) usually only served short terms. These trends may explain why the image of the unmarried female MP has held more resonance for historians of the period. The most high-profile women, mostly from the Labour party, were those who were unmarried and childless. Again, these prominent early women parliamentarians, while important figures in their own right, were by no means representative of the wider party structures they sat atop.

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[37] Marian Goronwy-Roberts, *A Woman of Vision: A Life of Marion Phillips MP* (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 2000); Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Margaret Bondfield* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1924). Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Mary Macarthur: A Biographical Sketch* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1925); Kenneth Baxter, 'Florence Gertrude Horsbrugh the Conservative Party's forgotten first lady' *Conservative History Journal*, vol.8, no.22 (2009); Laura Beers, *Red Ellen.*

[38] Mari Takayanagi, 'Parliament and Women, c.1900-1945' (unpublished Thesis, King's College London, 2012).

[39] Although there are questions as to the nature of her relationship with her long-term live in female partner. See Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p.166.

[40] Data on number of debates spoken in is taken from 'Hansard 1805-2003 Online', (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/, last accessed at 29 November 2022).

Electoral records are not the only tool we have to analyse differences between the parties in their approach to marriage and women candidates. In the interwar period, many of the same women contested elections multiple times, but the 1950s saw a new cohort of married women standing for parliamentary elections. Looking at this group of women standing in the 1950s, the short biographies from the *Times Guide to the House of Commons* clarify the background of this new influx of married women. One finding is the greater likelihood for married women candidates to have had substantial experience in local government. In the postwar period, 63% of Labour's married women candidates mentioned local government experience in their candidate biographies, as opposed to only 12.5% of the unmarried women. One possible reason for this difference is that renumeration for political work was low and Councillors did not even receive expenses for their work until 1948.[41] It was therefore difficult for unmarried women to have the time or financial stability for candidacy unless they came from backgrounds with independent means. This points towards a trend that will be explored later in this chapter and throughout the rest of the thesis – that marriage for Labour women often gave them opportunities for political activism, particularly within local government. It also suggests some of the class differences that will be explored further.

The candidate biographies in the *Times Guide* also reveal how some married women viewed their candidacy as intersecting with their domestic identity. From 1950-1970, 22% of female Tory candidates described their profession as 'housewife', compared to 17% for Labour and 30% for the Liberals. For instance, the Labour MP for Wood Green 1955-1979, Joyce Butler, was described as: 'A housewife. Mrs Joyce Butler has represented this constituency since 1955.'[42] This concept of the dual role between housewife and politician is interesting in the use of the term. Catriona Beaumont has argued that domesticity and the image of the housewife was 'the means through which modern women could assert their right to participate in public life.'[43] They used their own personal experience and adoption of the language of housewifery to advocate for women's causes without seeming too radical. This connects to the earlier discussion of the equation of elected office with paid work for

[41] Tony Byrne, *Local Government in Britain: Everyone's Guide to How It All Works* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1986), p.131.
[42] Other elected MPs who were described as 'housewives' were Alice Cullen (Lab), Doris Fisher (Lab) Gwyneth Dunwoody (Lab), Jill Knight (Con), Judith Hart (Lab), Patricia McLaughlin (UU), Peggy Fenner (Con).
[43] Caitríona Beaumont, *Housewives and citizens: Domesticity and the women's movement in England, 1928-64* (Manchester: Manchester Univeristy Press, 2016), p.8.

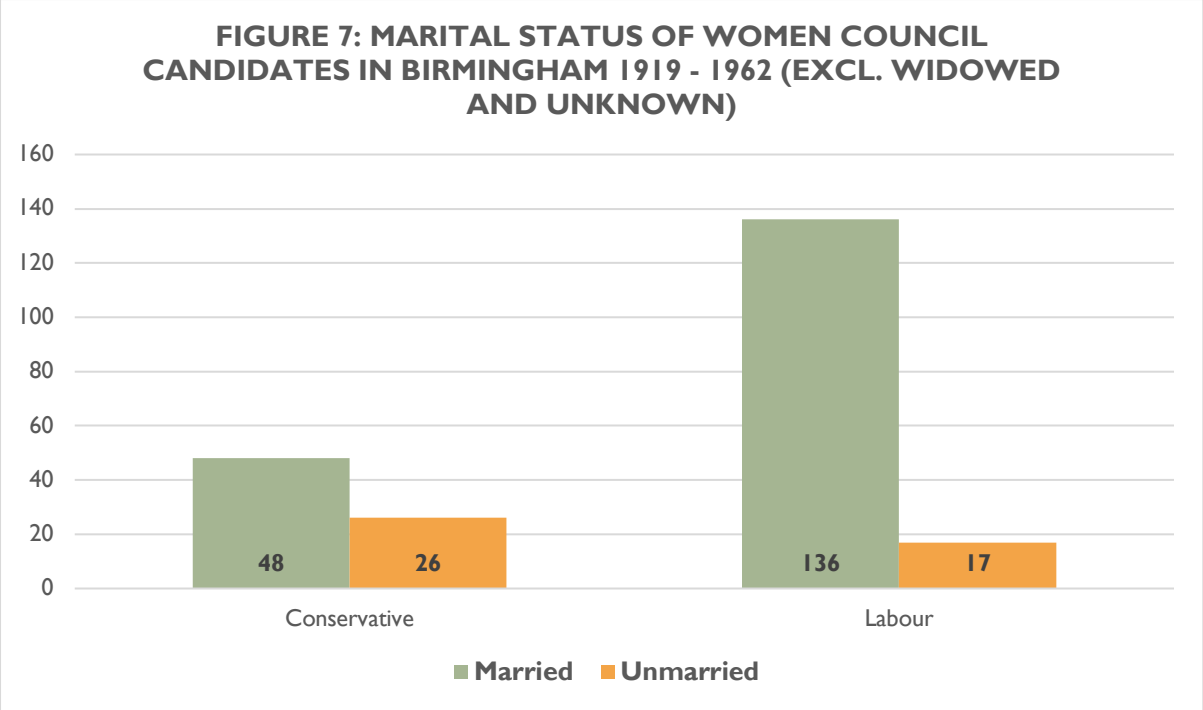
women. They saw value in their domestic experience in the ways others did from their profession.

We see in municipal elections similar cross-party trends to those observed at a national level. Comparison of local and national politics is somewhat complicated prior to the 1950s, as Conservative and Liberal candidates did not stand uniformly under these party names. The Labour party was the only party whose election candidates stood consistently with this name in this period. [44] The Conservative party candidates were most usually under the title of the Municipal Reform party. However, these candidates would often swap between a mixture of Ratepayers parties, the Municipal Electoral Alliance, the Electoral Alliance and others. Most candidates who stood for the Municipal Reform party or the Municipal Electors Alliance were Conservative party members.[45] This was a conscious decision on behalf of the Conservative party as they 'needed constantly to retool its messages and reconstruct new, fragile electoral alliances.'[46] The 'battle of names', as James Thompson calls it, allowed parties to form viable coalitions of support from potentially divergent factions, but often led to accusations of parties hiding their 'true colours' or intentions.[47] In the interwar years a number of 'Progressive Parties' emerged in municipalities in England and Scotland as 'coalitions of anti-socialist forces, including local business elites and Unionist politicians who vigorously opposed 'municipal socialism'.[48] After 1945, local election battles were fought under the wider party banners of Labour, Conservative and Liberal. For comparative purposes, the Municipal Reform candidates have been considered as Conservative across the period.

Turning again to the extended analysis of St Pancras and Birmingham, figures 7 and 8 show the marital status of women candidates in these councils split by political party. Here we see some of the same patterns reflected in local elections as we do in national ones.

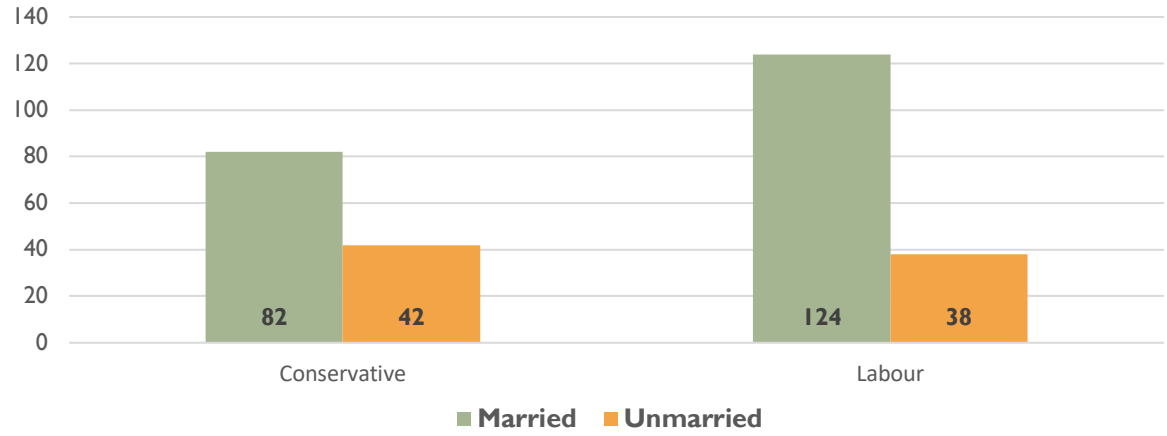
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[44] Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales vol 1*, p.25.
[45] In the case study of Kensington for example, the Municipal Reform candidate Charlotte Keeling was the Honorary Secretary of South Kensington Conservative Association and Chairman of their Women's Branch. Miss Evelyn Pennefather was also heavily involved in the local Conservative Association in North Kensington. See 'Conservative women's first Tuesdays', *Kensington News and West London Times*, 9 July 1937, p.7.
[46] Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in London* (Chippenham: Anthony Rowe Ltd, 2008), p.24.
[47] James Thompson, 'The Lights of the Electric Octopus Have Been Switched Off': Visual and Political Culture in Edwardian London', *Twentieth Century British History,* Vol. 29, no.3 (2018), pp.331–356.
[48] Emily Robinson, *The language of progressive politics in modern Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.68.



As seen in Figure 7, 30% of the Conservative women seeking election to Birmingham council between 1919 and 1962 were unmarried as opposed to just 11% of Labour candidates. Interestingly, we see in the change over time some contrary patterns to those in national elections. While at national level, unmarried and married Labour women competed in elections with relative parity, there is little equivalence in Birmingham council elections. The first unmarried Labour candidate did not stand until 1945. Meanwhile, unmarried Conservative candidates stood for election throughout the period. We also do not see replicated the trend in national Conservative politics for unmarried women to be more electorally successful. Across all elections in Birmingham that women contested for the Conservatives in this period, married women received a mean vote of 3502 votes compared to a mean of 2354 for unmarried women. Labour married women also received a higher average vote than their unmarried peers, but by a far smaller margin.

FIGURE 8: MARITAL STATUS OF WOMEN CANDIDATES IN ST PANCRAS 1919-1962 (EXCL. WIDOWED AND UNKNOWN)



Similarly, in St Pancras, the marriage rate of Conservative candidates is lower than that of Labour, although to a lesser degree than in Birmingham. Around 30% of Conservative women candidates were identifiably unmarried, as opposed to 22% of Labour candidates. Clear trends in a changing rate over time here are harder to discern, with unmarried candidates standing at varying levels for both parties throughout the period.

Examination of both national and local election candidacies has revealed clear differences between the propensity of Labour and Conservative women candidates to be married in this period. Marriage, it seems, was a greater feature amongst Labour candidates for elected office. This finding presents a counterpoint to the historiography discussed in the Introduction, largely by widening the lens of the investigation to incorporate unsuccessful candidates. The women who were initially successful as MPs did not represent the wider culture of the political party they belonged to. The reasons for this will be explored further in the thesis. However, it is revealing that in both cases, landslide elections acted as a fulcrum around which change occurred. Following these landslides, the fundamental nature of the underlying party structures asserted itself and was reflected in both the marriage rate of candidates and in the electability of married and unmarried women for each party.

For the Conservative party, the early success of married women is likely to owe much to the phenomenon of seat inheritance - a practice more commonly used by Conservative women seeking election. This process will be discussed more fully in chapter two. The rising preponderance of successful Labour married women is likely to owe something to the

greater propensity for Labour women to be in marriages where both partners were expressly and publicly political, standing for office together or in close conjunction, as explored below.

Husbands and Wives

This study of election results has revealed that women candidates were very often married to men who were also standing for elected office. The final section of this chapter seeks to quantify how widespread this phenomenon was and introduces some of the key reasons behind it. For local authority candidates, the fact that they were restricted to living in a particular geographical area allows the use of electoral roll records to identify to whom they were married. There are limitations in how far we can take this approach at a national level. Unsuccessful candidates are less likely to leave behind the same kind of historical evidence as successful MPs. However, analysis of the married women who were successfully elected is extremely revealing. Twenty-nine women Labour MPs were married at the time of their election. Of these, nine (just under a third) were married to men who would, or already had, served as Members of Parliament.[49] Two more were married to parliamentary candidates and a further seven were married to men who played an identifiable political role as activists, local councillors or party officials.[50] While it has not been possible to determine active political engagement in the Labour movement for the other eleven husbands, this lack of evidence does not preclude their engagement in party politics in undocumented ways. A number were active in fields adjacent to party politics, such as Eirene White's lobby journalist husband John Cameron White, or Shirley Williams' first husband, the philosopher Bernard Williams. Bernard, who, while not a candidate for office, is said to have 'shared her

[49] Anne Kerr (Rochester & Chatham 1964-70) married to Russell Kerr (Feltham and Heston 1966-74); Gwyneth Dunwoody (Exeter 1966-70, Crewe and Nantwich 1974-83) married to John Dunwoody (Falmouth and Camborne 1966-70), Florence Paton (Rushcliffe 1945-50) married to John Paton (Norwich North 1945-64); Jennie Lee (North Lanarkshire 1929-31, Cannock 1945-70) married to Aneurin Bevan (Ebbw Vale 1929-160); Lena Jeger (Holborn & St Pancras 1953-79) married to Santo Jeger (Holborn & St Pancras 1945-53); Cynthia Moseley (Stoke-on-Trent 1929-31) married to Oswald Mosley (Harrow 1918-24, Smethwick 1926-31); Lady Noel Buxton (North Norfolk 30-31, Norwich, 1945-50) married to Noel Buxton (Whitby 1905-6, Norfolk North 1910-30); Jennie Adamson (Dartford 1938-45, Bexley 1945-6) married to William Murdoch Adamson (Cannock 1922-45); Dr Shirley Summerskill (Halifax 1964-83) married to John Ryman (Blyth Valley 1974-87); Agnes Hardie (Glasgow Springburn 1937-45) married to George Hardie (Glasgow Springburn 1922-37).

[50] Judith Hart (Lanark 1959-87) married to Tony Hart (parliamentary candidate in 1959); Joyce Butler (Wood Green 1955-79) married to Vic Butler (parliamentary candidate in 1955).

political interests and enthusiastically supported her in her early political career.'[51] He was a member of the Labour party and, although they had by this point divorced, joined the Social Democratic Party on its foundation in 1981. The professional backgrounds of these possibly non-political spouses varied, but included doctors, teachers, and manual workers.

Intra-party marriage was far less frequent for Conservative parliamentary candidates. During this period, 17 Conservative women MPs were married at the time of their election, with five elected in 1970, the final year covered by this analysis. Out of the 17 married Conservative women MPs, five were married to identifiable party members.[52] For the remaining twelve, it has not been possible to determine active political engagement, although as with Labour this lack of evidence does not preclude it. What is remarkable about the five who were married to other MPs, is that four of them were the beneficiaries of the practice of seat inheritance, the so-called 'halo effect'. This was strongest in the interwar period, where almost a third of women elected to Parliament won a seat previously held by their husband. The strength of this effect waned after the Second World War, accounting for only a handful of by-election victories. The halo effect is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but it is important to note here its dominance amongst Conservative political couples, as opposed to Labour's more sustained political partnerships.

Similar patterns were replicated in local government, where evidence suggests that there were hundreds of married couples standing in local and national elections concurrently. One notable finding is that the halo effect appears to be far less significant in local elections, but more couples stood simultaneously. In the six local boroughs examined in detail, only one clear case of seat inheritance could be identified, that of Labour's Eliza Anne Shakespeare succeeding unopposed her deceased husband Arthur onto Birmingham City Council in 1927. Arthur Shakespeare had been a popular figure in the Birmingham Labour movement and was the district secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen.[53] Eliza Shakespeare had been a very active member of the Birmingham Labour party with her husband, and a large contingent of women from the East Birmingham Labour party attended

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[51] A. W Moore, 'Sir Bernard Arthur Owen Williams, (1929–2003)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan. 2007; online edn, (https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-90066, last accessed 13 April 2023).

[52] The Countess of Iveagh, the Duchess of Atholl, Lady Nancy Astor, Mabel Phillipson and Viscountess Davidson. These candidacies are discussed in depth in chapter two.

[53] 'Late Mr Shakespeare. Funeral of Birmingham Councillor', *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 15 October 1927, p.6.

Arthur's funeral.[54] She died only a few years after her husband. Her obituary commended her for her 'unostentatious service' and reported that she commanded very high respect in the ranks of the local Labour party, working in the interests of children's welfare, housing and maternity.[55]

There are several possible explanations for the lack of halo effect in local government. Name recognition of the candidate may have been a less salient factor in local elections. Many national instances of the halo effect were the result of a male MP's elevation to the House of Lords and disqualification from the Commons, a factor not at play in municipal politics. In a number of instances of seat inheritance in the period, a desire to 'keep the seat in the family' can also be identified, a concept that may have had less resonance for electoral wards within councils than parliamentary seats which may have had sentimental attractions for MPs.

As the table below shows, across some of the boroughs examined in detail for this thesis, between ten and twenty percent of the female candidates were married to a man who also stood for election in the same borough, whether in the same year or in a different election cycle. The percentages were highest in boroughs with the greatest Labour party support. In Bermondsey, seventeen percent of the female candidates were married to another male candidate and, in Poplar, the percentage was even higher, with twenty percent of female candidates married to an identifiable male candidate. The percentages were lower in boroughs with stronger levels of Conservative support, eleven percent in St Pancras and ten percent in Hampstead. Full details of the names of these married couples can be found in the appendix.[56]

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[54] ibid.

[55] 'Council's loss. Tributes to late Alderman Sir D Brooks and Mrs. Shakespeare', *Birmingham Daily Gazette,* 1 May 1930, p.7.

[56] Although the case studies of St Pancras and Birmingham discussed earlier cover the period from 1918-1962, the information on marriage couples both standing in local elections is only looks at 1918-1939 in the London Boroughs. This is because the digitised electoral rolls from the London Metropolitan Archives gave sufficient depth to facilitate this time consuming process.

Borough	Percentage of female candidates married to a male candidate
Bermondsey	17%
Hampstead	10%
Kensington	20%
Poplar	20%
St Pancras	11%

The previously identified cross-party difference in the numbers of married couples politically active together is borne out here too. The figures above correlate closely with the dominant party: high rates of co-participation are evident in Labour strongholds such as Poplar and Bermondsey and lower rates in more Conservative-leaning areas like Hampstead and St Pancras. The outlier, Kensington, still supports this trend. In this borough, polarised between Labour-friendly North Kensington and the Conservative South Kensington, every couple standing together except for one (Arthur and Mary Kathleen Burton who stood for the Municipal Reform party) were Labour party candidates. The Labour party in Kensington throughout this period appears to have struggled to source candidates for election, evidenced by the fact that some candidates stood simultaneously in a number of wards.[57] Even if the shortage of candidates encouraged such high levels of spousal participation, the fact that wives may have been the first port of call speaks to the importance that marriage had in emergent local parties.

When considering the cohort of female candidates across each borough, there is a correlation between the rate of marriage more widely in the borough and amongst the female candidates. The fact that the marriage rates of candidates follow that of the borough that they sought to represent is important. Rather than standing apart from the voters of the borough, they resembled the make-up of the communities they represented, at least when it came to marital status. MPs representing seats to which they had no prior connection has long been a feature of parliamentary democracy, but the different nature of local government meant that candidates were much more grounded in their local communities. Many of the women who stood for election numerous times over the period rarely changed their

[57] For example wards George Berkoff (a tailor) stood in both St Charles and Pembridge in 1928, 'Borough Council elections', *The Kensington News and West London Times*, 26 October 1928, p.5.

address.[58] The women who were stalwarts of local government were usually embedded and rooted in the communities that they represented. This local picture emphasises that these women's political activism should, at least in part, be understood in the context of their communities, and within that their marriages and personal lives.

There is a strong tendency amongst the married couples identified for the husband to stand for election first, with no examples found here of a wife preceding her husband, although many began standing in the same year. Political couples who stood for election together are likely to be just the tip of the iceberg. The evidence examined only allows us to see those political activists who took the step of seeking elected office. It does not identify those whose spouses may have been active within the party in some other capacity. It seems highly likely that many more spouses were politically active with their partner without standing for election with them.

It is also significant that there has only been one example found in this research of married couples standing for rival parties. Undoubtedly, political affiliations did differ between spouses in many instances, but amongst those couples who stood for election at the same time, there was next to no divergence.[59] Again looking at Kensington, Alice Jarrett and her husband William Joseph Jarett both began standing for election at the same time in 1919 for the Labour party. In 1925, they split from the Labour party, and they both stood – together - for the 'People's Party'.[60] Whilst it is not clear why they both left the Labour party at the same time, the fact that they went together seems significant. While conducting wider research on this topic, the only couple encountered as standing for opposing parties were Dame Mabel Tylecoat and Frank Edward Tylecoat on Manchester City Council. Mabel and Frank were married in 1932 and this was Frank's second marriage after being widowed. Frank was a Manchester City Councillor for the Conservative party and professor of

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[58] See for example, Ada Crosby, who lived at 19 Gordon Square for 50 years with her retired doctor father and bachelor brother, who was also a doctor. Ada never married, and was listed on the census as having no occupation, but she assisted her Father as Lady Mayoress in 1911/12 and was awarded MBE for her charity work. 1911, *Census Returns of England and Wales*, (The National Archives of the UK (TNA), class: RG14), http://www.ancestry.com.

[59] Contemporary political scientists have examined and identified so-called 'couples convergence' where political attitudes between spouses become closer over time. See Laura Stoker and M. Kent Jennings, 'Life-cycle transitions and political participation: the case of marriage', *The American Political Science Review,* vol.89, no.2 (1995), pp.421-33.

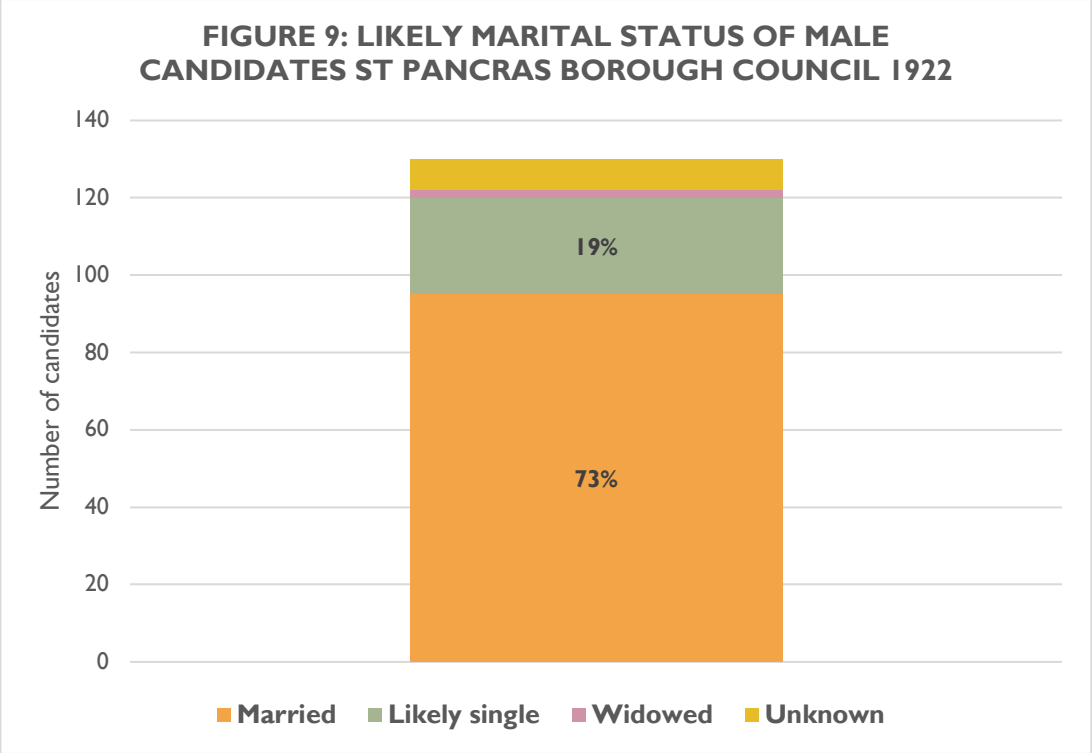
[60] 'Kensington chimes and the changes they ring', *The Kensington News and West London Times*, 6 November 1925, p.5. It is not clear why the Jarretts did not stand for the Labour party in 1925. William Jarrett had previously been the candidate for the Kensington North seat in the general election but he did not win the nomination in 1924. This perhaps could have contributed to the split.

medicine at Manchester University.[61] He was 18 years Mabel's senior and they knew each other through the university where Mabel also worked as an Assistant Lecturer in the humanities. She had been political from a young age, leaving the Liberal party for Labour in 1914 while just 18 years old. Mabel was elected to the Manchester City Council as well in 1940-51 for the Labour party. Frank served on the council as a Conservative, but his wife stressed when interviewed later in her life that he was really not really a Tory but 'needed to save his seat, and had the most un-Thatcherite passion for improving the City's public services'.[62] Although they stood for rival parties, Mabel still seems keen to suggest accord within their political views.

Focussing on the candidates who were married to each other also presents an opportunity to understand something of the role of marriage in politics for men. While the first two sections of this chapter were able to closely track the marriage rate for female candidates, such a broad analysis is methodologically problematic for male candidates. In the first instance, as they made up the overwhelming majority of candidates their number is so high as to render unviable the careful triangulation of sources which has been conducted for female candidates. Secondly, and more problematically still, men are referred to in the sources as 'Mr' or by their initial, regardless of their marital status.

[61] A. B Robertson, Dame Mabel Tylecote [née Phythian] (1896–1987), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan. 2007, online edn, (http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-59254, last accessed at 22 April 2019)

[62] Colin Harding, *Mabel Tylecoat: Champion of Adult Education* (Educational Centres Association, 2007), p.8.



However, to gain an idea of some of the likely trends, a closer examination of the election of 1922 in the borough of St Pancras can be made. This particular election has been chosen as it was possible to obtain the full address of every candidate nominated for the municipal elections and, by cross referencing this data with census records, it was possible to establish the marital status of both male and female candidates.[63] This was not possible to do with the records for parliamentary elections because the addresses of the candidates were not published publicly as they have been for this year in St Pancras.

The numbers of women candidates in St Pancras in 1922 alone are too small to make a meaningful direct comparison with the male marriage rate in that year, but the percentage of men who were married is higher than the overall average for women candidates in St Pancras. 73% of male candidates were married compared to the overall average of 66% for women across the entire period in St Pancras. For those who were not married to an identifiable candidate, we cannot, however, rule out political engagement in a manner that has left no historical record. Through tracing the political experiences of married couples

[63] If women were unmarried and not a householder, their qualification to vote was listed as 'H.O' - 'Qualification through husband's occupation'. If a man and woman live together with the same surname and the woman is qualified to vote through the husband's occupation, they are highly likely to be married. However, in order to ensure that they were not siblings, children or happened to share to a surname, this information had been cross referenced with the 1911 census or marriage records. With this, a reasonably accurate analysis of the number of men who were married can be made.

throughout this period, further chapters of this thesis will tease out the significance of marriage to men in political couples.

As the addresses of the candidates can be traced, the living situations of unmarried men who stood for election can be uncovered. These broke down into two categories: those who lived in what was presumably rented accommodation with other tenants, and those who still resided in their family homes, often with elderly parents. Harold Harcourt Hughes, who stood for the Labour party in Ward No.7, lived with his parents and brother in the same home; he was in his 30s and his profession was listed as a Company Clerk.[64] Similarly, George Arthur Caunt was a Company Secretary in his 30s and lived with his widowed mother in 1922.[65] Chapter five will examine in more detail the alternative intimacies of unmarried men, and some of the quasi-marital relationships that took on some of the functions and benefits of marriage.

The other clear trend identified by this deeper look into who female candidates were married to is the huge role that family networks played in political life in this period. This is not a surprising finding; extended kinship networks had been a long-standing feature of British political life for centuries. We can see in both national and local elections that it continued in this period within both political parties. In parliamentary elections, Dr Edith Summerskill, one of the early Labour women MPs, was followed into parliament by her daughter Shirley, who later married John Ryman, who would go on to be elected in 1974. From the Conservatives, Gwendolyn Guinness, the Countess of Iveagh, who gained her seat upon her husband's elevation to the House of Lords, was succeeded in her seat by her son-in-law, the diarist Henry 'Chips' Channon, who will be discussed further in chapter two. Another son-in-law, Alan Lennox-Boyd served contemporaneously with her in the House of Commons. These are just two of the numerous examples of the family connections underpinning many women's involvement in politics. Family networks could allow women access, both economic and political, to participation in electoral life.

Family connections were present too in London's municipal politics between the

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[64] Harold Harcourt Hughes was listed on the 1911 Company Clerk, his father was a clock maker. He was 25 and single and on the 1922 electoral role, still lives with parents and brother. 'Harold Harcourt Hughes', 1911, *Census Returns of England and Wales*, (The National Archives of the UK (TNA), class: RG14), http://www.ancestry.com; 'Hughes Harold Harcourt', Electoral Roll for North St Pancras, Bartholomew Polling District, Ward 3, p.103, London Metropolitan Archives; London, England, http://www.ancestry.com.
[65] 'Caunt family', 1911, *Census Returns of England and Wales*, (The National Archives of the UK (TNA), class: RG14), http://www.ancestry.com.

wars, with more instances of family members standing together for elections for Conservatives than can be identified for the Labour party. Take, for example, the Glover family in Hampstead. The Glover name was a mainstay of election records in Hampstead throughout the interwar period. Sir John Howard Glover and Septimus Glover started the ship brokering firm of 'Glover Bros', which in 1906 was handed over to their sons.[66] Frederick Beaumont Glover was the first of the Glovers to stand for election in Town ward in 1919, and in 1922 he was joined in his attempts to reach the council by his unmarried daughter, Agatha Mabel Glover. The mantle was then taken up by further members of the Glover family in the 1930s, with brother Lewis Gladstone Glover, and his sister Julia Augusta Glover (unmarried and living with their sister Ida) standing in Central Ward throughout the 1930s. In Kensington, Miss E M Pennefather was a stalwart for the Municipal Reform party in local elections whilst she still lived at home with her father the Alderman for Kensington, the Reverend Pennefather. In Poplar, we find the example of Matthias and Cecilia Aylward who served on the council together in the early 1920s. After Matthias' death, their son, Thomas was elected to the council to join his mother.[67] The importance of family and political participation is discussed in further detail in the examination of unmarried politician's alternative intimacies in chapter five.

This more detailed analysis of 'who' political women were marrying is striking. Particularly amongst the Labour party, politically active women were frequently married to politically active men and the causes and consequences of this phenomenon will be explored throughout this thesis. The deep dive also sheds new light onto the extent to which family and kinship networks played a part in shaping women's early engagement with electoral politics. For many women in this period, political activism was intrinsically tied up with their domestic, family and community lives.

[66] 'The Company Acts, 1862 to 1900', *The London Gazette*, 15 January 1907, p.351.
[67] 'Alyward', 1911, Poplar, *Census Returns of England and Wales*, (The National Archives of the UK (TNA), class: RG14), http://www.ancestry.com;

The benefits and disadvantages of co-participation: case studies

Figure 10: Married couples in Bermondsey (1919 – 1937)	
Susan Amos	1925, 1928, 1931, 1934, 1937 (Lab.)
Andrew Amos	Party member, never stood
Lilian Franklin	1931 (Lab.)
George Franklin	1928 (Lab.)
Lilian Alice Glasson	1934, 1937 (Lab.)
Edward James Glasson	1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Emily Gledhill	1919 (Lab.)
Joe Gledhill	1922 (Lab.)
Ellen Eliza Hardy	1934 (M.R.)
Harold W. Hardy	1931 (E.A.)
Jessie Mallandain	1928 (E.A.)
William Mallandain	1919 (Prog.), 1922 (E.A.)
Dorothy Merrells	1931 (Comm.)
Harold Merrells	1931, 1934 (Comm.)
Alice Maud Nicklin	1925, 1934 (M.R.)
Ernest Nicklin	1934 (M.R.)
Kate Payne	1925, 1928 (E.A.)
Philip Payne	1922, 1925 (E.A.)
Helen Pullar	1937 (Con.)
Victor Pullar	1937 (Con.)
Edith Rouse	1931 (E.A.)
Robert Rouse	1931 (E.A.), 1934 (M.R.), 1937 (Con.)
Maud Shearring	1928 (E.A)
William Shearring	1919 (Ind.), 1922 (P.R.), 1925, 1928, 1931, 1934 (E.A.)
Elizabeth Annie Stokes	1925, 1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Isaiah Stokes	1922, 1925, 1928 (Lab.)
Annie Elizabeth Wilmott	1934 (M.R.)
Joseph Wilmott	1931 (E.A.), 1934 (M.R.)
Abbreviations: Comm – Communist; Con – Conservative; E.A. – Electorsl Alliance; Ind. – Independent; Lab. – Labour; M.R. – Municipal Reform; Prog. / P.R. – Progressive	
Percentage of female candidates married to another candidate or councillor: 17%	

The table above shows all the married couples who were both candidates in municipal elections between 1919-1939 in Bermondsey. Bermondsey has been used here as a case study for the final section of this chapter, but the details for couples in other London boroughs can be found in the appendix. To understand the impact of the high rate of

political co-participation between spouses, this final section examines Bermondsey more closely as it was the London borough with the greatest number of married couples standing for election together. The richer source material in Bermondsey than is left by many councils from this period is useful in building up a picture of local party activism.

Particularly amongst the Labour party, there was a strong tradition and culture of married couples engaging in political activity together. The Independent Labour Party in Bermondsey had originally been formed by four 'founding families'. These were doctors from the same practice, who along with their wives came together to create the local branch of the ILP in Bermondsey.[68] The most prominent amongst these couples were the Salters. Alfred and Ada Salter served as the MP and local councillor (and Mayor in 1922) respectively.[69] Bermondsey Labour had a thriving political culture. The local party published a monthly borough newspaper, had their own football team and even ran a Bermondsey Labour Bakery (which fittingly for this research, specialized in wedding cakes).[70]

Bermondsey Labour party, partly inspired by the political strength and camaraderie of women such as Ada Salter, was particularly encouraging of women to become active in the local party and to stand to be councillors. It frequently had the highest numbers of women councillors in any London borough and had a very strong Women's Section.[71] Social Tea Hours were held at 3pm every Wednesday for a discussion of Labour's ideals and how they affected women and children. Yet this was advertised to men as well as women: 'Trade Unionists are asked to make it possible for their women folk to attend these meetings, for it is only through women coming into close association with each other that they can understand the social and industrial needs of the community.'[72] The idea of the 'Labour family' begins to be revealed; it was assumed that trade unionists should also have a Labour-supporting wife and if they did not, it was necessary that their wives become so by understanding the 'social and industrial needs of the community.'

Yet even the large proportion of married couples found by this data does not do justice to the other unelected couples that could be found in local activism and other forms

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[68] Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey story: the life of Alfred Salter* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), p.28.
[69] This gave rise to the unusual circumstance in Ada Salter, as the Mayor, declared the result of her husband winning the Bermondsey parliamentary seat in 1922.
[70] One advert for the bakery implored 'Why remain single? When you can use getting married as an excuse for buying one of our wedding cakes?'. *Bermondsey Labour Magazine,* May 1937, no.40, p.2.
[71] Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: A study of changing interests politics and policy in Southwark from 1919-*1982 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), pp.21-22.
[72] *Bermondsey Labour Magazine,* November 1920, no.8, p.4.

of public office. Bermondsey Labour party certainly saw this as a central feature of their organisation. They celebrated the culture of couples in the constituency as part of their organisational strength. One article in *Bermondsey Labour Magazine* said: 'A happy feature of the Bermondsey Labour movement is the way in which husbands, wives and whole families are associated together in the Party. Mrs Franklin and her husband are to be seen together at our public meetings, in the Committee Rooms and in canvassing work on the doorstep. The idealism of the movement brings an added inspiration and fellowship to family life.'[73] This was a constituency that prided itself on being a movement that incorporated families rather than just individuals.

This is a function that has usually been seen more strongly in the Conservative party by historians, where the Primrose League had been formed partly as a way of involving women and whole families into party activism. Considering the dominance of the Labour vote on the council, the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Conservative party was surprisingly active. There was a 'flourishing habitation of the Primrose League'[74] and in the 1920s the Women's Branch of the Bermondsey Conservative Association gave frequent concerts, teas, dances and debates.[75] The Conservatives attempted to replicate the mass appeal of the Bermondsey Labour Magazine from the late 1930s by publishing a monthly magazine that focused on general topics as well as 'opposing socialism in all its forms'.[76] Within Bermondsey, both parties deployed events and publications to foster associational cultures that helped promote political activism for women.

The other useful place to see the role of marriage and associational culture slightly later in the time period was within the youth wing of the Conservative party, the Young Conservatives (YCs). The YCs generated so many romances that they were known as a 'marriage bureau'. One of the key issues that vexed the comment and correspondence pages of the Young Conservatives was the balance between social and political activities within the YCs. The 'marriage bureau' and sense of family community was considered by some to be an attractive feature of the YCs, and they did not shy away from it being a selling point in their party literature. They ran an annual summer camp in 1949 at the Yorkshire seaside resort of Filey. In a report on the camp, they noted how four romances that had begun in Filey the

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[73] 'Bermondsey's Candidates for the Board of Guardians Election', *Bermondsey Labour Magazine*, March 1924, no.17, p.6.
[74] Press cuttings from the *Southwark Recorder*, 30/3/1889, P.C 329 CON, Southwark Local History Library and Archive (hereafter SLHL),
[75] Press cuttings from the *Southwark Recorder*, 1/3/1929, P.C 329 CON, SLHL.
[76] Press cuttings from *The Bermondsey and Rotherhithe News*, 329.CON Ber, SLHL.

year before were warmly congratulated on their subsequent engagements.[77] YCs with young children were encouraged to still attend these summer camps; the organisers provided trained nurses who would watch the children and a listening service in the evenings. Victoria Ewens at 11 months old was reported to be the 'youngest Conservative present'.[78]

However, for others this influence stopped the YCs from being sufficiently political and successful. The publication of the McLeod report in 1965 was the culmination of these tensions that had been present for decades. This report looked into the reasons for the declining memberships numbers of the YCs and was a key moment for the movement to turn towards being more 'political' rather than social.[79] In 1968, the Young Conservative magazine *Impact* interviewed John Selwyn Gummer, the MP for Suffolk Coastal and Vice-Chair of the Conservative party with responsibility for the Young Conservatives. Gummer was a former chair of the YCs himself, and the interviewer asked him if he agreed with 'the impression which is sometimes put across by other elements in the Party, sometimes on Television and in newspapers that the Young Conservative are a ballyhoo social group hell bent upon enjoying themselves at parties, and a sort of marriage bureau?'[80] He gave a non-committal answer on the social group question, but when pressed on the 'marriage bureau charge', he said:

> Oh, on the marriage bureau, so far as that is concerned I regard it as a great compliment. The fact that the YCs have so many attractive people that they want to marry one another says a great deal for a quality of the membership of the YCs.[81]

But while some YCs were happy for the 'marriage bureau' to be a part of the movement, there were other problems with this culture of intermarriage. 'The problem of young marrieds' was one that appeared frequently in Young Conservative literature from the 1950s. The problem was that there were couples in their twenties who had been very active within the party and met their future spouse through the YCs, but increasing family demands meant that branches were losing not one, but two, activists to these other duties. The

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[77] *Advance,* Vol. 2, No. 8, August 1950, pp.10-11, PUB 114/1-3, Conservative Party Archive (hereafter CPA), Oxford, Bodleian Libraries.
[78] ibid.
[79] See Lawrence Black, 'The Lost World of Young Conservatism'.
[80] *Impact*, Winter/Spring 1968-69, p.9, PUB 201, CPA.
[81] ibid.

magazine *Impact* in 1966 had a feature in which they told the story of Keith and his 'attractive wife' Angela, a young couple from near Newcastle.[82] Keith had joined the YCs when he was 17 purely as a social interest but 'never looked back' after attending a weekend conference. Angela originally went to a YC meeting to 'oblige a friend' but she met Keith and they both went on to hold a number of positions on their YC and local association executive.[83] They married in 1963 and had a 16-month old called Stuart. Since marriage, they have found it difficult to maintain their same levels of involvement in the Conservative party, the feature described that:

> Keith frequently makes the 18 mile journey to Newcastle to attend meetings but Angela is not able to go with him so much because of the baby. At the moment, he is out on party work on an average of two nights a week as against perhaps every night before he was married…. to him, having a wife who is understanding and sympathetic to then Party cause is extremely important. Otherwise he would not be able to spend the time that he does spend on this work.[84]

The proposal that Keith, Angela and members of their local executive had come up with was to for the YCs to organise more events for 'young marrieds'. Taking the form of wine and cheese, or coffee evenings, these would allow married couples to socialise and discuss politics with others in similar circumstances, instead of with younger members that they may feel that they had less in common with. The personal and correspondence columns of the YC journals had requests for other newlyweds to come to a 'young married' night.[85] But these ideas were also dependent on married couples having childcare to be able to attend these events. One post in the personal column pleaded:

> Minders Wanted! Mrs B: 'My husband and I are both enthusiastic Young Conservatives, but since we have two babies and no one to mind them if we go out, it is seldom that we can jointly take party in the activities of the Branch. My husband is anxious and eligible to transfer to the Senior movement but has held back on my account. There must be many young couples placed as we are. Wouldn't it be a good

[82] *Impact*, Winter/Spring 1956, p.7, PUB 201, CPA.
[83] ibid.
[84] ibid.
[85] *Rightway*, Autumn 1958, p.3, PUB 144/4, CPA.

idea if Young Conservatives formed a panel of 'baby-minders' and so gave others a chance to share in the work?[86]

Both of these couples recognised the importance to them of carrying out their political interests together. The husband's political interest is prioritised over his wives in both examples, but these couples do seem to have a desire to continue to participate together as much as they could. One YC branch felt that they had found a solution to this problem. The Colchester Young Conservative Chairman, Mr John Douglas, felt that he knew how to fix this 'national problem' of enticing YC couples back into active political life. The Colchester branch was very large and, alongside their political activity they had three hockey teams, two table tennis, netball, a football, and a bridge team. The downside of this engaged membership was that many of the members were being lost to the curse of the 'young marrieds'. The Chairman reported that at a meeting recently, 'three members tried to tot-up how many Colchester Y.C marriages there have been in recent years - and lost count. Recently two more members… announced their engagement.'[87] The solution that this branch came up with was to pair up senior women members of the local Conservative Association, who had reared their own children, and YCs with children to run a free babysitting service. It is not clear if this plan ever came to fruition, but the Colchester YCs were looking to purchase a property that would give them the necessary space to run a creche.

These examples suggest similar dynamics to the Labour party cultures seen in Bermdonsey, where there was an intergenerational and communitarian perspective on party activism. Whilst the analysis of election results was helpful in giving an indication of the prevalence of married couples, these examples allow us to see how local parties, for both Labour and Conservative, actively encouraged husbands and wives joint political activity. The case studies from the Young Conservatives also indicate some of the challenges of sustaining political activism across a lifetime, which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters.

There can often be a tendency when speaking about post-suffrage political activists to emphasise women's exceptional qualities and focus on the idea that there were 'unusual'

[86] *Advance,* January-March 1947, PUB 201, CPA.
[87] *Rightway*, Autumn 1958, p.3, PUB 144/4, CPA.

women whose personal qualities allowed them to succeed. For some, such as Margaret Bondfield or Ellen Wilkinson, this was undoubtedly true. However, this misses an important point about how becoming an elected representative happens. Political interest, understanding and opportunity for women and men was deeply embedded in local party cultures and personal and familial relationships. This research demonstrates that it is important to look beyond the formal structures of committees and minute books, and see more clearly the connections forged through family, friends, and love.

There are three points overall to conclude from this analysis. Firstly, most women who stood for elections were married at both national and local level. Secondly, Labour candidates had much higher rates of marriage. Spinsters were more representative of the Conservative party than the Labour party. Lastly, not only were Labour party candidates more likely to be married, successful candidates were far more likely to be married to a man who was also involved in politics.

These findings may shed new light on a long-standing question within the historiography of women and political activism: why was the number of women MPs so slow to rise in the twentieth century after the acquisition of the franchise.[88] The strong presence of marital and familial links amongst those standing for office suggests a number of plausible answers. Women may have needed strong support networks provided by spouses, family, friends or neighbours to access and flourish in these environments, or else have independent means that would diminish this need. Both possibilities would be limiting factors on the growth of women's representation. The impact of spousal support on women's electoral prospects is most obviously seen in the practice of seat inheritance in the early part of the twentieth century. The next chapter will consider this practice, its rise and decline, and the implications for wider cultures in political parties.

[88] See Sarah Childs, *Women and British party politics : descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation,* (London: Routledge, 2008).

Chapter two

Spouses and seat inheritors: the halo effect reconsidered

In the first parliamentary election where women could stand in 1918, Constance Markiewicz seemed like exactly the kind of woman to claim the title of first female Member of Parliament. She had campaigned extensively for women's suffrage since the late-nineteenth century before switching her leading political concerns to Irish nationalism and socialism.[1] However, she did not accept her parliamentary seat, in line with the abstentionist policy of her party Sinn Féin. So instead, the title of first female MP fell to Nancy Astor in 1919, in the Plymouth South by-election she won after her husband stepped down.

This was not the empowering statement for the future of political women that some hoped that the first female MP would be. Many suffragists such as Christabel Pankhurst and Ray Strachey had stood unsuccessfully for Parliament in 1918 and they 'had doubtless assumed that the first woman MP would very likely be one of themselves'.[2] Constance Markievicz referred to Lady Astor as 'out of touch completely with the problems and difficulties of the average women. She is a carpetbagger.'[3] Indeed, what caused consternation for many feminists (and suffragists) was that whilst Astor had the accolade of being the first female MP, she had not been active in the fight to gain women's entry into parliament. As Karen Musolf says about the feelings of women involved in the suffrage movement on the election of Nancy Astor: 'while they had been meeting and marching, smashing and starving, she had been home at Cliveden tending to her babies and other duties.'[4] Furthermore, in the eyes of many, Astor was able to make her way to Parliament only through the patronage of her husband.

This chapter considers further these tensions, and considers the phenomenon mentioned in the previous two chapters of the halo effect. This chapter uses the presence, and undeniable success, of the halo effect or 'seat inheritance' between husbands and wives as an entry-point for exploring the wider gendered cultures of British politics in the decades

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[1] S. Pašeta, 'Constance Georgine Markievicz [née Gore-Booth] (1868–1927)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford Univerisity Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37472 last accessed 16 Apr. 2023.)
[2] Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House: A Study of Women Members of Parliament*, (London: Athlone, 1979), p.25.
[3] Quoted in Karen J Musolf, *From Plymouth to Parliament : a rhetorical history of Nancy Astor's 1919 campaign* (Basingstoke, 1999), p.10.
[4] Musolf, *Plymouth to Parliament,* p.10.

following women's enfranchisement. It complicates the idea that the halo effect was simply about legitimisation for female candidates through their husbands. Instead, it asserts that the success of halo effect candidates shows the enduring role that marriage, family and relationships played in political cultures, and argues that their importance did not diminish with the arrival of mass democracy and women's suffrage. This chapter suggests that, through the halo effect, we can better understand the early attempts by the major political parties to, as Pedersen puts it, 'accommodate gender in public life'.[5] In these initial tentative forays, parties drew upon the methods that had served political cultures for centuries, namely, familial, and social networks. Women's status as wives provided excellent political training and access to political networks, supplying an identity that allayed some of tensions surrounding women in public political life and - in many cases - a supportive and committed political partner to help them in their careers.

This challenges some suggestions within the historiography, discussed below, of the halo effect as indicative of women's failure to break onto the political stage post-suffrage. The presence and success of the halo effect is not simply representative of unfair nepotism. Wives often were able to overcome many of the barriers that other women faced in reaching the Houses of Parliament. Yet by dismissing these women MPs as halo effect candidates, we ignore an important, enduring feature of British political culture and remove much of the agency and ability that should be credited to some female politicians of this era.

The first half of this chapter catalogues the instances of the halo effect, bringing together all the instances of spouses standing in seats previously held by a husband or wife. In doing so it analyses the differing circumstances by which it occurred. It also expands the analysis beyond previous work by looking at what happened to 'seat inheritance' after 1945 and provides some possible explanations as to why its ubiquity and effectiveness disappeared later in the twentieth century. The second half of the chapter addresses the question of why it was such a successful method through which women entered Parliament. It suggests that the success of halo effect candidates was down largely to the way in which it allowed candidates to negotiate tensions around women in public life. There was a broader reinvention of the political wife in the age of suffrage and part of this reinvention was their new electoral roles. The second reason proposed for the success of the halo effect candidates was the training – informal and formal - and networks that women could access because of

[5] Susan Pedersen, 'Ben Pimlott Memorial Lecture 2018 The Women's Suffrage Movement in the Balfour Family', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2019), p.300.

their marital relationships. Finally, the chapter argues that halo effect candidates had the support of an experienced political partner, and this chapter considers the role of men and 'political husbands' in helping women initiate and maintain political activity.

The halo effect reconsidered

The obstacles for women seeking election to Parliament in this period were considerable. Krista Cowman suggests that getting selected in a winnable constituency was difficult for women across all the political parties and was the greatest factor in explaining the low number of female MPs in this period.[6] Pugh and others have rightly acknowledged the important role that familial connections played and that 'personal circumstances appear to have been more central in structural ones in their route to parliament'.[7]

Although the Labour party in theory had a better commitment to sex equality, female candidates were often selected for unwinnable seats that the party had never previously held. They also faced masculine trade union cultures that made it difficult for women to be placed in coveted seats. The unmarried Labour MP Jean Mann speaks in her autobiography of the difficulties that women faced in getting selected for winnable parliamentary constituencies. She recalls fighting seven 'hopeless seats' before being in the running for a safe seat, citing the problem that the 'Labour men, particularly in the unions, meet together often. Friendships are made, sometimes around the bar; introduction to those who have influence in the safe seats follow… [the] difficulty is to get into the inner circle of influential members in a safe constituency'.[8] Cathy Hunt argues that this difficulty was even greater for single women within the party. Looking at the career of local councillor Alice Arnold, Hunt shows that as an unmarried woman she could not access the informal, social networks which revolved around gatherings in pubs and clubs after ward meetings that married women could attend with their husbands.[9]

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[6] Krista Cowman, *Women in British politics, c.1689-1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.122.
[7] Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999. 2nd ed* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p.164.
[8] Jean Mann, *Woman in Parliament* (London: Odhams Press, 1962), pp.44-45.
[9] Cathy Hunt, "Everyone's Poor Relation': the poverty and isolation of a working-class woman local politician in interwar Britain", *Women's History Review*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2007), p.425.

There was even greater ambivalence towards selecting women candidates in the Conservative party. Despite pressure from Nancy Astor (the first woman to take up a seat in Parliament in 1919) and the hierarchy of the party, there was great prejudice against woman candidates in the constituencies and many local selection committees refused to consider them.[10] The cost of standing in elections was another inhibitor, particularly in the Conservative party where prospective MPs were expected to finance their own campaigns.[11] As women already embedded in political worlds as wives, halo effect candidates were able to overcome many of these barriers more easily.

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, historians seeking to locate women's political agency for women in the pre-suffrage era have often looked to the work of women within their wider families' political activities. We should not discard this framework of analysis, labelling familial influence as regressive, from the moment that women were able to stand as MPs themselves. As Amanda Vickery argues: 'the feminist heroic mode has accustomed us to see female activists as unique, defiant outsiders rebelling against their crushing families, but … many of them were nurtured in comparatively congenial familial and social networks'.[12] Jean Mann was sympathetic to the women who had entered Parliament in seats left vacant by their husbands. 'Knowing these MPs,' she wrote, 'and having worked with them, I cannot agree that they did not have a place in the House on their own right'.[13] To restore women's political activism into social and familial contexts, post-suffrage, is to reveal what difference the vote really did make.[14]

Closer inspection of the adopters of seat inheritance, however, helps us to move beyond monolithic considerations of this group of candidates. Table 1 provides an analysis of the candidacies, both male and female, where a spouse had previously contested the seat up to 1970.[15] Nancy Astor was not the first candidate to stand in her husband's stead. In the 1918 election the first woman to stand as a Conservative candidate, Alice Lucas, was selected after her husband died suddenly – mid-campaign – in the Spanish influenza pandemic. She

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[10] Joni Lovenduski, Pippa Norris and Catriona Burness, 'The party and women', in Anthony Seldon ed., *Conservative century: the Conservative party since* 1900 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.627.
[11] ibid.
[12] Amanda Vickery ed., *Women, privilege, and power: British Politics, 1750 to the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.52.
[13] Jean Mann, *Woman in Parliament*, pp.44-45.
[14] On this question see Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane eds., *Women and citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the twentieth century: what difference did the vote make? (*London: Continuum, 2010).
[15] Election results in this table have been compiled from F.S Craig eds., *British parliamentary election statistics, 1918-1968* (Glasgow: Political Reference Publications, 1968).

polled much more strongly than her husband was expected to and came a mere 832 votes away from being elected.[16]

[16] Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An account of women in the British Parliament 1918-1966* (London: 1967), p.14.

FIGURE 11: CANDIDATES STANDING IN A SEAT PREVIOUSLY CONTESTED BY A SPOUSE (1918-1970)

Name	Year	Party	Outcome	Constituency	Circumstance	Turnout %	Results	%
Alice Lucas	1918	Conservative	Unsuccessful	Lambeth, Kennington	Widowed	29.7	Co L **Con** Lab	42.4 **32.2** 25.4
Nancy Astor	1919 (15/11)	Conservative	Successful	Plymouth Sutton	Elevation	72.5	**Co C** Lab L	**51.9** 33.3 14.8
Margaret Wintringham	1921 (22/9)	Liberal	Successful	Louth	Widowed	72.1	**L** C Lab	**42.2** 38.3 19.5
Mary Emmott	1922	Liberal	Unsuccessful	Oldham	Elevation	78.8	NL Lab C L **L**	28 27.7 26.2 11.1 **7**
Katharine Stewart Murray	1923	Conservative	Successful	Kinross and West Perthshire	Elevation	72.6	**C** L	**50.4** 49.6
Mabel Philipson	1923 (31/5)	Conservative (husband Liberal)	Successful	Berwick-Upon-Tweed	Husband barred from standing	74.9	**C** L Lab	**55** 26.8 18.2
Gwendoline Guinness	1927 (19/11)	Conservative	Successful	Southend-on-Sea	Elevation	73.2	**C** L Lab Ind C	**54.6** 30.7 12.3 2.4
Walter Runciman	1929	Liberal	Successful	St Ives	Political Tactics	76.5	**L (NL)** C Lab	**42.6** 39.4 18
Hugh Dalton	1929	Labour	Successful	Bishop Auckland	Political Tactics	76.5	**Lab** L C	**55.8** 30.1 14.1
Lucy Noel-Buxton	1930 (9/7)	Labour	Successful	North Norfolk	Elevation	75	**Lab** C	**50.3** 49.7
Oswald Mosley	1931	New Party	Unsuccessful	Stoke	Political Tactics	75.9	C Lab **NP**	45.6 30.3 **24.1**
Joan Davidson	1937 (22/6)	Conservative	Successful	Hemel Hempstead	Elevation	55	**C** L Lab	**57.7** 28.3 14
Agnes Hardie	1937	Labour	Successful	Glasgow Springburn	Widowed	50.9	**Lab** C	**62.6** 37.4
Juliet Rhys-Williams	1938 (11/2)	Liberal	Unsuccessful	Pontypridd	Political Tactics	78.3	Lab **NL**	59.9 **40.1**
Beatrice Rathbone	1941 (11/3)	Conservative	Successful	Bodmin	Widowed	n/a	**C**	**Unopposed**
Violet Bathurst (Lady Apsley)	1943	Conservative	Successful	Bristol Central	Widowed	32.9	**C** Ind Lab ILP Ind	**52.1** 38.2 7.3 2.3
Kitty Wintringham	1945	Common Wealth	Unsuccessful	Midlothian and Peebleshire	Political Tactics	70	C Lab **CW**	47.9 45.7 **6.4**
Lena Jeger	1953 (19/11)	Labour	Successful	Holborn and St Pancras South	Widowed	67.8	**Lab** Con Lib	**52.11** 45.59 2.29
Muriel Gammans	1957 (30/5)	Conservative	Successful	Hornsey	Widowed	50.1	**C** Lab	**53.46** 46.54

The analysis here has characterised the circumstances of the seat inheritance into three main categories. Two of these categories more straightforwardly fit the soubriquet inheritance. The most common circumstance was a woman standing in her husband's constituency after his death in office. This was a highly successful route to election for women. Every woman who stood in the by-election called because of her husband's death won. The second most common was the route taken by Nancy Astor, the first successful beneficiary, where women succeeded their husbands when they were elevated to the House of Lords. After the death of a family member who held a hereditary title, men would have to, often begrudgingly, relinquish their seats in the Commons and their wives stood in the subsequent by-elections. This method had a near total rate of success within this period. Only one woman who stood in a seat after her husband had been elevated to the Lords did not win her election. Mary Emmott failed to win the Oldham seat in 1922, but her husband Alfred had been raised to the peerage in 1911, so her candidacy was not a directly successive attempt.[17]

The third method has been characterised in the table as 'political tactics'. While wives succeeded husbands in all instances of the two categories mentioned above, there were three instances of men standing in seats previously held by their wives. Walter Runciman (Liberal) and Hugh Dalton (Labour) employed what was known at the time and in the historiography as the 'warming pan' strategy.[18] Both were already MPs but wished to change from their marginal seats to more secure ones. In these cases, their wives stood in these more desirable by-election seats to stop another candidate from taking it. The women then resigned at the 1929 general election, allowing their husbands to take over. These circumstances meant that the Runcimans and Daltons were the first married couples to sit concurrently in the House, albeit temporarily. Both couples were frank with the electorate about this scheme. The Runcimans saw this as a boon for the constituency and suggested that the voters were flattered by the suggestions that electing Hilda meant they would gain two Liberal members representing them in Parliament rather than one.[19] Speaking at a lunch after the by-election, Hilda said that she had not won the election because she was a woman:

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[17] Ruth Davidson, '(Mary) Gertrude, Emmott [née Lees] (1866–1954), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 8 Aug. 2019; online edn, (https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-369107. accessed 14 Apr. 2023).

[18] For use of the term 'warming pan' see Brooks, *Women at Westminster,* p.65.

[19] 'Mrs. Runciman On St. Ives Election', *The Times*, 22 March 1928, p. 21.

> I am afraid I was only a wife, which is not quite the same thing. It was not so much on my merits that I was invited to contest the seat but because they thought any wife could be relied on to vacate the seat for her husband when the time came.[20]

The Daltons applied a similar logic to their representation of Bishop Auckland for the Labour party. The sitting MP for Bishop Auckland, Ben Spoor, died before the planned retirement of his seat at the next general election. He had been due to be replaced by Hugh Dalton as the candidate for Bishop Auckland, moving from his marginal Peckham seat. In order to keep the seat 'in the family' Ruth Dalton was nominated in the ensuing by-election of February 1929. Though she did not attend the selection meeting, she was unanimously selected to be the by-election candidate. She had two main credentials in her favour: she was a well-respected LCC councillor and, most importantly for the constituency, who wanted Hugh Dalton as their MP, could be relied to stand down as soon as Parliament was dissolved. The idea of Ruth as a 'warming pan' was widely acknowledged, as Hugh said in his diaries: 'They say they don't want any other warming-pan … they want to get people into the habit of voting Dalton'.[21] To this purpose, Ruth stood on the ballot paper under the name Mrs Hugh Dalton.[22] However, like Hilda Runciman, Ruth did not covet a parliamentary career for herself. As she said when asked by Ramsay MacDonald to consider continuing her political career, she told him that she had never wished to become an MP and preferred her work on the LCC: 'There we do things. Here it all seems to be talk'.[23]

The other man to stand in a seat that had previously been contested by his wife was Oswald Mosley. In 1931, he stood in Stoke-on-Trent for his fledgling New Party. Stoke-on-Trent had previously been held for Labour since 1929 by his wife Cynthia Mosley. Although her constituency party wanted her to continue, Cynthia did not fight for reelection due to health considerations and political disillusionment.[24] Cynthia's connections in Stoke did not pull Oswald through and he finished in last place. Significantly, Mosley was fighting for a different party, suggesting seat inheritance was not as powerful across party lines. There were

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[20] ibid.
[21] Ben Pimlott ed., *The political diary of Hugh Dalton, 1918–40, 1945–60* (London: Cape, 1986), p.173.
[22] 'Bishop Auckland Contest' *The Times*, 23 January 1929, p. 9.
[23] Hugh Dalton, *Call back yesterday. Memoirs, 1887-1931* (London: Frederick Muller, 1953), p.210.
[24] Duncan Sutherland, 'Lady Cynthia Blanche Mosley [née Curzon], (1898–1933)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004;
(https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50053 last accessed 14 Apr. 2023.)

others who used the halo effect as a form of political tactics. Along with the 'warming-pan' candidates and Oswald Mosley, two women – Juliet Rhys-Williams and Kitty Wintringham – stood in seats that had been previously contested by their husbands in the pursuit of some political advantage. Both sought to capitalise on the name recognition of their husbands and family and will be discussed further in this chapter. However, none of the above were successful, suggesting that the use of seat inheritance for tactical reasons was less successful than instances driven by elevation or widowhood.

Beverley Stobaugh has suggested that there were cross-party differences in levels of enthusiasm about adopting the halo effect, and that the Conservative party were the most enthusiastic proponents of seat inheritance.[25] It is true that not until the 1931 general election did the Tories return a female MP who had not won in a seat that her husband had previously held. Yet it is wrong to understand this as simply a tactic from a socially conservative party negotiating the role that women should play in parliamentary politics. Of the full number of halo effect candidates, three were Labour, four Liberal, nine Conservative and one Independent. Stobaugh rightly identified that the Conservative party were the largest adopters of seat inheritance, but it was not solely a Conservative party tactic.

Another unifying factor within this cohort of candidates was class. All could be considered upper-middle or upper-class, except for Agnes Hardie, who was drawn into the Labour movement as an organiser for the National Union of Shop Assistants.[26] This does offer a contrast to Labour women such as Margaret Bondfield and Ellen Wilkinson, who, like Hardie, found their way into politics through the trade union movement. In this respect, the halo effect was a feature of the continuation of class privileges that served political dynastic ambitions for men and women, yet it should not prevent us from seeing political agency in the lives of the women who benefitted from it.

The peak of the halo effect was before 1939. During the Second World War, two women, Lady Apsley and Beatrice Rathbone, won uncontested by-election seats after their MP husbands were killed in action. Yet by 1945, when the largest number of female candidates yet stood and won seats, the halo effect had all but disappeared. Only the candidacy of Kitty Wintringham could tentatively be classed as an attempt to capitalise on a seat previously contested by a spouse, as will be discussed later. From 1945 until 1970, only

[25] Beverley Stobaugh, *Women and Parliament 1918–1970* (New York: Exposition Press, 1978), p.54.
[26] W. W. J. Knox, 'Agnes Agnew Hardie, (1874–1951)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/75530, accessed 14 Aug 2017).

two women stood in seats previously held by their partners – in both instances standing in by-elections when they had been unexpectedly widowed.[27] Elizabeth Vallance has argued that this change occurred because the 'legitimisation process' had become less significant.[28] In other words, the idea of 'male equivalence' that some have considered important for allowing women's access to Parliamentary careers immediately post-suffrage had waned in potency.[29] This change over time can, however, be contextualised within a wider cultural turn against the value of familial political dynasties. Familial ties to constituencies did not die away with the abolition of pocket boroughs in the Reform Acts.[30] But as the twentieth century progressed, there was increased criticism of nepotism. Beatrice Rathbone found this to her cost when she contested the Bodmin seat in 1941. Her local newspaper declared:

> the idea that when a member dies his widow should succeed him is bad, not good at all. It establishes an hereditary principle in the Lower Chamber … we must for the future seek out those who have greater claims upon our suffrage than the simple one of family connection.[31]

As the seat was uncontested, the criticism had no effect, but Beatrice Rathbone was not to be a long serving MP and stood down at the next General Election. This growing turn against the idea of seat inheritance and the longstanding relationships of families to certain constituencies is a topic ripe for further investigation. But although there were voices of dissent, for male and female candidates alike, the endorsement of a family member could be the tipping point for selection in a winnable seat right into the post-war period. Participation in familial political networks was both a stepping stone to consideration for selection and a vital training ground for the skills required for an electoral career. The remainder of this chapter examines in more detail the types of training that female candidates in particular

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[27] Lena Jeger (1953) and Muriel Gammans (1957).
[28] Vallance, *Women in the house*, p.28.
[29] Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House the Women M.P.s, 1919–1945', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 29, no.3 (1986), pp.225-226.
[30] For historiography on parliamentary familial ties see Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics;* Reynolds *Aristocratic women and political society,* David Cannandine*, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Brenda van Coppenolle, 'Political Dynasties in the UK House of Commons: The Null Effect of Narrow Electoral Selection', Legislative *Studies Quarterly*, vol. 42 (2017), pp. 449–475; Martin Spychal, 'Five elections in seven years: Peterborough, Whalley and the Fitzwilliam interest.' *The Victorian Commons,* 2017, https:// victoriancommons.wordpress.com/2017/04/28/five-elections-in-seven-yearspeterborough-whalley-and-the-fitzwilliam-interest/ last accessed 6 November 2020).
[31] 'Pilot's Widow To Take Place in Commons', *The Cornish Times*, 10 January 1941, p. 3.

benefitted from. It examines how, beyond simply legitimising them through marital status, their experiences as wives gave them political experience and access to established networks that helped them surmount the barriers in place for other women seeking to enter public political life.

Whilst it is true that the 'legitimisation process' became less significant after 1945, it did not disappear. Seat inheritance as a practice becomes more contested from the 1950s, but it still remains. Lena Jeger and Muriel Gammans both won the by-elections after the deaths of their husbands in the 1950s. Lena Jeger took over her husband's St Pancras and Holborn seat in 1953. In the decades after, she commented how she could do with a wife's help, writing of 'dark hole at the bottom of every day' without a partner to return home to.[32] Muriel Gammans took over the Hornsey seat from her husband Leonard Gammans after he died suddenly in 1957. The historian Duncan Sutherland claims that as an MP, Muriel Gammans mainly enjoyed attending innumerable teas in her constituency, and 'was probably better suited to the role of a political wife than that of a politician in her own right' as she made little mark on Parliament.[33] Sutherland does, however, suggest that she was successful and popular within her constituency. The constituency role was one that she had great experience with – she had been fully privy to the political machinations of her husband's selection for the Hornsey seat and sought to develop independent relationships herself with the members in the constituency even at this stage. She becomes fully involved in campaigning soon after, attending meetings and touring the streets of Muswell Hill in an election van.[34]

This transition from 'political wife' to a politician in their own right captures this argument of the electoral reinvention of the political spouse. However, it seems unfair for Sutherland to reduce her to only an MP of social events. A large part of her diaries were her thoughts on international affairs and she had great experience within constituency work and campaigning.[35] Although she was not one of the notable MPs of the twentieth century, it is a mistake to only consider the political activity of politicians of those most accomplished in the

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[32] Reeves, *Women of Westminster,* p. 80.
[33] Duncan Sutherland, 'Annie Muriel Gammans [née Paul], (1898–1989)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-70442, last accessed 14 Apr. 2023).
[34] 'Diaries of AMG', MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 506, box 6, vol.1, 31, pp.5-8, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[35] See 'Diaries of AMG', Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.

chamber. In general, 'serious' politicians have been characterised as finding constituency work as irksome and drudgery.[36] But MPs like Gammans were perhaps ahead of the trend: the role of constituency work grew most rapidly from 1970s, expanding to occupy the greatest part of members time by the 1990s.[37]

Falling just outside of this thesis' time period, in the 1974 General Election, Lady Kina Avebury failed to win back the Orpington seat which her husband Eric Lubbock (Lord Avebury) had represented.[38] *The Times* had got wind of this plan as early as 1971, suggesting that the Lubbocks had a:

> ready-made candidate of the necessary calibre to succeed Eric Lubbock…They could keep the Liberal nomination "in the family" by fielding Mrs Kina Lubbock at the next general election. It has always been a Liberal boast in Orpington that they gave the constituency, for the eight years that Eric Lubbock represented it "two MPs for the price of one."[39]

Lubbock's election addresses always prominently featured his wife's services to the community. This same article in *The Times* reflected that there was 'an excellent precedent' for Kina Lubbock taking over the seat, as this had been the way that Nancy Astor entered Parliament.[40] It is interesting the long shadow that Nancy Astor's election still cast in the 1970s, and that the journalist in question viewed it as legtimising for Kina Lubbock's aspirations.

Although seat inheritance did occasionally happen after 1945, the main reason that it became less important was because there was greater public hesitance around the principle. This was not the case for all candidates, which as will be described below, Paul Channon found to his cost. This lessening of the power and adoption of the halo effect is useful in considering how political parties and cultures were changing during the early twentieth century. The era of mass democracy did not necessarily result in MPs and their families

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[36] Michael Rush, *The Role of the Member of Parliament Since 1868: From Gentlemen to Players* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.210.
[37] ibid, p.211.
[38] A handful of more recent examples do exist, including a candidacy at the 2019 general election where Natasha Elphicke stood for the seat of Dover in place of her husband. Charlie Elphicke was unable to stand as he had been suspended from the Conservative party on charges of sexual assault.
[39] 'The Times Diary', *The Times*, 24 June 1971, p. 14.
[40] ibid.

feeling any less personal ownership over their constituencies, but the fact that wives could now be incorporated into keeping a seat raises interesting questions about gendered political cultures. Due to the changing nature of politics, with an increased emphasis on an active role in the constituency, administering welfare and civic presence, women were now eligible to be considered as political successors, just as brothers, sons and nephews had been for the preceding centuries.

The seat of Southend-on-Sea and its association with the Guinness family is a useful example of changing attitudes to familial politics as the twentieth century progressed. Rupert Guinness had first won Southend in 1912 for the Conservative party. His wife, Gwendolen, took over the seat in a 1927 by-election when Rupert was elevated to the peerage as Lord Iveagh. Lady Iveagh was reported as saying that she was seeking election for the borough 'partly because she and her husband had been associated with it for so long that she felt loath to allow circumstances over which they had no control to sever that connexion'.[41] The familial connection with the seat was felt just as keenly by Lord Iveagh. He featured on Lady Iveagh's election address with an imploring 'Message from your old member':

> It is with the keenest regret that, after fifteen years I am retiring from that position, but my regrets are lessened by the hope that you may return my wife as your Member, placing that confidence in her which you have never failed to give me throughout the years during which we have been so happily associated. Should this come to pass I shall rejoice that my connection with Southend will still remain.[42]

The tendrils of the Guinness family did not retreat when Lady Iveagh retired. In 1935 the son-in-law of Rupert and Gwendolen Guinness and future political diarist, Sir Henry 'Chips' Channon, took over Southend-on-Sea (which became Southend West when the constituency boundaries were redrawn in 1950).[43] Henry Channon stayed in office until his death in 1958. Although only 23 and still an undergraduate at Oxford, Henry's son Paul wanted to represent the Southend constituency in the by-election triggered by his father's death.[44]

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[41] 'The By-Election At Southend', *The Times*, 3 November 1927, p.16.
[42] 'Countess of Iveagh's 1927 Election Address', PUB 229/1/3, CPA, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[43] For details of 'Chips' Channon's selection, see Chips Channon, *The diaries of Chips Channon. Volume 1* (London: Cornerstone Digital, 2021), pp.356-361.
[44] Mark Garnett, ', (Henry) Paul Guinness Channon, (1935–2007', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 6 Jan. 2011; (https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-97546. last accessed at 15 Apr. 2023).

Although the local constituency party ultimately backed Paul over 129 other candidates, his selection was not plain sailing. Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* took great umbrage to his selection campaign. The *Express* described Paul Channon as a 'hotly indignant controversial candidate' and reported that the public houses were full of anger at this 'hereditary principle'.[45] The night before the selection poll the paper ran a large feature on this 'nasty business, a discredit to the party', heavily criticizing Channon's age and inexperience. When charged with these accusations of nepotism, Channon replied that: 'All I can say is that my selection was done scrupulously fairly. You must ask those who selected me; I don't think it is reasonable for me to comment on the reasons of those who selected me'. Paul Channon won the selection and served as the MP for Southend West for 38 years. His ex-MP grandmother, Lady Iveagh, saw the reasons for his selection as simple. The voters had instinctively done their duty by 'backing a colt when you know the stable he was trained in'.[46] This case, and the Lubbocks in 1974, suggests that seat inheritance was still happening, but was more likely to attract external criticism by the 1950s and 1960s. The principle of seat inheritance did still exist after 1945, but the attitudes and assumptions of those selecting candidates seems to be lagging behind wider social and cultural changes – while some party activists still found it to be a desirable quality, others disagreed.

Marriage and gender in public life

This rest of this chapter turns to consider why seat inheritance was such a successful method for women to win parliamentary seats, particularly in the interwar period. One of the most important reasons was that halo effect candidates allayed public fears about 'home ties', especially children. Some women also used widowhood to construct a public identity that negotiated the tension between drawing on the family name whilst also maintaining an independent identity before voters. There is no question that the barriers facing women seeking election were very great. All parties experienced significant tensions in accommodating gender within political party structures. Martin Francis has shown how the Labour party's conception of 'acceptable womanhood ultimately proved to be relatively

[45] 'One young man in 130', *The Daily Express*, 15 January 1959, p. 2.
[46] ibid. p.8.

narrow' and evoked very traditional images of domestic femininity.[47] David Jarvis argues that the Conservative party was even more socially conservative, and that marriage and motherhood were integral to Conservative ideals.[48] This led to the tension for the Conservatives particularly, that although the party's ideology consigned women to domestic or private roles, they also depended on women undertaking public duties.[49] The halo effect helped women to negotiate this tension; women were able to align their feminine images as wives and mothers with that of a credible politician. This section of the chapter explores how halo effect candidates drew upon their status as wives and candidates, looking at the cases of Juliet Rhys-Williams, Margaret Wintringham and Agnes Hardie.

Juliet Rhys-Williams encountered these tensions when she first stood for the seat of Pontypridd in a 1938 by-election. Juliet had met her husband, Rhys Rhys-Williams, when she worked in his office during his time as a junior transport minister and Liberal MP 1918-1922 (he later became a Conservative). Rhys initially held the seat of Banbury in Oxfordshire but then set his aspirations to represent Pontypridd where his family home, Miskin Manor, was located. He unsuccessfully stood here in 1922 and lost by over 6,000 votes. When a by-election was called in 1938 for Pontypridd, Rhys did not stand again, presumably as he was now in his seventies, but Juliet Rhys-Williams decided to try for the seat. The press noted Juliet's candidature for the by-election for the fact she accepted the invitation to stand only eight days after giving birth to her youngest daughter, Elspeth. The reporter requested Juliet respond to comments made by the Conservative MP Sir Paul Latham, who had said that he was not going to stand for Parliament when his term ended because his parliamentary duties 'did not allow him to see as much of his four-year-old son as was proper for a father to see of his child.'[50] The reporter presented her as being confident that fighting the election and possible parliamentary duties would not interfere with bringing up her daughter, saying: 'I think I should be able to combine family life and parliament.' Juliet used this as a moment to spin this in favour of her strong local credentials for the seat and replied: 'It is very different in my case, for my interests are in Pontypridd. When my husband was a member for Banbury we used to find things a strain, but you don't feel that when you belong to the place

[47] Martin Francis, 'Labour and Gender', in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's first century* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p.214.
[48] David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: the Conservative appeal to women voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.5, no.2 (1994), p.142.
[49] Lovenduski, Norris and Burness, 'The party and women', p.611.
[50] 'Lady Rhys-Williams to contest Pontypridd', *The Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 7 January 1938, p.8.

you are to stand for'.[51] Here, Juliet invoked her wifely expertise: she had experienced the 'strain' before in her role supporting her husband and was able to use this knowledge to overcome possible problems as an MP herself. Her previous experience of combining both political and family life allowed her to publicly lessen concerns over possible diminution of duty to her husband and children. However, as her husband had in 1923, Juliet lost the seat by over 7,000 votes to the Labour candidate. The Rhys-Williams family still did not give up on Pontrypridd. Their son Brandon contested the seat in 1959, this time losing by nearly 16,000 votes.[52] This event and further analysis of the Rhys-Williams's marriage will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Four women between 1918 and 1945 came to the House in by-elections triggered by their husband's death: Margaret Wintringham, Beatrice Rathbone, Agnes Hardie and Lady Apsley. Widowhood was a key part of their public identity during the campaign. It again presented an opportunity for women to allay concerns that they would not be able to perform public duties alongside their role in the domestic sphere. For widows standing for election following a husband's death, bereavement became central to their public identity in ways which may have assisted them electorally. This was certainly portrayed as a benefit in the case of Margaret Wintringham when *The Times* reported that:

> There are not many men in the House of Commons with so fine a record of service outside. Mrs Wintringham has had to do a considerable amount of speech-making in the discharge of these multifarious duties during the past 20 years … She has no children, and this absence of home ties affords her all the necessary leisure to devote herself to the business of the House.[53]

These women could thus still be considered as appropriately and safely feminine without concern that they were neglecting any of their traditional duties. The fact that she was childless was also a considerable factor in reducing these tensions, a theme discussed further in chapter three. Her identity as a widow also featured in commentaries on her electioneering:

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[51] ibid.
[52] 'A message from Lady Rhys-Williams', 1959, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/21/10/1, LSE Archives, London.
[53] 'Women Of The Moment', *The Times*, 24 September 1921, p. 11.

> Mrs Wintringham was known during the contest at Louth as the silent candidate. That was not because [she] has not the gift of speech-making. She is on the contrary, an experienced and fluent public speaker. But having regard to her recent bereavement – the sudden death of her husband in the smoking-room of the House of Commons – she naturally thought it more fitting not to take a prominent part in the election. She was, however, to be seen, in deep mourning, on the platform at Liberal meetings.[54]

The theme of mourning was also present in Beatrice Rathbone's election after her husband was killed in the Battle of Britain. On being sworn into the House she was described as in 'deep mourning, and her only ornament was a silver brooch of the Royal Air Force'.[55]

Like those women who gained their seats after their husband's elevation to the peerage, these women's forays into the political scene did not first come after their husband was deceased. These women had been highly active politically, not just as an appendage to their husband, but in their own right. Margaret Wintringham and Lady Apsley both served as presidents of the local women's associations for their respective parties in their husband's constituencies. Agnes Hardie had been a Labour party organiser and served as the ILP candidate on the Glasgow school board even before her marriage to George Hardie (incidentally the younger brother of Keir Hardie).[56] They met through the Labour movement and worked together in politics a great deal before their marriage. *The Times* described how she accepted 'pressing invitations' to become the Labour candidate upon her husband's death.[57]

This independence was reflected in the statements that some halo effect candidates made at the time of their election. Agnes Hardie, for example, declared that her victory with a majority of 5,978 (2,449 votes fewer than her husband George received at the last poll) showed: 'The magnificent result … indicates that Springburn had remained loyal to its Labour allegiances and has given entire support to the Labour Party's programme of reconstruction at home for the benefit of all people'.[58] However, her Unionist opponent Colonel McInnes Shaw 'hoped that Mrs Hardie would regard the result as a token of the

[54] 'Women Of The Moment', *The Times*, 24 September 1921, p. 11.
[55] 'RAF Widow MP', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 18 March 1941, p. 4.
[56] Knox, 'Agnes Agnew Hardie'.
[57] 'Mrs. G. D. Hardie', *The Times,* 4 April 1951, p.6.
[58] 'Glasgow's First Woman M.P', *The Glasgow Herald*, 8 September 1937, p. 13.

esteem in which her husband had been held'.[59] In her comments on her election, Agnes Hardie positioned herself as an independent actor who was representing the Labour party before she was representing herself or her husband. This instance was different from the other halo effect widows, who were more explicit about standing as male equivalents. This perhaps gives some insight into the turn against seat inheritance too, as this was one of the last instances of the halo effect. As more women had developed considerable political experience and often had met their partner within a political party, they were less willing to be perceived as simply a substitute for their husband.

It was not just the esteem and regard of the constituents that was being transmitted through their candidature in the place of their husbands, but there was often an understanding that the women would embody the same political views as their spouse had also held. Yet this was not always a positive factor for women following on from their husbands. Margaret Wintringham faced difficulties in her election as her husband's radical views were cited against her by the Conservative candidate in the local press.[60] However, the halo effect overall did allow women to assuage some tensions about marriage and women's place in public life. They could present politics as an integral part of their domestic role such as in the case of Juliet Rhys-Williams, or they could avoid the criticism altogether by being widowed.

Political training and networks

Another reason that the halo effect was such a successful route to Parliament for women was because through their marriages they experienced far greater training and benefitted more from political networks than unmarried or unconnected women. Ellen Wilkinson grappled extensively with questions of how women could negotiate both marriage and a political career. Wilkinson is one of the most iconic examples of the spinster MP, who claimed that:

> if a woman is to marry and have children, her peak period is between eighteen and twenty-five. But if her ambition is to be … a politician, she inevitably kicks her colt-

[59] ibid.
[60] Elaine Harrison, 'Margaret Wintringham [née Longbottom] (1879–1955)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50055 last accessed 15 Apr. 2023).

> feet around till well in the thirties, as a man does, suffering and learning from her mistakes, building the personality that can do things in the forties.[61]

This chapter takes a different view, arguing that through marriage to a politically active man, women were able to engage in 'building a personality'. In fact, it was one of the best forms of political training, and this may attest to why comparatively so many women found their route to Parliament in this way. Emily Harmer has analysed newspaper coverage of the relatives of male candidates in general elections from 1918. This research found that reports on the political activity of candidate's wives and other female relatives between 1918-1950 focused on the campaigning of women on behalf of a male candidate, such as giving speeches at campaign events or canvassing voters.[62] After the Second World War, the coverage of relatives became increasingly personalised and focused on private lives.[63] Women were less often depicted as actively campaigning but rather accompanying their husbands or fathers.[64] This is partly because of the decline of campaign activities directed only to women, but Harmer also suggests that it was the increased focus on the 'ideal domestic companion' for politicians.[65] For the peak of the halo effect however, this analysis of the role of women campaigning for their male relatives is helpful, as it is indicative of the amount of time that wives spent engaged in political work.

The halo effect MPs were not plucked from the domestic hearth, adorned with a rosette and thrust clueless onto the hustings stage; they often had long political experience both before and throughout their marriages. Lucy Noel-Buxton, for example, met her husband Noel on the campaign trail in North Norfolk in 1914. They had become acquainted as Lucy (a Conservative in her formative political years) was speaking on a platform against his then Liberal politics under the slogan 'No Noel for North Norfolk'.[66] They later joined the Labour party together and Lucy was very active within the 'Half-Circle Club' of Beatrice Webb, which is discussed below. Another example of a politically experienced spouse was

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[61] Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: the life of Ellen Wilkinson socialist, feminist, internationalist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), p.105.
[62] Emily Harmer, *Women, Media, and Elections: Representation and Marginalization in British Politics* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021), p.99.
[63] ibid, p.104.
[64] ibid. p.106.
[65] ibid.
[66] C. V. J. Griffiths, 'Lucy Edith Noel- [Buxton, née Lucy Edith Burn], Lady Noel-Buxton (1888–1960), politician.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/70448 last accessed 17 Apr. 2023).

Mary Emmott, who unsuccessfully fought the Oldham seat some years after her husband Alfred was elevated to the peerage. She had served on the Oldham Board of Guardians since 1898, and had been the vice-chair of the national Women's Liberal Federation and numerous other political organisations and societies.[67] Similarly, Hilda Runciman was considered the archetypical 'warming-pan' candidate but had a considerable political life before her husband. In 1897 she was the first woman to be elected to the Newcastle school board. Later, in the 1920s, she extended her public role and served as a Justice of the Peace and as president of the Women's National Liberal Federation in 1919-21, as well as other housing associations and the executive of the League of Nations Union. It is important to recognise that most of these women had a considerable amount of political interest and ability independent of their relationships with their husbands.

Rather than being the sole basis of their political involvement, these women's marriages were a contributory factor in opening up opportunities and modes of engagement. They could help women to develop political connections and networks – many of which were pre-existing and pre-dated their marriages. Although taking over the Southend-on-Sea seat directly after her husband's elevation to the House of Lords, the Countess of Iveagh was the 22nd member of her own family to enter parliament, including three former speakers of the Commons.[68] Katharine Stewart-Murray, the Duchess of Atholl, also enjoyed a wide circle of personal political connections that helped in her selection. The networks that she and the Duke of Atholl jointly possessed made it far more achievable to stand for and win election. Katharine describes how the suggestion that she should stand for Parliament in 1923 first came from Lloyd-George, then Prime Minister of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition government. She wrote in her memoir that:

> I therefore began to think over his proposal seriously, and of course discussed it with Bardie [the Duke of Atholl]. He raised no difficulties, and shortly after the Prime Minister and Dame Margaret had left us, we had a talk about it with Sir George Younger, Chief Unionist Whip … The King was our guest at luncheon one day, on his way south from Balmoral at the end of the shooting season. I told His Majesty of the proposal the Prime Minister had made to me. He was evidently doubtful how I should be able to combine the duties of hostess at Blair with parliamentary work, but

[67] Cheryl Law, *Women: a modern political dictionary* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp.58-59.
[68] 'The By-Election At Southend', *The Times*, 3 November 1927, p. 16.

> I knew I could rely on Bardie, with his wonderful domestic gifts, to make good the deficiencies such work might force on me.[69]

While contemporaries and historians alike have decried the direct advantages that these women derived from their marriages, it is vital to consider the other, and often more important, social and cultural capital that they possessed in their lives and that were supported by these relationships. And indeed, the prominence of these connections was no less important for men when seeking candidature for parliament. In the case of the Plymouth Sutton seat, if Nancy had not accepted the role it would have still been an Astor on the ballot paper, as the committee was planning to ask Waldorf's brother John Jacob Astor to fight the seat in the event of her refusal.[70]

Being married to an MP and fighting his seat did give some of the halo effect women a significant career advantage in another, more direct, way. In addition to any political connections they possessed or developed, it was often through their husbands' campaigns that they discovered and then honed their political talents and abilities. Whilst her parents had been politically inclined, the Duchess of Atholl was not active in party politics until her husband was adopted as the Unionist candidate. At that point, Katharine took up canvassing and campaigning to support the Duke of Atholl enthusiastically, giving her the opportunity to engage politically in a public forum. Throughout her autobiography, Atholl presents herself as the altogether more politically interested of the pair, commenting, for example, on her greater enthusiasm for campaigning: 'He was not, I think, as interested in political speaking as I was, for I enjoyed trying to explain things … In the election which came a few weeks later, I spoke in public every night for the last week or two.'[71] Similarly, although family and friends close to Lady Astor noted her rhetorical talents, it was not until Waldorf's election campaigns in 1910 and 1918 that she was able to put these abilities to use in a public forum.[72]

The work that women had undertaken in the constituencies was also essential in helping their selection and election. Many had built up significant experience of serving alongside their husbands. This was very clear in the case of the Duchess of Atholl. When an

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[69] Katharine Stewart-Murray, *Working Partnership: Being the Lives of John George 8th Duke of Atholl and of his wife Katharine Marjory Ramsay*, (London: A. Barker, 1958), p.158.
[70] Adrian Fort, *Nancy : the story of Lady Astor* (London: Vintage Digital, 2012), p.160.
[71] Stewart-Murray, *Working Partnership*, pp.55-57.
[72] Karen Musolf, *From Plymouth to Parliament: A Rhetorical History of Nancy Astor's 1919 Campaign* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p.24.

election was called in 1923, the local association felt that they needed a strong local candidate and voted for her unanimously as the wife of the former MP and current President of the local association.[73] Stuart Ball claims that she was more popular than her husband within the constituency.[74]

Having such a prominent local role also allowed women to build upon the persona of 'Lady Bountiful': the image of the women doing good deeds for the poor and needy in society.[75] For Nancy Astor, this grounding in the local community of the constituency, and the ability to cite the works she had done in the areas of maternity work and child welfare, enhanced her political credibility and public image.[76] The Countess of Iveagh similarly had attracted this reputation, being described in the press as 'given to good works, she is the "lady bountiful," helping where help is needed, and seeking, in every way possible, to make happier and brighter the lives of fellow citizens.'[77] It is worth noting that this option was only available to two incredibly wealthy women.

Although women benefitted electorally from the halo effect, husbands also relied on having a politically skilled wife. For halo effect politicians, their experience in the constituency was crucial in helping them to become an MP, and to remain as an MP. JCC Davidson was the MP for Hemel Hempstead from 1920-1937, when it was taken over by Joan (or 'Mimi' as she was known to her family). Joan moved in political circles before her marriage to John. She was the daughter of an MP, and the couple were introduced by their great mutual friend, Conservative party leader Stanley Baldwin. Viscountess Davidson played an important role from the early days of her husband's Hemel Hempstead seat, feeling that at his selection for the seat, it was not just he who was being selected but also her:

> We were met by the agent … he having talked to us, decided at once – I think I am right in saying – that we were the couple he would like to have work for the constituency and with him; we were young and active and keen, and my husband had very high recommendations from Bonar Law and other leading people in the Party.[78]

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[73] Stuart Ball, 'The Politics of Appeasement: The Fall of the Duchess of Atholl and the Kinross and West Perth By-Election, December 1938' *The Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 69, no. 187 (1990), pp.51-52.
[74] Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a party* p.327.
[75] See for example Jessica Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy', *Victorian Studies*, vol.30, no. 2 (1987), pp. 183–210.
[76] Musolf, *From Plymouth to Parliament*, p.22.
[77] 'Countess of Iveagh – MP', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 1931, p.7.
[78] J. C. C. Davidson and R. R. James (eds.), *Memoirs of a Conservative: J.C.C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910–37* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969) p.89.

In her autobiography, Joan Davidson refers to the Hemel Hempstead constituency repeatedly as 'our seat', even before she was elected as an MP.[79] Even when wives did not play an active campaigning role, their presence was an important fact in validating their male candidates. As Kenneth Baker, MP for Dorking in the 1960s reflect on his selection process: 'there were about 25 or 30 people in the selection room. You had to make a speech and answer questions. Your wife had to come with you if you were married, she just sat there.'[80] Even if they did not plan to be involved, family and the support of a spouse was a key part of the selection criteria for committees.

This points to the growing importance of the MP in the local constituency as having a role in local social issues and as a civic figure. The halo effect women had often been instrumental in helping the formation and functioning of this increased role of constituency politics.[81] During the 1923 election campaign, Joan worked out of the local campaign headquarters extensively, sending instructions and orders to JCCs many other personal assistants and secretaries. JCC could afford to employ an agent, as well as a friend, called Colonel Storr who worked as 'a kind of personal assistant': drawing no pay from the government, nor was he a civil servant.[82] Letters sent to John suggest that Storr did not enjoy being sent batches of questionnaires from Davidson's 'lady wife', as he referred to her, preferring to communicate directly with John and to prioritise the matters that he saw as important.[83] Yet Joan's political astuteness came from her local knowledge: she was best placed to know which issues had the most local salience, and which of the constituents needed to be replied to with the greatest haste and care.[84] Joan Davidson effectively ran the Hemel Hempstead constituency for nearly twenty years before becoming the MP herself in 1937. In doing so much constituency work she saw herself as 'releasing her husband for his

[79] Davidson and James, *Memoirs of a Conservative,* p.101.
[80] Kenneth Baker, interviewed by Mike Greenwood, 2012 for the project 'The History of Parliament Oral History Project', interview available as a British Library Sound Recording, ref. C1503/13, Track 1, 35:50.
[81] See Rush, *The Role of the Member of Parliament Since 1868, ch.7.*
[82] Letter from Col.Storr to unknown, 23 November 1923. DAV 164, J C C Davidson papers, Parliamentary Archives London. Lancelot Storr had been in the Indian Army until 1913 and then served with the War Cabinet, the Committee of Imperial Defence, and at the Peace Conference. In 1920 he approached Davidson with the object of securing a political appointment in England, which Davidson was able to arrange. He became a close friend, a loyal allay and a reliable informant.
[83] Col. Storr to J C C Davidson, 30 November 1923, DAV 164, J C C Davidson papers, Parliamentary Archives, London.
[84] For example, Joan Davidson to Col.Storr, 28 November 1923, DAV 164, Parliamentary Archives, London.

work in Parliament and government'.[85] When J.C.C. Davidson left Parliament it seemed natural for her to take over the seat. The local press reported that: 'Lady Davidson brings to the House an intimate knowledge of politics behind the scenes over a long period. Her husband 'J.C.C' was 'keeper of the Premier's secrets' in two regimes and he found in his wife a colleague whom he could consult with benefit to himself and safety to the realm.'[86] The by-election was deemed by the electorate to be a foregone conclusion and political apathy was high, with a turnout of just over 50%.[87] At the declaration of the poll, Lady Davidson said 'she would try to represent the men as well as her husband had tried to represent the women.'[88] This sense of interchangeability between the Davidsons made them a formidable political force. At the victory dinner given six months after Viscountess Davidson's victory, the local constituency party proposed a toast, saying: 'Lady Davidson used to be Lord Davidson's right-hand, and now Lord Davidson is her left hand, but the combination is just the same as before.'[89] Unlike the Rhys-Williamses, there was only a five year age gap between the couple, but Lord Davidson took no further part in public political life once he stood down. The explanation for this perhaps lines in the previous quote, noting how he remained active and involved in his constituency by virtue of his wife.

It was not only individual families themselves who recognised the benefit of incorporating spouses and family members into political work. Political party organisations in the early twentieth century considered not only how they involved women in their party structures, but also how they incorporated women in their roles as wives. Women and men were not automatically brought into their spouses' political work. Rather, this was an active process within political cultures. The Conservative party saw the role of the male MP's wife as more codified than the Labour party, as will be discussed below. For the Labour party, although this was not its central goal, Margaret Bondfield believed that the Women's Labour League had an educative purpose for the wives of trade unionists and Labour men to take an interest in their husbands wider work.[90] Beatrice Webb founded the 'Half-Circle Club' in

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[85] Elliot of Harwood, '(Frances) Joan, Davidson [née Dickinson], (1894–1985)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/31006 last accessed 15 Apr. 2023).
[86] 'The Election Campaign Opens', *Buckinghamshire Examiner*, 11 June 1937, p. 3.
[87] F.S Craig eds., *British parliamentary election statistics, 1918-1968* (Glasgow: Political Reference Publications, 1968).
[88] 'Hertfordshire's First Woman M.P', *Buckinghamshire Examiner*, 25 June 1937, p. 7.
[89] 'Conservative Victory Celebrated', *Buckinghamshire Examiner*, 12 November 1937, p. 8.
[90] Christine Collette, *For Labour and for women: The Women's Labour League, 1906–1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.47.

1922 as she was concerned that the wives of Labour MPs and trade unionists were not sufficiently incorporated into their husbands' political work and wanted to promote friendships between the wives of Labour MPs, candidates and trade union officials.[91] Political parties were recognising the changing role of spouses and introducing new structures and training to direct and mould their political development.

The idea of the 'Half Circle Club' had come to Beatrice whilst attending the International Socialist Conference in Geneva. She had become concerned about the lonely nature of being an MP's wife, a new role in which she found herself following Sidney Webb's election to Parliament in 1922.[92] The object of the club was 'the encouragement of friendships among the wives of Labour Members, Labour Candidates and Trade Union Secretaries, together with Women Candidates and Trade Union Officials; and also to promote general social intercourse within the Labour Movement.'[93] They would meet for monthly gatherings, sometimes for members only and sometimes with male and female guests. Martin Pugh suggests that the aim of these gatherings was also for Beatrice to protect the wives of Labour MPs and candidates from falling into the traditional trappings of London society by offering them an alternative forum for sociability and fellowship.[94]

Jennie Lee was very critical of the role that Beatrice Webb appointed for herself as the authority on political wifehood. In her memoir *My Life With Nye*, Jennie describes how she was infuriated with Webb's attempts to teach the wives of the poorer Labour MPs how to dress, how to curtsey, and how to behave generally when invited to Buckingham Palace or other grand social occasions:

> The homely, plump wives of two elderly miner MPs told me how nervous there were about all this. I said there was no need at all to be nervous, just wear your Sunday best and you will look and feel fine…My poor friends had accepted the Webb guidance. They were anxious not to do the wrong thing. Of course some of our working-class women had helped their husbands in the struggle to win local government, and later, parliamentary seats; they were used to accompanying them on social occasions…They had their own natural dignity, their own best clothes for

[91] Half Circle Club, 'Prospectus and notice of first gatherings', 6 January 1921, PASSFIELD, 4/16, Papers of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, LSE Archives.
[92] Lisanne Radice, *Beatrice and Sidney Webb: Fabian Socialists* (London, 1984), p. 232.
[93] 'Half Circle Club', PASSFIELD, 4/16, Papers of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, LSE Archives.
[94] Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain: A New History of the Labour Party* (London: Vintage Digital, 2010), p. 167.

special occasions. But these things Mrs Webb did not understand. There was a great deal she did not understand.[95]

Although the existence of the 'Half Circle Club' demonstrates the changing nature of British political landscape, some scholars have found the existence alone of the 'Half-Circle Club' problematic as it suggests a continuity of the roles for women in politics as behind the scenes. The historian Hanneke Hoekstra describes the problem as: 'why now, would Beatrice Webb, a committed socialist who obviously abhorred the corruptions of Society, foresee a role for Labour women in political life modelled on a gendered tradition that looked backwards, rather than forward?'[96]

However, there is far more that this reveals about political cultures for both men and women than it does about patriarchal attitudes within politics and society more widely. As discussed in the Introduction, the role of the political spouse has been an important feature of British political life for centuries. Yet in the twentieth century it was not only the introduction of female suffrage that changed the role of women in political cultures. The foundation and growth of the Labour party from the late nineteenth century also changed political cultures greatly in terms of class and gender. The class boundaries for MPs were widening and more of the new cohort of MPs came from working-class backgrounds.[97] The networks of socialist society were still in formation, and these were being actively constructed by many of the members of left-wing circles.

The Conservative party had similar ideas about the importance of bringing wives into political work. In 1930, a new Conservative Training Centre at Ashridge College was opened, designed to 'make the party a more congenial home for women'.[98] A new course was developed for MPs' wives, training them in political issues, public speaking, party organisation, local government, and running bazaars, amongst other issues. Local newspaper reports on the new course commented that: 'It is a sign of the times that many MPs who were necessarily kept at Westminster during the Parliamentary Season rely on their wives to

[95] Jennie Lee, *My life with Nye* (London: J Cape, 1980), p.79-80.
[96] Hanneke Hostra, 'Party Versus Party: Beatrice Webb and the Ascent of the British Labour Party', in Henk te Velde and Maartje Janse eds., *Organizing Democracy. Palgrave Studies in Political History* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.234.
[97] On the class anxieties experienced by Labour MPs in integrating in elite polite culture see Nick Owen, 'MacDonald's parties: the Labour Party and the 'aristocratic embrace', 1922-31', *Twentieth Century British History*, 18 (2007), pp. 1–53.
[98] Clarisse Berthezène, *Training minds for the war of ideas : Ashridge College, the Conservative Party and the cultural politics of Britain, 1929-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.35

maintain that personal contact with voters which, to-day, is regarded as essential.'[99] Julie Gottlieb has researched this special course specifically for MP's wives. The syllabus included the Countess of Iveagh MP talking about 'some trials of a Member's wife', as well as more generally political topics such as industry insurance and national taxation, foreign relations, unemployment and Conservative principles. There were also more practical sessions on public speaking at political meetings and bazaars and a talk on women and local government.[100] This course does not seem to have been popular, it was never advertised again in the training centre journals, nor where there any reports on it taking place again.[101] These training topics discussed by Julie Gottlieb were not dissimilar from the wider political education courses that were offered more generally at the Conservative Training Centres. There was little in this training that was directed to women specifically in their roles as 'MP's wives'. The organisers of the courses at Ashridge College believed that the important lessons for wives were in their general political training in Conservative political ideology and education; there was only one session of practical advice on the duties and lifestyle of an MPs wife.[102]

These examples show how many of the halo effect candidates benefitted from the political experience that they had built up through their position as wives. It was not only the benefits and networks from individual families, but political parties also saw the importance in incorporating wives into political roles and structures. These developments help to account for the great success of the halo effect, particularly in the interwar period.

Political husbands

As we have seen, the idea of the political wife was not just constructed to enhance a male politician's public image; it also reflected the demands of modern political representation. The independent, and unmarried, MP Eleanor Rathbone experienced the problem when she was elected in 1929 that 'representing a constituency was really a two-person job.'[103]

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[99] Clarisse Berthezène and Julie Gottlieb eds., *Rethinking right-wing women : gender and the Conservative party, 1880s to the present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p.101.
[100] Gottleib and Berthezène, *Rethinknig right-wing women*, p.92.
[101] Swinton College Journal, PUB 188/1-2, CPA, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford; Ashridge Journal, PUB 187/1-4, CPA, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[102] Gottleib and Berthezène, *Rethinknig right-wing women*, p.92.
[103] Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p.169.

Although wives had been working with their husbands politically for centuries, a distinctive feature of this period was the shift in the dynamics of marriage that allowed wives greater opportunity to have public profiles and stand for elected office themselves. Chapter one has noted the prevalence of husbands and wives working together in political partnerships in this period. Although usually a more common Labour party occurrence, within this cohort of candidates we see couples from all political parties who worked together in political partnerships, which is considered more fully in the next chapter.

This section explores how the new role and support of political husbands may also explain the considerable success of the halo effect. This set of candidates experienced a bonus to their candidature by having the support and experience of their husbands. In her study of the Nancy Astor's 1919 election campaign, Karen Musolf characterises Waldorf Astor as 'keeping control over the overall operation'.[104] She explains that Waldorf's role involved being the connecting link between the local party organisation and the home circle, soliciting speakers on her behalf, speaking at her meetings and elaborating, explaining and justifying her positions.[105] Pamela Brookes similarly describes Waldorf as Nancy's campaign manager who wrote all of her speeches.[106]

Yet, there is little in this list of duties and roles that these women had not performed themselves in their husbands' election campaigns. They all canvassed enthusiastically, explained their husbands' positions, spoke on platforms, and provided logistical support. However, there is a gendered element to how this political work was characterised. As wives, women's work was framed in the mode of supportive spouses and hostesses. Men married to women candidates and MPs, by contrast, were viewed as 'organisers' and 'strategists', even if there was little difference in the actual work that they performed. This may be a useful consideration for historians in their reading of wives' political work for their husbands.

The Duchess of Atholl's characterisation of her life with the Duke of Atholl was arguably more of a 'working partnership' (as is the title of her autobiography) than any kind of romantic marriage. The numerous affairs that her husband engaged in were no secret, and whilst not referred to in her autobiography, there is a certain distance that comes through in

[104] Musolf, *From Plymouth to Parliament*, p.67.
[105] Musolf, *From Plymouth to Parliament*, p.62.
[106] Brookes, *Women at Westminster,* p.18.

her writing.[107] A quote from the Duchess in Sheila Hetherington's biography perhaps sheds some light on this incongruity:

> My husband and I made a success of our marriage, largely because we tried to devote ourselves to causes in which we believed. We took immense interest in each other's activities, but sometimes out paths diverted. One of us would be fighting in one cause while the other was battling in aid of another.[108]

The fact that they were both fighting for political causes simultaneously was part of the success of both the Duke and Duchess' political careers. Politics and activism were often shared passions between other spouses too. We have already seen how George and Agnes Hardie met through the ILP, Lucy and Noel Noel-Buxton on the North Norfolk campaign trail, and the Rhys-Williamses in a parliamentary office. Tom and Kitty Wintringham (no relation to Margaret Wintringham) were another couple for whom politics and activism were an integral part of their relationship. While fighting in Spain as part of the International Brigades, Tom Wintringham met American journalist Kitty Bowler and they married back in Britain in 1941. Tom had a turbulent relationship with the Communist party and in 1942 he and Kitty were founding members of the new Common Wealth party.[109] Tom stood in the 1943 by-election for Midlothian and Peebles for this new party. Although ultimately unsuccessful, he polled an impressive 48% of the vote, missing out on victory by a few hundred votes.[110] For the 1945 general election, the couple decided that Kitty would try her luck in the same seat. She had come to know the constituency when campaigning for Tom and they hoped that the Wintringham name and previous success of her husband may help to carry a decent polling result. Kitty's election material reflected this theme. Her election leaflet carried a large endorsement in the centrespread from her husband Tom, proclaiming:

> Kitty Wintringham does five jobs well: wife, politician, secretary, housekeeper and journalist. She is particularly good at the first two of these, and I am all in favour of her concentrating on them. Working with me as my secretary she has often

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[107] Sheila Hetherington, *Katharine Atholl 1874–1960: Against the tide* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), p.15.
[108] ibid.
[109] Adrian Smith, 'Thomas Henry [Tom] Wintringham, (1898–1949)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford Univeristy Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/59635 last accessed 15 Apr. 2023).
[110] F.S Craig eds., *British parliamentary election statistics.*

> completed things I left unfinished: pamphlets for training the Army and Home Guard, choosing instructors for the Osterley Home Guard School, and articles for the papers. In Midlothian I left something not quite finished. The Tory majority came down from over 10,000 to under 900. You can see that she finishes that up neatly.[111]

Unfortunately, this was not a job that Kitty could finish up neatly. She finished in last place with a paltry 6.4% of the vote. Yet the election leaflet reveals the importance that the Wintringhams felt was attached to the name after Tom's success. The belief in this name ignored the other circumstances that had led to Tom's impressive share of the vote in 1943; this was a by-election held during the Second World War when the parties in the coalition governments had agreed not to stand against the incumbent party. Once Kitty stood in the 1945 general election, she came a distant third to the Unionist and Labour party candidates, who fought a close contest.[112]

Correspondence, however, between Tom and Kitty reveals the rationale for Kitty contesting the Midlothian seat. They had built up connections in the area during Tom's campaign that they felt that Kitty could capitalise on. They were both simultaneously contesting seats in the 1945 election and with Kitty in Scotland and Tom in Aldershot, their contact was limited to frequent letters. From Tom's experience he was able to suggest possible supporters and endorsers for Kitty. He had fought the same seat and could provide reassurance for Kitty, even if his advice often simply amounted to: 'Be good, don't panic, and go on without worrying what the Tories do.' [113]

The role of 'political husbands' is discussed further in the next chapter, but these examples indicate the usefulness for halo effect candidates for having a spouse who had previously fought a seat before. These women were not apolitical and picked to stand just because they were wives. They needed to be politically experienced *and* to be a wife. The inheritance of the pre-1918 era is important here. Election candidates were not always selected or returned on meritocratic principles, they were not 'individualised' but rather regarded as members of a family or dynastic team with a 'brand' which the voters could trust.

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[111] Kitty Wintringham North Midlothian Campaign Leaflet, 1945, WINTRINGHAM Tom 3/2/5, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives.
[112] F.S Craig eds., *British parliamentary election statistics.*
[113] 'Letter from Tom to Kitty Wintringham', WINTRINGHAM, Tom 3/2/5, LHMA.

Conclusion

Historians seeking to document political agency for women before suffrage have often looked to the work of women within the political activities of their families. We should not discard this method of analysis from the point at which women were able stand as MPs themselves. Simply the theoretical ability to be added to a ballot paper did not mean that the obstacles for women had been removed. The presence and success of the halo effect indicates the continued relevance of the family as a political organising unit within the era of mass democracy. Enduring links of family, kinship, and personal relationships were as crucial to political activism as has been seen in the centuries before. The fact that many successful political women benfitted from the knowledge, political experience and connections of their husbands should not be seen in a negative light. Their relationships with their husbands provided them with attributes that were necessary to forge a parliamentary career when many were still so resistant to lady members. They had experienced an excellent training in political organisation, platform speaking and canvassing, they had built up the trust and loyalty of local constituencies, and they had a supportive and politically experienced spouse to help them navigate their route.

For men as well as women, the position of MP was often suffused with family and dynastic ambitions.[114] We should not see the presence of the halo effect as a marker of women's failure to break onto the political scene. As Amanda Vickery has suggested: 'feminist hagiography has accustomed us to see female activists as heroic outsiders rising *sui generis* from a hostile environment'.[115] Understanding the political role of women post-suffrage as still remaining embedded in networks of power and privilege from their marriage and family may seem counter-intuitive in the story and success of suffrage, but it is also a pragmatic response to the challenges for women in accessing political worlds in the twentieth century. The structures and modes for incorporating women into existing, and new, political party structures were still developing. It is not surprising that women who already had access to political life through marriage were some of the first women to transform this experience into elected representation. This chapter has used the existence, and cohort, of halo effect

[114] Although referring to the current parliament, a research paper by Sarah Priddy gives an interesting insight into the deep familial connections between MPs that still remain. Sarah Priddy, 'MPs related to other current or former Members', (research briefing, House of Commons library, 2022), https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn04809/

[115] Vickery, *Women, Privilege, Power,* p.3.

candidates as a means to explore some of the types of political marriages present in politics in twentieth-century Britain. The next chapter zooms in closer on political marriage to expand on some of the dynamics that have been seen here.

Chapter three

The right hand and the left hand: models and functions of political partnerships

In her classic work, *Parallel Lives,* Phyllis Rose writes: 'Marriages, or parallel lives as I have chosen to call them, hold a particular fascination for the biographer-critic because they set two imaginations to work constructing narratives about experience presumed to be the same for both.'[1] Rose's contention is that understanding marriage is not about love, but about understanding the balance of power between a couple.[2] This chapter delves into the archive to look at this balance of power within political marriages. As discussed in the Introduction, there are limitations to writing about marriage and politics using a case study approach. However, by contextualising this chapter in relation to the bigger picture set out in this thesis, we can gain a closer perspective onto the dynamics and realities of political marriages. Each part of this chapter provides a narrative of the lives and relationships of one political couple, but contextualises features of their relationship within other marriages to suggest three models of political partnerships between husbands and wives.

Chapters one and two have shown marital status to be a useful category of analysis for understanding political life. This chapter looks in greater detail as to why this was so. It analyses how marriage was a crucial factor in beginning, supporting and sustaining both partners' political activities. The relationships discussed here focus on political partnerships, where each partner was an activist in their own right, though their relative importance might wax and wane. This chapter demonstrates that this distinction was not hard and fast. In practice, couples often moved between different kinds of relationship over the course of their lives. Initial partnerships could lapse into less reciprocal models of spousal support during a marriage, but the direction of travel could equally be reversed.

The first model considered in this chapter are public partnerships, where both partners were equally devoted to their chosen political causes. Their lives were saturated with political activity as both simultaneously pursued public-facing political life, often through elected office or official party roles. There are many Labour couples who fit this model: Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Ethel and Philip Snowdon, Margaret and Ramsay McDonald, Jennie Lee and Aneurin Bevan, Ruth and Hugh Dalton, Katherine and John Bruce Glasier, Lucy and Jim

[1] Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (London: Daunt Books, 2020), p.14.
[2] ibid., p.15.

Middleton, to name just a few. Chosen for discussion here are Jack and Bessie Braddock, who authored a joint political autobiography, offering insight into how they used their separate political roles to form a dominant presence in the government of Liverpool for decades. They met through the Independent Labour Party and their careers culminated with Jack serving as Leader of Liverpool City Council and Bessie as MP for Liverpool Exchange. For both Jack and Bessie to be political, sacrifices within the marriage needed to be made and life needed to be organised accordingly. It involved a total immersion of life into politics.

The second model is that of the 'weather house' partnership. A weather house is a cuckoo-clock device that tells the weather. It features a man and woman on a type of see-saw mechanism. The man and the woman are never seen outside of the house at the same time but circle between the inside and the outside. These were couples who were both political, but their political involvement and prominence worked in cycles, with the focus switching between one partner's political activity and the other playing the role of a supportive spouse. It is here that the majority of political partnerships fall, and this model accounts for most of the halo effect relationships discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the 'weather house' model is explored through the marriage of Juliet and Rhys Rhys-Williams, who were briefly mentioned earlier. Both were Liberals turned Conservative, beginning their relationship when Juliet worked as Rhys' private secretary during his stint as a Transport Minister. There was a large age gap between the two, and as Rhys' political career and involvement waned, Juliet's grew. It was difficult to sustain two political lives, so there had to be fluctuations between the couples as to whose political work took precedence.

The third model is labelled 'emergent' partnerships. Unlike the other two models, politics was not a cornerstone of these marriages, but the overriding political passions of one spouse influenced and enhanced the political beliefs and activity of the other. The partner might be mildly politically interested and share similar views, but did not at first seek a political career for themselves. As an example, this chapter uses the marriage of Evelyn and Thomas Addis Emmet. Evelyn began her political life as a Conservative LCC councillor. She was married to Thomas who by the age of 30 had failed in all his various attempts to become, consecutively, a naval officer, an artist and an Oxford graduate. He eventually settled on being a farmer and a Conservative district councillor. Evelyn would go on to become the Conservative MP for East Grinstead and, later, Baroness Emmet of Amberley.

The case studies in this chapter draw predominantly on correspondence and personal archival material to create an impression of each couple's marriage and relationship.

Accessing working-class marriages within archives has been difficult, as most collections of this kind belong to middle and upper-class couples. Bessie and Jack Braddock were a working-class couple and have not left rich archival material, but, as noted above, were the only political partnership to author a joint autobiography. Whilst Bessie Braddock's career and role had attention from historians, the role of the Braddocks as a political partnership has not been discussed.[3] Although the Braddocks were unique in co-authoring their autobiography, ideas of love and politics come into the titles of many other Labour figures' written works. The title of Beatrice Webb's second volume of autobiography, covering the first twenty years of the Webb marriage, is *Our Partnership*; Peggy Jay, meanwhile, calls her autobiography *Loves and Labours*, and Jennie Lee titles hers *My Life With Nye*. The historian Jane Cox titles her edited collection of Ramsay and Margaret McDonald's letters *A Singular Marriage: A Labour Love Story in Letters and Diaries*. As seen in chapter one, no Labour marriages were really 'singular marriages' but part of much a larger trend.

Public partnerships, political power: Bessie and Jack Braddock

The Braddocks was published in 1963 and recounts Bessie and Jack's political lives and careers. Considering the numerous Labour autobiographies penned in this period by comparable politicians, Jack and Bessie would each have warranted their own volumes independently. That they chose to write an autobiography together suggests that they conceived of their political lives and work as a joint project. The individual achievements that they described had been made under the shared name of Braddock. This is an important feature of public partnerships: a unity of mind, purpose, and political philosophy.

Bessie, christened Elizabeth Margaret Bamber, was born in 1899 in Zante Street, Liverpool. She was the daughter of Scottish-born Mary 'Ma' Bamber, whom Bessie describes as 'a real revolutionary' and an icon of Liverpool socialism.[4] Bessie's mother had not been born into poverty, but into a comfortable family of Edinburgh lawyers who provided private education for their six children.[5] But Mary's father turned to drink and disappeared. The family moved to Liverpool and Bessie's grandmother, Agnes Little, lived with the Bamber

[3] See for example, Millie Toole, *Mrs. Bessie Braddock, M. P., a Biography* (London: Robert Hale, 1957); Ben Rees, *A Portrait of Battling Bessie: Life and Work of Bessie Braddock, a Liverpool MP* (Bulwell Lane: Leen Editions, 2011); Pelham McMahon, *Our Bessie* (Liverpool: Pelham McMahon, 2008).
[4] Braddocks, *The Braddocks* (London: Macdonald, 1963), p.3.
[5] Toole, *Mrs Bessie Braddock,* p.13.

family caring for Bessie and her sister Enid when their mother was engaged in her political work as an official in the Warehouse Workers' Union, and later a local councillor.[6] From three weeks old, Bessie was taken to meetings of the ILP: 'beginning her training early'.[7] Bessie's upbringing was not as socially and economically varied as her mother's had been, although she reports that they lived to a lower standard than they needed to as 'mother spent every spare penny on other people. But Enid [Bessie's sister] and I were always properly clothed and fed.'[8] The Bamber family were undeniably working-class, but with an economic safety net. Bessie's father, Hugh, held a reasonably good job as a bookbinder and guillotine worker in a Liverpool newspaper company, while her mother earned a wage through her union work. Bessie was proud that her parents did not force religion upon her or her sister, nor send them to Sunday School, but left them to decide for themselves.[9] However, the question of Socialist Sunday School at the club rooms of the British Socialist party was a different question. Whilst religion was not something to be inherited, there was little choice for the Bamber girls but to become socialists.

Jack Braddock's family, similarly, had connections in working-class politics. His father was a pottery worker and a co-opted member of the Hanley School Board.[10] His maternal uncle was chairman of the Bricklayers' Union in North Staffordshire. The historian Sam Davies claims that Jack's upbringing was also by no means poor, with his father earning about £160 a year in the late nineteenth century.[11] Jack only received elementary school education, as his father died in 1907, and Jack left to become a clerk for a draper's shop and then an apprenticeship at a wagon building workshop. Jack never stayed in any jobs for long. He moved around the north, working for a few weeks here and there, mostly for railway companies. During this time, however, Jack joined 'one of the small political organisations which were all over the industrial areas.'[12] He then made his way to Liverpool with his brother to take a ship to Canada in an attempt to join the Canadian Army, which paid more than being conscripted into the British Army. But once in Liverpool, he never left. Jack

[6] Toole, *Mrs Bessie Braddock,* p.14.
[7] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.3.
[8] ibid p.4.
[9] ibid, p.8.
[10] ibid. p.19.
[11] Sam Davies, 'John [Jack] Braddock, (1892–1963)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-65629 last accessed 6 Oct. 2019).
[12] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.21.

found his political home at the ILP Branch at Upper Parliament Street. It was there that he met Bessie Bamber.

Partner choice – love and socialism

Bessie and Jack devote no space to the story of their meeting, courtship, or marriage in the co-authored autobiography. Only mentioned in passing, it could be easily missed. Bessie simply writes: 'I had married Jack on February 9, 1922, during lunch break from my clerical job with the Warehouse Workers' Union.'[13] In promoting her 1957 book on Bessie Braddock, which drew on interviews with her subject, the journalist and author Millie Toole used the story of their somewhat unconventional relationship as a selling point as it fascinated readers.[14] Bessie and Jack met in the ILP rooms from which time, as Toole puts it, they began to 'walk out together'. Bessie's quote to Toole on the matter was simply: 'You don't get time for courting. We just realised that sooner or later we would marry.'[15] Fellow comrades noted the oddness of that arrangement with an anonymous source saying 'That courtship was like nothing on earth…They were thrown together a great deal. He was living at her home some of the time. Anyway, no one would have known they were courting if they had not been told.' [16] It was not just Bessie with whom Jack had formed a strong relationship, but also Bessie's mother, Mary Bamber. Presumably this explained why Jack lived at the house as a lodger before Jack and Bessie were actually married. Toole describes Jack as accepting 'Bessie as Ma Bamber's heir and his natural partner in the work he had to do.'[17] They courted for seven years before making the marriage official for practical and political reasons. Jack was imprisoned in 1921 during an unemployment demonstration. At the committee meeting of Ward no.2 branch, of which Bessie was the chair, the meeting decided that perhaps it would be prudent for Jack and Bessie to set a date. 'We agreed,' says Bessie, 'that if Jack got stuck into prison again, contact with him would be easier if we were married.'[18] This unromantic conception of partner choice were not unique to Jack and Bessie – Beatrice Webb employed a similar articulation of choosing a 'political partner' rather than a

[13] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.67.
[14] Millie Toole, 'No Time For Courting', *Liverpool Echo*, Saturday 26 October 1957, p.31.
[15] ibid.
[16] Toole, *Mrs Bessie Braddock*, p.46.
[17] Toole, *Mrs Bessie Braddock*, pp.52-53.
[18] Millie Toole, 'No Time For Courting'*, Liverpool Echo*, Saturday 26 October 1957, p.31.

romantic lover in Sidney Webb.[19] But an emphasis on practical partner choice emerged as of paramount importance, as it to enabled them to both pursue their first and true love of socialism. Jack was not Bessie's first romantic interest that flowered within her gang of ILP associates. Bessie recounts her relationship with Ernest Silverman, a brilliant young socialist but with a proclivity for theft and fraud. Bessie helped him throughout her life, including supporting him in prison and acting as the executor of his will upon his suicide. People used to ask Bessie why she bothered to maintain her friendship with Ernest, to whom she felt a degree of responsibility for his behavior and eventual death:

> I regretted the loss to Socialism of his fine brain. Before all these regrettable things happened, Ernest asked me to marry him and I refused… So it's just possible that I could have altered the sad, lost life of Ernest Silverman. But I suppose that to have done so would have cost me my own.[20]

What is so revealing about Bessie's friendship with Ernest was her rejection of him as a romantic and political partner. Very early in her life, Bessie recognized that she needed to choose a partner who would not be a liability to her own work or ambition. Although she had deep feelings for Ernest, coupled with a shared sense of socialist commitment, Bessie saw in Jack a man who would be a support to her and complement her political ambitions, rather than stand in her way. Sam Davies suggests that Jack was not the overpowering personality that his reputation might suggest, and that he paled in comparison to Bessie.[21] She describes her husband in a similar way, claiming that: 'Some of us hear our husbands talk a lot, and some of us get tired of it. But I like hearing Jack, because he doesn't talk unless he has something to say."[22] She needed a more passive partner who would allow her political ambitions to flourish, and whose voice would not overpower her own.

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[19] Beatrice Webb had been deeply in love with Joseph Chamberlain but the relationship had failed. On her eventual agreement to marry Sidney she claimed: "On the face of it, it seems an extraordinary end to the once brilliant Beatrice Potter (but it is just because it is not an end that she has gone into it) to marry an ugly little man with no social position and less means, whose only recommendation, so some may say, is a certain pushing ability. And I am not "in love' with him, not as I was. But I see something else in him (the world would say it was a proof of my love) – a fine intellect and a warm-heartedness, a power of self-subordination and self-devotion for the 'common good'." (Beatrice Webb, diary, 20 June 1891).
[20] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.17.
[21] Sam Davies, 'Jack Braddock', *ODNB.*
[22]Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.76.

Whilst a practical choice of partner was important for these public partnerships, shared political values became inextricably entangled with their concept of love. It is difficult to demonstrate from the evidence the ways that Jack and Bessie conceived of their love for each other, although clearly their socialist ideals constituted the cornerstone of their relationship. This is easier to elucidate through the evidence available for other Labour party couples. For Alfred and Ada Salter, for example, the Bermondsey political couple discussed in chapter one, there was more evidence in their correspondence of how they envisioned their relationship together. Alfred and Ada Salter had a similar MP and local councillor arrangement in the London Borough of Bermondsey as the Braddocks did to Liverpool. Like Jack and Bessie, their political activity brought them together, and they were founding members of the Bermondsey ILP. As Alfred remarked in a letter to Ada early in their courtship: 'We are living and working for the same goal - to make the world, and in particular, this corner of the world, happier and holier for our joint lives.'[23] Although they had individual interests, their political work belonged to a larger vision of what they would achieve as a couple in Bermondsey. Graham Taylor has viewed their relationship as part of the couple's commitment to ethical socialism, which he describes as 'an emancipation that comprised not just strikes and protests but fun and fellowship, reading and song.'[24] Indeed, this was a transformation of daily life that incorporated a form of socialism that was lived within all things. For those adhering to this ideology, it would have been inconceivable to marry a partner who did not share the same left-wing views, or more crucially, were accepting of the sacrifices that therefore had to be made.

Having a partner who did not share these values was incompatible with the belief in a wider mission that they were set to fulfill through socialism. This was integral to these Labour dual-career partnerships. An excellent example of this is found the marriage of suffrage campaigners and Labour activists Emmeline and Frederick Pethwick-Lawrence. Below is a passage from Emmeline's response to a proposal of marriage from Frederick in 1900. It is suggestive of deep internal conflict, for however much she cares for and could see a future with him, she cannot reconcile her fondness for Frederick with his political beliefs. Writing how incompatible their political beliefs and future together looked, Emmeline recalled:

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[23] The original copies of these love letters between Alfred and Ada that Fenner Brockway quotes in his work *Bermondsey Story* have been lost. But several extracts have been published in Fenner Brockway*, Bermondsey Story: the life of Alfred Salter* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), p.16.
[24] Graham Taylor, *Ada Salter: Pioneer of Ethical Socialism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016), p.8.

> I have always felt this compelling force – the authority that sets choosing aside: And now knowing this, when I come to face the question that you put to me, I cannot help thinking first… But my - Socialism,- call it, - (for want of a better name) is not an idea in my head - it is in my bones - it was born in me- my whole life long it has been my touch-stone - my Standard of values. I mean this - my first consciousness was the clearest, strongest & most inveterate sense of the dignity & worth of the human body & soul above everything else - and this has forced me into life long campaign - against every sort of bondage, against all sorts of established authorities: and it has kept me (not by choice but by inward necessity) always against the stream. Now what has this to do with you? Can you not see? It is impossible for me in a letter to do more than suggest why it is, that I could not help you play your part as a Liberal Unionist politician.[25]

Compromise from Frederick allowed the couple to resolve their impasse, which included disagreement over the Boer War. Fred toured South Africa to assess the situation for himself, returning a pro-Boer and prepared to abandon his parliamentary candidature.[26] This allowed Emmeline to abandon her doubts and agree to their engagement. Emmeline describes her socialism as fixed and immutable. Her socialism was not just a set of opinions, or political creed, but part of her being. Being a Liberal-Unionist did not carry with it the same sense of loyalty for Fred. This allowed him to both align his beliefs to the woman he wished to marry and move into the Labour party after the demise of the Liberals.[27]

Family and kinship networks

The Braddocks had networks of familial and kinship support that allowed them to live fully political lives. After marriage, Jack's employment record was patchy. He repeatedly lost jobs when employers learnt of his previous communist connections and a police investigation

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[25] Letter from Emmeline Pethwick to F.W Lawrence 27 June 1900, Box 7/48, Pethwick-Lawrence Papers, Trinity College, Cambridge.
[26] Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 246.
[27] Brian Harrison, 'Frederick William Pethick- Lawrence, Baron Pethick-Lawrence (1871–1961), politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35491 last accessed 17 Apr. 2023).

into his charge of handling arms for the IRA.[28] He was unemployed between 1920 and 1925. Luckily, Sir Benjamin Johnson, who owned a large dye works, was a great friend of Mary Bamber. 'He thought Mrs Bamber was wonderful', Jack reported, 'and he would talk politics and economics with her for hours…He told Mrs. Bamber that he didn't like to see me out of work because I ought to have a steady income and enough free time to be active in politics.'[29] Sir Benjamin leant Jack £150 to buy an insurance book with the Co-operative Insurance Society. Jack was initially sceptical about accepting this offer:

> I was independent, and I did not like the idea that anyone might be able to claim my allegiance because of something they had done for me. On the other hand, I didn't want to live off Bessie and her parents, not that they objected. I had a talk with Bill Cruickshank, an old Liverpool Socialist, who was in the insurance business and could tell me how it worked, and how much time I would have free for politics. Bill's report was favourable, but I still didn't want Sir Benjamin's money, and I wouldn't have taken it if Mrs Bamber had not persuaded me to do so… I worked really hard at door-to-door collecting for three years until I had the book so well organised that it looked after itself, and I had the money to pay back Sir Benjamin. Then I became a politician again.[30]

Irrespective of political party allegiance, financial stability and security were essential for all politicians. In working-class Liverpool, family connections and financial support were essential in providing the economic conditions to be politically active. Jack's marriage to Bessie, with the networks of support and relationships he gained through her, allowed them to both pursue political work. This is a large factor in what distinguishes these public partnerships: the commitment to reorganise their lives to be full-time politicians.

Practical and domestic support were also crucial and the Braddocks had considerable help on this front. The couple lived with Bessie's sister, Enid and her family, in a four-bed semi-detached house in Liverpool, where Enid ran the household and looked after Bessie and Jack, as well as her own husband and daughter. This must have felt like a normal

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[28] Jack first came to the attention of the police for forming a branch of the Industrial Workers of the World, a US-based anarcho-syndicalist organization. In 1923 he was tried and acquitted on a charge of possessing arms intended for the IRA. The police had been tipped off that the offices of the Communist party were being used a storage place for IRA weapons, an allegation that Jack and Bessie denied.
[29] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.69.
[30] ibid.

arrangement to Bessie and Enid, who had grown up living with their own grandmother, who cared for them when their mother was busy with political work. Ada Salter had the help of a 'homely Bermondsey woman', Mrs. Hoadley, who worked full time at the Salter's house as a housekeeper, and on her death was soon replaced by another comrade from the ILP.[31]

Another factor in the organization of their lives was that Jack and Bessie did not have any children. A Liverpool comrade, Annie Myers, recalls that Bessie was an unabashed follower of Marie Stopes and she could be seen striding the streets of Liverpool with her nose in a copy of *Married Love*.[32] Sometimes, Bessie organised *ad hoc* street recitals from the text, drawing a crowd usually composed of men. Annie claimed that Bessie knew 'everything a woman of those days was not supposed to know before marriage…Bessie called it scientific birth control for the purposes of the meeting, but she did not bother to wrap up what it meant.'[33] Public political partnerships were not conducive to having children. The Pethwick-Lawrences, mentioned above, also did not have children, and nor did the Webbs. The Salters had one daughter, who tragically died after contracting scarlet fever for the third time in the slums of Bermondsey.[34]

For those who did have children, Labour party cultures could be instrumental in allowing women access to political spaces. Reuben and Florence Farrow were active together in the Birmingham Labour party, both standing in local elections together throughout the 1920s and 30s. Reuben and Florence had been intensely involved in setting up the local ILP branch in Derby in 1912. Reuben was one of the first socialist town councilors in Derby, but they later moved to Birmingham. He and his wife took part in Labour politics together, made possible, in Reuben's words in his unpublished memoir, by 'an ample reservoir of baby sitters' available in the local party, but also his fervent belief that 'socialism was not simply about external changes but about living differently by creating a new culture of everyday life.'[35] This new 'culture of everyday life' included a more communal approach to childrearing and childcare. This was also apparent in the Bermondsey Labour party. Eveline and George Lowe, for instance, were stalwarts of the party and best friends of the Salters.[36]

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[31] Sybil Oldfield, 'Salter , Ada (1866–1942)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38531, accessed 4 Aug 2014).
[32] *Married Love* was one of the first books to discuss birth control. See Marie Carmichael Stopes, *Married Love a New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties : A Book for Married Couples* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2013).
[33] Toole, *Mrs Bessie Braddock,* p.49.
[34] Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey story: the life of Alfred Salter* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), p.43.
[35] Sheila Rowbotham, S*ocialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), pp.5-6.
[36] *Bermondsey Labour Magazine,* February 1926, no.16, p.5.

In her obituary, Eveline Lowe's house was described as always open to visitors, and that: 'If our families were busy at committee meetings... we went "round to Mrs Lowe"…. Looking back it is astonishing how often so busy a woman happened to be at home at least in time for tea and to direct our games.'[37]

Partnerships and power

Although benefitting from strong political networks of family, Jack and Bessie always vehemently denied any suggestions of nepotism at play in the Liverpool Labour party. Bessie benefitted from her mother's reputation and the political networks that Mary Bamber had spent years building. She was welcomed at many politically useful events (bazaars, Christmas fairs, summer rallies and so on) because 'so many of the older women remembered my mother. Many had been helped by her when she and Ellen Wilkinson were joint women's organisers of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers …I have a reputation of my own, but I remain proud still to be living on hers.'[38] However, Bessie and Jack were vociferously opposed to any suggestion of familial favouritism on the opposition benches. When Jack was quite newly elected to Liverpool City Council, there was a motion to approve the new Lord Mayor of Liverpool, a Tory Councillor named George Strong. The motion was put forward by the leader of the Liverpool Tories who listed Councilor Strong's qualifications. He then moved on somewhat additionally to list the qualities of Mrs. Strong, who although not a councillor, 'identified herself with child welfare work and played golf.'[39] Jack decided that this nomination would not stand. He was fed up with the system of the Lord Mayor always being chosen by the Tory group, and felt that Councillor Strong was only being given the role because of his familial connections. In his speech, Jack protested:

> Councillor Strong - who is, of course, the father-in-law of Sir Thomas White's son… It is about time, in our view, that we nominated somebody who is really entitled to be considered for this very high position. On the grounds of service, and other things, I want to support Alderman Fred Richardson. He is a good family man - none of his family is in any way association with this council and he

[37] 'Obituary, Mrs E M Lowe', *The Times*, 5th June 1956.
[38] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.144.
[39] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.77.

> lacks the kind of support that has so generously been given to Councillor Strong.[40]

In this impassioned speech, Jack failed to acknowledge that his own family had three members associated with the council. Jack, who had no family roots in the area, married into the Bamber family and benefitted from the support and connections that this gave him. Presumably Jack would defend this as the Braddock/Bambers were socialists, but relationships and marriage clearly did give political advantage, in the way that he was criticising the Strongs, even if Jack did not view his own life in these terms.

Some historians have been very critical of the 'boss politics' that the Braddocks adopted in Liverpool, comparing it to city politics in the US, where political 'machines' – based on ethnic identification and cutting across class boundaries – have been historically significant.[41] Robert Baxter views similar sectarian lines being created in Liverpool under the influence of the Braddocks. Within the Liverpool Labour party post-1945, the party descended into factional conflict between a 'right-wing' machine, controlled by the Braddocks, and a radical left-wing group.[42] P. J. Waller has also taken up this theme, calling Jack Braddock 'Boss Braddock'. Waller criticizes Jack for not embarking on new initiatives to attract new groups of voters into the Liverpool Labour party, preferring instead to block electoral change and, although irreligious himself, concentrate on the old Irish Catholic demographic in Liverpool.[43] Bessie and Jack had become obsessed with their complete opposition to Aneurin Bevan and his followers, who had a power base in the 1950s Liverpool Labour party.[44] Jack was also described as having 'an insularity and intolerance … an obsession with loyalty and discipline appeared his outstanding characteristics.'[45] Strong networks of families and relationships could cement this factionalism. Bessie, Jack, and Mary Bamber had always moved together politically, from the Communist Party to the ILP and then the Labour party, forming a powerful political unit.

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[40] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.80.
[41] R. Baxter, 'The Liverpool Labour party, 1918–1963' (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1969).
[42] Sam Davies, *Liverpool Labour : Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool, 1900-1939* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996), p.141.
[43] P. J. Waller, *Democracy and sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool, 1868–1939* (Livepool: Liverpool University Press, 1981).
[44] Janet McLarney, 'Bessie Braddock, Bevanism and the Struggle for Liverpool Exchange, 1952-55', *North West Labour History*, no. 25 (2001), pp. 55-63.
[45] Rees, *Battling Bessie,* p.54.

'Boss politics' or not, they held a great deal of power together in Liverpool. Towards the end of their joint autobiography, published in 1963, the narrative voice changes, and Bessie begins to write in the present tense. She narrates the story from her constituency office, which is crumbling around her and she has not taken much trouble to brighten up as 'we're going to drive a new ring road through my office.'[46] Although it is unlikely that the Braddocks chose the route themselves, they clearly felt their importance and power in the decisions that were being taken in Liverpool. Whether the 'we' here was referring to the Labour council or to Bessie and Jack it is difficult to tell, but that fact she could have meant either speaks volumes of their power.

As a source, *The Braddocks* offers considerable insight into their personalities and the dynamics of their marriage. The autobiography begins equitably, with Bessie and Jack each taking alternate chapters to narrate their own life stories. But after the initial accounts of the flourishing socialism in Jack's life, and his escapades with the Communist party, Bessie's contributions dominate the work. Some of the chapters then become jointly authored. One co-authored chapter looks at their work on hospitals, where Bessie's sections run to nearly four times the length of Jack's. Bessie writes a long and emphatic account of the people she met, the conditions she saw, and the problems she solved. In contrast to Bessie, Jack only contributes a few paragraphs covering the committee that he sat on.[47] This reticence on Jack's part could also simply be indicative of his personality: Bessie was considered to be the dominant force in their relationship, while Jack the taciturn 'off-stage shadow'.[48] His death in 1963 was reported on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* with the headline 'Bessie Braddock's Husband Is Dead.'[49] Bessie had, and sought, a much higher profile than Jack. She was celebrity obsessed, proudly recounting that her friends included Marlene Dietrich, the bookmaker William Hill, and Max Bygraves.[50] This imbalance in personalities is perhaps also reflected by the fact that Bessie took on the role of MP whilst Jack stayed in local government.

There is very little reference to each other in their individual chapters, their work and triumphs rarely interact in the book. They conceive of their work as important in their

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[46] Braddocks, *The Braddocks*, p.157.
[47] Jack and Bessie Braddock, *The Braddocks*, chp.10.
[48] Millie Toole, 'No Time For Courting'*, Liverpool Echo*, 26 October 1957, p.31.
[49] 'Bessie Braddock's Husband Is Dead', *Daily Mirror*, 13 November 1963, p.1.
[50] Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.178. She even mystifyingly appeared in an episode of *This is Your Life* for Max Bygraves. 'This is Your Life – Max Bygraves'*:* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5m9xg3jJ0K0&t=253s last accessed at 16 April 2023)

chosen fields and, although they attend many of the same events, conferences and meetings, there is almost no reference that they did so together. This lack of interaction could also reflect the way that they considered their political work. Although they shared the same political values, their championed political causes were in different fields: Jack in local government and Bessie in Parliament. Alfred and Ada Salter had a similar arrangement. When interviewed about her marriage in the late 1930s by a journalist investigating 'Two-Career Marriages,' Ada Salter said: 'I don't know what it would be like to have two politicians in the home who take opposite views, but we two, who have the same opinions, but different fields of administration, find it very satisfactory indeed.'[51] For Jack and Bessie, that there is lack of interaction between their political activities, but that they chose to write their political life story together, suggests the ways that they conceived their marriage as working towards the overall cause of socialism.

In this model of public political partnership, there were far more Labour party couples than Conservative. It seems likely that there is an ideological component to this: couples who met and grew up in the milieu of socialist politics were more inclined to subordinate other aspects of their lives and relationships to their political activism. This had a number of impacts, not least of all that many of these couples were childless. Some of those without adequate financial means also adopted a more communal style of living. Their belief in living socialist life was in many cases so powerful that it was impossible for them to consider a partner who was not similarly absorbed.

Returning to how we understand the balance of power in relationships, Phyllis Rose reveals some of the problems for John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill in their attempts in the 1850s and 60s to lead 'a true marriage of equals'. Rose says that 'so unusual was this situation that for Harriet to be anywhere near equal she had to be 'more than equal'. To achieve equality, more power had to go to Harriet, in compensation for the inequality of their conditions.'[52] This perhaps explains the dominance of this model of relationship within the Labour party. The socialist understanding of the rebalancing of power within society may have helped Labour couples to prioritise this rebalance within their own relationships. As we have seen here, the attempts to make the relationships 'more than equal' involved an outsourcing of help to remove some of the constraints upon women, such as domestic work

[51] Angela Milne, 'Politics on the Hearth', *The Evening News*, 25 August 1939, p.8.
[52] Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives*, p. 140.

and childcare. Or in the case of Bessie Braddock, her dominance of the relationship, both personally and politically, allowed her to have a political career.

'Weather house' partnerships: Juliet and Rhys Rhys-Williams

In contrast to model adopted by the Braddocks, spouses in 'weather house' partnerships moved in and out of public political life. Either they made the choice, or did not possess the financial or practical arrangements, to both pursue public political life simultaneously. They fluctuated between periods of support and periods of promotion. This model of the waxing and waning of political life was seen in the previous chapter on the halo effect. The couple used as the primary case study here is Juliet and Rhys Rhys-Williams. Juliet has left a rich archive, which incorporates many items from other family members, including correspondence between Rhys and Juliet at various times throughout their marriage. In contrast to the public narrative found in *The Braddocks*, we see glimpses of the everyday lives and relationship of the couple. The collection does not just feature Juliet's political life, but her family and personal views. Whilst, inevitably, there is much that this private correspondence does not tell us, it nonetheless offers a fuller picture of the relationship between Rhys and Juliet.

Juliet Rhys-Williams was born in 1898 at Sheering Hall, Essex. She was the youngest of two daughters of the barrister Clayton Louis Glyn and his wife, the romantic novelist Elinor Glyn. Glyn's novels included *Three Weeks*, which sold millions of copies and revolutionised the romantic fiction genre by focusing more on women's sexuality, and the view of the female protagonist. [53] Once Clayton Glyn had spent his inherited fortune, the Glyns' economic situation was precarious, resulting in Elinor becoming a prolific writer, publishing at least a novel a year to support the family. Juliet claims that Elinor deliberately signed away her 'substantial marriage settlement' to extricate her husband from some moneylenders, and consequently had to write more books and articles, which she hated doing.[54] Just before her father's death in 1915, Juliet refused to return to boarding school in Eastbourne, and instead

[53] Alexis Weddon, 'An Introduction to Elinor Glyn: Her Life and Legacy', *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol.29, no.2 (2018), p.146; J Castagna, 'Elinor Glyn [née Sutherland', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* Oxford University Press, 2008, (https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-33428 last accessed 6 Oct. 2019)

[54] 'My Mother: Elinor Glyn', Woman's Hour script, 1958, RHYSWILLAIMS/J/20/2, Rhys-Williams papers, LSE Library Archives, London.

joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment aged sixteen. She worked for two years as an operating theatre assistant at the Hospital for Officers in Park Lane, before passing the civil service exams for the clerical grade of the War Office and Admiralty, where she moved into several secretarial and administrative roles.[55]

Juliet's future husband, Lieutenant Colonel Rhys Rhys-Williams, was considerably older. He was 38 years her senior: the son of a 'well-known and popular judge', Gwilym Williams, and grew up at Miskin Manor, a large Victorian manor house south of Cardiff.[56] Rhys followed his father into the legal profession, following an education at Eton and Oriel College, Oxford and subsequently worked as a barrister on the South Wales Circuit.[57] On the outbreak of the First World War, aged 49, Rhys Rhys-Williams joined the Grenadier Guards, where he fought until he was injured at the Battle of Loos in 1915. He was brought back to England and treated at the Hospital for Officers in Park Lane, which brought him into contact, for the first time, with Juliet, then aged 17. As soon as he was well enough, Rhys was sent as a military attaché to Tehran before returning after a year to work at the War Office and Admiralty. At the 1918 election, he entered Parliament as a member for the Banbury Division of Oxfordshire as a Coalition Liberal, and was appointed Under-Secretary at the Transport Ministry.

It was here that Rhys and Juliet's paths crossed once again. Juliet had left nursing to become a clerk in the Military Intelligence department of the War Office from 1917-18. After the war, she moved through a number of clerical roles before arriving in the Transport Ministry in 1918, where she became what she describes as private secretary to Rhys Rhys-Williams.[58] Their relationship blossomed, Sir Rhys telling journalists later in the 1930s: 'Well, we could neither get out of it then.'[59] They married on the 24th February 1921 in Westminster and honeymooned in the bridegroom's constituency.[60] Their first child, Glyn, was born later that year. They had four children, the youngest, Elspeth, was born in 1937 when Rhys was 72 years old. The age gap here is important in understanding how this couple

[55] 'Notes about Juliet Rhys-Williams', 1932, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/27/1/.
[56] 'Rhys Rhys-Williams introduction', undated, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/27/1/.
[57] 'Sir Rhys Rhyswilliams', *The Times*, 31 Jan. 1955, p. 8.
[58] 'Notes about Juliet Rhys-Williams'. This definition is presumably as a secretary working at a clerical grade. Juliet describes her duties as responsible for the organisation of volunteers for the care of Railway Horses during the transport strike.
[59] 'One of Britain's Most Brilliant Women', *The Western Mail*, Wednesday 12 January 1938, p.6.
[60] 'Marriages', *The Times*, 22 Feb. 1921, p. 13.

evolved a model of supporting each other at various times throughout their political life. Rhys almost had a full career behind him before he even met Juliet.

Fluctuations in promotion and support

During their early marriage, Juliet's political life revolved around supporting Rhys in his role as an MP. Juliet lists this as a facet of her experience on a later CV, stating that she did 'organising and political work as wife of Member for North Oxfordshire to 1922.'[61] At this time in her life, Juliet's focus was on her children and supporting Rhys in his political ambitions. Their main residence was Miskin Manor, where Juliet held several honorary charitable positions in Wales for organisations such as the Red Cross, St John's Ambulance, and the Group of Council Schools.[62] Rhys resigned his Banbury constituency in 1922 to try for the Pontypridd seat, where the familial home was, but as noted in the previous chapter, he lost. He left electoral politics, returning to the legal profession where he served for the next 38 years as Chairman of Quarters Sessions for Glamorgan and Recorder for Cardiff, with directorships at several companies. Whilst Rhys' role in party politics and elected office abated, Juliet's grew. Throughout the 1930s, she involved herself in social and political causes such as maternity services and child welfare. Juliet was a founding member of the National Birthday Trust in 1928, an organisation committed to the wider provision of analgesia in childbirth and improvements in midwifery services.[63] She received a DBE in 1937 in recognition of her contributions to drafting the Midwives Act (1936), going on to conduct pioneering work highlighting the role of nutrition in relation to maternal mortality.

The couples' political party home was ambiguous. Sir Rhys was still considered an important voice within the Liberal party and 'one of the most prominent Liberals in Wales', but he gave his support to the local Conservative candidate at the 1931 election because he was concerned at the prospect of a socialist government. [64] Juliet's political background was Conservative and Peter Sloman describes how she was 'an unlikely Liberal in a number of respects…she was a fervent imperialist and supporter of tariff protection.' [65] But she

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[61] 'Rhys Rhys-Williams introduction', RHYSWILLIAMS/J/27/1/.
[62] ibid.
[63] See A. Susan Williams, *Women and Childbirth in the Twentieth Century: A History of the National Birthday Trust Fund 1928-93* (Stroud, England: Sutton Publishing).
[64] 'Liberal backs up Unionist', *The Western Mail,* Wednesday 04 March 1931, p.8.
[65] Peter Sloman, 'Beveridge's rival: Juliet Rhys-Williams and the campaign for basic income, 1942–55', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2006), p.4.

increasingly became a leading figure in the Liberal party, standing twice unsuccessfully for Parliament, trying for Pontypridd herself in 1938 and Ilford North in the 1945 general election. She became a member of the party's ruling council and honorary secretary of the Women's Liberal Federation.

Like J.C.C. Davidson, Rhys Rhys-Williams did not take such an active role in politics later in his life, but supported his wife politically in many ways. After the Second World War, Juliet's political interests concentrated on building European unity. One collection of letters within the family's archive illustrates the role that Rhys, alongside the rest of the family, played within Juliet's political activities. These letters paint a picture of everyday life at Miskin Manor during the summer of 1949. Rhys Rhys-Williams, their daughters Susan and Elspeth, and Susan's infant daughter Caroline all stayed at Miskin whilst Juliet was away in Paris attending a meeting of the United Europe Movement, of which she was Secretary. Rhys effectively acted as Juliet's own secretary during her absence, opening and organising her post and sending on anything that he deemed important. On 19th August he writes, 'Nothing of interest for you in the post this morning. I see you are to speak on Income Tax Reform on September 17th at 11.30.'[66] Rhys took his duties for Juliet very seriously, writing on an earlier occasion from London: 'I shall stay here till Thursday and deal with your correspondence. I have rung up Goddard's office several time, but there no-one there today! I will see that your books are sent on Monday.'[67] Yet their eldest daughter Susan expressed concern to her mother over Rhys' involvement in his wife's affairs:

> Daddy is rather tired, I think. He took it out of himself so much seeing relays of the family off, in London, and since he came down has had tedious appointments. He toils over your letters for hours but I simply can't persuade him not to. I hope the ones he is keeping back are not anything you want, but he says they are of no interest and he has answered them, and filed them. (Please don't ever do that to me if I am away unless I am really in Timbuktu.) [68]

[66] Rhys Rhys-Williams to Juliet Rhys-Williams, 19 August 1949, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/21/9/1.
[67] ibid, 6 August 1949.
[68] Susan Davson to Juliet Rhys-Williams, 13 August 1949, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/21/9/1.

Although the family had domestic help at Miskin (they report being overjoyed that Susan sacked Caroline's nanny and heavily criticize the 'lazy fat' cook Marta), it is clear that Rhys took on some organisational and emotional duties for the family. He organised his granddaughter Caroline's birthday present in Juliet's absence, writing to her: 'It's Caroline's birthday tomorrow. I am giving her a record from you and me. She adores them.'[69] Clearly the age gap between the Rhys-Williams' played a part in the changing role that Rhys took later in life. He had experienced a full political life already when Juliet was in middle age, and was ready with the time and knowledge to support her.

Describing her marriage to a newspaper in 1954, Juliet claimed that she had been 'extraordinarily fortunate - I've found being married to a Welshman an enchanting experience. I've found the Welsh extremely kind-hearted and not dominating. They have sympathy for women's aspirations and interest…I have never been bored or bullied.'[70] This was a facet of Rhys' personality that was emphasised by others, the 'kindly considerate manner in which he deals with everybody.'[71] Clearly, Rhys had sympathy for women's aspirations and interests as evidenced in the way that he supported Juliet, but there was arguably an element of seeking control of their relationship, and approach to wider family life. Although the example above of how Rhys organised Juliet's post could be interpreted as helpful, Elspeth's vehement objection that she couldn't stand the thought of someone reading and responding to their post for them suggests that this could similarly be viewed as controlling behaviour.

There was other evidence of the involvement and interference that Juliet and Rhys exerted over their adult children. Their youngest son, Brandon, followed his parents into political life.[72] He found working as a Junior Executive at Imperial Chemical Industries frustrating, and subsequently wanted to enter politics.[73] The political knowledge and support of his parents were invaluable. He also had to contend, however, with his mother and father interfering in his affairs. Juliet followed up a letter that Brandon, then in his twenties, had sent to a senior figure in an attempt to further his career with her own missive saying: 'I would like you to know that I advised Brandon against writing to you. But children don't

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[69] Rhys Rhys-Williams to Juliet Rhys-Williams, 23 August 1949, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/21/9/1.
[70] 'Draft article on Welsh Husbands', Keidrych Rhys for *The People,* 1954, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/21/9/1.
[71] 'Rhys Rhys-Williams introduction', RHYSWILLIAMS/J/27/1/1.
[72] Brandon would later become Conservative MP for Kensington and a MEP for London South East. His wife Caroline ran lunch groups for wavering voters, known as 'The Floating Ladies'. See 'Lives Remembered', *The Telegraph,* 13 January 2010.
[73] Juliet Rhys-Williams to unknown, 16 November 1961, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/21/9/1.

always take their parent's advice, as perhaps you know by now! I told him it would do not good, and would merely oblige you to snub him.'[74] Brandon's father-in-law also corresponded with the Rhys-Williamses on the subject of Brandon's career. He was unhappy about the prospect of Brandon and his wife Caroline accompanying Juliet on a trip to Russia and wrote saying:

> I must confess that I very much dislike appearing so soon in the role of a heavy interfering father and would not do so if I were not deeply concerned about the implications of your proposal on Caroline and Brandon's whole future… should he be elected to the LCC he would need yet more latitude over working hours and equally his absence from one or two of his first valuable committees at County Hall could well be misconstrued.[75]

In a similar way to public partnerships, politics was a family endeavour. After the death of Rhys, the youngest daughter Elspeth remained living with Juliet and attended many society and social events with her mother, serving as her companion. Elspeth became involved in the management of the Conservative pressure group, the Monday Club, not marrying until she was 44, long after her mother's death.[76] Although the support and knowledge provided by spouses and family members was invaluable, it also was difficult to diverge from expected roles and expectations. The hierarchical power relations and structures of upper middle-class families makes the equitable public partnerships between husband and wives more difficult.

Difficulties in two political lives

Whilst Juliet and Rhys Rhys-Williams show how lifecycles could be used to a political couple's advantage, there were other factors that made sustaining political involvement difficult, particularly for women. Unlike the Braddocks, the Rhys-Williams had three children. Larger families were much more common for Conservative and Liberal women examined in this thesis, who could afford greater amounts of paid help with domestic duties and childcare. The fact that the Rhys-Williamses could afford to pay for domestic help such

[74] Rhys-Williams to unknown, undated, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/21/9/1.
[75] Ludo A Foster to Juliet Rhys-Williams, 26 February 1961, RHYSWILLIAMS/J/21/9/1.
[76] 'Marriages', *The Times*, 2 Mar. 1981, p. 14.

as nannies and nursery maids, meant that Juliet could pursue political opportunities when they were offered to her. As noted in the previous chapter, she stood for Pontypridd in 1938, only days after giving birth to Elspeth. She stood again at the 1945 general election but she and Rhys were by then disagreeing more and more with the Liberal leadership on policy matters. Juliet and Rhys both resigned from the Liberals and concentrated their energies on the Conservative party from this point. Like the Braddock family, it is notable that they moved to a different political party at the same time.

Domestic and childcare pressures were not so easily alleviated for other political couples, leading to greater fluctuations in the political involvement of the partners. The unpredictable nature of electoral politics was another factor that political couples had to contend with. Inevitably, one partner could win and the other could lose. Caroline Selina Ganley and her husband Jim Ganley were an example of a Labour party couple who faced these tensions. Jim's political life had started through the Garment Maker's Union as he worked a tailor's cutter.[77] After having children, Caroline described, in her unpublished autobiography, how she began joining him at party meetings:

> In order not to deprive myself of his company I used to take the children in a perambulator and accompany him to meetings. I heard arguments that deeply interested me; I heard people expressing very lucidly just what I felt; I enjoyed the feeling of true comradeship; in fact I really 'belonged' to such meetings even as I do now…Then arose the problem of family life; three children and a home and a burning desire to participate in a fuller political life along with my husband.[78]

Although Jim had introduced Caroline to political involvement and championed her political ambitions, her career very quickly eclipsed his own.[79] Both stood for election to the local council in 1919; Caroline won, and Jim lost by 17 votes.[80] Jim never stood for election again

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[77] Gillian Scott, 'Ganley, Caroline Selina (1879–1966)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 (http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50552, accessed 18 April 2023).
[78] Typescript autobiography c.1955, p.3, GANLEY, Caroline Ganley Papers, Bishopsgate Institute Archive, London.
[79] Caroline's first experience of speaking in public came from a rally in Trafalgar Square in the early 1900s: 'I was dishing up the dinner when my husband came in and without any preamble said his Union, the Government Worker's Union, was holding a demonstration at Trafalgar Square but had no women speaker on the platform. He said simply, "I told them I thought you would do it." GANLEY, Typescript autobiography c.1955, p.19
[80] L. Ware, C. Rallings, M. Thrasher, 'British Local Election Database, 1889-2003', SN: 5319, 2006, UK Data Service, (date last accessed 13 April 2023), http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5319-1

whilst Caroline went from strength to strength, elected to the LCC before becoming MP for Battersea and President of the Co-operative Society. The unpredictability of elections was an important factor for these 'weather-house' couples, with some victories changing the course of their lives very quickly. For the Ganleys, there was the added pressure of money and work. Before being elected as an MP, Caroline had to resign from the LCC as she simply could not fund the travel and expenses that the role required. Jim had many periods of unemployment and ill health which made her political ambitions difficult to sustain.[81] This is a direct contrast to the Braddocks, who had financial and familial support networks in place and did not have the pressure of three children as dependants.

Compared to public partnerships, 'weather house' partnerships were more pragmatic than ideological – from all political parties. Practical circumstances like age gaps, child raising, finances and the unpredictability of electoral life meant that couples moved between periods of promotion and periods of support. The political knowledge, networks, and commitment that spouses shared were invaluable, but their lives were not, and in many cases could not be, organised in such a way to allow for both partners to pursue political careers simultaneously.

Emergent partnerships: Evelyn and Thomas Addis Emmet

The third and final model of political partnerships is that of the 'emergent' partnership. As shown in chapter one, women who desired political careers often remained single, or, in the case of Labour women, sought a public political partnership. This emergent partnership was a relationship in which one partner was more political than the other and the marriage had to be shaped to accommodate and support this political ambition. Emergent partnerships benefitted from the presence of devoted but undomineering spouses who gradually developed their own political interests to complement the more political partner. This final model looks at the relationship of Evelyn and Thomas Addis Emmet.

[81] Caroline describes how: 'The cloud that really hung above our household was the continual uncertainty of my husband's employment. There was spells of short time, spells of unemployment, spells of sickness, and spells of victimisation, and these made meticulous budgeting of expenses a real nightmare sometimes. I have always kept account of every penny I spent in my diaries, and many nights I have lain awake planning to make do with this, and that, scheming to get a pair of trousers from an old coat or skirt, and always making do somehow.' GANLEY, Typescript autobiography c.1955, p.98.

Evelyn Emmet was the daughter of Sir James Rennell Rodd, a distinguished diplomat who briefly served as a Conservative politician from 1928-1932.[82] Coming from a diplomatic family, Evelyn was educated chiefly on the continent, speaking Italian, German and French fluently. Evelyn returned to England as a teenager where she finished her education in Hertfordshire and went up to Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford where she studied 'the Greats' graduating with a third in 1920. Her father was the British Ambassador in Rome from 1908-1919 and during the turbulent war years Evelyn served as his secretary at the British Embassy in Rome - presumably during her university vacations. When her father resigned from his post in 1919, she returned to England, where she spent several months in London's East End slums carrying out social work at Toynbee Hall.[83]

Thomas Addis Emmet was the youngest son of Major Robert and Louise Emmet, wealthy Americans who had emigrated to the UK at the end of the nineteenth century. His father became a naturalised Englishman and fought with the British Army in the First World War.[84] In 1926 the family purchased Amberley Castle in Sussex, to which Thomas became heir. Although there are no recorded details of how Evelyn and Thomas met, they married in June 1923 at St James' Roman Catholic Church in Marylebone, with one of his naval friends serving as the best man. The wedding was a large society wedding and was reported widely in the press before a honeymoon to Italy followed.[85] Soon after they were married, Evelyn fell pregnant with their first child, giving birth almost exactly a year after their wedding to a daughter, Lavinia. 1924 was also the year that Evelyn officially became a member of the Conservative party.[86] Evelyn did not have paid employment after marriage. She began some form of postgraduate study at the LSE, but, as Thomas noted, he ideally wanted her 'to find a really interesting occupation and one which fills up your time, for at present you haven't got one'.[87]

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[82] For further information see Sir James Rennell Rodd, *Social and Diplomatic Memories, 1884–1893* (London: Edward Arnold, 1922), *Social and Diplomatic Memories, 1894–1901: Egypt and Abyssinia* (London: Edward Arnold, 1923); *Social and Diplomatic Memories, 1902–1919* (London: Edward Arnold, 1925).
[83] For short biography see G. E. Maguire, 'Evelyn Violet Elizabeth Emmet [née Rodd], Baroness Emmet of Amberley (1899–1980), politician.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50059 last accessed at 7 Oct. 2019); 'The Hon Mrs Evelyn Emmet CV', MS.Eng.c.5721/3, Evelyn Emmett papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[84] *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*, 3 February 1923, p.8.
[85] 'Marriages', *The Times*, 11 June 1923, p. 15.
[86] 'The Hon Mrs Evelyn Emmet CV', Emmett papers, MS.Eng.c.5721/3.
[87] Thomas Emmet to Evelyn Emmet, 27th January 1925, Emmett papers, MS.Eng.d.2382.

Apolitical partners

Although he felt that it was important for Evelyn to have an occupation to fill her time, Thomas never established a successful career for himself. Following his education, Thomas joined the Royal Navy as a midshipman in 1918. He was promoted to Acting Sub-Lieutenant in 1921 and sent for further officer training at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich. A few months later he obtained a private medical certificate that recommended several weeks of sick leave due to 'inflammation of the throat and debility'. He was due to be sent to Portsmouth for further officer training, but it seems that Thomas never returned to duty from his illness and requested to be placed on the retired list in November 1922.[88] His passions thereafter came to lie in becoming an artist. Due to financial support from family, the couple was able to live without Thomas earning a regular income. Both sets of parents, and especially Evelyn's father, were alarmed to learn that the couple had decided to spend several months apart when Lavinia was only 6 months old for Thomas to pursue his painting.[89] This separation does not seem to have been prompted by a lack of affection between the couple, but rather Thomas' passionate interest in becoming an artist. Evelyn remained in London whilst Thomas travelled to Rome, living next to the Tiber to study painting.

It was during this time, in January 1925, that Evelyn was approached with the idea of standing for the London County Council by Captain Warburg of the Municipal Reform party. It is not clear from the archival evidence why Evelyn was approached. She had joined the Conservative party in 1924 and had helped in her father's diplomatic office. The family identified politically as Conservatives, although it is not clear whether she had been active before. The previous Municipal Reform incumbent for the Hackney North seat had been Lady Trustrum Eve, who was vacating Hackney to stand for Kensington. There may have been a concerted effort, as was common, from the Municipal Reform party to recruit another woman to stand in her place in order to keep similar numbers of female representatives. Evelyn, as a young female Conservative party member and the daughter of a Conservative politician, may have seemed an excellent prospect. Due to their geographical separation at this time, some of the correspondence between Thomas and Evelyn about

[88] The National Archives, Royal Navy ratings' service records 1853-1928, ADM 196/148/560, 'Thomas Addis Emmet'.
[89] Thomas Emmet to Evelyn Emmet, 26th January 1925, MS.Eng.d.2382.

whether she should pursue the offer has been preserved. She herself was surprised at the invitation and in her initial remarks to Thomas on the subject appeared reluctant to accept it:

> With regard to the County Council everybody is pressuring me to stand but I am not going to because I am afraid of anything coming between us and because of the child. I couldn't bear the idea of signing away any of our happiness for the sake of the L.C.C!!!![90]

Thomas' reaction was unenthusiastic. The letter that contained his most strongly voiced objections has not been saved, but this lost correspondence sparked a volley of twice daily letters and telegrams on the subject between the couple. Thomas' reasons against Evelyn standing were predominantly that he was concerned that her role on the LCC would interrupt their future plans for the family. Although besotted with their 'wonder-child' Lavinia, they were very keen to conceive their next baby, a desperately longed for boy to whom they were already referring as 'Christopher'.[91] However, once Thomas raised his objections, it became clear that Evelyn did want to take up the offer of the LCC seat and had in fact already reconsidered her initial answer to the local party. In a telegram sent on 27th January, Evelyn ends the message with: 'You decide'. In reality, she had no intention of leaving the decision to Thomas. On the same day she sent the following letter:

> As your letter this morning of the 27th repeats, our family must come before anything else. Beside, I want you and Christopher! Every bit as much as you; I knew it would be the one thing that would really worry you so I put it in the wire it is also the reason why I refused in the first instance. It is also only when it was put to me that I should be allowed to put family considerations first that I reconsidered my decision and sent you the wire.
>
> My darling, I wasn't going to do without you for 3 years! All L.C.C work is over by 5.30. The council sit once a week on Tuesday afternoons all the work being done by Committees of which I should only have to attend one a fortnight. This would be all my obligations for the first year except about a twice monthly visit to N

[90] ibid.
[91] ibid.

> Hackney. I think it will really be just enough to keep me occupied but not enough to interfere with family affairs.[92]

With her mind already made up, Evelyn goes further to gain Thomas's assent. She chooses this moment, quite out of context from the rest of the letter, to voice some of her concerns about Thomas' artistic aspirations and career path. She had been trying to persuade him to enroll at the Slade School of Fine Art in London with a view to obtaining qualifications that would enable him to earn a living and establish 'if you have it in you to be a great painter':

> Its far as your work goes, darling, I should never want you to change it for my sake but you know anxious I am that you should feel self-supporting as soon as possible… I am always rather haunted by the thought of what might become of our family supposing there was another war or some financial crash. I also want them to grow up respecting you and ambitious to follow in your footsteps…
>
> You see, my Tom, I think you will more than likely learn to paint and draw very well but that would only be good enough for a pastime - museums and picture galleries are crowded already with thousands of useless pictures by people who took themselves seriously as artists and should only have used their talent as a pastime.
>
> Of course you are happy painting, so is everybody with the least little bit of art in them that does not necessarily indicate that it is your profession.[93]

Evelyn's decision to voice these concerns after she had been dissuaded from standing for the North Hackney seat by Thomas certainly feels calculated. The absence of a lucrative profession was no doubt something that niggled Thomas, and Evelyn reports that his father was also concerned about the direction that his son was taking. If this was her design, it seems to have worked. Evelyn wrote to apologise for the letter the next day and instructs Thomas to forget all about it (although at the same time she sent a wire confirming to the Conservative party that she was going to proceed with the LCC selection process). Thomas' tone changes markedly and sensing defeat he moves to be fully supportive of Evelyn's plans:

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[92] Evelyn Emmet to Thomas Emmet, 27 January 1925, MS.Eng.d.2382.
[93] ibid.

> It's wonderful, your wire. I had just written you not to give up the idea of it for all sorts of reasons so long as Christopher wasn't interfered with, & had posted it when along came your wire, so I'm now hurrying off another line to tell you how pleased I am. As I said in my last letter, I wasn't at all satisfied with the idea of your spending another year or two with nothing besides our married life to pass your time. It is a poor substitute when I'm away working all the day! But now this apparently is giving us all that we can ask from it, for two years anyway, and lots may happen in that time!…Then we can combine everything, work like niggers at what pleases us most, have every evening together, & our own days, which we were bound to spend separated, well filled with our next greatest interests in life. It is perfect, darling, perfect. Darling, it's wonderful. Let me know when the election comes off so I can pop back to help, but if it is a safe seat, there shouldn't be much expense. All my love dearest, & all my congratulations.
>
> Devotedly, Tommy.[94]

The effusiveness with which Thomas meets his wife's change in decision is perhaps telling of his character. Not only does he suddenly assent to the plan, but now tells Evelyn how he considers the idea 'perfect'. Thomas remained in Italy for another few months whilst Evelyn rushed into being adopted as the Municipal Reform candidate for the May elections. She was told that she did not have to do any of the canvassing for the seat herself and needed only to speak at meetings. She also writes to her father to ask him if they could borrow some money for election expenses, which he happily agrees to.[95]

Evelyn won the North Hackney election comfortably and took up the seat on the LCC. Thomas finally heeded his family's advice and gave up on his painting, although soon he was again living apart from his wife and child, this time as a student at Balliol College, Oxford. 'Christopher' was now a reality, born in November of that year. Thomas' career at Oxford was not auspicious. He struggled with his studies and, after finding his exams very difficult, did not pass his first year. The college appears to have provided a dispensation and agreed he did not have to do exams but undertake some reading and write an essay a week instead.[96]

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[94] Thomas Emmet to Evelyn Emmet, 27 January 1925, MS.Eng.d.2382.
[95] Evelyn Emmet to Sir Rennell Rodd, 8-9 February 1925, MS.Eng.d.2382.
[96] Various letters from Thomas Emmet to Evelyn Emmet from Balliol College Oxford, MS.Eng.d.2382.

A series of letters from Thomas' first year at Oxford have been saved in the archive and are revealing of the dynamics of the Emmet marriage during Evelyn's early years on the LCC. Their first daughter, Lavinia, was 2 years old and their long-awaited son Christopher only 2 months. Evelyn wrote to Thomas with a copy of her maiden speech and a description of its reception, to which Thomas replied with mild interest: 'How splendid you having managed your maiden speech. It seemed very good indeed from what you wrote to me but it can sound so different when spoken.' In the next breath Thomas shared his important news: 'And I have something to tell you, too. I have been chosen in the Jiu Jitsu team!'[97] Jiu jitsu subsequently became a very common theme in their letters, including an eight-page letter from Thomas explaining his training regime, diet and competitions. Evelyn responded rather coolly to a deluge of jiu jitsu-themed letters in January 1926:

> Darling,
>
> The Baby's temperature is normal but he isn't himself yet. I hope to see an improvement tomorrow. I haven't done anything today except look after the children so have no news and am now off to bed as I am rather tired.[98]

Thomas did notice that Evelyn might not have shared his same enrapturement with Japanese martial arts whilst she was awake with a feverish baby. He offered to come home that weekend to 'help relieve the pressure'. Noting that not only did he love to see his daughter but that his presence 'must be a blessing for Nanny'.[99] The Emmets had a nanny, a nursery maid and other domestic staff at their London residence. This domestic and financial support was crucial to Evelyn's ability to pursue her political aspirations. But it was also her husband's general lack of aspiration and talent that helped Evelyn. Thomas did not have a career which required devoted spousal support from her, rather a succession of hobbies and minor interests. Eventually, Thomas settled on farming and they bred Jersey and Dexter cattle. His daughter Lavinia noted on an annotation about Thomas' artistic career to this collection of letters: 'He was Quite good but not very, and gave it up…This kept them both very happy.'[100] Evelyn was undoubtedly the more dynamic force in the relationship. Having

[97] Thomas Emmet to Evelyn Emmet, undated, MS.Eng.d.2382.
[98] Evelyn Emmet to Thomas Emmet, 25 January 1926, MS.Eng.d.2382.
[99] Thomas Emmet to Evelyn Emmet, 16 January 1926 MS.Eng.d.2382.
[100] Annotation by Lavinia Emmet to letter from Evelyn Emmet to Thomas Emmet, 27 January 1925, MS.Eng.d.2382.

a husband who was agreeable to abandoning original interests for ones that would not conflict with her own aspirations was crucial for her political involvement.

Inevitable incorporation

Although Thomas came from a wealthy family and owned shares in the Conservative newspaper, *The Morning Post*, he did not have such a strong political identity as Evelyn. This is captured in an incident recalled in one of his letters from Oxford. Thomas was daily being persuaded to join the Oxford Labour Club by the secretary who sat next to him at meals. Instead of being open about his political views, he told him that he was saving up for his subscription to the Farmers' Union and so could not afford to join yet.[101] He apparently failed to mention his Conservative wife or family. After Thomas left Oxford and the couple were settled at Amberley Castle, Thomas did, however, become more political. Alongside his farming and the development of their estate, Thomas became a Conservative district councillor and was the youngest member of the Chanctonbury Rural District Council. After a few years, he also rose to the position of Chairman of the Public Health Committee and a member of the Arundel Sewers Commission.[102] This is a useful example of the trend seen in chapter two, whereby spouses become involved through their partners' political work. The process of standing for office was often about inhabiting the political networks that would lead to the party organisation approaching a candidate. Thomas had moved from having little discernable political engagement to serving as a Conservative party councillor, his wife's influence undeniable in this transformation. With Evelyn's political experience and Thomas' flexible working life, serving on a district council was a natural fit.

In 1934, Evelyn lost her North Hackney seat on the LCC to the Labour candidate Molly Bolton, whose career and marriage exhibited some similarities to the Emmets' emergent partnership. Molly had begun her life working as Beatrice Webb's secretary and research assistant, retaining this job for a few years after marriage until she had her first child. She had 'four years of uninterrupted domesticity' after having her two children until taking up part-time work for various political societies and causes.[103] Beating Evelyn in 1934 and becoming

[101] Thomas Emmet to Evelyn Emmet, 13 October 1925, MS.Eng.d.2382.
[102] *The Worthing Gazette*, 6 June 1934, p.4.
[103] Letter from Ivy Molly Bolton to Mrs Gooch, 18 March 1942, Papers of Molly Bolton, BOLTON Box 1, The Women's Library, LSE, London.

an LCC councillor allowed Molly's career to grow, and in 1953 she became the first female chair of the LCC. The husbands of these two women shared some qualities in common. Molly was married to Douglas James Bolton, a civil engineer who later become a lecturer in engineering at a London polytechnic. He was mildly politically interested, but it was through Molly that he became much more engaged. Early in their courtship, Douglas called on the Webbs to introduce himself and later wrote to Molly to report on the meeting:

> Well I've just been calling on those wonderful employers of yours and I have had an extremely interesting time which is probably more than they did:- in fact I'm afraid that they thought I stayed far too long…and I finished a fully blown fabian with no discernable differences from them themselves![104]

Beatrice Webb described in her diary how she viewed Douglas Bolton as vastly inferior to Molly. She describes Molly as 'a clever and courageous speaker, upright and rather defiant in her independence; left in opinion and cool and determined…she will probably stand for Parliament and may eventually become an M.P'. Douglas had been correct in his assumption that the Webbs had not been impressed by him. Beatrice describes him as: 'a second rate intellectual'. At another social occasion between the couples, the Webbs and Douglas Bolton disagreed over Soviet planning and Beatrice noted that 'Molly listened with kindly tolerance to her husband's insistent argumentation, but apparently agreed with the old Webbs.'[105] Yet Douglas did become more political and closely involved in the Labour movement, submitting articles to the *Manchester Guardian* on issues within the electricity industry (which it seems were not accepted for publication).[106] Douglas also worked abroad as an electrical engineer for much of their marriage. As with the Emmets, although Molly faced domestic and organisational pressures combining marriage and motherhood with politics, Douglas' absence and middling career allowed her more space to pursue her own political work.

It is also interesting how the couple negotiated Molly's greater public and professional status. She was publicly referred to as Mrs. Douglas Bolton in newspaper reports and appears to have preferred this form of address. One envelope in her archive

[104] Letter from Douglas Bolton to Ivy Bolton, Undated (c.1910), BOLTON Box 4 171.
[105] Beatrice Webb's typescript diary, 1 January 1935-27 December 1937, p.6023, PASSFIELD/1, LSE.
[106] Draft articles submitted to the *Manchester Guardian*, BOLTON Box 4.

during her tenure on the LCC shows her crossing out an address that says 'Mrs I. M. Bolton' and replacing it with a handwritten 'Mrs Douglas Bolton'.[107] A report when she became Chairman of the LCC notes that the 'wife or husband of a chairman of the council has no official status but is nevertheless very closely associated with the chairman in all his or her official ceremonial and similar civic activities.'[108] This certainly became true for Douglas Bolton. One report that Molly delivered in 1954 details the number of occasions that her husband accompanied her in an official capacity. From mid-December to the end of January, Molly represented the council at 30 different events in only 48 days. Douglas Bolton attended 11 of these events with Molly.[109]

In her archive is a hand drawn cartoon of the 'Day in the Life of a County Councillor – presented to one who may wonder how they spend their time.'[110] Although the provenance is not documented in the archive, it appears to have been drawn by Molly to be read by her husband and family. The couple clearly had an unconventional rhythm to their domestic life during Molly's busiest political years. The story begins at 2am, when Molly finally falls into bed, sleeping through her husband's alarm at 7am when he rises. She wakes up with a start at 11am and jumps out of bed. She then does a full day at the LCC, running through the halls like a tornado and holding forth to her male colleagues. She finally returns home at 10pm, reclining with her feet up with the caption 'Get the supper'. However, the accompanying image was in fact her husband in the kitchen getting the supper whilst Molly has a rest. At midnight she starts work again, and the cycle of her day repeats, crawling into bed at 2pm next to her already sleeping husband.

There is clearly a joke running through this cartoon for the benefit of Molly's family. Although it is captioned that Molly is getting the supper, it is her husband Douglas who is pictured in the kitchen doing the work. Again, we see evidence of a supportive yet undemanding spouse who enabled their partner to spend long hours out of the house doing political work. The fact that she clearly still retained such a strong identity as 'Mrs Douglas Bolton' is perhaps important for understanding how the couple could negotiate the balance of power within their relationship.

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[107] 'Envelope to Mrs I M Bolton', BOLTON, Box 8.
[108] 'The LCC New Chairman', *Lewisham Borough News*, 17 November 1953, p.3.
[109] Report to LCC General Purpose Committee, 1 February 1954, BOLTON, box 8.
[110] 'A day in the life of County Councillor, undated, BOLTON, box 8.

The advantages of absence

Thomas Emmet died suddenly in 1934, aged just 34. By this time, the couple had moved almost permanently to Amberly Castle in West Sussex, working on renovating the residence and building up their cattle herd. His death was a huge shock to the family. Evelyn was traveling in Freiburg when Thomas was admitted to hospital. He had kept his ill health hidden from those around him and none of them were aware that he had been tubercular in his childhood. Evelyn was too overcome with grief to attend his funeral.[111] Their third child, Penelope, was just a year old.

Yet Evelyn's political life grew after Thomas' death. From 1938 to 1945 she was the county organiser for the Women's Voluntary Service in Sussex alongside serving as a JP, chair of the children's court, the matrimonial court and chair of the Sussex county probation advisory committee. As her children became older, Evelyn fixed her sights on a parliamentary seat. She campaigned for selection to the vacancy in East Grinstead in 1953, which attracted 60-70 applicants from all over the country, reflecting its safe status: it had a 18,352 Tory majority at the previous election.[112] As part of her campaign material she spoke of her reasons for standing:

> If my name has not appeared before you until now, it is because before the war my children were too young, and since the war your minds and my mind have been bent on winning the war, not fussing over problematical happenings…. I have no personal ambitions, and am no place seeker. I was brought up by my Father in a strong tradition of public service - a tradition which taught me as a child that it would take very hard work indeed to repay the privilege of being born an Englishwoman.[113]

Evelyn was also determined to win a seat as she was tired of the Conservatives being so underrepresented by women in the House. She wrote to the selection committee to say: 'One of the principal reasons I am offering you my services is that I am a Woman…On the Socialist side there are 19 women, on our side two only. These two gallant ladies are being killed by the work that is being put upon them.'[114] Evelyn was successful in her selection and

[111] *The Worthing Gazette*, 13 June 1934, p.3.
[112] Emmet papers, MS.Eng.c.5721/126, Oct 1953.
[113] Emmet papers, MS.Eng.c.5721/18.
[114] Emmet papers, MS.Eng.c.5721/4.

became the MP for East Grinstead in 1955, serving until 1964 when she was elevated to the House of Lords. As noted in chapter one, many women who were widowed took an active part in national and local government. In many ways the partnership of the Emmets was an ideal model for a woman who wished to be politically active. Thomas had not demanded her active involvement in his own pursuits and had gradually allowed himself to become incorporated into her political world. However devastated she was by his early death, she had sufficient means and support to sustain a political life as a widow.

We are used to the idea of the transmission of political ideas between parents and children, and the congruity through which families normally shared political allegiances. The Emmets are an interesting example of where husbands and wives fitted in these same processes. Evelyn became politically active, following in the footsteps of her father, and eventually transmitted this involvement to Thomas in its own small way.

Conclusion

This chapter builds on the previous analysis of the political spouse to show how marriage played a significant role in catalysing and sustaining political lives in this period. Women undoubtedly faced obstacles when seeking to participate in public life post-1918, but as the stories explored in this chapter – and many others – demonstrate marriage need not be one of them. As these case studies show, marriage could offer women important ways for side-stepping or overcoming their political exclusion. This was, in some ways, nothing new. These case studies indicate a continued relevance of the family as a political organising unit within the era of mass democracy. Enduring links of family, kinship and personal relationships were as crucial to political activism as they had been in the centuries before. It is notable that most of the men and women in these case studies had political mothers and fathers, of whom they often attributed their political beginning. Their choice of partner may reflect an attitudinal political inheritance and the beneficiaries of established networks of political support.

Despite this continuity, there were changes. Women's ability to become elected politicians in their own right fundamentally changed the roles that they could play in these networks. With the 1918 Representation of People Act, women were able to be formally incorporated into familial political networks in the same ways that brothers, uncles and cousins had been for centuries. Political activism was, however, a peculiar path, demanding

intense sacrifice and commitment. Both men and women were aided in the support of a spouse to navigate these waters.

Changing conceptual understandings of marriage meant that a shared political world-view was becoming a more important attribute in a potential love-match. The 1930s and 40s were noted for the move towards more companionate forms of marriage.[115] By the post-war period, marriage was being redefined as a relationship in which the partners negotiated their roles in accordance with personal preferences rather than externally imposed expectations.[116] Political beliefs become a key part of these preferences. In these case studies, this can be particularly seen amongst Labour couples for whom a shared commitment to socialist principles underpinned both their personal and political lives. Couples like the Braddocks and the Salters built their relationships along the lines of their political beliefs. Such fervent commitment is harder to detect amongst the Conservative case studies cited, but it remains notable that internal political disagreement amongst those studied is extremely rare. It's more common, in fact, to see married couples changing political affiliation together as the Rhys-Williamses did.

The importance of ideology and political beliefs is best shown in the public partnership model. The pursuit of two careers was aided by such measures as the prioritisation of practical partner choice over romantic ideals, the limiting of family size and adequate support from family and community networks. The difficulty of sustaining two political lives simultaneously does suggest why it was predominantly a Labour party formulation. The deep sense of socialist conviction and purpose helped to provide the impetus to dedicate two lives to the movement together, but it is likely that there were hundreds of other socialist men and women who did not have the means or support to make this life possible. It is harder to conclude such a concerted sense of the political ideology shown in the Conservative and Liberal partnerships. But perhaps this is revealing of the political cultures of the parties, and reflective of some of the ideas discussed in the thesis' introduction concerning how Conservative women's politics were rooted in traditionalism, duty and service.

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[115] Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, 'Love and Authority in Mid-Twentieth Century Marriages: Sharing and Caring', in Delap, Griffin and Wills, *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2009), p.133.

[116] Penny Summerfield, 'Women in Britain since 1945: Companionate marriage and the double burden', in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds.), *Understanding post-war British society* (London, 1997), p.58.

Nevertheless, with a greater willingness to follow the ebbs and flows of political fortune, these companionate partnerships remained resilient. Juliet Rhys-Williams and Evelyn Emmett, for example, focused on their family and domestic lives before taking a political turn in later life. And when this time came, they had husbands who were happy to move between periods and promotion and support, or did not have a career that demanded the close involvement of their wives. As was asserted in the previous chapter, the fact that many successful political women benefitted from the knowledge, political experience and connections of their husbands should not be seen in a negative light. It was, rather, a pragmatic response to the challenges for women in accessing political worlds in the twentieth century.

Chapter Four

Perfect comradeship: representations of love and marriage in political cultures

Chapters one and two showed marital status to be a crucial category of analysis for understanding political involvement, and argued for the importance of the social and practical functions of political marriage. Building on chapter three, this chapter probes the emotional and psychological aspects of political marriages, which were difficult to access using the archival methods of the previous chapters. It looks at how those in political marriages may have felt, and how love and emotions were spoken about. To do this, this chapter looks at representations of love and marriage in printed political sources, using two forms of literary evidence. The first are 'political romance' novels written by Labour politicians and party activists that frame the dilemma facing political women as involving a choice between true love and their own political careers. This chapter then develops these themes by looking at a second type of source, the fictional short stories and serials that were published in *Labour Woman*, the journal of the Women's Section of the Labour party.

This chapter is organised into three parts. The first two parts explore these genres of romantic literature, whilst the third part considers the absence of an equivalent culture of political romance in the Conservative party. Through these literary representations we can see the distinctiveness of Labour party culture. Novels by Labour authors and short stories published in *Labour Woman* point not only to the importance of political identity in partner choice, a theme noted in the last chapter, but also the possibility of politics as an erotic and sexual space. Particularly in the *Labour Woman* short stories, we see the attempts of the party and left-wing authors to press the genre of romantic fiction into the service of socialism to educate and organise women.

Also evident in these literary forms are echoes of the models of marriage discussed in chapter three. As well as framing the dilemma of marriage versus politics for readers, political fiction provided models for solving it, showing women how heterosexual love and politics could be combined, rather than entrenching the view that women had to choose between them. This political culture adopted in the Labour party meant that it created didactic models of marriage through these party communications. Whether these were fantasies or attempts at propaganda, the evidence of these cultural forms is important to the central arguments of this thesis.

The use of fictional sources in this chapter follows the example of historians such as Ross McKibbin who have used literary material as a means of recovering attitudes to politics and society.[1] Looking at the politics of this period, Steven Fielding has researched novels written by authors in the interwar period who would be considered, as he describes it, on the 'broad left'.[2] Fielding argues that by fully integrating fiction into an analysis of British political history, it is possible to map out common ways of thinking about politics that were shared by novelists working in differing genres in the period. Taken as a whole, novels can suggest the extent to which the characters broadly reflected the social constituency that supplied authors and the sort of public that read such novels. Fielding uses this cross-section of 'broad-left' novels to understand the experience of political frustration in this period, and also how the hopeful beginnings of the 1920s turned to despondency and disappointments with democracy.[3] This chapter similarly groups together authors writing in the genre of political romance to map out the commonalties around feelings of love and relationships experienced by activists in this period.

Other historians have used literature to understand political ideas and feelings. William Whyte uses the *Just William* stories by Richmal Crompton as sources both for an understanding of middle-class social history, but also as access to a popular political philosophy of Conservatism that underpinned middle class understandings of modernity.[4] Whyte's work partly took inspiration from Alison Light's use of middlebrow interwar fiction to explore ideas of femininity and social conservativism, demonstrating how they can capture the dominant conservative mood between the wars as between modernity and tradition.[5] These cultural forms of Conservative fiction are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Broad-left fiction and the political romance

This first section argues that there was a genre of novels written by left-wing activists and

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[1] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); 'Preface', in Clare V. J. Griffiths, James J. Nott, and William Whyte eds., *Classes, Cultures, and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibbin* (Oxford, 2011).
[2] Steven Fielding, 'Novels for "thinking people": fiction and the broad left'. in Andrew Edwards and Chris Williams eds., *The Art of the Possible.: Politics and Governance in Modern British History. Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.98.
[3] ibid. p.115.
[4] William Whyte, 'Just William? Richmal Crompton and Conservative Fiction', in Griffiths, Nott, and Whyte eds., *Classes, Cultures, and Politics*.
[5] Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.11.

authors that can be understood as 'political romances'. These novels took the popularity, structures and themes of romantic novels published throughout the 1920s and 30s and moved them into a political setting. Laura Beers has shown how the romantic plots of MP Ellen Wilkinson's novels *Clash* and *The Division Bell Mystery* allowed the author to discuss the personal challenges that accompanied being a woman in Parliament and the conflict faced by women between love and a political career.[6] This chapter extends Beers' analysis by placing these novels by Ellen Wilkinson in dialogue with other contemporary novels by left-wing politicians and authors. By considering these novels together, we can see the emergence of a larger genre of the political romance. The novels in this genre shared similar structures, settings, and conflicts. They depicted political activism as a source of sexual attraction and political parties as heterosexual romantic spaces. The political romance championed a depiction of marriage that privileged practicality over passion. It presented models for how women could combine heterosexual love and politics, by finding an ideal partner who would work with them.

This genre of political romance was a synthesis of two other highly popular genres of the interwar period. Ross McKibbin categorises the predominant types of middlebrow literature of these years as a 'literature of conflict', a 'literature of modernity', and a 'literature of sexual romance'.[7] Within this 'literature of sexual romance' is the genre of romantic fiction, which was written exclusively by women and for women. A moderately popular romance novel would outsell almost all other middlebrow novels.[8] Although its publishing heyday did not arrive until the 1930s, Mills and Boon published a steady-stream of romance literature throughout the 1920s, targeting the 'low-brow' reading tastes of lower-middle and working-class consumers.[9] The key to the success of Mills and Boon romance novels were that they melded together a combination of realism and escapism, and although full of fantasy, had a strong grounding in social reality.[10] The result was a 'soothing combination of realistic instruction and escapist entertainment.'[11]

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[6] Laura Beers, 'Feminism and Sexuality in Ellen Wilkinson's Fiction', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 64, no. 2 (2011), p.249.
[7] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.479.
[8] ibid.
[9] Joseph McAleer, 'Scenes from Love and Marriage: Mills and Boon and the Popular Publishing Industry in Britain, 1908–1950', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1990), p.267.
[10] Laura King, The Perfect Man: Fatherhood, masculinity and romance in popular culture in mid-twentieth-century Britain', in Alana Harris and Timothy Willem Jones eds., *Love and Romance in Britain, 1918-1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.43.
[11] McAleer, 'Scenes from Love and Marriage', p.265.

The 'literature of modernity' was a 'literature of public life' in which 'a self-confident middle class stood as a modernising class.'[12] Ross McKibbin has argued that the runaway success of Joseph Cronin's scathing attack on Britain's medical system, *The Citadel*, was partly due to the book's 'representation, if highly charged, of social reality.'[13] The novels and stories discussed within this chapter are positioned at an intersection between McKibbin's 'literature of modernity' and 'literature of sexual romance', as demonstrated by the analysis below of three titles by female politicians and left-wing activists: C*lash* (1929) by MP Ellen Wilkinson, *Follow my Leader* (1922) by MP Mary Agnes Hamilton, and *Honourable Estate: a Novel of Transition* (1936) by feminist and socialist writer Vera Brittain.[14] These novels are selected because they can all be read as love stories set within political worlds.[15]

The three novels feature female protagonists facing romantic dilemmas amongst the drama of left-wing politics. *Clash* is set amidst the fervour of the 1926 General Strike where trade union organiser Joan Craig has to decide whether she can give up her political work to marry bourgeois journalist Tony Dacre. In *Follow my Leader,* young political secretary, Jane Heriot, is torn whether she will abandon her Tory-MP father for his Labour election opponent, Sandy Colquhon, with whom she falls in love. *Honourable Estate* looks at three generations of women being denied their political desires by domineering husbands. The youngest, Ruth Allenyndene, breaks this pattern by becoming an MP herself through the support of her husband Denis, who is determined to avoid repeating the mistakes of his father. Contemporary reviews from left-wing publications of these novels commented on their sharp depiction of the reality of political environments.[16] They also share similar plots which revolve around the conflict between love interests who deny them political involvement, and partners that enable them.

The authors of these novels also contended with these same questions. Vera Brittain was married to George Catlin, a political scientist and socialist. Vera struggled with life as a 'university wife' and to save the marriage the couple pursued a 'semi-detached marriage'

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[12] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.479.
[13] Ross McKibbin, 'The Triumph of the Medical Hero: A.J. Cronin's The Citadel.' in *Democracy and Political Culture: Studies in Modern British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.65.
[14] Also considered are novels with political themes *Love on the Dole* by Walter Greenwood, *Swan Song and The Silver Spoon* by John Galsworthy.
[15] For example, although *South Riding* (1936) by Winfred Holtby was a bestseller of the period and also dealt with questions of politics and love, it is not discussed in depth here because the central story for the main character is not a love story.
[16] See for example, reviews of *Clash*: 'Clash', *The Woman's Leader*, 31 May 1931, p.133; Jennie Lee, 'Woman MP as Novelist', *The Daily Herald*, 19 April 1929, p.3.

where they spent time living apart between Cornell University and London.[17] *Honourable Estate* was based on the recent history of the Brittain and Catlin families, drawing directly from the diary of George Catlin's mother, who had abandoned her son and husband.[18] As we will see, these experiences informed the plot of *Honourable Estate*. Deborah Gorham claims that Brittain consciously modelled the hero of the novel, Ruth Alleyndene, on 'her best self'.[19]

Fuller discussion of the life of Mary Agnes Hamilton is provided in the next chapter, but she was the MP for Blackburn 1929-31, having first became involved in politics through pacifism, then socialism. She was the author of nine novels and numerous non-fiction books on Labour party history.[20] In Hamilton's early novelistic career she believed in the importance of writing about political themes. In 1920, writing in the book review column of the periodical *Time and Tide* she wrote that 'in so far as the novelist, in particular, is attempting to render the strange, irregular rhythms of life – of contemporary life – he must write about politics.'[21] But this naturalistic portrayal of political life was not popular amongst all audiences. Reviewing *Follow My Leader* for *Time and Tide* in 1922 the poet and novelist Sylvia Lynd was critical of the novel as she concluded the book 'is in a mood more suited to successful canvassing than to novel writing.'[22] Catherine Clay claims that the plot of *Follow My Leader* anticipates Hamilton's own shift of allegiance from the predominantly middle-class ILP to the more working class and trade union side of the Labour movement.[23]

There is, however, difficulty in studying the reception of these works. Circulation figures for the novels discussed here have been difficult to obtain. Laura Beers notes that *Clash* was billed as a political romance and Wilkinson had agreed to a profitable serialisation in the *Daily Express* upon its publication, joking that the profits from this alone would cover her election expenses.[24] It was widely reviewed in Labour party publications and other

[17] Alan Bishop, 'Vera Mary Brittain [married name Catlin], (1893–1970), writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004 (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32076 last accessed at 19 Apr. 2023).
[18] ibid.
[19] Deborah Gorham, 'Have We Really Rounded Seraglio Point?': Vera Brittain and Inter-war Feminism', in Harold L Smith ed., *British feminism in the twentieth century* (Aldershot: Elgar, 1990), p.96.
[20] Catherine Clay, '"The Novelist … Must Write About Politics': Mary Agnes Hamilton and the Politics of Modern Fiction', *Women: a cultural review*, vol.31, no.4 (2020), p.368.
[21] ibid, p.367.
[22] ibid. p369.
[23] ibid.
[24] Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: the life of Ellen Wilkinson, socialist, feminist, internationalist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), p.214.

newspapers.[25] Figures for *Honourable Estate* by Vera Brittain are also unknown but she was a bestselling author of the interwar period. One of her earlier novel's *Testament of Youth* sold 120,000 copies in the first six years of its publication.[26] Nor have any figures been possible for *Follow my Leader*.

Whilst it has been possible to identify that these books were likely popular and widely read, it has been harder to reconstruct what readers took away from fiction in their private reading. Matt Houlbrook has shown how popular fiction could shape subjectivities. Rather than simply facilitating 'escapism', the romance novels that Houlbrook's subject, Edith Thompson, read allowed her to make sense of her life and loves.[27] Inspired by her voracious reading habits, Edith attempts to render her life as if on stage on or screen, casting herself and her lover into the roles of her romantic heroes and heroines. But Houlbrook argues that these lives were not just 'imagined or narrated, but lived in London's public spaces.'[28] Similar sources, such as the letters used by Houlbrook, have not been found so far for readers of these political novels or *Labour Woman*. But these ideas are perhaps useful in thinking about this political context. The fact that these novels and stories were fictional romances set in real-life spaces of political parties, and insights from the authors own experiences, indicates some of the ways that they may be useful in understanding how political activists were 'making sense of their lives and loves.'[29]

Politics and passion

These novels contain many examples where political ideas and activism are depicted as a source of sexuality and physical attraction. In Hamilton's *Follow My Leader*, Jane Heriot, daughter of Tory MP John Heriot, has worked all of her adult life as her father's unpaid political assistant, giving up for him, as she says, 'everything – not only dances and parties I don't mind that – but my own reading, going to meetings, and so on.'[30] Her distance from

[25] See for example, reviews of Clash: 'Clash', *The Woman's Leader*, 31 May 1931, p.133; Jennie Lee, 'Woman MP as Novelist', *The Daily Herald*, Friday April 19th 1929, p.3; Walter Greenwood's novel *Love on the Dole* sold 46,920 copies between 1933 and 1949 see Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization 1919-1939* (Harmondsworth, Penguin: 2010), p.71.
[26] Mark Bostridge, *Vera Brittain and the First World War: the story of Testament of Youth* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
[27] Matt Houlbrook, "A pin to see the peepshow': culture, fiction and selfhood in Edith Thompson's letters, 1921-1922.' *Past & Present*, no. 207 (2010), p.222.
[28] ibid. p.234.
[29] ibid. p.222.
[30] Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Follow My Leader* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1922), p.12.

her father grows over the course of the novel. First, he moves his parliamentary secretary, Mary Yelverton, to live in the family home to continue their adulterous affair and usurp Jane's political role. Jane then falls in love with Sandy Colquhon, leader of the union at her father's print works and aspiring Labour MP. She falls in love with Sandy when seated across the negotiating table from him, assisting her father to break a printer's strike. They begin secretly courting and very quickly she starts to recognise socialism as a third presence in their relationship. Although they did not always speak about socialism when they met, 'at all times, she had to feel that it was there.'[31] For Jane, her attraction to Sandy is indistinguishable from his political drive, and he also knows that that his political passion is his most attractive attribute. Referring to their as yet unspoken love for each other, he tells Jane that she was not ready to understand socialism and therefore not ready to love him, but that 'someday I'll tell you what I mean. At a meeting, maybe.'[32] This prophecy is fulfilled when her father and Sandy are pitted against each other in a by-election and Jane secretly attends a Labour campaign meeting to hear Sandy speak:

> Whatever she felt, she had to listen to him, and listen with an attention that made her feel she had never, in all her life, listened before… For a moment she covered her eyes with her hands as his voice rang through her; almost in prayer that she might be able to hold on to it, not lose or let it go… Jane listened and knew that, so far as she was concerned, it was settled. The speech was for her, the culmination of a long underground process, which he had brought up and lifted to the light.[33]

This culmination prompts Jane to agree to marry Sandy and give up her comfortable life to work for the cause of socialism together. The conversion to socialism and the uniting of their lives are portrayed by Hamilton are integral parts of the same story. Although Jane is fearful of Sandy's extreme devotion to socialism, it is also the source of her attraction to him.

The figure of the charismatic working-class autodidact appeared in other novels of this era. In his bestselling 1933 novel and subsequent cinematic success *Love on the Dole*, Walter Greenwood employs a similar characterisation with his portrayal of Larry Meath. Larry's activism was deeply attractive to mill-girl Sally Hardcastle, who described herself as 'don't

[31] Hamilton, *Follow my Leader,* p. 51.
[32] Hamilton, *Follow my Leader,* p. 65.
[33] Hamilton, *Follow my Leader,* pp.233-237.

know nowt-er anything about politics.'[34] Sally was highly in demand by other potential suitors, but it was Larry that she followed around the streets handing out:

> what were to her – dry-as-dust pamphlets…Nearly always she thought on him thus; it pleased her, charmed her so to do: as such she saw him 'attired in brightness as a man inspired', a character full of such qualities as those of an ideal.[35]

For female protagonists, too, political commitment and ideals could be a source of desirability. In *Clash*, Wilkinson describes the heroine Joan as attractive to men largely due to her political activity and ambition. She had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the trade union movement and General Strike. This was a great part of her appeal, alongside her political connections and influence, rather than her appearance and personality. The men clamouring for action during the General Strike found that 'the trade union leaders were as remote as gods. Here was an approachable liaison officer. Joan found herself a queen.'[36]

Political skill and political commitment were framed as qualities of sexual attraction by these authors. Political engagement was not simply about being drawn to policies and ideas, but also the emotional bonds and relationships that could be formed within this space. The political meeting, trade union activity, canvassing and election campaign, amongst others, were all portrayed in these novels as having a highly emotional quality, and could be a sexual and erotic space. Larry Meath's tramping of the streets with 'dry as dust' pamphlets was oddly compelling to Sally Hardcastle; the election campaign and meeting where Jane finally hears Sandy speak is where she surrenders herself to their love, and Joan Craig's romantic dilemmas are impossible to disentangle from the action of the General Strike.

In one of the few fictional portrayals of a Tory MP and his wife, the events of the strike similarly present an opportunity for a wife to take political action and through this resolve briefly remedy some of the marriage's tensions. In the novels of the Foryste Saga, *The Silver Spoon* (1926) and *Swan Song* (1928), John Galsworthy depicts the election of Michael Mont MP and the role of his wife Fleur. Michael Mont is not very politically driven, only finding a seat as a Conservative MP through the patronage of his father. Fleur Mont initially runs a political 'salon' for the benefit of Michael's career, but this fizzles out when she is embroiled in a legal

[34] Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (London: Vintage, 2004), p.87.
[35] Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 139.
[36] Wilkinson, *Clash*, p.49.

dispute after overhearing an attendee insult her. In *Swan Song*, Fleur seeks to rebuild her confidence by running a railway canteen for strike-breaking volunteers. Although positioned on a different side of the dispute, Fleur finds the experience as enthralling and invigorating as Joan Craig in *Clash* finds attending TUC meetings.[37] Fleur exclaims that she's '..enjoying it frightfully…I hope the strike lasts!' and her husband notes with surprise 'the rise and fall of her breast, as if she had been running.'[38] This reinvigoration that Fleur experiences through organising her canteen far surpasses her enjoyment and success at her political 'salon' evenings. Her new-found calling and enthusiasm reassure Michael about the state and happiness of their marriage.[39] These novels are useful examples of the affective ties that politics could forge, and the emotional intensity of political activism that the authors were trying to convey.

Fictional models of marriage

Within the case studies discussed in chapter three, the 'public partnership' model involved a negotiation in partner choice to allow freedom and space to continue political activism, rather than a pursuit of 'true love'. As we have seen, this was true of Bessie Braddock who chose an equally politically obsessed but undomineering spouse in Jack Braddock. In the 1890s, Beatrice Potter did not immediately believe Sidney Webb to be her ultimate political and romantic partner, finding 'his tiny tadpole body' incomparable to her infatuation with Joseph Chamberlain.[40] Barbara Caine has suggested that in the autobiographies of middle and upper-middle class women in the interwar period, 'love and romance were very problematic and involved some anguish over conflicting desires for work and freedom, on the one hand, and marriage and a family, on the other.'[41] There is a similar tension displayed in this group of novels where female characters attempt to negotiate how they can lead political lives and still have love.

This conflict between love and comradeship is portrayed extensively by Wilkinson in

[37] *Clash* also depicts Helen Dacre, the wife of Joan's first love interest Tony, running a canteen for volunteers working on trams during the strike. This act solidifies Tony's resolve to leave his wife and commit to Joan, but the realisation of Tony's first wife's 'blackleg' nature simply strengthens Joan's decision that she and Tony are from too different worlds to be able to be together.
[38] John Galsworthy, *Swan Song,* (ebook: Horses' Mouth, 2017), loc. 699.
[39] ibid, loc 975.
[40] Quoted in John Davis, '(Martha) Beatrice Webb [née Potter], (1858–1943), social reformer and diarist.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36799 last accessed at 19 Apr. 2023).
[41] Barbara Caine, 'Love and Romance in Interwar British Women's Autobiography' in Alana Harris, Timothy Willem Jones (eds.), *Love and Romance in Britain, 1918-1970*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 20-21).

Clash. Joan initially finds Gerry, the war-wounded and unsophisticated socialist, incomparable to Tony: 'Gerry was a fine pal, a great comrade to work with, she admired and trusted him, but he had no power to thrill her, as the mere whispering of Tony's name under her breath could thrill her.'[42] However, Gerry eventually persuades Joan to marry him instead when he shows her that she can have both a happy marriage and a political career with him, and that they'll 'fit in together because we're both keen.'[43] The feminist author Vera Brittain found this resolution to the novel a great relief. In a review of *Clash* for the magazine *Time and Time*, Brittain commented: 'The reader . . . heaves a sigh of relief when her problem finds a solution which involves neither celibacy nor parasitism'.[44] In Brittain's own novel *Honourable Estate*, there is a similar dilemma and resolution for her protagonists. *Honourable Estate* follows the fortunes of multiple generations as they negotiate questions of love, marriage, children, war, and suffrage. Ruth Allendeyne is devastated when the man she loves, a heroic and handsome American called Eugene, is killed in the war. A chance meeting puts her back into contact with childhood acquaintance, Denis Rutherston, now an academic but forever plagued by his unhappy childhood and relationship with his parents. His mother and father endured a painfully unhappy marriage. His mother was desperately political and wanted nothing more than to work for women's suffrage. His father was a priest who expected obedience and duty from his wife towards his life and work. Through his relationship with Ruth, Denis is able to create a marriage without the flaws of his parents' - he fully supports Ruth's political ambitions and activities. He initially organises a job within the Labour party for her, leading to Ruth being selected to run as the Labour candidate in her home constituency. However, this supportive and caring relationship still cannot compare to the passion she felt for Eugene. On her relationship with Denis, Ruth muses that:

> One day, just by going on living and thinking and working, Denis and I may create something more lasting than children between us. I believe in Denis. I'm glad I married him. I don't feel passion for him; I never have and never shall. But "the mutual society, help and comfort that one ought to have of the other" – this does exist between us, and I think it always will.[45]

[42] Wilkinson, *Clash*, p.220.
[43] Wilkinson, *Clash*, p.309.
[44] Quoted in Laura Beers, 'Feminism and Sexuality', p.253
[45] Vera Brittain, *Honourable Estate* (Chatham, 2000), p.501.

These dilemmas depicted by female political authors are useful in understanding the questions for political women of how to align love, marriage, and politics. The relationship of Denis and Ruth was an echo of Vera Brittain's own political views and experiences. Brittain not only advocated modern, feminist motherhood; she also advocated feminist fatherhood and was quoted saying: 'The good husband of the future will be the man who understands how to play the part of equal comrade.'[46]

Clash in some ways subscribes to the conventional formula of the romance novel that found great commercial success in the 1930s and 40s – where a career minded woman would meet a dashing man about ten years older and they marry, with the protagonist giving up her career.[47] Laura Beers certainly sees this as the central struggle of the novel for Joan, who is forced to decide between love or a career. Joan's eventual choice of Gerry over Tony has elicited a number of other interpretations by scholars. Pamela Fox and Ian Haywood see the choice that Joan must make as one between loyalty to her class or desire for a middle-class life in Bloomsbury with Tony Dacre.[48] By contrast, Ferrall and McNeil in their study of literature depicting the General Strike see the core dilemma as one between duty and personal desire.[49]

Yet in other ways, the choice taken by characters such as Joan and Ruth to pursue a form of love that does not involve the traditional tenets of romance – attraction, passion, the power of irrational love – is subversive of the genre. Although in the studies described above there is often a sense of disappointment that Joan was forced to make this choice, we can instead see Joan's choice of Gerry as a liberation rather than a concession, as Vera Brittain presents in *Honourable Estate*. Marriage to Gerry entailed benefits where they both 'go all out' on their careers.[50] This can be only considered a sacrifice if we adhere to the idea that without 'true love' or romance, Joan will be unfulfilled. When we place these novels alongside the other sources in this thesis, we can reconsider the meaning of whether this was a 'sacrifice' at all.

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[46] Deborah Gorham, 'Vera Brittain and Inter-war Feminism', p.91.
[47] McAleer, p.275.
[48] Pamela Fox, "The "Revolt of the Gentle": Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working-Class Women's Writing." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 27, no. 2 (1994), Ian Haywood, "'Never Again?': Ellen Wilkinson's Clash and the Feminization of the General Strike." *Literature & History* 8, no. 2 (November 1999), pp.34–43
[49] Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill, *Writing the 1926 General Strike: Literature, Culture, Politics*, (Cambridge, 2015) p.162
[50] Wilkinson, *Clash*, p.309

Jane Heriot's resolution in *Follow my Leader* could also be considered in some regards as an adoption of a 'public partnership' model. Mary Agnes Hamilton articulates through Jane the all-encompassing commitment that socialist life and activism demanded of its participants. After agreeing to marry Sandy, it suddenly dawns on Jane what this entailed:

> But Sandy's awful preoccupation, his awful selflessness, demanded of her a selflessness as complete… It was what 'All for the Cause', meant, when one got up against it. And it was not a thing she could, even now, fully imagine in advance. It was so rare that no one could tell one about it.[51]

At first, this could be considered a sublimation or surrender to the inevitable role of a political help-mate, transferred from her father onto Sandy. But *Follow my Leader* concludes the story in a similar way to *Clash*: after a slow build, the denouement and resolution occurs suddenly within the final pages. Jane's father blesses her marriage to Sandy and says that he's 'not sure that your political future is not even brighter than his.'[52] Not only does her father give his blessing to their marriage but he also hints that she might stand for election herself. As seen in the previous chapters, marriage for some women could be incredibly enabling and liberating for their political careers. Although there were conflicts between marriage and politics, singleness was not by itself easy, as the final chapter of this thesis explores.

Imagining love in *The Labour Woman*

Both the Labour and Conservative parties targeted political communications to women, particularly in the interwar period. *The Labour Woman* was produced from 1911-1971 and *Home and Politics* was published by the Conservative party, 1921-1930. David Thackeray has shown that the key to the success of these journals was the manner in which they melded together 'notes on party organisation and politics with features typical of a contemporary women's lifestyle magazine.'[53] Karen Hunt, however, argues that *Labour Woman* did not see itself as being in direct competition with commercial women's magazines as it had more

[51] Hamilton, *Follow my Leader,* p. 264
[52] Hamilton, *Follow my Leader*, p. 312
[53] Thackeray, D. (2013). From Prudent Housewife to Empire Shopper: Party Appeals to the Female Voter, 1918–1928. In: Gottlieb, J.V., Toye, R. (eds) *The Aftermath of Suffrage* (Palgrave Macmillan, London), pp.38-39.

explicitly political content and a more serious format.[54] This part of the chapter takes a different approach, and looks at the way that *Labour Woman* combined both the typical features of women's magazines with this political content.

This is done by looking at an element of *Labour Woman* that has not been widely discussed by historians – the short stories and serials that were a key feature of this publication in the interwar period. Tracey Loughran has looked at the place of women's magazines in the 'cultural imagination', exploring the ways in which the narratives, ideas and symbols of women's magazines 'have their origins in the 'real' social world, but they are also part of a shared imaginative world.'[55] In the romance stories of *Labour Woman*, they are situated in the social world of women, but also within the imaginative processes of the authors. There are reflections of the relationships discussed in chapter three, but the stories also show the processes of imagining new forms of marriage and relationships for Labour men and women.

This part of the chapter expands on this analysis, exploring how *Labour Woman* recrafted the popular features of women's magazines in an explicitly political way, reconfiguring romantic fiction styles for socialist purposes. This is helpful in suggesting some of the ways that socialist women thought about love and marriage. In looking at the middle-class sex reformers and socialists Naomi Mitchison and Dora Russell, Stephen Brooke has shown that 'most striking was their belief that emotions, as much as sexual bodies, had to be remade in the establishment of a new society and new relations between men and women.'[56] The love stories in *Labour Woman* can indicate some of ways that this remaking of relations was imagined within the Labour party.

Labour Woman was produced every month for women in the Labour party. The cost of the magazine in the interwar period was 2d, the same price as a domestic women's weekly magazine. Subscription was offered with postage for 3s a year.[57] Each Women's Section was encouraged to appoint a Literature Secretary, who would receive and distribute the month's supply of *Labour Woman* and other pamphlets of importance to party members. This was a

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[54] Hunt, Karen, 'Labour Woman and the Housewife', in Catherine Clay and others (eds), *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918-1939: The Interwar Period, The Edinburgh History of Womens Periodical Culture in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p.238

[55] Tracey Loughran, 'Landscape for a good woman's weekly: finding magazines in post-war British history and culture' in Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips and S. Jay Kleinberg eds., *Women in magazines : research, representation, production and consumption* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), p.42.

[56] Stephen Brooke, *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning, and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.65

[57] Hunt, 'Labour Woman and the Housewife', p. 241.

model started by the Women's Sections and then adopted more widely by constituency parties.[58]

Alongside the political articles and summaries of activity from branches, there were many features in the journal that women would find in commercial women's magazines. These included the household hints column 'The Housewife', a children's page, a book page for reading recommendations and a weekly short story or serial. The stories normally ran the length of a single page in the journal and did not usually have illustrations. Standalone short stories were more common than serialisations. Serialisations would normally be comprised of around six parts, which, as they would take half a year to publish, were not that common.[59] Mary Sutherland took over editorial responsibility in 1932 and began her tenure by writing to readers to ask for suggestions for creating a 'journal working women want'. Serials and short stories were popular features of the magazine and women requested more of these.[60] In general, readers were also in favour of the household tips sections, although a few requested that these were removed.[61]

As in the previous section of this chapter, this analysis focuses on the interwar years, when the concentration of fictional stories was highest. In the 1940s, the short stories became less frequent and they disappeared by the 1950s, a point to which this chapter will return. The journal continued to be published until 1971 and although the stories disappeared, the children's pages, 'Hints to the Homemaker' and 'Bookwoman' remained. In the 1960s, the 'Homemakers page' still understood the burden of domestic work to be the responsibility of women. An edition in 1961 had a feature on 'Hints for the Newly-Weds' which imagined that 'honeymoon over, you are now back in your own home – most likely both of you going out to work.'[62] Although recognising this shared responsibility for employment, the tips were still directed towards working-class women to be responsible for the organising of the domestic duties within the home, without a sense of shared obligations.

These short stories and serials were not written by well-known authors, and it seems unlikely that they would have received payment for writing them, given that much of the work on *Labour Woman* was done voluntarily. Although difficult to tell which were written under her pen-name, an obituary of the Chief Woman Officer until 1932, Marion Phillips,

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[58] Mrs M Anderson, 'Our Party Literature', *The Labour Woman,* 1 September 1934, p.135.
[59] See for example Stacey Hyde, 'The Leader', *The Labour Woman*, January-June 1929 or Marion Hood, 'The Gentle Heart', *The Labour Woman*, February-July 1927.
[60] 'Journal Working Women Want', *The Labour Woman,* 1 October 1930, p.153.
[61] ibid.
[62] 'Hints for the newly-weds', *The Labour Woman,* April 1961, p.15.

suggested that she was behind many of the short stories published by the magazine. In crediting the tireless work that she had given to *Labour Woman,* a tribute said that: 'many of those human little serials appeared under all sorts of names were hers. She liked writing love stories, but was always a little shy of being teased about them.'[63] Another author able to be traced was Stacey William Hyde, a frequent male contributor of short stories. According to a review of one of his plays, Stacey Hyde was a 'production-manager at a local factory during the day [and] does a lot writing at his home. He readily admits that he has very little knowledge of the theatre, except as a keen playgoer.'[64] He also published seven novels, which all dealt with portrayals of working-class life.[65] As well as publishing stories, plays were designed to be performed at Labour socials.[66] The little that can be discovered about these authors suggest that they were Labour party members and activists who enjoyed writing stories with left-wing themes.

Many of the journalists and editors of *Labour Woman* considered the journal and the literary sections as forms of propaganda. Evelyn Sharp, the suffragette and writer, wrote the 'Books to Read' (later 'The Bookwoman' column) for many years where she recommended reading for Labour women.[67] She believed in the power of socialist literature to reveal the conditions of working-class people, but also of the place of English literature to promote books with a political or moral purpose. She believed that 'the immense influence of Dickens on social reform in the 19th century is enough to show that propaganda in a book will not deter people from reading it, so long as it is a good book in itself.'[68]

The audience for *Labour Woman* were women members of the party, but it was also aimed at potential new recruits. In an article summarising the party's key literature, Mrs Anderson, the organiser for the North West Area, reminded members that '*The Labour Woman* is our own special contribution to the Socialist literature of to-day.' She saw that its role was to record the work of the movement for socialist history, but also to provide women members with 'propaganda material and information to help them in the day to day

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[63] 'Marion Phillips', *The Labour Woman*, 1 March 1932, p.41.
[64] *The Stage*, 25 January 1951, p.10.
[65] Hyde's novels included: *Shopmates* (London: Labour Publishing Co.,1924), *That One Talent* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1939), *The Blank Wall* (London: Longmans & Co., 1929), *The Bus Stops at Binham Lane* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), *Each Had His Day*, (London: Geoffey Bles, 1938), *The Blackleg: a novel* (London: Longmans & Co, 1930), *Simple Annals* (London: Noel Douglas, 1925).
[66] See for example *Where Are We?* (April 1932), *Recruits* (January 1932), *The Maze* (October 1932), *The Blood-Stained Hand* (August 1932).
[67] For more about Evelyn Sharp see Angela V. John, *Evelyn Sharp: Rebel Woman, 1869-1955,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).
[68] Evelyn Sharp, 'Our Book Page', *The Labour Woman*, October 1933, p.150-1.

work of the movement'.[69] Karen Hunt notes that it is important to remember that the magazine was not a commercial concern and relied on subsidy from the party, as well as carrying adverts. The magazine was distributed solely through the party and women's sections were implored to take their role of increasing circulation seriously, including considering to distribute to free libraries for its 'splendid propaganda value'.[70] In understanding this propaganda role of *Labour Woman*, this section argues that these portrayals of life and love on the left were didactic attempts by the authors and parties to create inspirational models of women in the party to recruit new members and drive social change.

The possibility of love in the Labour party

The authors set the short stories within the Labour movement and Labour spaces, presenting these possible sites to find love and companionship. In the 1930 serial *Through Misery to Welfare*, Mary and Bert were denied marriage as Bert's parents 'don't want no common Labour folk connected to us by marriage… we've always been Tories, I'm proud to say.'[71] They break off their engagement, Bert buys a new motorbike and moves away. Mary was devastated and distracts herself by becoming the secretary for her local Women's Section, even though she had not been political before. Bert has a bad crash on his motorbike and whilst convalescing in hospital a fellow patient reads aloud to him from the *Daily Herald* and, 'to cut a long story short, he became an ardent Labourite'. Back home meanwhile, Mary was thrilled to be elected as a delegate to the National Conference of Labour Women and astonished when she saw her old love Bert speaking on the platform as one of the local organisers. Instantly, all the problems of the past melted away and she was enraptured by the thought that 'if they had married theirs would have been a real Labour home, with perhaps two or three children growing up to help forward the cause she loved so well.' But she also recognised the value of their separation as if they had married when she was indifferent to politics, as 'dozen of young mothers I know are, and never joined the Section, and so missed the education and happiness I've been through…' Mary and Bert are married the next month. Like the picket line or TUC hall in the novels discussed earlier, the

[69] Mrs M Anderson, 'Our Party Literature', *The Labour Woman*, September 1934, p.135.
[70] Barbara Ayrton Gould, 'Editor's Monthly Letter', *The Labour Woman*, April 1932, p.50.
[71] Blanche Leadbitter, 'Through Misery to Welfare', *Labour Woman*, March 1930, p.46.

party conference in this story is a place of romantic meeting and imagination. Through the mutual conversion and union of Mary and Bert, they are actively building the movement by creating a 'real Labour home'.

In other stories set within the Labour movement, women were frequently depicted as initially suspicious of what was happening within the Labour clubs or the Women's Sections, but were happily converted to the cause by the end of the story. In *A New Year's Partnership*, Ethel becomes very suspicious of her husband Will's new political meetings. He is elected to the Executive Committee and Ethel feels like he cares for nothing else. He tries to take her along with him to meetings and encourages her to join, but she says that she 'didn't understand half of it.' One night Ethel agrees to go to a social at the Labour Club and finds him sitting talking to another woman. Her neighbours report that they had 'seen those two canvassing together'. Ethel and Will start quarrelling night after night, but Will refuses to give up his 'wretched meetings.' After more arguments, Will leaves Ethel and her daughter, not to be seen again. Ethel assumed that he had gone to live with this other Labour woman and she 'laid her head on her friend's comforting shoulder and sobbed as if her heart was breaking.' But this friend was also involved in the 'Movement' and Ethel began asking her questions. She learnt through this friend that there was a place for women in politics, and that there were women Members of Parliament. She began to be active in the women's section herself and felt that she 'must have been living my eyes shut.' Ethel and Will's daughter runs into the road and is hit by a car but is saved by a chance encounter with her father. The couple reunite - Will apologises for spending too much time in politics and offers to give it up for her. But Ethel says that she's changed her mind and found that there is something in the work for her too. They embrace and agree that they will begin the new year afresh and 'both work for the ideals of the Labour Party together.'

These two stories demonstrate that for those within the Labour party, the political meeting and conference were heterosocial environments where men and women could mix together and share interests. There is a clear message conveyed to the readers of these stories of the transformation and happiness that could be achieved by finding the correct partner who shares your political ideals, and with whom you could build a new Labour movement. These plot settings are similar to the novels discussed earlier but were less erotically charged and more sentimental. Partly due the nature of the short story form, they were also less developed than the novel in terms of plot and characterisation. There were no scenes of passion, or deep explorations of the motivations and feelings of the characters. Dilemmas

are resolved in the course of a few paragraphs and couples reunite in one sentence. The simplicity of these stories makes them feel overtly propagandistic in comparison to the novels where Wilkinson, Brittain and Hamilton were, to some extent, working through their own lived experiences in their writing.

Incompatibility of Labour and Tory partners

Another suggestion made by these stories relates to the incompatibility of Labour and Conservative spouses. The short stories and serials found in the late 1920s *Labour Woman* regularly featured the 1926 General Strike as a setting. One popular serial was *Ruth,* written in 1927 by an author called Rose Stuckely Jenkins. *Ruth* tells the story of a middle-class brewer and his wife who, unable to have children, adopt Ruth, the orphan of their deceased servant and bring her up as their own child. Her gang of friends and current love interest, Tudor, have taken jobs as blacklegs working on the trams, but Ruth stumbles upon a political meeting about the General Strike and she finds that: 'The homely words of the speaker seemed to touch a chord in the girl's soul. Almost forgotten were those far off days when she had lived in a miner's cottage - one of them.'[72] Although she has lived all of her life as a comfortable middle-class woman, this prompts her to remember her 'true' roots: 'Oh - please do believe me - I'm not what you say I am. I-I-I'm really one of you, and oh-I feel so sad about it all. My father was a miner, and he's dead.'[73]

Ruth reconnects with her past mining community and confronts her former lover Tudor about his strike breaking. He merely laughs, saying: 'What - Ruthie - you turned Bolshie? Leave that to ugly, soured old women, my dear. You are far too beautiful to bother your head about anything but love.' But what Ruth had seen that day, in the suffering mining communities, meant that she "wouldn't marry you for worlds. You are cruel - cruel to these people, who are only fighting for a right to live."[74] Instead, she reconnects with David who had 'been Ruth's big playmate and ardent worshipper in her dimpled childhood's days.' Very quickly this romance with David develops and thus the story ends: 'Ruth married and dwelt among her own people.'[75]

Even though Ruth had no conscious memory of her working-class life, the story suggests

[72] Rose Stukely Jenkins, 'Ruth', *Labour Woman,* September 1 1927, p.138.
[73] ibid.
[74] ibid, p.139.
[75] Rose Stukely Jenkins, 'Ruth', *The Labour Woman*, October 1 1927, p.155.

that this provided an inherent underpinning to her character that meant she could not marry a man who was oppressing her working-class family. This is one of the most overtly propagandistic stories found in *Labour Woman* in the 1920s, but is important in its representation of the class solidarity deemed necessary for love and marriage. These same class dilemmas were seen in *Clash* and in *Follow my Leader*. Joan Craig rejects marriage from the Bloomsbury-set life of Tony Dacre as she insists that she must 'stick with my crowd…and work with them. One can't live in luxury and pretend one is working with them just the same.'[76] Jane Heriot in *Follow my Leader* betrays her upper-middle class background and her Conservative father by marrying a working-class socialist. Yet in the same way that Tony and Joan could have survived if Tony had agreed to live his life with the class-values of Joan, Jane agrees to forgo her comfortable lifestyle and 'it was his life that she proposed to share, its drudgery, not only its playtime.'[77] This was an important consideration in attraction and partner choice as promoted in left-wing literature.

Models of Labour marriage

The fiction in *Labour Woman* also contained representations of ideal 'socialist marriage'. *Fraternity* was a short story published in June 1926. It told the story of Mrs Bryce, a poor mother to many children who felt that she could not go on any longer with life. She planned to put her head in the oven, but had run out of pennies for the meter. She went to ask a neighbour, Annie Trent, for change to complete the task. She usually distrusted Annie because she was a 'Bolshie' but when Mrs Bryce revealed what she had planned, Annie explained that she wished she'd known and would have helped more. Annie revealed that she always wanted babies but was unable to have them. Mrs Bryce had assumed that she was childless by choice as her and husband had always assumed that 'she didn't want any children because they'd stop her gadding about so much to her meetings.'[78] After this conversation, Mrs Bryce no longer wanted to die and Annie gave her jam to take home to her children.

The story resolves by Mrs Bryce seeing a form a new form of marriage and companionship lived by Annie Trent and her husband: 'Mr Bryce himself had perhaps learnt

[76] Wilkinson, *Clash,* p.309.
[77] Hamilton, *Follow my Leader,* p.293.
[78] Florence Kelly, 'Fraternity', *The Labour Woman*, 1 June 1926, p.94.

something from the perfect comradeship between Annie Trent and her husband. At any rate, he had certainly come to realise how much he had been taking his wife for granted, regarding her as a sort of unpaid servant to minister to his wants, and look after his children.' The happy ending is extended further as Annie and Mrs Bryce go on holiday together. Annie has her own resolution as she announces that she has finally fallen pregnant. The promotion of this story in *Labour Woman* of 'perfect comradeship', demonstrated socialist politics as being able to provide resolution to these intimate problems of poverty and married life.

There is a similar theme in the story *Mrs Scarth's Babies.*[79] Mrs Scarth is bitter and sad that she and her husband Tom are unable to have babies. She resents the local Labour women who meet weekly in the hall at the end of the road and 'hated the word 'co-operation' and all that it implied.'[80] But she accidentally attends a meeting and keeps on coming back, 'losing her bitterness and self-absorption, and finding a new world of comradeship and knowledge opening out before her.' She brings her husband into the movement with her too, 'chasing his rather lukewarm interest in the Labour Party into a very eager and aggressive support of it. They had never been so happy in all their married life as they were now. For the first time they had a common interest outside their own home.' Together they start a new branch in their ward and are offered the chance to adopt a baby. They see both responsibilities as equally important with Mrs Scarth saying: 'the Section is my other baby…I'm going to look after it, and bring it on as carefully as Phyllis here, so it'll grow up to be a credit to me!'

There seems to be a pronatalist strand in these stories that presented the desired Labour family as fertile, and that marriage was for having children. This has been noted by Amy Black and Stephen Brooke, that there was a reliance in Labour propaganda in the 1950s and 60s on maternalism as a ploy to attract women as voters and party workers.[81] Appeals to women usually defined all women as mothers and natural guardians of social welfare. Annie Trent and Mrs Scarth in these stories were conforming to normative femininity by desiring to have children, and transgressing by not being able to have them.[82]

These romantic depictions of love and marriage also suggest the move towards companionate marriage in this period, as has been well discussed by historians, where shared values, commitment and morals were seen as a crucial part of a successful marriage.

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[79] Florence Kelly, 'Mrs Scarth's Babies', *The Labour Woman*, 1 July 1931, p.108.
[80] ibid.
[81] Amy Black and Stephen Brooke, 'The Labour Party, Women, and the Problem of Gender, 1951–1966' *Journal of British Studies*, vol.36, no. 4 (1997), p.441.
[82] See also Pamela Graves, *Labour women: women in British working-class politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ch.3.

However, Laura King has found that there were limited representations of the equal or companionate marriage in mid-twentieth century romantic literature and popular media.[83] Within most depictions, authors and readers still subscribed to 'tropes of strong male figures who benevolently ruled over women and children and were positively defined by a hierarchal power relationships.[84] That we see in *Labour Woman* representations of companionate marriage as 'perfect comradeship' suggests the possible importance of left-wing culture in contributing to wider societal change.

Memories of marriage

The interaction between politics, pragmatism and passion is a recurrent theme within the genre of the 'spousal memoir' that was discussed in the thesis Introduction. Considering these memoirs as a genre allows us to reflect on the works as semi-fictionalised presentations of their public lives and marriages. Within these memoirs, we can see many of the same themes as within the novels and short stories that have just been discussed. Most markedly, we see the memoirists articulating the tensions between passion and pragmatism; that political skill could be attractive, and how the memoirists measured up their own relationships to other representations of public Labour marriages.

In Jennie Lee's second autobiography, *My Life With Nye*, Jennie contends with these dilemmas. She shows her initial reluctance in agreeing to become involved or marry Nye Bevan. She was devasted at the death of her married lover Frank Wise and was uncertain as to her future with Nye. She wrote to a friend after Frank's death saying: 'Frank's loss does not grow less…Did I tell you that Ni wants to share a cottage with me in the summer? Frank was solid gold. Ni is quick-silver. He is as unreliable as Frank was reliable.'[85] Although there was no initial conception of being joined with their 'soul-mate', they grew into a remarkably successful and productive partnership. Although Patricia Hollis' biography of Jennie Lee recounts many of the unhappy elements of the relationship, she also demonstrates the deep care and affection with which Jennie nursed Nye, and her absolute devastation on his death.[86] Edna Healey also recounts a lack of romance within her and Denis' relationship. She met Denis at a Oxford Labour Club meeting that she chaired where he arrived 'black-haired,

[83] King, 'The Perfect Man', p.41.
[84] King, 'The Perfect Man', p.54.
[85] Jennie Lee, *My Life with Nye* (Reading, 1980), p. 117
[86] Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee : a life* (London : Faber and Faber, 2014), chs.7 and 8.

red cheeked and already sporting the eye brows that were to become famous…I found Denis impressive but alarmingly omniscient.'[87] They both had other partners that they were hoping that things would work out with. However, their close friendship eventually developed into more but 'there was no romantic proposal on one knee. As we walked over the moorland road he suddenly turned and said, 'I think we had better get it over with.'

But some of our political spouses do clearly articulate that they found their husbands' political abilities and ambition an attractive quality, as was seen within these stories and novels. Pauline Prescott claimed that she wasn't interested in politics, although her family were always strong Labour people. She still found John's political ambition and drive to be attractive and she says that she loved his passion and 'fervour for the unions and championing of the underdog' and the 'maverick side of him which fought so passionately for what he believed in.'[88] She claims that her and John's love hadn't been at first sight 'but over time we came to care deeply for each other.'[89] Although initially reluctant, John's parents began to accept Pauline into the family and threw them an engagement party in their garden that was normally reserved for Labour party fundraisers.[90]

As they are reflecting on their own marriages, these authors also comment on other political marriages. Here we get the clear sense that being in a public partnership was a constant dialectic between one's own lived reality and the imagined characteristics of other marriages, both real and fictional. Political partnerships not only had to contend with their internal fictions, but also how their marriage interacted with the established tropes of what love in the Labour party might mean.

Edna Healey recognised that she and Denis were not an equal partnership. She claims that she understood that she was married to a politician who 'at the end of the day, has had enough of words. His eyes, understandably, will glaze over after a two minute conversation.'[91] When she asked Denis to read the proofs of her book *Wives of Fame* he was delighted, and astonished, that Edna had written it saying: 'But this is good!'. Edna claims that she was not put out by this response, but did say that she 'wondered whether he would ever have known what I was had I not written that book.'[92] This absence of shared connection in their own work meant it was something that Edna admired in other married

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[87] Edna Healey, *Part of the pattern: memoirs of a wife at Westminster* (London: Headline Review, 2006), p.45.
[88] Pauline Prescott with Wendy Holden, *Smile though your heart is breaking* (London: HarperCollins, 2010), p.105
[89] ibid, p.95.
[90] ibid, p.104.
[91] Healey, *Part of the pattern*, p.184 & 193.
[92] ibid.

couples. She comments frequently on the marriage of Susan and Tony Crosland, of whom she felt Susan was 'the perfect match' for Tony.[93] She compares herself and Denis directly to them saying: 'she [Susan] would stay awake for his late-night arrival from Parliament so that he could unwind by chatting about the day's business - unlike Denis, who was never given to chatting at the best of times, and certainly not at night.'[94] She claims that it did not worry her that she and Denis did not discuss politics, 'unlike Tony Crosland who found talking over his problems with Susan a relaxation.'[95] The other political marriage that she greatly admired was the 'marriage of true minds' of Audrey and Jim Callaghan.[96] Audrey was central to Jim's life as a political partner and also was an 'efficient and tireless administrator' on the LCC.[97] One of her happiest memories is when she was so touched by Denis' comments in his eulogy for Jim Callaghan that: 'Their marriage, like ours, was always close and central to their lives.' Her happiness at this description of her marriage as like the Callaghan's is at odds with the portrayal in the rest of her memoir, where for most of her marriage she describes herself as a 'single parent.'

This example from Edna Healey is useful in thinking about the ways that fictional portrayals of Labour marriages were communicated and absorbed. Clearly for Edna, the presentation of other relationships left her feeling that other Labour couples had marriages that were more equal and companionate than her own. These memoirs echo the romantic plots found in the novels and short stories. Political passion and skill is something that is seen as deeply attractive, but often the decision to marry is one that is made with greater practicality and rationality. The political party was a space for romance, but the political marriage was often a far more considered proposal.

Conservative fiction

This final part of this chapter considers why there was not an equivalent literature of political romance in Conservative party culture. It argues that this absence was not an exclusion, but rather a reflection of the fact the mainstream literary forms of the time were, as Alison Light has shown, essentially promoting a social conservatism.[98] There was no need for the

[93] Healey, *Part of the pattern*, p.120.
[94] ibid.
[95] ibid.
[96] Healey, *Part of the pattern*, p.284.
[97] Healey, *Part of the pattern*, p.282.
[98] Light, *Forever England.*

Conservative party to invent a 'Conservative romance' to counter Labour's socialist version, because mainstream romantic fiction was inherently conservative. We can connect this idea back to themes seen in the previous chapter, where the promotion of traditionalism and 'common-sense' values should not be seen as an absence of Conservative ideology on marriage. As Light says in her work on conservative fiction between the wars, the emphasis on conservatism of 'the 'taken-for-granted' or invisibility as a 'natural' part of ourselves has made it difficult to give a history to.'[99]

This part of the chapter deconstructs these 'natural' portrayals of Conservative marriage and compares them to the ideas promoted by the Labour party. It argues that whilst Labour wanted to promote new ideas of marriage, the models of marriage and femininity for the Conservative party were ones of tradition and duty. It has been more difficult to find a coherent source base of Conservative party fiction. This section looks at representations of marriage and politics in the Conservative party journal *Home and Politics* and *Home Truths* (1949-1951).

The Conservative party published a number of journals in this period aimed for mass consumption. *Home and Politics* had a circulation of 200,000 and was printed between 1921-1930.[100] *Home and Politics* also contained short stories and serialisations, as explored by David Jarvis in his work on the nature of interwar Conservative femininities.[101] Yet the stories in *Home and Politics* rarely feature representations of the emotional lives of the characters in the same way as *Labour Woman*. 'Mrs Maggs' and 'Betty', characters in a long-running short story series discussed by Jarvis, are not presented with a developed sense of interiority. Their exchanges are all through dialogue around explicitly political topics such as tariff reform or pensions. There were a number of serialisations in *Home and Politics,* but these were often re-publications of popular serials or novels such as *The Courtship of Maurice Buckler* by AEW Mason*,* or *The Thirty Nine Steps* by John Buchan.[102]

Instead, representations of marriage in *Home and Politics* focused on the marriages of the

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[99] ibid, p.17.
[100] Clarisse Berthezène, *Training minds for the war of ideas : Ashridge College, the Conservative Party and the cultural politics of Britain, 1929-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.10.
[101] David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: the Conservative appeal to women voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.5, no.2 (1994), p.17.
[102] The Thirty Nine Steps was popular amongst readers and published over the course of a year between 1928-29. John Buchan was a Conservative member of parliament for the Scottish Universities seat. See H. C. G. Matthew, 'Buchan, John, first Baron Tweedsmuir (1875–1940), author, publisher, and governor-general of Canada.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32145 last accessed at 20 Apr. 2023).

wives of influential Conservative politicians, or occasionally women MPs and activists. For the *Home and Politics* editions of the year 1926, the journal cover featured a picture of a prominent woman and her family with a two-page article as a character sketch of them 'at home'. The exemplary qualities that were emphasised in these articles give some indication about the values of wifehood that were prized by *Home and Politics*. These sketches articulated women's fundamental nature as understanding their role in serving the home and their husbands. Mrs Stanley Baldwin, who featured in the March edition, had 'a high conception of her public duties, and nobly endeavours to carry out her belief that a wife should be an inspiration and help-mate to her husband, and assist him by every means in her power.'[103] Mrs Amery, the featured woman of the July issue and wife of the Secretary of State for Dominions and Colonies, was reported as believing 'that domestic happiness means a great deal to a man's work…women have a very special part which no one else can fill, and indeed, that when they try to do men's work their own especial gifts are apt to be neglected.'[104]

Sacrifice and duty is another common theme in these sketches of women. Dame Caroline Bridgeman is described as making sacrifices in her home and social life in order to do her public work with her husband, and that she has 'given up much.'[105] Lady Joynson-Hicks is said to have 'no time for interests of her own…she is so busy sharing in the interests of her husband and children.'[106] Mrs Amery confesses that 'to be the wife of a public man requires considerable sacrifices of home-life'. When asked what her hobbies were, she declared 'her husband and children.[107]

The running of the household was their main task in their support of their husband. The portraits celebrate these women's skills, both in how they have decorated official government residences that they may occupy and how well they run the staff and household to enable their husbands to have comfortable private lives. There is clearly a strong class dimension to the profiles of these women. They all are aristocratic or upper-class and often come from political dynasties. Their ideals of marriage were rooted in conservative ideologies of femininity. Clarisse Bertheneze has argued that the Conservative party in the 1920s wanted to present itself as the 'party of domesticity, reliability and quietude fighting against Socialism, and its alleged destruction of the family. 'The family' in its idealised form was seen

[103] 'The Premier's Wife at home', *Home and Politics*, no.59 (March 1926), p.7.
[104] 'Home and Empire: Mrs Amery's Activities', no.63 (July 1926), p.7.
[105] 'Our new Chairman', *Home and Politics*, no.60 (April 1926), p.7.
[106] ' The 'Jix' Family: Lady Joynson-Hicks at home', no.65 (Sep 1926), p.9.
[107] Home and Empire: Mrs Amery's Activities', no.63 (July 1926), pp.7-8.

as the essential unit of society and, as such, stood in for that nation.'[108] These are certainly the models of family life and marriage that we see exemplified from the vignettes of wives of MPs.

Home and Politics promoted what might be regarded as a 'celebrity culture' model of marriage and politics. The 1929 propaganda leaflet *The Woman of To-day and to-morrow* which was published separately from *Home and Politics* carried an article on MP Mary Pickford which revealed intimate details of the marriage of 'Mary and Doug', including the pet names they called each other.[109] The Conservative party saw no need to imagine and invent the ideal models of marriage and family - they saw the ideal as the traditional upper and middle-class model. This is perhaps another reason why we do not see fictional representations of love and marriage in Conservative party literature in the same ways as for the Labour party. The idealised versions of family and femininity already existed for the Tories, they did not need to be imagined. It is more difficult to picture 'at home' profiles of the Labour couples discussed in chapter three. Many of these women, such as Bessie Braddock or Jennie Lee, consciously avoided trappings of domesticity and homeliness. For them, the ideal imagined marriage was one of working-class companionship and equality but, as we saw in chapter three, this was a difficult ideal for women to achieve. The aspirational Labour marriage needed to be in a process of making, whereas Conservative ideals were already there to be promoted.

There was also a sense in Conservative party publications that they wished to protect society against new forms of marriage as promoted by the socialists. In the 1950s, shorter propaganda leaflets aimed towards women were reprised with a series named *Home Truths*, which featured 'Winnie Welcome', the embodiment of the 'average housewife'.[110] Again, there is little sense of her hopes or imagination, beyond her frustration with the socialists and the cost of living. In the March 1951 issue, we see a story of the negotiation of political activism between husbands and wives.

Winnie Welcome is feeling desperate because her husband Ken has been 'taken in' by the slogans of the socialists and their marriage was 'on the rocks'. She persuades her husband to take her to a meeting with him to see if this can stop their quarrels over politics. At the

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[108] Clarisse Bertheneze, *Rethinking right-wing women,* p.106.
[109] 'Woman of to-day and to-morrow (the paper every woman should read)', vol.1, no.1, p.1, 285/1, CPA, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
[110] *Home Truths* was published by Conservative Central Office from at least 1947, either monthly or bi-monthly. see https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk//repositories/2/archival_objects/211457 (last accessed at 17 April 2023). See also Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Rationing, Austerity and the Conservative Party Recovery after 1945." The Historical Journal 37, no. 1 (1994), p.182.

socialist meeting, one man turns to the other and says 'Fraser's wife, eh? Not bad! We want more of her kind – and don't pretend you don't know why!' His companion agrees and says 'You're right – it's good to see a few blondes around!' A few weeks later Winnie's husband shouts at these men for 'fooling around' with his wife and insists they leave her alone. He also admonishes Winnie for neglecting their home, and refusing to send their daughter to Sunday School anymore. Winnie simply rolls her eyes and tells Ken to stop being 'so bourgeois'. This pushes Ken to breaking point and he exclaims 'I wish I'd never taken you to that Communist meeting! I see now they are only out to destroy everything that is fine and splendid with our life!' Winnie beams upon hearing this – her plan has worked. She has proved to her husband through this experiment that socialism destroys marriage and the home. She says to her friend that 'it's up to all us women to protect our homes and men from evil influences.'[111]

Winnie Welcome was seeking to preserve a traditional model of marriage rather than imagining new forms. The Conservative conception of the socialist meeting space was one which fostered extra-marital affairs and encouraged women to neglect the home, children and religion. By contrast, *Labour Woman* depicted socialist marriage as involving shared political ideals and companionship, although it is important to note that the stories in *Labour Woman* were not proposing a drastic remaking of society. The ending of the romance stories was always still marriage, and there were undertones of women's expectations to reproduce. Extra-marital relationships were similarly discouraged: Joan in *Clash* was not willing to be content with affairs with Tony and Gerry – she wanted marriage or nothing.

Conclusion

These literary representations underpin a key difference between Labour and Conservative party cultures in this period. The Labour party, particularly in the interwar period, was not just a political party but a movement. Politicians and activists intertwined conceptions of love and politics, suggesting the strong emotional components of political activism. For the Labour party, the political meeting, the conference, canvassing or leafleting could all be spaces of romance. To be in love on the left was often about shared passion for remaking the world, and believing by uniting and creating Labour families, change could happen. For

[111] *Home Truths*, March 1951, p.1, PUB 585/1, CPA.

the Conservative party, the aim was the opposite. They already had their ideal role models in the form of their women MPs and politician's wives. They wanted to promote marriages that followed 'traditional values'. As in the previous chapter, we can see this as an active promotion of Conservative values and ideology rather than an absence.

The previous chapters have suggested the functional benefits of being married to another political person; this chapter has explored how the physical and emotional satisfactions of marriage were presented to women active in party politics. Passion and shared desire to change the world was a large part of the reason why the Labour party had higher levels of incorporation of wives, to aspire to the ultimate goal of 'perfect comradeship.' Throughout the thesis we have seen stories and examples of husbands and wives meeting in political spaces, but these fictional representations give some indication of the feeling and emotions behind these relationships. The political romance showed ways that women could combine both politics and marriage – by marrying a man that would support her.

Chapter Five

Beyond marriage: alternative intimacies

Janet Fookes had known since childhood that she wanted to be an MP. From her teenage years she trod a careful route from the Young Conservatives, to local government, to unwinnable constituency fights, to finally success as the MP for Merton and Morden in 1970. As one of the new 'lady Conservative members' she was booked to appear on the BBC for their election night coverage. Janet had been waiting patiently - and nervously - for quite some time when the journalist Robin Day finally switched his attention to her, apologising that 'Mrs Fookes has been waiting rather a long time.' Quickly Janet corrected him, saying, 'It's Miss Fookes actually.' Day replied 'Miss Fookes, I'm so sorry. And Miss Fookes tells me she's Miss Fookes because no man has ever plucked up the courage to ask. Well, that's a challenge to any bachelors in the House of Commons… and perhaps one in particular, who knows?'[1]

This one bachelor 'in particular' was a very thinly veiled reference to the soon-to-be declared Prime Minister, Ted Heath. In her life story interview with the History of Parliament Trust in 2013, Fookes recalled that Robin Day went even further with this line of questioning than shown in the clip. She recalled Day asking her some 'rather quaint questions.' Did she like sailing? Was she interested in music? Finally, twigging that he was questioning her suitability as a romantic partner for Ted Heath, she recalls that 'I looked him straight in the eye and I said 'Mr Day, are you running a matrimonial agency?' And he quickly changed the subject.'[2]

But the election night matrimonial agency still did not think that its job was done. At the end of her interview, Cliff Michaelmore, the host of the coverage, felt that it was important to point out to the viewers at home that: 'Ah, I think we ought to say that Miss Fookes incidentally is the most gorgeous redhead. If you're seeing it in black and white, it is something that you are missing.'[3]

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[1] 'Gorgeous redhead' Baroness Janet Fookes on 1970 interview', (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-sussex-43430613 last accessed 7 December 2021).
[2] Janet Fookes, interviewed by Emma Peplow, 2013 for the project 'The History of Parliament Oral History Project', interview available as a British Library Sound Recording, C1503/66, Track 1, 50:21.
[3] 'Gorgeous redhead' Baroness Janet Fookes on 1970 interview', bbc.co.uk.

Thus far, this thesis has argued that political marriage was a sustaining and enabling force for men and women. Yet how did those who were *not* married navigate political life? What was political life like for those whose marriages had broken down, or who had never married? How did personal relationships work that were organised around alternative intimacies, such as politicians who had non-heteronormative relationships or whose friendship networks might act as replacements for the role of a spouse? The first part of this chapter looks at some of the difficulties and prejudices that were faced by the non-married, and in doing so reinforces the core claims of this thesis – that having a political partner really mattered. The second section of the chapter investigates some of the alternative intimacies and networks of support that individuals formed in the absence of marriage. It studies political relationships, or 'quasi-marriages' between parents and children, brothers and sisters, and companionate female friendships, comparing these to the models of political marriage discussed in chapter three. Within this, it will also address possible homosexual intimacies. The final section of this chapter looks at intimacies that were formed through extra-marital affairs and argues that the stresses of sustaining such illicit relationships further demonstrates the advantages accrued from having public and stable political marriage.

In her monograph on singleness, Katherine Holden argues that historians have overlooked the unmarried, as they have viewed this group as representing a lifecycle stage or an exception to the norm.[4] Holden, by contrast, frames singleness and marriage as relational categories, which should be understood in terms of one another. Whilst marriage could mean confinement and dependence, freedom has been more commonly attached to singleness, particularly for men. Holden argues that this freedom could also be applied to middle and upper-class women who chose to live independent lives from their families.[5] But this relative freedom could come at a cost. Singleness could also be disturbing, implying rivalry and exclusion, concerns about reproductive duty, and allegations of selfishness.[6] Historians of sexuality have explored lives outside heteronormative marital relationships, looking, for instance, at the place of the bachelor both in gay subcultures and as an object of wider

[4] Katherine Holden, *The shadow of marriage: singleness in England, 1914-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.1.
[5] ibid, p.6., see also Sheila Jeffreys, *The spinster and her enemies: feminism and sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1985), ch.5.
[6] Katherine Holden, Amy Froide and June Hannam, 'Introduction', *Winners or Losers? Single Women in History 1000–2000, Women's History Review,* Vol. 17, No.3 (2008), p.314

suspicion in society.[7] Exploring proposals for a 'Bachelor Tax' in the early twentieth century, Piers Haslam has shown how that there was a 'problem' of the bachelor, as much as of the spinster. Haslam argues that these fears cannot be read only through the lens of sexuality. The concerns at play were also about preserving patriotic masculinity and the upholding of fertility and demographic expansion, the latter of which were similar concerns as for spinsters.[8]

Like Holden and Haslam, this chapter does not treat the figure of the unmarried through this lens of sexuality. Some of the same-sex relationships discussed here were sexual, some were not, and some we do not know. However, these same-sex relationships are not treated as a separate category of analysis within the chapter. This is because it looks at the dynamics within these relationships and whether they helped to facilitate – or otherwise – the political activities of one or both partners.[9] It is also important to note that for most of this thesis' time period, up until 1968, sex between men was illegal. Although many of those discussed here have been identified as homosexual by contemporaries or historians, there were differing ways in which their sexuality was expressed, and only one couple lived with an openly homosexual identity – the first openly lesbian MP, Maureen Colquhon, and her partner Babs. Even more so than for heterosexual couples, the available sources do not allow for an in-depth analysis of how intimacy in same-sex partnerships shaped political lives. Instead, this chapter tries to map the close relationships of unmarried people who were active in politics across the period, asking how far they replicated, or substituted for, the sustaining and enabling functions of heterosexual marriage.

Conjugality remained the norm in politics, as it was in wider British society, throughout the period that this thesis covers. While there were some examples of less 'traditional' forms of relationship (as will be discussed later), these were very much the exception rather than the rule. This created a difficult context for those who were not married. Katherine Synder has shown that bachelors were a 'troubling presence' in late

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[7] Matt Houlbrook, Queer London *: perils and pleasures in the sexual metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), p.234.

[8] Piers Haslam, *Debating the Bachelor Tax: Singleness, Masculinity, and Social Anxiety in England, 1900–1945* (unpublished MSt Thesis, University of Oxford, 2022), p.5.

[9] Sharon Marcus helpfully describes how she writes about women in Victorian England: 'There are lesbians in this book, if by that we mean women who had sexual relationships with other women, but this book is not only about lesbians; nor is it about the lesbian potential of all relationships between women. Indeed, if we take "lesbian" to connote deviance, gender inversion, a refusal to objectify women, or a rejection of marriage as an institution, then none of the relationships discussed here was lesbian.' Sharon Marcus, *Between Women : Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.3.

nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain. She argues that 'bachelor trouble was, fundamentally, gender trouble' because they were seen as violating gendered norms.[10] This chapter also builds upon ideas elsewhere in the thesis regarding the construction of political masculinities and femininities. It reveals the difficulties faced by those who did not have a spouse, and suggests that for men, bachelorhood was more troublesome than spinsterhood for women. As we saw through the statistical analysis of chapter one, a large number of unmarried women did enter parliament. However, the characterisation of them as 'married to the party' in some senses rendered inert their challenge to the heteronormative orthodoxy – their singleness posed no great threat. For single men, there was not so ready a narrative to hand, begging the question: what dangerous sexualities a man might be hiding by not marrying?

The struggles of singleness

As revealed in chapter one, most politically active women were married, but there were more unmarried women standing for parliament than compared to the wider population. For men we do not have the benefit of gendered marital titles in election records to carry out similar research. This 'relative invisibility of bachelorhood' also derives from the idea that the passage from singleness into marriage carried less significance for men than for women.[11] To try and locate unmarried political men, I have used the *Times Guide to the House of Commons* and *Who Was Who,* searching for the terms 'bachelor' and 'unmarried'. This produced a small list of male parliamentarians and candidates for election who were unmarried. Only the 1950 edition of the *Times Guide to the House of Commons* included descriptors of men as bachelors. Prior and subsequently, the short biographies only focused on professional and political roles. In this 1950 edition, only 15 men out of the 1,868 candidates were described as bachelors in their biography.[12] It is not clear why the authors of the *Times Guide* stopped

[10] Katherine Synder, *Bachelors, manhood, and the novel, 1850-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.3.
[11] Holden, *Shadow of Marriage*, p.9.
[12] Mr A H Foord (Conservative, Lambeth Brixton, solicitor), Mr A W Wilson (Liberal, Streatham, teacher), Mr J Campbell (Conservative, Woolwich, barrister), Mr F J Erroll (Altrincham and Sale, Conservative, director of five engineering companies), Mr A R Maybe (Liberal, Croydon West, estate agent), Mr D G Maskrey (Liberal, Kingston Upon Thames, engineers draughtsman), Mr R J Hurst (Labour, Leeds North, insurance broker), Mr J W F Hill (Conservative and National Liberal, Lincoln, solicitor), Mr T C Skeffington-Lodge (Labour, Bedford,

including such details. The tone changed, and such descriptions as these from 1950 stopped being included: 'He is a bachelor, and 6ft. 8in. tall.'[13] Looking at *Who Was Who* across this period, forty men were identified as unmarried and served as an MP. It is difficult with these small numbers of identifiable bachelors to draw as firm conclusions as we were able to in chapter one. However, it is worth stating that if these figures cited above are even close to being representative, there is a striking difference. Of the 127 women to stand for election to parliament in 1950, 51 could be identified as unmarried. This is a percentage of 40% to set against the 0.8% of unmarried male candidates identified by the *Times Guide to the House of Commons*. Against *Who Was Who's* estimate of 40 male bachelor MPs across the time period, the analysis in chapter one identified 94 unmarried female MPs. Given the relative reliability of the two methodologies, no solid conclusions can be drawn. But the men identified by these sources do allow for reliable identification of a population of bachelor politicians and can help develop our understanding of the lives of some men who sustained political life unmarried.

Some activists faced problems and prejudices linked to their unmarried status when attempting selection for a parliamentary seat. Janet Fookes recalled that in her frequent quests for a winnable seat, she found that bachelors could fall into the same undesirable camp as women for local parties. Fookes said that: 'One of the MPs who was retiring said his seat was a very good Conservative seat, but he said unfortunately that they've drawn up a list of attributes and the top of the attributes is 'no bachelors, no women.'[14] This was likely due to the fear that unmarried men were bachelors because they were homosexual. Although slightly later than the period discussed here, the MP Christopher Butler found that when going for selection in 1983 his opponents tried to claim that he was gay, and hence electorally undesirable, because he was not married.[15]

The most politically successful bachelor of this period was Ted Heath. His experiences in office illuminate some of the difficulties faced by the unmarried in public life. Heath was one of only three Prime Ministers to remain a bachelor in office (the others being

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farmer), Mr Basil Nield (Conservative, City of Chester, barrister), Mr L L Maitland (Liberal, Knutsford, engineer), Mr F W H Munning (Liberal, Tavistock, farmer and social worker), Mr P A Stevens (Labour, Hemel Hempstead, public relations officer), Capt H F C Crookshank (Conservative, Gainsborough, politician), Mr D G Bullard (Conservative, Kings Lynn South West, farmer), Mr A Pearson (Labour, Pontypridd, chairmaker/MP).

[13] *Times Guide to the House of Commons 1950* (Times Newspapers Ltd.: London), p.79.

[14] Janet Fookes oral history interview, C1503/66, Track 1, 63:20.

[15] Christopher Butler interviewed by Andrea Hertz, 2016 for the project 'The History of Parliament Oral History Project', interview available as a British Library Sound Recording, C1503/142, Track 1, 42:05.

Balfour and Pitt the Younger). Heath was the first Tory party leader elected directly by Conservative MPs, but his private life was a total mystery to most of his colleagues. Michael McManus, who was Heath's private secretary and helped him to write his memoirs, said he was 'left in no doubt whatsoever that Heath was a gay man who had sacrificed his personal life to his political career, exercising iron self-control and living a celibate existence as he climbed the 'greasy pole' of preferment.'[16] There has yet to be any convincing evidence that Heath had sexual or even close platonic relationships with anyone.[17] Whatever the reality, rumours of his homosexuality followed his political career. The satirical journal *Private Eye* commonly portrayed him as either a virgin who was clueless about sex or 'Sailor Ted', a double entendre referencing both Heath's well-known love of sailing and the equally well-known rumours of his sexual orientation.[18]

There were also concerns about whether Heath could fulfil his duties as Prime Minister appropriately without a spouse. Although there is no official office in the British government for the spouse of the Prime Minister (unlike in the US), journalists and opposition MPs frequently raised as an issue Heath's lack of a partner to act as his hostess. The broadcaster Robin Day has form again on this issue, irritating Heath in an exchange in 1965 when Day questioned how he would function in Number 10 without a wife, or whether it would lessen his electoral appeal.[19] Although Heath tetchily brushed off this suggestion, this was a concern for the Conservative party. The Conservative party after 1945 was increasingly led by 'scientific' methods of assessing public opinion such as polling.[20] This meant that there was greater concern with public opinion on topics such perceptions of the party leader.

The Labour MP Leslie Huckfield tried to gain a rise from Heath by asking in the chamber of the House of Commons whether Heath 'will consider the appointment of an official hostess to assist him in the performance of his public duties.'[21] Huckfield, the MP for Nuneaton and a bachelor himself at this time, offered Heath the use of 'his little black book'

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[16] Michael McManus, *Tory Pride and Prejudice : The Conservative Party and Homosexual Law Reform* (London: Biteback Pub. ebook, 2011), ch.4, para.21.
[17] Michael Bloch, *Closet Queens : Some 20th Century British Politicians* (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2015), pp.217-220.
[18] 'Sod off Sailor – neow', *Private Eye*, no.316, January 1974, front cover.
[19] Michael McManus, *Edward Heath: A Singular Life* (Elliot & Thompson, 2016), p.949.
[20] Charles Lockwood, 'Action Not Words': The Conservative Party, Public Opinion and 'Scientific' Politics, c.1945–70', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 31, no. 3, (2020), pp. 360-386.
[21] 'Prime Minister (Official Hostess), HC Deb 27 April 1972 vol 835 c357W (Online: https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1972/apr/27/prime-minister-official-hostess)

or to put him in touch with one or two escort agencies.[22] This was likely an attempt to draw media attention to this issue, and rumours of his sexuality. Huckfield subsequently told the *Daily Mail*:

> He probably doesn't realise how disastrous it is for his image never to have a woman around, he probably kids himself he doesn't have the time. I think a lady-friend would help bring in the votes. Tory Central Office seems to realise this. It is always trying to conjure up birds— or rumours of them.[23]

There was some truth in this idea that Tory staffers were keen for Heath to marry, and tried to persuade the pianist Moura Lympany, a close friend of Heath's, to marry him. One frustrated newspaper columnist felt that the attempts from the Tory party to atone for Heath's bachelor status were clumsy and unnecessary. He pleaded that Heath should stop being photographed all the time with children, as this was 'exceptionally corny and it is a most obvious stunt, designed only to overcome the fact that Mr. Heath is a bachelor.'[24]

There were also aspersions cast upon Heath's masculinity due to his bachelor status. Just after his defeat to Margaret Thatcher for the leadership of the party, a *Private Eye* cover portrayed him with his head superimposed onto a naked women with a speech bubble saying: 'If it's a woman you want, I'm your man'.[25] According to McManus, Barbara Castle made similar comments upon visiting Chequers, that Heath had made it feel 'so much more feminine'.[26]

Although facing these rumours about his sexuality and slights against his masculinity, being a bachelor did allow Heath to cast himself with a tireless work ethic and devotion to politics. The Conservative MP Robin Chichester-Clark, speaking about his experience of serving under Ted Heath as Chief Whip, explained that, although he thought that Heath was an 'extremely good chief whip. He didn't have a wife. So he didn't quite realise some of us would like to get away in the evenings to see our wives.'[27] Heath was able to resolve the

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[22] The Park Lane agency capitalised on this press interest and offered to waive their £12.50 fee to have the Prime Minister as a client, see Sally Wilkins, *Daily Mail*, 17 Apr. 1972, p.34.
[23] Sally Wilkins, *Daily Mail*, 17 Apr. 1972, p.34.
[24] Walter Terry, *Daily Mail*, 12 Oct. 1966, p.14.
[25] 'Tory Leadership Grocer's last stand', *Private Eye*, no.343, 7 February 1975.
[26] McManus, *A Singular Life*, p.957.
[27] Robin Chichester-Clark interviewed by Andrew Hyams, 2016 for the project 'The History of Parliament Oral History Project', interview available as a British Library Sound Recording, C1503/21, Track 3, 15:50.

potential problem of balancing work with his personal life by simply not having one. Heath's family felt that his lack of romantic relationships were due to his ardent dedication to politics. Similar to the claims made of spinster politicians, his father concluded that Ted was simply 'married to politics'.[28] His sister-in-law Marian Evans also suggested that Ted did not marry because he needed a woman who was prepared to devote herself entirely to his career and success.[29] For Heath, unlike unmarried women, being 'married to politics' was not enough to forestall the rumours that followed him throughout his political career. There is, in the commentary around him, a discomfort with singleness that is harder to detect amongst spinsters.

There could be tensions too for women in how they aligned their marital status with the expected femininities from their political parties. As chapter one began to explore, framing singleness in terms of dedication to one's work allowed some women to succeed politically in the post-suffrage period. This echoes the contemporary observation of Beatrice Webb, who saw the three women Labour MPs elected in 1927 as 'distinctly celibates who diverted their emotions into endless activities'.[30] For the Conservatives, Irene Ward was, according to one biographer, adamant in 'her belief that work and charity could compensate for the absence of love.'[31] But for some women there were difficulties in how they could align their singleness with expectations from their parties and the public regarding the performance of conventional femininity. Chapter two showed how the status and experience of marriage and family was helpful for women articulating their place in public life, and in having the practical support to be able to do so. Single women did not have these same tools to draw upon. As seen in the previous two chapters, within the Conservative party, the projections of ideal womanhood were embedded in domesticity, duty, and service. This finding competes with the reality discussed earlier that many Conservative women activists were unmarried. Both men and women experienced negative practical implications when they chose not to marry, whether that was the support of a male spouse, or in Heath's case the lack of a clear person to fulfil the social responsibilities of residence in Downing Street.

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[28] McManus, *A Singular Life*, p. 951.
[29] ibid.
[30] Beatrice Webb, 'Beatrice Webb's Diary', http://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:vat325giy (accessed 21 November 2021).
[31] Helen Langley, "Ward, Irene Mary Bewick, Baroness Ward of North Tyneside (1895–1980), politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (Last access at accessed 21 Feb. 2022. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/)

However, it remains notable that despite the similarities of these problems, public opprobrium did not attach itself to spinster women in the same way.

Lucy Helen Yates is an example of how women could negotiate these tensions within Conservative party femininities for unmarried women. Lucy Yates stood for St Pancras Borough Council in 1919 and her profession was identified as an 'author and journalist'. Lucy was an unmarried woman in her 50s who stood for the Municipal Reform party in Ward No.4, coming at the bottom of the poll.[32] She lived for most of her adult life with her sister Amy who was listed in the 1911 Census as a 'Lady Gardener' (although was actually unemployed at the time).[33] Lucy was a prolific journalist and author who wrote many works on finances for women, cooking, household management and family life, including a book called *Marriage on Small Means*.[34] Her career had been made writing about issues of which she had little direct experience. She had never managed a household budget for a family nor experienced 'living marriage on small means', yet she wrote about these issues authoritatively for the public. In her book *Modern Housecraft: The Art Of Reasonable Living* she instructs: "'Is it possible to maintain a comfortable home and enjoy the pleasures to make life something better than a mere struggle for the necessaries of existence on an income of from £150 to £300 a year?" the answer that has been given is this, "*It all depends upon the wife.*"'.[35] She proceeds to instruct women in the correct way of managing a household, believing it is a skill that is learned rather than intuited. But Lucy had never raised children or, judging on the evidence of census returns and electoral rolls, ever instructed a servant, yet she devoted chapters of her texts to these themes. Singlehood for Lucy seems to have been no bar to understanding, performing, and instructing on these ideals of domesticity and Conservative femininity. She was by no means a successful politician, but these ideas can perhaps point towards explaining the dissonance of the ubiquity of unmarried women within the Conservative party and the projected ideals.

Although singleness could mean more time for politics, it could also be more isolating. The loneliness of political life could be a major problem for unmarried men and women. Mary Agnes Hamilton, the author of *Follow my Leader* from the previous chapter, was elected MP for Blackburn in 1929. Although she initially married in 1905, she separated from

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[32] 'Municipal Election results', *St Pancras Gazette*, November 7th 1919, p.1.
[33] 'Lucy Yates', 1911, *Census Returns of England and Wales*, (The National Archives of the UK (TNA), class: RG14), http://www.ancestry.com.
[34] Lucy Helen Yates, *Marriage on Small Means* (London: Country Life, 1931).
[35] Lucy Helen Yates, *Modern Housecraft: The Art Of Reasonable Living* (London: William Heinemann, 1906), p.v

her husband within a year.[36] They never divorced and no more is known about what happened to her husband, although on her death certificate her occupation is listed as the widow of Charles Hamilton.[37] Her family believe that she may have had a son who died in infancy from this marriage.[38] She never seems to have had another significant relationship and after losing her seat in 1931 she wrote that the House of Commons was devoid of opportunities for romance:

> Of emotional adventures, in the conventional sense, I have none to record. They do not figure in the life of the House of Commons. I doubt if they ever will. I was a member at a time when, as now, the males outnumbered the females in the population at six hundred to fifteen… No if there is no romance of the conventional kind in the House of Commons, the explanation is to be found in its atmosphere - an atmosphere dense and impregnated with another, less widely recognised kind of romance. The thick air quiver perpetually with the electricity generated by the contention of ideas and the clash of personal ambitions.[39]

This thesis has shown that this lack of romance was not true for all MPs, but it is interesting that Hamilton partly credits her singleness to the atmosphere in the House of Commons. This comment was written less than ten years after she had penned the tale of socialist love seen in *Follow my Leader* in chapter four, writing of the frisson between socialist men and women during strikes and campaigns. She seems jaded by her experience of Parliament, perhaps indicating the differences between the wider House of Commons and the Labour party cultures. Instead of romantic partners, Hamilton finds her key sources of support in her political life as a network of close friends (she titled her autobiography *Remembering My Good Friends*).[40] She lived alone after her separation and from her diaries seemed to eat most of her meals at her club.[41]

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[36] Papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton, 'The Story of My Family', GBR/0014/HMTN 4/1, p.32, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge.
[37] 'Scrapbook', GBR/0014/HMTN 2/1 Fascicule 1, Papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton.
[38] 'The Story of My Family', GBR/0014/HMTN 4/1 p.32. This was researched and compiled by family member Commander Robert V Adamson, Churchill Archives Centre.
[39] Papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton, GBR/0014/HMTN 3, Mary Agnes Hamilton, 'Confessions of an MP', *Harpers Magazine* 1931, p.582-3.
[40] Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Remembering my good friends* (London : Jonathan Cape, 1944).
[41] 'Diary, 1944-45, Papers of Mary Agnes Hamilton, GBR/0014/HMTN 1/12.

Although theoretically it could allow access to politics unencumbered by family demands, singleness was not easy for men and women in political life. For men in particular, there were questions raised over whether they embodied the required masculinities and sexualities, often making selection for parliamentary seats difficult. They also lacked the practical support of a husband or wife, making life sometimes lonely, or battling perceptions from their colleagues that they were out of touch in an era where most people were married. However, the fact that Ted Heath did become the first leader elected by Tory MPs, suggests that the barriers were not insurmountable, and this next section looks at some of the alternative relationships that politically active men and women sought to overcome the struggles of singleness.

Quasi-marriages: mothers, brothers, sisters and others

Whilst the above analysis has detailed some of the difficulties experienced by unmarried people, the previous chapters have demonstrated the very practical impact that having a supportive spouse could make. For spinsters and bachelors, there were often other relationships that played supportive roles to their political careers, sometimes operating as quasi-marriages. Three types of relationships are discussed here: sons and mothers, brothers and sisters, and female companions. This analysis suggests some of the limitations of these relationships of support compared to the political marriages discussed in earlier chapters. Undoubtedly, they did offer support and stability, but parents, siblings and companions were rarely confidantes or political advisors. Nor do we see any evidence, like in the 'emergent partnerships' discussed in chapter two, of instances where the political engagement of one partner helps to foster the political activity of the other.

As discussed earlier for Ted Heath, one of the problems for bachelors was the absence of a wife to act as political hostess. The problem also came within local councils, where the Mayor was expected to have his wife accompany him in an official role as the Mayoress. Charles Irving was elected Mayor of Cheltenham from 1957-58, serving a subsequent term in 1958-9. He would go on to be elected MP for his beloved Cheltenham in 1974. He was not openly homosexual but was widely known to be gay in political circles.[42] In

[42] Bloch, *Closet Queens*, loc. 3877.

her 1980 memoir, Maureen Colquhoun, the first openly lesbian MP, openly hints towards him sexuality:

> Charles Irving (Tory, Cheltenham) was usually quoted in the press when marriages broke up, and is on record with dire warnings about the hours of the Commons. I found that rather contradictory as he is a bachelor, but he is certainly a friendly and charming man…He was also interested in the arts and the theatre, which was something we both had in common…[43]

He was also known to have secretly offered a huge amount of advice on lobbying and government influence to the Conservative Campaign for Homosexual Equality in the 1990s.[44] It is likely that even this secret position was one that he felt more comfortable in carrying out towards the end of his political career. However, he was first implicated in homosexual activity only two years into his term on the council in 1947, aged 26. He was charged with 'importuning other male persons for an immoral purpose' when two plain-clothed police officers, observing a public convenience in Mayfair, alleged that he 'misbehaved himself and smiled at two men who were among the several to use the convenience.'[45] In court Irving thoroughly refuted the charges and claimed he was only in the toilets because he was feeling unwell after a difficult flight from Paris. Through the testimony of his chauffeur and reports of good character from a number of notable Cheltenham people, it was decided that there was insufficient evidence to find him guilty. Irving informed the local newspaper that he was considering issuing a writ against the police for wrongful arrest and defamation of character.[46] Whether this episode was evidence of Irving soliciting in a public toilet or not, it does suggest that there would have been questions and public rumours around the reasons behind his bachelor status.

Throughout his adult life, he lived with his mother at the family's hotel, the Irving Hotel, until her death in 1957. Before her marriage, his mother, Ethel Irving, had been a militant suffragette, spending time in Holloway Prison after chaining herself to the railings of Hyde Park. Upon marrying she moved to Cheltenham where she also ran the Irving Academy of Dancing and Dramatic Art. His mother styled herself Madame Irving in her

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[43] Maureen Colquhoun, *A Woman in the House* (Shoreham-by-Sea : Scan, c.1980), p.43.
[44] McManus, *Tory Pride and Prejudice,* p.92.
[45] 'Coun. Iriving Again Remanded', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 3 November 1949, p.3.
[46] 'Case Against Local Councillor Dismissed', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 24 November 1949, p.1.

professional role in the teaching of elocution and drama.[47] Charles had a twin sister, Tibby, to whom he was very close, but she emigrated to Canada during her second marriage.[48] He was incredibly devoted to the town of Cheltenham and, in accordance with his will, his ashes were scattered from a plane over his former constituency after his funeral.[49]

At 34, Charles Irving was the youngest Mayor in Cheltenham's history. He became a member of Council when he was 24, in 1927, as a representative for St Marks.[50] He chose his mother to be his Mayoress out of esteem for her rather than a practical appointment. Madame Irving had been in poor health for a number of years and it was Charles's tribute to her to ask her to be his Mayoress. [51] The *Gloucestershire Echo* reported that 'it was a proud moment for Madame Irving to see the boy on whom she had lavished such care rising to the highest office the town could give.' [52] She did manage to attend the Mayor-making ceremony and give a speech. Of her son she said: 'If he is as good as mayor as he has been a son to me in my illnesses he will be very good indeed… He is very argumentative, even to his own mother..' She then finished with a recitation of Rudyard Kipling's poem 'If', indicating her dramatic flair.[53]

Irving's mother died only a few months into her term as Mayoress, and from the local newspaper coverage she never seemed to have attended any events with her son. Allegedly on her deathbed his mother instructed him that everything must go on the same, and that 'he mustn't miss no council engagements. You must stop no dances. You must stop nothing.'[54] Charles had no regrets about appointing his mother for such a short time. In his speech at the end of his term as Mayor he said: 'I remember so keenly and deeply listening last year to my mother making her speech. How much I wish she were here to do it again. I have had a wonderful new-found friendship with my brother and his wife and my niece, and their help and companionship have given me a tremendous pleasure and have helped to fill a terrible gap.'[55] His niece was nine-year old Mary Ann Irving, who had been stepping in at civic functions for Madame Irving even before her death. This included shaking hands with

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[47] 'Death of the Mayoress of Cheltenham', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 2 September 1957, p.1.
[48] Her first marriage was a short lived and unsuccessful marriage to the historian John Michael Wallace Hadrill. See 'John Michael Wallace Hadrill', (accessed online 20/2/21: https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/1628/124p333.pdf)
[49] 'Basil Neild Obituary', *Daily Mail*, 8 April 1995, p.23
[50] 'Visitors from three nations welcomed at Mayor making ceremony', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 20 May 1958, p.1
[51] *Gloucestershire Echo*, 2 September 1957, p.1.
[52] 'Three Wishes of Town's Youngest Mayor', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 21 May 1957, p.1.
[53] ibid. p.3.
[54] 'Death of the Mayoress of Cheltenham', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 2 September 1957, p.1.
[55] 'Exchange of gifts at Town Hall ceremony',*Gloucestershire Echo*, 20 May 1958, p.5.

850 guests at the Civic Ball and opening the event by dancing a waltz with her uncle Charles.[56]

This was a similar story to the Labour MP Cyril Smith. This chapter is not going to go into Smith's story in detail. He was a prolific paedophile who abused hundreds of boys through his influence as an MP.[57] This makes his story difficult to tell in this context, as the claims that he makes about his political career in his autobiography and other sources are overshadowed by the reality of his crimes. He was a bachelor who claimed that he did not marry because 'he's tended to be married to politics'.[58] His autobiography explains in detail why he, like Irving, appointed his mother as his Mayoress when he served as Mayor of Rochdale. He says that 'being a bachelor, it was assumed that I would make my mother the Mayoress'.[59] His mother, however, did not want the role, insisting that she was not going to quit her charwoman job at the Town Hall and nor was she was going 'round this town speechifying and making myself a laughing stock in front of all my friends and neighbours.'[60] On his appointment, the local newspaper confirmed that Smith did not plan to have a Mayoress.[61] His mother eventually relented in the last few months of Smith's term. It is interesting to contrast this to the ways in which Alderman Howarth, to whom Cyril Smith handed the mayoralty in May 1967, spoke about his wife who was to become the new Mayoress. In his speech at the Mayor-making ceremony, Alderman Howarth paid public tribute to his wife as:

> Without her constant tolerance, support and understanding, it would long ago have been impossible for him to have continued as a member of the Council. He said she had been a source of inspiration to him over 26 years and, as his Mayoress during the coming year, would continue to be his mainstay and principal counsellor and advisor.[62]

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[56] 'Mary Ann (9) Welcomes Guests at Civic Ball', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 28 May 1957, p.1.
[57] Simon Danczuk and Matthew Baker, *Smile for the camera:* the *double life of Cyril Smith* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2014).
[58] Cyril Smith, *Big Cyril* (London: W.H. Allen, 1977), p.78.
[59] Smith, *Big Cyril*, p.88.
[60] Smith, *Big Cyril*, p.88.
[61] 'Boyhood prophecy has become a reality for town's new Mayor', *The Rochdale Observer*, 12 January 1966, p.11.
[62] 'Former RSM takes control of Rochdale Council', *The Rochdale Observer*, 24 May 1967, p.11.

However loyal and devoted Cyril Smith was to his mother, there was no indication that she was a significant source of support to his political career. In both instances Irving and Smith appointed their mothers as the Mayoress, but never had any intention of them actually carrying out the official duties. Madame Irving was known to be too ill and Eva Smith felt herself unacceptable and unwilling to conduct certain elements of the role. In both cases their sons appointed them essentially as a token of their esteem and dedication. The *Rochdale Observer* ran a story on its front page with a large picture of Eva Smith with the headline: 'Mayoress stays on as 'Mrs Mop', emphasising that she was still staying true to herself even with her new mayoral status.[63] This was likely to have been curated by Cyril Smith himself, as a nod to his working-class roots, and an indication of his impressive rise to power with his mother still a cleaner.[64]

Parents who were in better health than Madame Irving, or were more politically savvy than Eva Smith could, however, provide essential support to their politically active children, particularly financially. As we saw earlier, Janet Fookes was unmarried but had parents who were dedicated in supporting her political career. Although she refused the idea of a romance with Ted Heath, she had previously dated a number of men that she had met in the Young Conservatives but had not formed any significant partnerships with them. Notably, she recalled that it was one of these boyfriends who helped her take the first steps towards her goal of becoming an MP. She was walking with him in Westminster, telling him that she was not quite sure if she was ready to be an MP, but he marched her into the Conservative offices to start the process of selection.[65] This partnership did not last, but Janet had the support of her parents as she began gaining experience in unwinnable seats. She lived at home with her family, where 'my father helped by not requiring me to make too much of a contribution to the household expenses, another subtle way of supporting me. Well maybe not so subtle. It was very helpful.'[66] Her parents continued to be inveterate backers of her political career, even waiting around the corner in a pub the first time that Janet made it to the final stages of a selection meeting. For Janet, supportive boyfriends might come and go, but her parents were steadfast.

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[63] 'Mayoress stays on as 'Mrs Mop', *The Rochdale Observer*, 11 February 1967, p.1.
[64] He was publicity obsessed, featuring in the local newspaper, *The Rochdale Observer*, nearly every week. The local newspaper, was sometimes known as 'Cyril's scrapbook' for the coverage and effort that Cyril Smith put into curating his image. see Danzcuk and Baker, *Smile for the Camera.*
[65] Janet Fookes, C1503/66, Track 1, 38:25.
[66] Janet Fookes, C1503/66, Track 1, 35:49.

The support and companionship of other family members, particularly sisters, was a common theme amongst the political bachelors. Basil Neild entered parliament in 1940 as the MP for Chester after education at Oxford and a career as a lawyer.[67] He remained a bachelor throughout his life but lived with and was supported by his twin sister Beryl, also unmarried. The siblings had become politically active together in the Young Conservatives and Beryl was very proud of serving as President of the Chester Young Conservatives directly after her brother.[68] She was first elected as a Conservative councillor to Chester Town Council in 1949 and was a councillor for ten years, including a term as the Mayor of Chester. Beryl served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service during the Second World War, but resigned her role to devote herself to ensuring Basil won his by-election in 1940. Basil's 1996 obituary described how Beryl 'helped him a great deal when he was an MP and often sat beside him on the Bench.[69] Her death, 20 years ago, was a heavy blow to him.'[70]

There was an almost identical arrangement between the bachelor MP John Jestyn Llewellin and his unmarried sister Margaret Mary Llewillin. Jay Llewellin, as he was known, was elected as MP for Uxbridge in 1929 until 1945, serving as a minister during the war. He was raised to the peerage when he lost his seat and also served as the Governor of Rhodesia and Nyasaland until his death in 1957. The siblings spent as much time as they could (along with another unmarried brother, William) in their grand residence of Upton House in Poole. Margaret relished her role as hostess and ran the house. She later fulfilled the same duties at the governor-general's house in Rhodesia.[71] Like Beryl Nield, she had an active role in local government, serving as a JP and Poole councillor from 1937-54 as well as the first female Mayor and Admiral of Poole in 1951 and 1954. It is interesting that she chose to take on a political role, as her brother's *ODNB* entry suggests that he objected intensely to the idea of women in public life, particularly politics: 'They are always inclined to be so bossy', he used to say, 'and the ladies in the House of Commons have a tremendous amount of bees in their

[67] *Times Guide to the House of Commons 1950* (Times, London), p.166
[68] 'Death of Miss Beryl Nield', *Cheshire Observer*, 17th October 1975, p.30
[69] Presumerably the 'Bench' referred to here is the court bench, not in the Houses of Parliament.
[70] 'Obituary: Sir Basil Nield', *The Independent*, 12 December 1996, (last accessed at 20 April 2023 https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-sir-basil-nield-1314165.html).
[71] Jonathan Lewis, 'Llewellin, John Jestyn, Baron Llewellin (1893–1957), politician and governor-general of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; (last accessed at 8 Dec. 2021)m https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-34563.

bonnets'.[72] Compared to the parent-child relationships described above, these examples are striking in their similarities to the marital models described in earlier chapters, where we often saw husbands and wives both engaged in politics, but in separate fields of administration. Another similarity was the willingness of one sibling to devote their life to the political career of the other, even if they possessed political interest and ambition themselves.

There were, however, some examples of women receiving support from siblings. Thelma Cazalet-Keir was unmarried when she contested the Islington East by-election in 1931 as a National Conservative. She had been a LCC councillor since 1924 and was a very close friend of Megan Lloyd-George and the wider Lloyd-George family.[73] Her brother, Victor Cazalet, was a bachelor MP for Wilshire and became an enormous support during her campaign. The siblings were very close and it is clear in Thelma's memoir *From the Wings* (1967) that she adored him. When a vacancy opened up in Islington East in 1931, she said that she 'rushed straight into the fray, with my brother Victor, himself already an MP, as my chief of staff.'[74] She would later marry a lobby journalist in 1939 and hold her wedding in the chapel of the House of Commons. There is some evidence in this story of the support going from brother to sister, although in a similarly gendered way to the husbands discussed earlier, where they took on appropriately masculine roles of 'strategists' and 'organisers'. Thelma was very protective of her brother and was indignant about any rumours of her brother's homosexuality. In her memoir she says that there was a clear reason why her brother never married. It was simply that 'he dreaded becoming too engrossed with one person, and too fond of his own children to bring them up properly.'[75] Michael Bloch suggests that it was very likely that Cazalet was homosexual and that his most important relationships were with homosexual or bisexual men.[76] This suggests that her may be another example of a likely homosexual man continuing to live with his mothers and sisters and engage politically together.

These sibling relationships appear to be more successful models of support than parent-child ones. The evidence suggests that this stemmed from a genuine shared interest in politics that led siblings to help and support each other. Lyndsey Jenkins has shown that

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[72] Janet Fookes, C1503/66, Track 1, 35:49.
[73] John, Grigg, 'Keir, Thelma Cazalet- (1899–1989), politician', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 23 Sep. 2004; (https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/39850 last accessed 22 Apr. 2023).
[74] Thelma Cazalet-Keir, *From the Wings* (London: Bodley Head, 1967), p.90.
[75] Cazalet-Keir, *From the Wings*, p.29.
[76] Michael Bloch, *Closet Queens,* 2358.

sibling support was essential for allowing the Kenney sisters to be politically active in the Suffrage movement in the early twentieth century, particularly, in their case, in the absence of material resources. It was also the home that she suggests as the primary place for political learning.[77] She also argues that sibling dynamics were shaped by factors such as sex and birth order and the different 'roles' that siblings may have been assigned in the family.[78] As the examples above suggest, sibling relationships in politics were certainly gendered, as predominantly it was women playing supportive roles to their brothers even if they did sustain some political activity themselves.

The other model of supportive political relationships outside of marriage were friendships. Looking through the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entries for unmarried female MPs of this period reveals a number of women who had sustaining and supportive relationships with other women. Edith Picton-Turbervill, elected MP for the Wrekin in 1929 valued her political female friendships deeply. She believed that women's loving friendships could be 'as deep, as beautiful, and as exhilarating as any human relationship'.[79] She lived with the missionary and writer Emily Kinnard and 'was distressed by the propensity in the twenties and thirties to label such friendships as 'unwholesome' or perverse'.[80] The Conservative MP Mervyn Pike lived with her long-time companion, Susan Walker, a senior Conservative party agent, in a Westminster flat from the 1960s that was a hotbed of political gossip and parties.[81] When Pike left public life they both retired together to Kelso on the Scottish Borders.[82]

One of the best-known examples of female companionship involving politically active women was between the independent MP Eleanor Rathbone and her close friend Elizabeth Macadam, with whom she set up a household in 1919. Their relationship appears to have been non-sexual. Her biographer, Susan Pedersen, is keen to stress that Rathbone

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[77] Lyndsey Jenkins, *Sisters and Sisterhood : The Kenney Family, Class, and Suffrage, 1890-1965*. (Oxford: Oxford Historical Monographs, 2022), p.39.
[78] ibid p.17.
[79] Susan Pedersen, "Turbervill, Edith Picton- (1872–1960), social reformer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 21 Feb. 2022. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/).
[80] ibid.
[81] 'Dame Susan Walker Obituary', *The Independent* (Accessed 20/2/21: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-dame-susan-walker-1485198.html)
[82] Duncan Sutherland, "Pike, (Irene) Mervyn Parnicott, Baroness Pike (1918–2004), businesswoman, politician, and voluntary worker." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 3 Jan. 2008; Accessed 21 Feb. 2022. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-93152.

rejected the view of sex as a source of female pleasure, and would never have accepted the idea that her relationship with Macadam could be understood in such terms.[83] Eleanor was domestically hapless and disorganised and had never lived independently. Elizabeth was practical and self-sufficient, and took control of domestic and organisational tasks. Although this was in strict terms a platonic friendship, Eleanor Rathbone did have in effect 'a wife'. Their relationship involved 'role specialisation', with Macadam taking on the persona of the practical manager and Rathbone the abstract thinker.[84] Although this companionate relationship was deeply meaningful to both Eleanor and Elizabeth, there were tensions which quickly developed. The original purpose of setting up house together was to enable each to pursue her independent career, but Macadam devoted such a great deal of time to taking care of Eleanor that her own career in social work suffered.[85] Rathbone's work quickly eclipsed Macadam's as they discovered that 'representing a constituency was really a two-person job'.[86] Pedersen is keen to emphasise that this did not mean that Macadam resented Rathbone's success, but she did resent any idea that her own career was unimportant and that she would be remembered for playing the role of a 'political wife'.[87] Although Rathbone and Macadam had their struggles within their companionate relationship, it is clear from Pedersen's rich analysis that it was a sustaining and functional relationship, particularly from Eleanor's perspective, which helped her to carry out her role as an MP. The Rathbone-Macadam example gives further support to the picture described above: that same-sex relationships had their merits and their difficulties, but largely helped to sustain political careers.

As was seen in chapter three, enabling two actively political lives within a relationship was difficult. One male couple who attempted to live and do politics together were Captain Harry Crookshank and Desmond Kilvington. Crookshank was described as 'a bachelor, aged 57' by his biography in the *Times Guide to the House of Commons*.[88] He was elected in 1924 for the Conservatives in Gainsborough and held this seat for 32 years, also serving as a health minister and Leader of the House of Commons. Like many of the bachelors described earlier, he continued to live with his mother and sister until their deaths, after which he

[83] Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p.174
[84] Ibid, p.167.
[85] ibid, p.166.
[86] ibid, p.169.
[87] ibid p.171.
[88] *Times Guide to the House of Commons 1950*, p.199

became, according to his biographer, 'a lonely man'.[89] Crookshank was not openly homosexual, but after the death of his family in the late 1940s, he began living with Desmond Kilvington, a much younger merchant seaman from Brighton. Simon Ball suggests that the two men referred to themselves as 'cousins' to the wider world.[90] Desmond Kilvington was also reported to be Crookshank's nephew in the press.[91] Kilvington was known for campaigning for Crookshank during the 1950, 1951 and 1955 elections but had ambitions of his own to become a Conservative MP. Crookshank used his connections to persuade the Grimsby Conservative Association to adopt his lover as the candidate. However, their life together was not happy. Kilvington had a drinking problem and the Grimsby Association soon decided they wanted to get rid of their 'erratic candidate'.[92] Simon Ball describes how Crookshank was terrified that publicity of their relationship would follow as Kilvington had been identified as a 'protégé' of his. Although these two men shared an emotional commitment and a political interest, their relationship was unable to survive. The pressures and fears experienced by men conducting unlawful homosexual relationships meant that there was little scope for them to maintain a long term partnership and pursue their political ambitions under the gaze of the public eye. It is also worth noting that it seems to have been slightly easier for women in this respect, because the model of female companionship was available to them. Sex between women was not criminalised in the same ways as for men, and so the reputational, and legal risks, of living together were not as high.

One final relationship that could be considered as a 'quasi-marriage' was the actual marriage of Tom and Ena Driberg. Tom Driberg was initially elected in 1942 as an Independent MP with communist political beliefs, but later joined the Labour party in 1945. It would appear that even before the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, Driberg's sexuality was widely known within political circles. His posthumous biography *Ruling Passions* (1977) was scandalous for fully revealing his affairs and sexual inclinations.[93] Therefore it was much to everyone's surprise when he married Ena Binfield in 1951. The term 'quasi-marriage' is

[89] Ball, S. J. "Crookshank, Harry Frederick Comfort, first Viscount Crookshank (1893–1961), politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 8 Dec. 2021. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32641.
[90] Simon Ball, *The Guardsmen : Harold Macmillan, Three Friends, and the World They Made* (2005), p.340-41
[91] 'A Tory quits after row over Butler', *Weekly Dispatch*, 3 May 1959, p.1.
[92] Ball, *The Guardsmen*, p.341
[93] Tom Driberg, *Ruling passions* (London: Cape, 1977).

appropriate here as Driberg had no intention of entering into a conventional heterosexual marriage. Some biographers and close colleagues of Driberg have characterised the relationship as 'cover', designed purely to provide respectability for Driberg.[94] The rumour at the time, although refuted in a biography by Francis Wheen, was that was that Hugh Gaitskill had told Driberg that he would not be considered for a ministerial post unless he was married.[95]

This is clearly interesting, but it is also useful to consider this marriage beyond 'cover' and foreground the experience of Ena, considering more fully why she may have entered into this marriage. In his biography of Driberg, Francis Wheen does give space to the story of Ena and his findings can contribute to wider ideas within this thesis about motivations and realities of political marriage. Ena had been introduced to the Labour party by her second husband, joining in 1931 and serving as chairman of her local constituency in Bury St Edmunds. She stood for the local County Council and was the first Labour woman elected in West Suffolk. She relished this work and found it very fulfilling, but when her husband died in 1948, she unexpectedly needed to find paid employment to support herself. She had to resign her council seat and political activity and went to work as the Chief Administrative Officer of the Marie Curie Hospital.[96] She still kept in touch with her Labour networks and was desperate to be involved in politics again. She met Tom at a party given by George Strauss, the Minister of Supply and 18 months later they were engaged. Her son from her first marriage gave the following explanation to Francis Wheen on why Ena married him:

> She expected, I think to be a useful political hostess for Tom, and to enjoy some of the political excitement that seemed to surround Tom at home and abroad… She was well aware of his sex life; but guessed that he also needed stable companionship. She thought they could together do a useful political job as Mr and Mrs.[97]

This throws into question the claim that Driberg was simply looking for political cover for his homosexuality. His friends felt that his exploits were far too well known for a wife to make a difference, and that he was ready to settle down and wanted some help from

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[94] Lucy Robinson, *Gay men and the left in post-war Britain: how the personal got political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.18.
[95] Francis Wheen, *The soul of indiscretion: Tom Driberg: poet, philanderer, legislator and outlaw* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), p.247.
[96] ibid, p.245.
[97] ibid, p.246.

a wife in running his property.[98] They also believed that, particularly in the early days, he genuinely enjoyed Ena's company. After marriage, she was able to leave her job and, supported by his salary, become involved in politics again. She happily took up positions in Tom's constituency party, joining the Maldon Central Women's Committee and the local parish and Rural District Council. But the marriage was not a success. Tom was bullying and belittling to Ena, and soon wanted as little to do with her as possible. Francis Wheen publishes much of the correspondence between the couple that has survived in Driberg's archive. This correspondence is revealing as they negotiated unhappier periods in their marriage. One letter from Ena to Tom in 1960 read:

> I don't know why you married me - you never told me. I married you because I was lonely and because I thought we had sufficient interests in common to make for a pleasant easy friendship…It *was* a marriage of convenience in that we were not to sleep together… I married you for home and companionship - for a friendly relationship and because I thought we had a number of common interests - political, social and so on.[99]

She threatened and attempted to leave him many times, but it was only after twenty years that she finally did. In one of her final letters to Driberg she revealed that her psychiatrist had told her that he was 'incapable of having an adult relationship with anyone.'[100] Speaking to a journalist from the *News of the World* who had tracked her down after the death of Driberg, Ena said: 'We had twenty years of marriage. I won't say what they were like, that would be disloyal. I always admired and had a huge repeat for Tom's journalistic skills, political power and championship of the underdog. If that admiration didn't extend to our personal life, well, that's purely a private matter.'[101]

The motivations of both Tom and Ena throw fascinating light upon many of the themes that have been discussed in this thesis. Tom wanted a partner to help with his domestic life, offer pleasant company and serve as a political confidant. Ena wanted access to political worlds and freedom from paid employment so that she could concentrate on voluntary political commitments. Sometimes, as in Ena Driberg's case, women sought

[98] ibid, p.246.
[99] ibid, p.247.
[100] ibid, p.347.
[101] ibid, p.413.

political relationships because they wanted a partner who was as equally obsessive as they were. Although not in the time period studied by this thesis, a recent obituary of the New Labour MP Janet Anderson reveals how marital breakdown could be instigated by women if they felt their partner did not share their own political interests. Janet's marriage broke down according to her husband because: 'For Janet everything revolved around politics. We went on holiday and she talked constantly about the closing of Darwen police station. She might have been slightly annoyed that we didn't share her enthusiasm.'[102]

Marriage was the norm in this period. For those who did not, or could not, conform to this, alternative relationships filled some of the gaps. The benefits of these relationships were both optical and practical. Optical in the sense that they met expectations for performing a public role, and practical that they actually created networks that would enable political success. Features of these intimacies were similar to those identified in chapter three; the fraternal relationships were more like a partnership and homosocial relationships had features of emergent or weather house marriages. However, these were by nature more limited than marriage, and less resilient to public scrutiny.

Affairs and second marriages

This final section discusses alternative intimacies that were heterosexual and romantic, but formed outside of marriage. In *Parallel Lives,* Phyllis Rose describes how 'Marriages go bad not when love fades – love can modulate into affection without driving two people apart – but when this understanding about the balance of power breaks down, when the weaker member feels exploited or the stronger feels unrewarded for his or her strength.'[103] This section of the chapter looks at what happens when this power balance is interrupted in political relationships. Although this thesis has largely described marriages as sustaining and fruitful for those leading political lives, there were undoubtedly many unhappy partnerships, or times when previously happy partnerships broke down. Thinking about these kinds of tensions gives force to the conclusions of the earlier chapters, namely, that there were significant political advantages accrued to those with functioning marriages. This section also shows why alternative intimacies were often more complicated than marriage.

[102] 'Janet Anderson MP Obituary', 9 February 2023, *The Times* (last accessed at 20 Apr 2023 https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/janet-anderson-obituary-c52qt85wv)
[103] Rose, *Parallel Lives*, p.15.

Herbert Morrison is an interesting case study in these dynamics. His autobiography is strikingly absent of any details of his first marriage to Margaret Kent or to their daughter Mary. However, after Margaret's death in 1953, Morrison remarried and it is to 'Dimple', his pet name for his second wife Lady Edith Morrison (nee Meadowcroft), that his autobiography is dedicated.[104] Although Herbert himself did not divulge details about his first marriage, the second Mrs Herbert Morrison had plenty to say about the reasons for its failure. In the 1970s, after Morrison's death, she wrote her own memoir called *Memories of a Marriage* about her life with Morrison. Edith Meadowcroft was an unlikely partner for the politics-obsessed Morrison. She was a businesswoman, an ardent golfer, and a Conservative. While she saw herself as having settled down to a blissful marriage without any difficulty, she identified two main factors for the failure of Herbert's first marriage. Firstly, she posits that the traumatic delivery of their daughter Mary had left Margaret Morrison refusing to nurse her baby and suffering a nervous breakdown. This, Edith Morrison says, meant that she dealt a 'cruel blow' to Herbert and refused to ever have sex with him again.[105] The other factor was the fact that Margaret 'hated politics, although she must have known from the beginning that politics was his consuming passion…It was one of those marriages that never had a chance.'[106] Edith's marriage to Herbert, by contrast, was so successful because she understood that it was essential that as his wife she become politically involved:

> I had never been much interested in politics; I thought that I had married a man, not his job. But as time went on I came to see that Herbert's job represented the greater part of Herbert, and also, through his influence, I came to understand that no one; whether they are married to a politician, or a bus driver, or not married at all, can lead a satisfactory life and disregard the political scene. Politics, whether one likes it or not, is an inescapable element in every person's life.[107]

Edith Morrison also suggests that the 'public partnership' model that was adopted by many Labour couples, whereby both pursued political careers, was not one that she felt Herbert could have tolerated:

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[104] Herbert Morrison, *Herbert Morrison An Autobiography* (London, 1960).
[105] Edith Morrison, *Memories of a Marriage* (London, 1977), p.40.
[106] ibid, p.42.
[107] ibid, p.53.

> In practice he could never have been married to another politician or, indeed, a successful business woman or lawyer or doctor or anyone more exacting than a golf player. It was Herbert who had to be the bright start in the home firmament, who needed warmth and adoration from a wife, rather than competitions and arguments. This suited me admirably. It was so easy and enjoyable for me to bolster his ego.[108]

The idea that Herbert 'could never have been married to another politician' is unlikely in the context that he was known for conducting a protracted affair with fellow Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson. Morrison's official biographers have dismissed the idea, but Wilkinson's biographer Laura Beers is sure that the couple were intimate, noting how Morrison was frequently seen leaving Ellen's flat in Dolphin Square.[109] Herbert Morrison's autobiography is again, perhaps unsurprisingly, silent on this issue, but Herbert Morrison's grandson, the Labour peer Peter Mandelson, reflects in his autobiography on the effect that Morrison's political obsessiveness had on the wider family. Mandelson's mother had implored Morrison to keep her out of his 'beastly politics'.[110] Interestingly, Mandelson further comments that Morrison's second wife did not make it easy for them to see him as she wanted to cut him off from his family and past friends.[111]

The example of Maureen Colquhoun also gives comparison between first and second marriages. Maureen Colquhoun was the first openly lesbian MP in the 1970s. Colquhoun's marriage broke down during the 1960s and she began a devoted and stable relationship with Barbara Todd, who was known as Babs. Colquhoun oddly refers to her ex-husband throughout her memoir by his full name, 'Keith Colquhoun', on every use, rather than Keith, or 'my ex-husband', perhaps suggesting a desire to create distance in the reader's mind between her current lesbian identity and her older self. She claims that it was partly the fault of the culture of the House of Commons that her marriage broke down, remarking that: 'Parliamentary life is very hard on marriages, and it takes a hard toll of them…But men are particularly bad about accepting this. Keith Colquhoun hated the House and hated coming to it.'[112] She also frequently refers to the failures of this first marriage when in compared to her relationship with Babs: 'unlike Keith Colquhoun, she did not resent meeting me at the

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[108] ibid, p.128.
[109] Laura Beers, *Red Ellen*, p.294.
[110] Peter Mandelson, *The Third Man* (London, 2011), p. 42.
[111] Peter Mandelson, *The Third Man* (London, 2011), p.44
[112] Colquhoun, *A Woman in the House,* p.2.

House for a drink between a meal, or meetings or voting – and Babs became one of that small band of loyal appendages who met in the families room at the Commons waiting patiently to be collecting and taken off to supper.'[113] In other words, Babs was willing to behave like a 'wife', Keith was not, but a 'wife' was what Maureen wanted, despite her feminist principles.

The limits to the 'public partnership' model were also felt by the Labour couple Douglas and Peggy Jay, who married in 1933. The Jays initially had a happy marriage, fuelled by shared socialist values and commitment, but found it difficult to weather the uncertainties of political life. Douglas and Peggy had met as next door neighbours whilst children and from the age of 17, Peggy knew that Douglas was the only man she wanted to be married to. For some time, their marriage functioned and they had four children together. Douglas was a prominent MP and cabinet minister and Peggy was the youngest member ever elected to the LCC, where she served for over 30 years. But when both lost their political roles in 1967, fractures in their relationship began to show. Both were devastated at their losses, but seemed unable to support each other. A relationship based on shared political commitment struggled to adapt. Peggy Jay writes in her autobiography that:

> 1967 was a year of personal disaster for both Douglas and me. In April of that year, I lost my GLC seat, and in September, Douglas was asked to leave the Government. I lost my seat owing to the existing electoral procedure though I again had the highest personal Labour vote in the whole GLC area…I remember standing at the bedroom window at 4.00am as dawn broke over London. Douglas woke up and, though sympathetic, did not appear surprised. 'I thought it would be so,' he said…But, in my heart breaking unhappiness at this moment, I did rather long for something more comforting.[114]

When Douglas was later that year sacked from the Cabinet, Peggy hoped that they might be able to repair their marriage without the demands of politics. But instead of turning to her for comfort, immediately arriving at their home was Mary Thomas, a civil servant who had worked for Douglas and had promised to leave government service to work privately for Douglas. Initially Peggy was grateful for Mary's support and did not suspect that there was

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[113] ibid, p.87.
[114] Peggy Jay, *Loves and Labours An Autobiography by Peggy Jay* (London, 1990), p. 105

more than a working relationship. The marriage limped on for another few years, which Peggy credited to 'an intense shared interest in politics, our children and family holidays'.[115] But the final straw came for Peggy during the 1969 General Election campaign. It was Mary Thomas, not she, who stood by Douglas's side during the campaign. It was Douglas and Mary who 'canvassed together, were closeted in the Party office together, ate together.'[116] Peggy had always known that Douglas had affairs. He had told her at age 17 that he did not believe in monogamy, and this was a position that he maintained throughout their marriage.[117] Peggy 'had known since before we were married that Douglas had no intention of being technically faithful to me.'[118] But this demotion from her position as Douglas' political confidant and partner was one that she could not countenance, and from here they initiated divorce proceedings. Douglas would later marry Mary Thomas.

Non-monogamy was also openly acknowledged by the MP Peter Jackson in his life story recording by the History of Parliament Trust in 2012. Jackson was the Labour MP for High Peak. Elected in 1966, he served for only four years before losing his seat. He had been politically active for many years previously, and saw two things as important when looking for a partner which he found in his first wife Christine: 'Women who were interested in politics in my view, then, were very thin on the ground. So when you actually met someone that you found physically attractive who was politically involved, you didn't have second thoughts.'[119]

He claimed that he considered it very important that his wife should have an independent career: 'I read at an early age one of Mill's texts – The Subjection of Women. And I'd been a feminist all my life. Well not all my life, I've still got some bad habits as my current partner will tell you. I think all men of my generation do.'[120] He went on to say that these beliefs as well as the ideas of an American philosopher called Eric Frome meant that he and his wife embarked on an open marriage:

> And I was of a disposition where I was not sexually jealous. And we had an open relationship so we had 'friends' throughout our married life. Well now, I gather in

[115] ibid, p.115.
[116] ibid, p.115.
[117] ibid, p.32.
[118] ibid, p.114.
[119] Peter Jackson interviewed by Sandy Ruxton, 2012 for the project 'The History of Parliament Oral History Project', interview available as a British Library Sound Recording, , C1503/46, Track 1, 32:05.
[120] Peter Jackson, C1503/46, Track 1, 34:14.

> retrospect it didn't work out as I hoped it would. As in 18 years, we split, and she took up with a man who you may have heard of…a man called Eric Robinson who was principal of Manchester Poly.[121]

The interview is striking for the way that Peter Jackson speaks of the man that his ex-wife left him for as if the interviewer also knows him. These were similar to the difficulties experienced by the Jays, in that the left-wing circles they mixed in meant that current or future partners were often known to them, or from the same social milieu. Peggy Jay was forever bumping into Douglas and his new wife even after they had divorced as they continued to mix in the same Labour circles. How open Jackson would have been about his marriage during his career as an MP is not clear; it seems unlikely that constituents would have been aware. In this interview, he quickly diverts the conversation towards his love of forestry. He was one of the few interviewees willing to be this candid about such personal matters in the *Oral History of Parliament* project. In reflections on their political lives, many commented on the unhappiness that they had caused to their wives and families through the heavy demands of their jobs, but rarely with such candour as Peter Jackson.[122]

The source material for this section has principally been biography, memoir and oral history, which offer individuals spaces to reflect on their marriages. The openness and frankness of these politicians about the failures and unhappiness of their marriages is a product of the process of looking back on past selves, but possibly shaped also by the influence of access to therapy and psychotherapy in the later twentieth century. In the same way that Ena Driberg used her psychiatrist's comments to reflect on the doomed nature of her marriage, Peggy Jay credits her introduction to psychotherapy as helping her to see the flaws and failures in her relationship with Douglas. Peggy had been determined to try and keep her marriage together because of her 'longstanding family traditions of lifelong marriages.'[123] But she was introduced to a psychotherapist who was the last student trained by Jung himself. This relationship is what Peggy credits to allow herself to think about the possibility of life without Douglas.

Alternative intimacies found outside of marriage seem to have been fulfilling for Herbert Morrison and Douglas Jay, but perhaps not so for the women who were left. The

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[121] Peter Jackson, C1503/46, Track 1, 36:15.
[122] See Emma Peplow and Priscila Pivatto. *The Political Lives of Postwar British MPs : An Oral History of Parliament*. (London, 2020), ch 14.
[123] Jay, *Loves and Labours*, p.106.

stability of marriage was particularly important for women and when the balance of power within their relationships broke down, they were often left unmoored both personally and politically.

Conclusion

Although political marriages were not without complications, nor was being single. Unmarried men and women tried to find value in being 'married to politics' rather than to a husband or wife, but there were elements of singleness that were difficult to navigate. It was not tenable to go through public political life without some form of partner, so many formed alternative political intimacies with siblings, parents and friends. The relationships which most closely resembled political marriage were arguably sibling relationships, where both maintained political interests and ambitions, although the relationships were still heavily gendered with the expectation that sisters would care for brothers. This strengthens the idea that political marriage could be an important enabling factor, particularly for women. Breakdowns did occur, which was often the cost of living a life where political values and ideals were entwined. Marriages and relationships were constantly changing, but the value of functional relationships could give much strength and impetus to political lives.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to demonstrate a new approach to writing the history of political parties and activists in twentieth-century Britain. By combining extensive empirical data with intimate stories, it has offered a new perspective on the men and women who constituted political parties and how these parties functioned as social and emotional entities. Collated together, the research underpinning this thesis illuminates political activity over the course of a lifecycle in new ways. We see how men and women became political, how they stayed political, and how they passed this politics on. This matters for a wider understanding of the power structures of political parties and governments in Britain. This conclusion synthesises the contributions this thesis makes to the historiographical areas outlined in the Introduction – histories of gender and politics, histories of marriage, and histories of political parties – and indicates potential areas for future research.

The thesis began by demonstrating that for women, marital status really mattered for participation in political activism. Whether they were married, and who they were married to, were incredibly important factors in whether they could access political worlds. Chapter one provided evidence that the majority of women candidates, at both a national and local level, were married rather than single. There were many unmarried women involved in politics, but married women's presence was potentially far stronger than in many other forms of employment. There was a significant degree of difference between Labour and Conservative women's marriage rate and many MPs who were married, were married to another political activist of the same party. This evidence on the extent of married women's political participation underpins the whole of this thesis. The data also shows us that political activism was carried out by married couples across the country, thus offering a new perspective on what grassroots political organisation really looked like.[1]

With this understanding in place, this thesis has identified two key lenses for explaining this entwining of marriage and political work: the practical and the emotional. Through marriage, political networks and opportunities opened up, particularly for women. A lot of political education took place through socialising and inhabiting spaces for political discussion and activity. Chapter two showed that the first women to become elected as MPs

[1] These are similar patterns as found in other association cultures such as the League of Nations Union. See Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations Democracy, citizenship and internationalism, c.1918-45* (Manchester, 2011), p. 191.

came from political families, but that did not mean that they were simply the passive beneficiaries of spousal connections. They had, in many instances, acquired sufficient political and social capital to transition into being elected representatives themselves, and their marriages served as a further training ground for their own careers. This was a process facilitated by political parties, who clearly identified the significance of bringing women into the parties in their roles as wives, and provided avenues for them to do so. Chapter three explored these processes further, looking at how the day-to-day lives of political couples were organised around politics. This was essential for understanding not only how party activists, particularly women, became involved in politics, but how they maintained their political commitment as their lives changed. Having a partner with whom to engage in work together helped men and women to navigate political life and the strains that it entailed. Not just for MPs, but for local councillors and activists, the endless stream of meetings, canvassing, fundraisers and other political events involved a huge time commitment, which a supportive marriage helped people to meet. Chapter five enriched this picture of the practical advantages of political marriage by bringing the unmarried into the frame, showing how men and women might form 'alternative intimacies' to aid them in their political work, some of which replicated the benefits that may be derived from marriage. There was a heavily gendered component of these relationships. It was still primarily women who were doing the supporting, but the way in which siblings, parents, friends and lovers were absorbed too, showed the importance of a two-person political life.

The other strand to this thesis in explaining why marriage mattered to politics focused on the emotional and ideological components of this story. Husbands and wives shared interests and passion that they found attractive in one other, and sustained a shared interest that was an undercurrent to their marriage. Chapter four attempted to reconstruct the ways in which activists found love and romance in their political work, often leading to longer-term, emotionally sustaining marriages. For the Labour party, political skill, and devotion were vital criteria in choosing a spouse for both men and women. While some of the historiography has identified the Conservative party of the early twentieth-century as a 'marriage bureau'[2], it is clear that the Labour party was also a place where men and women met and married. In chapter four, we saw the ways in which the Labour party was forging new examples of what political marriage could be. Politics was a key area in which we can

[2] Lawrence Black, 'The Lost World of Young Conservatism', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2008), p.1008.

identify the emergence of a extreme form of companionate marriage, building on the wider cultural shift in mid-century Britain. These historical findings open up a new understanding of political cultures in twentieth-century Britain and offer valuable insights into the wider study of histories of gender and politics, of marriage, and of political organisation.

Histories of gender and politics

The introduction of this thesis argued that before the twentieth century, historians sited the political agency and influence of women within families and social networks. This thesis has shown that this remains a useful framework through which to analyse women's political lives in the era of mass democracy and new forms of political party structures. As this thesis has shown, familial and social networks remained a key way in which women accessed political spaces.[3] It has told a broadly positive story of political marriage in this period, seeking to identify and showcase the agency and individuality of women who benefitted from their marriages,

One major question in the historiography on women in British politics is why the numbers of women MPs have been so slow to rise in the twentieth century.[4] The analysis set out in this thesis, regarding the advantages of political partnerships for women, sheds light on this problem. The women featured in previous chapters derived many benefits from their marriages: an instinctive understanding of the demands of political life; training in practical activities such as canvassing and speaking; encouragement and support (both financial and emotional); a network of fellow politicians that they would consider friends and allies. Marriage was not a necessary precondition of women's political engagement, there were sufficient examples of successful spinsters to refute that. But a particular kind of marriage – the sustaining, enabling political marriage described in these pages – undoubtedly helped those women who were able to form such partnerships. But it is a question worthy of further study as to who was kept out of politics because they did not possess these connections of family and marriage. The methodology of this thesis, focussing as it does on those who put

[3] These questions have also been taken up by political scientists in understanding intimate family ties in understand political communication networks. See Laura Stoker and M. Kent Jennings, 'Political similarity and influence between husbands and wives.' in Alan S. Zuckerman ed., *The social logic of politics: Personal networks as contexts for political behaviour* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), pp.51-74.
[4] Sarah Childs, *Women and British party politics : descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation,* (London: Routledge, 2008).

themselves forward for election or those who left written historical evidence of their political activity, is not best suited to identify and examine these missing women.

This research has also shown the importance of seeing political work and activism as situated in domestic and personal lives. It has used the archived papers of many politicians and activists, looking at personal correspondence, diaries and other material to build up a picture of the rhythm of people's days. It is also worth noting that much of the rich material found for political women has come from papers archived within their husband's collections. Bringing out these personal and familial papers have been incredibly useful in understanding the dynamics of political life for both men and women.

Although the halo effect was key in initially bringing women into elected politics, towards the middle of the century the disappearance of this model points, at least in part, to a rejection of direct political inheritance between family members, the reasons for which could be explored much further. Yet peppered throughout this thesis are political marriages that produced equally political children. This was, as we saw in chapter two, again actively encouraged by political parties. But it clearly has ramifications for questions of fairness and diversity within party-political recruitment. This debate rages within the contemporary Labour party, where 'Red Princes', the children of notable Labour figures, seeking parliamentary seats generates voluminous column inches every time the selection campaign season comes around.[5]

Histories of marriage

This research provides further complexity to the concept of the 'political wife'. The supportive political spouse was not limited to women, although we see few men fulfil the role, and nor was it a stable category over a lifetime. The most fruitful types of partnership, described above, appear to be more common at local level. At national level, husbands who supported their wives' political ambitions were more unusual. Well beyond the end of this thesis' time period, the male spouse of a publicly prominent woman might be an awkward figure.[6] This too may be a limiting factor to the growth of women's political representation.

[5] See for example Catherine Bennett, 'Keeping it in the family is second nature to our MPs', *The Observer*, 15 January 2017; Sophie McBain, 'What Labour's Red Princes tell us about Britain', *The New Statesman*, 26 June 2014; Jane Merrick, 'Red Princes and Princesses: Labour grandees' offspring are following in their parents' footsteps', *The Independent,* 23 December 2012.

[6] See Emily Harmer, *Women, Media, and Elections*, *Representation and Marginalization in British Politics* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021), ch.5.

The different models of political marriage set out in chapter three showed that marriages were ongoing negotiations. It was a more complicated process than women simply being incorporated to fulfil the ambitions of their husbands. There clearly was a gendered component to the examples in this thesis – women were almost always subordinate to their husbands, and found political life harder without their own 'political wives'. Even the marriages which did aspire towards equality and the political participation of both partners had their challenges. Husbands were, on the whole, not willing to put their wives' careers first.

Another theme touched on throughout the thesis, but perhaps not adequately explored, is the difficulties of incorporating men into gendered political roles. Even with the growth of women's formal representation, the conjugal nature of public politics remained strong. As shown in chapter five, there was an expectation for men who did not have a spouse to find an available woman to accompany them to public functions. Normally this came in the form of sisters or mothers. Married women holding office would sometimes be accompanied by husbands, but often did the same as single women, by having sisters or other close female relations serve in this role. How husbands navigated their supporting role to public women is under-researched. There were examples, like in chapter three, of husbands taking on a background role for their wives later in their lives and careers, but more common was the 'public partnership' model, where husband and wife developed political specialisms in related but separate fields. Or, to borrow the title of Carol Thatcher's biography of her father, Denis, husbands disappeared 'below the parapet'.[7] It has been difficult to find the stories of 'political husbands', but further research might allow us to understand more fully the experiences of men who occupied this role. Another potential area of further research would be how bachelor MPs were able to negotiate their singleness. As chapter five demonstrated, there were, in some ways, archetypes for political singleness amongst women that were not available for men, leaving men more open to question about their sexual and romantic identities. How political men publicly navigated roles that ran contrary to the heteronormative assumptions around masculinity would be revealing.

This consideration of the 'public partnership' – of how husbands and wives worked together in the same fields or area of interests – is also worthy of further investigation. By the end of this time period, there had been a large increase in women's participation in the

[7] Carol Thatcher, *Below the Parapet : The Biography of Denis Thatcher* (London: HarperCollins, 1997).

workforce and professional life.[8] There were other professions with growing levels of intra-marriage, such as medicine, law, teaching, artists or academics.[9] A further point of research would be how different were political marriages from these other kinds of professional partnerships. Was politics very different as a profession in the demands of the levels of activity, ideological underpinnings and social networks? It would be interesting to compare if the models of marriage within this thesis are only applicable to politics, or if they can provide insights for other dual-career couples more generally. The research here indicates that political marriage was in many ways different to other types of marriage. The precarity, as was seen in chapter five, and the unique pressure points of public expectations and representations suggest that it is not a framework easily applied. In almost all instances, a very strong shared public purpose was key to holding these marriages together, but at the same time they were intensely susceptible to changes largely outside of their control, such as was seen for Douglas and Peggy Jay.

One potential avenue for further study on this area is political engagement in municipal councils and grassroots political parties. Chapter one showed how it was possible to trace many biographical details of candidates for municipal council elections, particularly for the earlier periods where it's possible to make use of available census data. It is possible, with relative ease, to extend the research of where these people lived, who they lived with, their professions, their ages and many other biographical details. This methodology in particular could be applied to enrich the gaps in knowledge of Conservative women's local activism. The research here has identified hundreds of women as stalwarts of the local Conservative Associations and in chapter one demonstrated comparatively high levels of variance in the marriage rates of different boroughs in the period 1919-1945. A stronger understanding of what drove marriage rates amongst council candidates may tell us much in terms of the detail of how political couples worked together. The ceremonial calendar of municipal life also presents more opportunities for typically gendered political moments – the few examples we see in this thesis of 'incorporated husbands' come from male mayoral consorts. A very detailed examination of local political cultures was ultimately beyond the scope of this study, but could offer rich detail to historians of incorporation.

[8] Helen McCarthy, *Double lives: a history of working motherhood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).
[9] see Ann Oakley, *Forgotten wives: how women get written out of history* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2021); Zoë Thomas, *Women art workers and the arts and crafts* movement (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

The almost universal homogeneity of political marriages occurring within the same party is also potentially interesting when considering wider changes in marriage in twentieth-century Britain. This persists into the modern day. Any attendee at a Labour party conference is likely to see scores of 'Never kissed a Tory' t-shirts (an item of merchandise championed by LGBT Labour, and reproduced by other brands). Research by political scientists Rob Ford and Philip Cowley have found that contemporary Labour supporters tend to be more supportive to marriages across class, racial and religious lines, but they are less open to marriage across a political divide.[10] A similar sentiment was seen in chapters three and four, where many Labour activists from the early twentieth century found the idea of marrying someone who had a different political outlook an impossibility. This political endogamy is an interesting aspect of the wider rise of companionate marriage in the twentieth century. While those involved in political activism are likely to be an extreme example of this trend, it would be interesting to further examine shared political sympathy amongst couples not engaged in public life.

Histories of political parties

This thesis has provided new insights into questions of gender in the history of political parties. Throughout, it has shown clear differences between the Labour and Conservative party. Labour political women were not solely 'married to the party' but were instead overwhelmingly married, often to Labour men. Conservative women had comparatively higher rates of singleness, but they were still predominantly married. This thesis has shown clear differences in the way that the parties conceived ideas towards marriage. In the Labour party, activists spoke of commitments towards equality and presented new models for romantic relationships between socialists. In reality, it involved a lot of compromise to make a Labour marriage work, both practical and emotional. For the Conservative party, the ideological underpinnings were more aligned with traditional tenets of marriage, involving wives deferring to husbands and taking charge of the home. Conservative women's involvement in politics could align itself to domestic ideals of duty and service, by being pursued for the benefit of a husband's career, or because it took place once their husbands were retired or dead. The fact that political marriage was encouraged by both Labour and

[10] Philip Cowley & Robert Ford eds., *More sex, lies & the ballot box : another 50 things you need to know about elections* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016).

Conservative parties suggest that it has relevance to broader understandings of the formation and function of political parties, regardless of ideological stance. This picture is reinforced by the findings of this thesis relating to local activism. Groups of husband and wives came together to form local party branches and were instrumental in their long-term viability and functioning of them. The growing social activism role of parliamentarians in their constituencies also provided new openings for spousal engagement in politics.

From what we have seen in this thesis, marriage was a key way in which people became involved in politics, and a crucial organising tool for local political parties at a time when they were adapting to new modes of campaigning. This isn't just a topic useful for historians: the past few decades have seen the explosion of new political parties. In Britain, UKIP rose from the margins to win many seats in European and local elections in the mid-2010s. In a similar period, the SNP, although not a new party, underwent a significant expansion and took control in Scotland. The Green Party established branches over the UK and secured the repeated re-election of its MP, Caroline Lucas. In Europe, a comparable process took shape in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Podemos in Spain, the Front National in France, Syriza in Greece and many other parties emerged as electorates became tired of the twentieth-century duopolies of left and right. This thesis has suggested that marriage was a key aspect of how political parties, particularly Labour – a 'new' party in the early twentieth century - adapted to the challenges of building mass party membership and winning elections under conditions of universal suffrage. It is plausible to suggest that these dynamics studied in the thesis have been present in other emerging political parties seeking to attract new members and candidates, including those active today.

This thesis has asked questions about people's political engagement on the basis of their intimate relationships, rather than an exclusive focus on their beliefs. Applying this lens to other political parties and time periods may open up new ways of considering political activism and causes, and why people chose to engage, and devote such time and energy to them. Again, an understanding of the day-to-day mitigations that enable first-time or continuing political participation would be of great interest to scholars in other areas. This could be extended further to non-party activism, for example NGO activism, which became more important from the 1970s onwards.[11] It would be interesting to see how far 'political marriage' exists outside party contexts within other political and charitable organisations.

[11] Matthew Hilton, James McKay, Nicholas Crowson, Jean-François Mouhot, *The politics of expertise : how NGOs shaped modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

The analysis of fictional representations of political marriage in chapter four presents another fruitful lens for the study of political cultures. In novels aimed at a general readership, or short stories published in party literature, party activists told stories about relationships as a way to make sense of their engagement in political life. These stories were both attempts to portray the realism of political activism, but also fantasies of ideal relationships and political spaces, and female authors working through their own personal dilemmas. These stories may have gone on to have impact on how future activists conceived of and constructed their own political identity. As the twentieth-century progressed, many other previously excluded minorities saw for the first time the prospect – if not always the reality – of political participation. Analysing the role that fictional representations of political life had on driving participation amongst working-class people or other groups previously excluded from direct participation would be an interesting study.

Just as situating political engagement in the domestic context offers ideas about the emergence of political parties, it also offers hints as to potential problems amidst the rise of 'anti-politics' in the second half of the twentieth century. In part, dissatisfaction with politics has been underpinned by a dissonance between expectations of what a politician should be like and the perception of an homogenous class of politicians who lacked authenticity.[12] There is an argument that this may have been influenced by these tight networks of husbands, wives and families having easier access to political networks and participation. Where political culture is in part developed in intimate spaces, away from the public eye, it is not hard to envisage a growing disconnection with an electorate who were largely excluded from these spaces. In the 1980s and 90s, coverage of political spouses became increasingly hostile, particularly towards women expressing political views or actively involving themselves in campaigns.[13] Some voters may be interested in the titillating details of politician's private lives, or be influenced by the cultivated image of domesticity in newspaper profiles, but there were also many who found it irrelevant and illegitimate for family members to have profile and influence.[14]. One of the main issues in the 2009-10 MPs expenses scandal was parliamentarians employing family member, including wives. However, an understanding of the companionate mode of political marriage makes this practice

[12] Clarke, Nick, *The Good Politician : Folk Theories, Political Interaction, and the Rise of Anti-politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[13] Emily Harmer, 'Public to private and back again: the role of politicians' wives in British election campaign coverage', *Feminist Media Studies,* vol.16, no.5 (2016), pp.852-868.
[14] ibid p.868.

unsurprising, given how likely spouses were to have been intimately involved in the wider political lives of their parliamentarian partners. A better understanding of how people outside politics viewed the marriages and family lives of those within it, would be worth considering further and enhance this research.

Although there was this increased hostility towards the influence of political wives, this came hand in hand with an increased market for their own stories. The 'spousal memoir' became an increasingly popular genre from the 1980s. The apotheosis of this trend perhaps comes from Pauline Prescott's memoir *Smile Though Your Heart is Breaking*. This book could blend seamlessly on a shelf with any bestselling romance novel. From the dusky pink cover, Pauline gazes up with heavily mascaraed eyes and her signature scrawled in pink, as if personally inviting the reader into her story. It was publicised as a 'tale of Catherine Cookson-esque tragedy', and readers were told that they would be shocked and amazed by this story of 'not your typical politician's wife'.[15] Pauline was married to John Prescott, a union leader and parliamentary candidate in the 1960s who eventually became Deputy Prime Minister in the New Labour government in 1997. Her memoir was published in 2010 in the aftermath of the very public scandal of her husband's affair with his political secretary and the exposure of a child that she had put up for adoption as a teenager. The increased publication of spousal memoir is also indicative of the trend post-1970 of increasing public frankness and openness about personal lives. As Deborah Cohen has shown, keeping secrets becomes a pathology rather than a marker of respectability.[16] The demands for political authenticity and openness became much greater, but with it came risks of women being cast as 'Lady Macbeth' with too great political influence.

Through statistical analysis and close reading of individual lives, this thesis has attempted to re-situate the role of marriage in political lives in the twentieth century. Marriages were an essential feature of the lives of the vast majority of those who took part in politics in this period. Yet it has been, at best, disregarded by many historians of the period and, at worst, maligned by those who prefer to privilege alternative narratives of female political engagement. To do either is a mistake. An understanding of the significance of marriage in political lives both enhances our knowledge of political cultures of the past and offers tantalising prospects for better understanding the political realities of the present.

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[15] Pauline Prescott with Wendy Holden, *Smile though your heart is breaking* (London: HarperCollins, 2010).
[16] Deborah Cohen, *Family secrets: the things we tried to hide* (London: Penguin, 2013).

Appendix One: married couples in municipal elections 1919-1939

St Pancras (1919 – 1937)	
Florence Nightingale Bell	1928, 1931, 1934, 1937 (Lab.)
Edward Percy Bell	1925, 1934 (Lab.)
Elizabeth Brierley	1922, 1925, 1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Charles Henry Brierley	1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Mary Dick Carter	1931 (Lab.)
William Carter	1919, 1922, 1925, 1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Mary Clark	1925 (Lab.)
William Richard Clark	1925 (Lab.)
Maggie May Dollar	1922 (Lab.)
Robert Law Dollar	1922 (Lab.)
Amy Elizabeth Lake	1925, 1928, 1931, 1934 (Lab.)
William James Joseph Lake	1925, 1931 (Lab.)
Rosa Mary Ann Marchant	1928, 1931, 1937 (Lab.)
William John Marchant	1925, 1931 (Lab.)
Mary Millar	1931 (Lab.)
Frederick Maurice Millar	1934 (Lab)
Edith Smerdon	1931, 1934 (MR.)
Robert John Smerdon	1922, 1925 (M.R)
Gladys Tibbles	1922, 1931, 1937 (Lab.)
Henry Tibbles	1919, 1922, 1925, 1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Catherine Tisler	1937 (BUF)
John Albert Tisler	1937 (BUF)
Iris Marion Woods	1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Albert Edward Woods	1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Abbreviations: Lab. – Labour; M.R – Municipal Reform; BUF – British Union of Fascists	
Percentage of female candidates married to another candidate or councillor: **11%**	

Poplar (1919 – 1937)	
Nellie Cressall	1919, 1922, 1925, 1928, 1931, 1934, 1927 (Lab.)
George Cressall	1919, 1922, 1925, 1928, 1931, 1934, 1927 (Lab.)
Emily Mudge	1925, 1928 (Lab.)
Joseph Mudge	1925 (Lab.)
Edgar Lansbury	1919, 1922 (Lab.)
Minnie Lansbury	1919, 1922 (Lab.)
Samuel March	1919, 1922 (Lab.)
Jane March	1919, 1922, 1925 (Lab.)
John Scurr	1919, 1922 (Lab.)
Julia Scurr	1919, 1922 (Lab.)
Abbreviations: Lab. – Labour	
Percentage of female candidates married to another candidate or councillor: **20%**	

Kensington (1919 – 1937)	
Lilian Mary Burns	1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Frederick H Burns	1922, 1925, 1928, 1931, 1934 (Lab.)
Mary Kathleen Burton	1919, 1922, 1925, 1928, 1931, 1934 (MR.)
Arthur Burton	1919, 1928 (M.R.)
Grace Glinwood	1928 (Lab.)
Arthur Edwin Glinwood	1919, 1925, 1928 (Lab.)
Alice Jarrett	1919, 1922, 1925, 1934, 1937 (Lab. except 1925 – Peo.)
William Joseph Jarrett	1919, 1922, 1925 (Lab. except 1925 – Peo.)
Mabel Kennard	1922 (Lab.)
Albert Henry Kennard	1922 (Lab.)
Frida Laski	1922, 1925 (Lab.)
Harold Laski	Known party member.
Winifred Beatrice M Owen	1931 (Lab.)
Wilfred Raymond Owen	1931 (Lab.)
Annie Louise Styles	1937 (Lab.)
Walter Reginald Styles	1937 (Lab.)
Abbreviations: Lab. – Labour; Peo. – People's party.	
Percentage of female candidates married to another candidate or councillor: **20%**	

Hampstead (1919 – 1937)	
Kate Levens	1934 (Lab.)
Ernest Gregory Levens	1934 (Lab.)
Grace Lechmere Lewis	1928, 1931 (Lab.)
Philip Henry Lewis	1928 (Lab.)
Ethel Maddox	1919, 1922, 1925 (Lab.)
Robert William Maddox	1919 (Lab.)
Clara Morris	1931 (Lab.)
William Harvey Morris	1931, 1934 (Lab.)
Marjorie Townroe	1928, 1931, 1934, 1937 (MEA)
Bernard Stephen Townroe	1925, 1928, 1931, 1937 (MEA)
Amelia Julia Arnholz	1919, 1925, 1928, 1931, 1934, 1937 (MEA)
Hugh Edward Arnholz	1934, 1937 (MEA)
Abbreviations: Lab. – Labour; MEA – Municipal Electors Alliance	
Percentage of female candidates married to another candidate or councillor: **10%**	

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